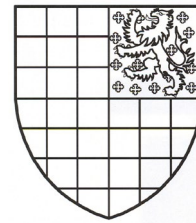


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council**,
held on **Thursday 18th June 2020**, online via Zoom Meetings at **7:30pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs J Baah; M Bird; R Burrows; S Catlin (*Deputy Mayor*); G Earl; R Handy; O Henman; J Herbert; J Lamb (*Mayor*); I Makepeace; Dr W Maples; Dr G Mayhew; M Milner; R O'Keefe; S Sains; J Vernon; R Waring and K Wood.

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*); Mrs F Garth (*Assistant Town Clerk & Civic Officer*)

Observing: Ms L Zeyfert (*All Saints Centre Manager*); B Courage (*Town Ranger*).

FC2020/11 QUESTION TIME: There were no questions.

FC2020/12 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS: There were none.

FC2020/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: There were none.

FC2020/14 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:

a) The Mayor noted the proceedings of the recent virtual Town Meeting and thanked those who had participated. He was planning to host a Travel Symposium, as discussed during the meeting, for the evening of 15th July and would release details when available.

b) Cllr Maples was invited to introduce a suggestion regarding support for the local PATINA Moving-on initiative, whereby everyone was asked to hold up to their camera a sheet upon which was written or drawn the word "Historic". All were happy to do this and a few moments were dedicated to capturing the various images for submission to PATINA's online project.

FC2020/15 MINUTES:

It was resolved that:

FC2020/15.1 Minutes of the Council meeting held on 14th May 2020 are received and agreed as an accurate record.

FC2020/16 WORKING PARTIES AND OUTSIDE BODIES:

Members are reminded that anyone who may have attended a meeting of any recognized outside body which has covered issues that deserve attention by the Council, should ensure that TC is aware of this before the Council's next meeting, and preferably before the agenda deadline. Reports on all activities of the organization are not expected.

a) Personnel Panel 4th June 2020. Council considered the Minutes of this meeting (*copy in Minute book*). Cllr Wood had been re-elected as Chair and elaborated as:

- i. *Update on TC appraisal programme:* The Council's consultant had provided some additional analysis of the distribution of questionnaire 'scores', following the previous meeting, which confirmed a principle that had been highlighted in that returns from Councillors were notably different from those of staff and external partners. This effect had been discussed with the consultant, who confirmed that it was common across local government, where the differing expectations of Members were a significant factor. It was acknowledged that the scheme had been agreed during the previous administrative term as a specific exercise, and that project was complete. With TC due to retire in 2021 it was accepted that continuation would involve time and cost that would be better deployed in addressing the prospective retirements of TC and five of the twelve other employees. There was general agreement on the introduction of appraisal as a contractual obligation when recruiting a successor to TC and this would be included in any proposals arising from that project.
- ii. *Matters re prospective retirement of staff:* The Panel had been tasked with an assessment of impacts on the Council arising from the number of staff eligible to retire in the next 2-3

years, and their roles. This was to begin with an assessment of the option to separate the functions of TC and Responsible Finance Officer, which might offer some advantages in simplifying recruitment of a successor to TC. Some illustrative examples of job descriptions for both models had been collected from comparator parishes and Members considered that a separate informal 'workshop' meeting would be the most effective way of dealing with these. It was accepted that there would probably be a need for some specialist external support as the process developed; in particular to establish appropriate salary grading for any revised roles.

TC had consulted with prospective retirees to enquire as to any firm plans for their retirement; and related the positions they had described.

- iii. *Training:* Council had resolved that the Panel's mandate was temporarily extended to look at training needs for 2020. There had been a general discussion on the topic, in which Members considered the training needs self-assessment form that was issued following election. TC noted that this would normally be re-issued once new administrations were 'settled' and recommended that this was the most practical first-step to address the task. It was agreed that the questionnaire would be updated and issued to all Councillors and staff.
- iv. *Conclusions:* The Panel would meet in informal workshops to consider various example documents and working papers. TC would update and re-issue a training needs self-assessment questionnaire, once converted for online completion.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/16.1 The Minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Panel (*copy in minute book*) held on 4th June 2020 are received and noted, and the Panel's decisions are supported.

