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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES**

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council**,  
held on **Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021**, in the Corn Exchange, Lewes Town Hall at **7:30pm**.

**PRESENT** Cllrs Dr J Baah; M Bird; R Burrows; S Catlin (*Mayor*); G Earl; J Herbert; J Lamb; I Makepeace; Dr W Maples; M Milner; R O’Keeffe; S Sains (*Deputy Mayor*) and R Waring.

*In attendance:* S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*); Mrs F Garth (*Assistant Town Clerk & Civic Officer*) and Mrs E Tingley (*C’tee Admin.*) M Larkin (*Town Hall Keeper*)

*Observing:* Ms L Zeyfert (*All Saints Centre Manager*); Ms H Roxx (*Malling Community Centre Manager*); Ms F Willis (*Asst. Malling Community Centre Manager*) B Courage (*Town Ranger*). Ms L Chrysostomou (*TC designate*).

Before the start of the meeting the Council’s Chaplain, Rev Judith Egar, offered a thought-provoking comment prompted by recent controversy over an Olympic athlete’s admission of mental health problems. It was observed that a “carry on regardless” attitude is not always appropriate and that Covid-19 had taught the lesson that “it’s OK to not be OK”.

**FC2021/26 QUESTION TIME:** There was one member of the public present who wished to ask a question, previously asked and answered by email. The question, together with the answer given, is appended to these minutes.

**FC2021/27 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS:** There were none.

**FC2021/28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Handy and Henman who were on holiday, Cllr Dr Mayhew and Cllr Wood, who were unwell and Cllr Vernon; who was recovering from an injury.

**FC2021/28.1** Reasons submitted for absence from this meeting are noted.

**FC2021/29 MAYOR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

a) Members noted that Cllr Dr Baah was now a Public Governor of the NHS Sussex Community Foundation Trust. Cllr Dr Baah and the Mayor would be promoting the Trust at an NHS stall on Cliffe Bridge this Saturday from 10.00am to 1.00pm and all Members were welcome to participate.

b) The Covid Hero Awards would be held in the Assembly Room, Town Hall on September 8<sup>th</sup> at 7.00pm. Invitations would be sent out shortly.

c) The Mayor’s Civic Reception would be held on 9<sup>th</sup> September, in the Assembly Room, Town Hall. Cllr and Mrs J Lamb would receive the Past Mayor and Mayoresses badges at the event. Invitations for this event were imminent.

**FC2021/30 MINUTES:**

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2021/30.1** Minutes of the Council meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021 were received and agreed as an accurate record.

**FC2021/31 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) South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA):** Cllr Waring gave an oral report explaining that he now held a number of roles since his election as an East Sussex Parishes representative member to the SDNPA, and he had recently been appointed onto the Park’s Planning Committee and to the South Downs National Park Trust; a separate organisation

that raised funds for nature recovery. Cllr Waring was also a member of the Local Access Forum and the Culture Group. The Access Forum advise the SDNPA and other organisations in ways to manage access to the surrounding countryside within the park. The Culture Group looks at the culture of the organisation and how it impacts the audience of the SDNPA. Cllr Waring mentioned two current Planning issues in Lewes: the proposed Old Malling Farm development and Garden Street. Members were informed that the South Downs National Park had now taken ownership of the Seven Sisters Country Park.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2021/31.1** The oral report on the South Downs National Park Authority is noted.

**FC2021/32**

**COUNCILLORS' INDIVIDUAL DUTIES:**

Report FC006/2021 (*copy in minute book*) was received, regarding changes to Members appointed individual duties.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2020/32.1** The individual responsibilities of Members for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year shall be amended as:

Cllr Dr Maples has stepped down from the Planning Committee.

**FC2021/33**

**DISPOSAL OF LAND by LEWES DISTRICT COUNCIL – North Street Quarter:**

Council considered a letter received from Lewes District Council (LDC) seeking opinions regarding the sale of land owned by LDC at the North Street Quarter (NSQ). LDC Cabinet had earlier approved the negotiation of a sale and purchase agreement with Human Nature, and the Town Council had made no comment. LDC was now consulting on its intention to sell the Equine Warehouse and Back to the Grain sites to Human Nature in order that they can be incorporated in the NSQ regeneration scheme. It was noted that this was conditional upon the purchaser securing planning permission for its new scheme, and upon the Council securing best consideration for the land in accordance with Section 123 of the Local Government Act (1972).

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2020/33.1** Lewes Town Council notes the intention of Lewes District Council to sell land to be incorporated into the North Street Quarter and makes no comment.