FC2020/17

FINANCIAL GRANTS SCHEME.

Councillors considered a motion NOM001/2020 (*copy in minute book*) proposing that its 'normal' miscellaneous financial grants programme (currently suspended in favour of the Emergency Fund scheme) be re-opened, with amendments to the scheme's aims as recommended by the Grants Panel.

Emergency grant applications had covered specific needs arising from the extraordinary circumstances of the 'lockdown', but it was said to be clear that the community was still in need of support for things not related to Covid-19.

The prevailing guidance statement for the miscellaneous grants scheme stated:

Lewes Town Council values the community sector and will make financial grants available for its ongoing work. The Council's grants programme is designed to build up the capacity of small groups in the community and to encourage the development of new groups

And the background to the scheme was described to applicants as:

The aim of our financial grants scheme is to help promote a vibrant and active local community. The Council recognises and supports the valuable contribution made by many voluntary groups and organizations (often very small) in the fields of arts; sport; culture; social care; services for children and young adults; services for the elderly and people with disabilities; and many others who contribute to the wellbeing of the local community. It will consider financial support for community organisations working for the benefit of residents, with the intention of improving the range of services and activities in the town. It will not normally aid commercial organizations.

The Grants Panel had discussed fine-tuning of how to frame the support on offer, to align it more closely to Council's stated principles. In January 2020, after the Visioning exercise, Council had refined these to embody:

- Sustainable transport related: infrastructure & signage, cycling routes, bus transport
- Openness: engagement; consultation; partnership
- Trees and biodiversity; wildlife and the environment; Open spaces
- Support for foodbanks and the disadvantaged

It was resolved that:

FC2020/17.1 The Council's general financial grant scheme shall restart as soon as practicable, with the published fundamental principles of the scheme amended in line with proposals considered at the council meeting on 18th June 2020, and;

FC2020/17.2 The Emergency Fund set up to address Covid-19 shall continue until the reserved sum is exhausted, unless earlier closure is agreed by Council.

FC2020/18

EAST SUSSEX FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

A motion NOM002/2020 (*copy in minute book*) was proposed, that Council should call upon East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS) not to make proposed cuts affecting Lewes. Other responses were proposed including a call upon central Government to make no more cuts to local authority services; in the interests of doing all it can to preserve life.

It was stated that East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service was required to prepare an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) covering 2020-2025 on which it was currently running a consultation. The IRMP was required under the 2004 Fire Services Act, the aim of which was to ensure that resources are properly allocated by the Fire Authority. It was primarily a safety review. This review, however, also had to take account of a 7.5% cut in grant from central government. In addition, this year, Secretary of State for Security at the Home Office, James Brokenshire, had directed Fire Authorities to continue with their IRMPs and consultations despite the effective state of national emergency brought on by the Coronavirus crisis.

There followed a debate in which several Members expressed concerns with regard to the proposals: their scope, context, and alarming effects on the safety of the Lewes community.

The consensus was for a response to the consultation (ending the following day), describing these concerns, and for appropriate letters to be written to the local Member of Parliament and the Home Office Minister

A vote was called, and Cllr O’Keeffe declared an interest as a member of the Fire Authority and did not vote. Subsequently, it was **resolved, with no dissent or abstention, that:**

FC2020/18.1 Lewes Town Council calls upon East Sussex Fire and Rescue Services not to make proposed cuts affecting Lewes. The Council is particularly concerned at the proposed loss of one fire tender and six firefighters and that the proposal to replace full-time positions with part-time, on-call staff is unlikely to meet the needs of the town and surrounding area. Councillors are dismayed that there is no consideration given to either the increase in size of Lewes Town, or to the likely increasing effects of climate change.

FC2020/18.2 The Council asks our MP, Maria Caulfield, to pursue her recent public promise that she can obtain additional funds from James Brokenshire, Minister for Security at the Home Office, and therefore maintain the current level of funding of East Sussex Fire and Rescue Services.

FC2020/18.3 The Council calls upon central Government to make no more cuts to local authority services; in the interests of doing all it can to preserve life.

FC2020/19

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Members considered a motion (*NOM003/2020, copy in minute book*) proposing that Council undertake a participatory budget pilot in the coming financial year, with a budget element for this included when the annual budget cycle was commenced. It was explained that participatory budgeting is a form of public engagement in the budget-making process and falls broadly into two main types: a) consultation and public priority setting on ‘core’ budgets; or b) a community grant approach, which sets a specific sum of the budget to be allocated to community projects via a range of informative sessions and deliberative meetings to ensure a spectrum of residents’ views are heard and balanced choices are reached.

It was recognized that Town Council budgets could be reduced in coming years and there was need to think carefully about the Council’s priorities. It was submitted that the best way to ensure these are met was to listen to the Town when decision-making at every reasonable opportunity. Introducing participatory budgeting (PB) could, it was claimed, also help materialize the goals divined through the Council’s ‘Visioning’ exercise; expanding the openness of the council and reassuring the community that their elected Councillors are listening and engaged.

TC advised that there was a need to carefully assess the impact of Covid-19 on the budget, with a prospect of a potential six-figure loss in estimated income for the current year due to closure of the Town Hall and All Saints Centre. Whilst there were some associated savings,

there remained the fact that the Council's General Fund balance was, prior to the current emergency, nearly £200,000 below the recommended level. Measures to address this were in place but left little flexibility in re-allocating funds. The following year's Council Tax precept would be set against a backdrop of many households having a reduced ability to pay following the Covid-19 crisis. The present situation meant that an immediate decision to allocate funds for PB would be unwise. A Workshop to review the principles of the Councils budget, and seek areas where some flexibility may be possible, was proposed.

A debate ensued, and it was **resolved that:**

FC2020/19.1 Lewes Town Council agrees to consider the inclusion of a participatory budget for future financial years, and asks the Finance Working Party; Audit Panel and Open Council Working Party to jointly conduct a feasibility study on the subject, to inform the budget process with a view to introducing this as soon as possible.

FC2020/20

SUPPORT FOR 'PRIDE'

Council received a motion (*NOM004/2020, copy in minute book*) proposing that it show support for its LGBTQ+* community and its allies by obtaining and flying a Pride flag on various relevant occasions during the year.

It was noted that the recognized 'Pride' flag falls into a category where no specific Planning permission is required for it to be flown from a public building. A flag suitable for attachment to the Town Hall flagpole could be obtained for less than £100 and, other than one or two single days when national flag protocols must be observed, there were no apparent conflicting requirements. It was suggested that similar recognition might be appropriate in several other contexts, and that this might be considered by the Commemorations & Events Committee.

A brief debate followed, and it was **resolved that:**

FC2020/20.1 Lewes Town Council will show support for its LGBTQ+* community and its allies by obtaining and flying a Pride flag on three occasions during the year: in June, which is recognised as national pride month in the UK; February, which is LGBT history month; and for Brighton Pride weekend in August.

** generally accepted as "Lesbian; Gay; Bisexual; Transgender; Queer; Questioning; Intersex; Allies; Asexual; Pansexual"*

FC2020/21

PELLS POOL

A report (*FC003/2020, copy in minute book*) was presented, proposing that a request by Pells Pool Community Association (PPCA), for approval to re-open the Pells Pool under restricted operational conditions, be approved.