**FC2021/34**

**PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARY PROPOSALS:**

Council considered a draft corporate response (*copy in the Minute book*) to current consultation on Parliamentary constituency boundary changes. There were suggestions for revised wording and the inclusion of some population statistics to add impact to the opinion, and consequently **it was resolved that:**

**FC2020/34.1** Lewes Town Council makes the following response to the Boundary Commission for England's current consultation on revised parliamentary constituency boundaries for 2023:

“Lewes Town Council believes that the 'northern villages/parishes' in a corridor running from the town NorthWest up to the East Sussex County border should be retained in the new Lewes County Constituency. These all have strong community links with Lewes (the ancient County Town), established over centuries, and these should be respected. For completeness these are Barcombe & Hamsey, East Chiltington & St John, Chailey, Newick, Plumpton, Streat, Ditchling & Westmeston and Wivelsfield. A useful side effect of this would be the elimination of the proposed division at Landport Bottom, which is acknowledged to follow a parish boundary but unhelpfully divides a significant landholding. As shown on the consultation maps the 'new' boundary also, somewhat bizarrely, arbitrarily divides several domestic landholdings, cutting through gardens and buildings - this can surely not have been intentional?

To counterbalance this in terms of constituency electorate numbers it is suggested that Polegate (already part of the existing constituency) is transferred to a neighbouring constituency with more natural community links (Eastbourne or Wealden) for the voters of Polegate. The proposed additions to the east could be retained in respect of the

balancing of numbers although arguably Willingdon voters are likely to have the same community links discrepancy as Polegate and almost no commonality with Lewes. Populations for these areas suggest a balance would be maintained as Polegate has a population of 9,000; and Willingdon & Jevington 7,500, whereas the populations of the villages noted in the Lewes area total around 9,000.”

FC2021/35

### **POLICY on COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS:**

Council considered report (*FC007/2021, copy in the Minute book*) that proposed a prudent continuation of some restrictions on use of Council buildings following central government’s release of restrictions on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

Following the government’s relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions there had been significant national debate on independent application of some controls by employers and public-facing organizations. Scientific advice and published statistics on the prevalence and transmission of Covid-19 indicated that the government decision was premature.

The National Joint Council for local government services guidance on this dilemma noted that: in line with the Government’s emphasis on a gradual return to ‘normal’, organizations should carefully consider retaining appropriate measures where this could help reduce Covid transmission.

With regard to staff, the government was no longer instructing work from home but during this period of high prevalence, it “expects and recommends” a gradual return and employers must observe their legal responsibilities for the health and safety of staff, applying measures to minimize the risk of transmission.

Generally, while face covering was no longer mandatory, in some areas it would be required, such as public transport. The government “expects and recommends that people continue to wear face coverings in crowded, enclosed spaces.” As such, organizations should consider mandating the wearing of face coverings, particularly in workplaces and public spaces which could become crowded, along with other mitigation measures such as barriers/screens, effective ventilation, and changes to the layout of the space.

Simply-put: precautions that had been in place for some time for staff and visitors to LTC buildings were still relevant and prudence dictated that they should continue. TC had instructed staff accordingly and asked Councillors to observe these reasonable measures. These were straightforward and simply maintained a need for ‘metre-plus’ distancing; wearing of masks; sanitizing of hands and frequent cleaning/sanitizing of surfaces and minimizing the exchange of paper and other materials that might enhance transmission.

With regard to hirers of the Council’s buildings, the matter was not quite so clear-cut. TC’s colleagues in larger parish Councils across the country reported arguments already being raised by users of their services, both for and against continued restrictions.

One council had reported seeking legal advice following a challenge which insisted that NOT continuing to provide an environment that allowed social distance and required face-coverings was a breach of the Equalities Act 2010. The legal advice received was that a disabled service user could support such a claim. Whilst not clear-cut there was a significant risk arising from the argument that failure to take appropriate safety measures while the pandemic continues (mandating masks, social distancing *etc*) amounted to indirect discrimination as it puts disabled people at a particular disadvantage and cannot be justified.

Whilst it was no longer unlawful not to wear masks without a valid excuse, it was open to the owners of premises to set their own rules. If such a rule was set and someone refused to comply, they may be asked to leave. Refusal would leave them open to legal action.

A number of events traditionally taking place in LTC premises attracted large numbers of visitors and/or used close seating layouts, and the weakest aspect of the risk management strategy was ventilation; known to be a key factor in transmission of the virus. The Town Hall and All Saints Centre in particular had limited options to provide adequate ventilation for large numbers in these circumstances, and TC therefore proposed that Council operate a temporary policy that continued to require the wearing of masks by all visitors and restricted audience or visitor numbers to events to 50% of a room/hall’s normal capacity. This could be reviewed as the Covid-19 situation unfolded nationally and locally.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2020/35.1** Lewes Town Council agrees the temporary policy set out in report FC007/2021 (*copy in the Minute Book*) with regard to continued restrictions on visitors to Council buildings. This will require the wearing of masks by all