(Cllr O'Keeffe declared a potentially prejudicial interest, and took no part in this debate, as she serves as a Trustee of the PPCA – a registered Charity)

The pool is managed on behalf of the Council each season by the PPCA under an annually-renewed management agreement. Whilst the pool remained closed under Covid-19 emergency rules, the PPCA had been closely following government proposals for easing of restrictions. Swim England, the national governing body, were due to release detailed guidance for safe re-opening of pools, potentially from early July with other public facilities. PPCA were confident that they could make all the recommended changes and amend operational procedures appropriately. Further: The Royal Life Saving Society, who regulate lifeguards, had published detailed guidance for operators and revised training plans; and these had already been built-in to a series of revised operational control protocols by the PPCA. Following the government's relaxation on closure of 'non-essential' categories of shop on 15th June, PPCA hoped to re-open the kiosk for passing trade in ice creams, drinks snacks *etc* working within the appropriate guidelines with respect to social distancing and hygiene.

PPCA had provided copies of a range of revised operating plans, including First-aid and pool rescue protocols, and detailed assessment of infection risks associated with clothing and equipment. These were considered to be to the Association's usual professional standard and had been carefully prepared. The Association sought Council's agreement to the re-opening of the kiosk and pool (subject always to overriding government restrictions) as soon as this was permitted. TC stated that, in his opinion the approach to 'remobilization planning' undertaken by PPCA was thoughtful and sensible and there was no reason to withhold

permission. Council was assured that its interests were adequately protected by standard elements of the annual Agreement.

It was **resolved that:**

FC2020/21.1 The Pells Pool Community Association is authorized to re-open the kiosk and swimming pool at The Pells when government emergency restrictions allow this, subject to the terms of the annual license agreement and observance of all relevant guidance issued and revised by HM Government; Swim England, and the Royal Life Saving Society.

FC2020/22

UPDATE ON MATTERS IN PROGRESS

In response to questions from Members, TC gave answers related to

a) *Major Items Plan:*

item 1- Town Hall repairs and boiler system replacement. This was to be discussed in detail at a meeting of the Buildings Working party the following week, but a general point was that the diversion of the project towards the most desirable sustainable heating plant would use the entire budgeted amount and other elements would need to be deferred.

Item 4 Malling Community Centre refurbishment project. This would also be discussed in detail by the Buildings Working Party, but salient points were that: despite delays due to Covid-19, it was still possible that work would be complete by October, which represented a very short extension to the original timescale. Planning consent was expected shortly for an amended design to roof extraction vents. Ten local companies had been sub-contracted, and a Building Regulations inspection was expected shortly, and no contentious issues were anticipated.

item 6 Devolution of assets & services by Lewes District Council. Lewes District Cabinet were understood to have considered devolution matters the previous week and contact was expected to follow from their lead officer. An LTC Devolution Working Party would be convened when required.

Item 7 – Retirement of key staff. The Personnel panel were scheduled to meet shortly in workshop sessions to begin examination of job descriptions *etc* with regard to a successor to the Town Clerk and to discuss 6 other posts affected by eligibility for retirement.

b) *Project to address Ash die-back disease.* A report (*copy in the Minute book*) by the Specialist Advisor (Arboriculture), Lewes District Council & Eastbourne Borough Council was included with the Agenda. Members were advised that the contracted work was completed on 11th March 2020 at a final cost of £32,610 (nett) for LTC's share. There would be some additional costs to be shared, including additional traffic control measures and associated equipment hire, and surveys by specialist ecologists.

No significant problems or complaints were reported, during or after the felling operations. There were some complaints about traffic control and rolling adjustments were made to try and mitigate the worst of these issues as far as practicable. There appeared to be a good level of awareness by the public of the reasons and scope of the works, with little dissent or disagreement, and a degree of sympathy for the Council and its officers was perceived.

The clear felling of woodland would have a profound impact on local flora and fauna, but there would be both gains and losses. Loss of high canopy will result in a reduced habitat and foraging area for fauna (*eg* birds and insects) which might have been predominantly dependent on the woodland environments. Conversely; newly exposed woodland floor, subsequent regrowth and associated regeneration will provide a rich and diverse environment for existing and also for an influx of new flora and associated fauna. This was a natural process known as secondary 'ecological succession': the series of community changes which take place on a previously colonized, but disturbed or altered habitat. A change in the plant species present would drive changes in animal species, because each plant species will have associated animal species which feed on it. As plant communities change, so do the associated micro-organism, fungus and animal species.

The issue of replanting had generated much interest and some confusion. Despite the felling, woodland remained and it was still populated with trees, albeit small ones at this time. No immediate replanting was planned, as it was important to see if any Ash, with

natural resistance to Ash Dieback Disease, survive. Only about 5% of Ash throughout the UK were expected to have congenital resistance to the disease and it was likely that resistance to ash dieback would further evolve in the UK ash population over time through natural selection. It was important, therefore, to ensure that any potential survivors are allowed to establish and for this reason re-planting the areas of felled woodland is not recommended by the Forestry Commission. A review in 4-5 years was proposed, when it may be decided whether there is a case for 'enrichment-planting'.

ESCC Highways were dealing with the remainder of the trees lining the Offham Road (amongst a large number of other sites throughout the East Sussex area).

- c) *Emergency Grants Fund status* TC advised the status of the fund, with six grants paid and another two currently under evaluation by the Grants Panel. There remained an available balance of £5,816, assuming these two were granted in the full amounts requested.

Remobilization' planning. TC gave a brief overview of the position regarding operations under continuing restrictions. The government had indicated prospective relaxation of these in some areas and this evolving situation was routinely monitored. He described alterations planned, when office operation was remobilized, to aspects such as patterns of office hours balanced with home working for some days each week, where practical long-term. This would maintain some of the positive effects of reduced travel and the associated benefit to the environment; and reduce the number of individuals at any point in time sharing very compact office accommodation, kitchens and WC's, and narrow corridors. Public reception had been maintained so far through email; telephone messaging, and website referrals and the very low number of contacts had highlighted the true nature of demand insofar as the 'traditional' visitors to Reception were most often not there for Town Council business. There had been no perceived reduction in service related to ongoing Council work or connections with local partners. Physical measures would be put in place for offices and hireable spaces, with provision of signage; segregated access routes; anti-viral cleaning products; personal protective equipment, and contactless payment facilities alongside a high-frequency cleaning programme. The priority was to provide as safe an environment as possible, with the health and wellbeing of staff and all visitors to the buildings of paramount importance. As hall-hire restrictions eased, regular and prospective customers would be advised as to what was allowed; and with any booking proposals would be required to confirm they were aware of Council measures, and accepted them, and to submit their own event-specific risk-assessments.

FC2020/23

NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT

Members, asked to consider items arising from this meeting worthy of a Press Release, indicated:

- the position regarding East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service proposals
- resumption of the 'normal' grants programme.

Dates to note were given as:

- The next Council meeting would take place on Thursday 30th July 2020 at 7:30pm, with a deadline for agenda items to reach TC by noon on Monday 20th July.
- Meetings were scheduled as:
 - o Buildings Working party 11:00am Tuesday 23rd June
 - o Personnel Panel Workshop #1 11:00am Wednesday 24th June
 - o Personnel Panel Workshop #2 11:00am Monday 6th July
 - o Landport Bottom Management Committee 7:00pm Tuesday 7th July
 - o Open Council Working Party 7:00pm Tuesday 14th July
 - o Mayor's "Reinventing Lewes Streets & Shops" symposium 7:00pm Weds 15th July
 - o Equality; Diversity & Inclusivity Working Party 7:00pm Tuesday 21st July

There being no further business the Mayor closed the meeting; and thanked everyone for their contributions.

The meeting ended at 10.15pm

Signed: Date: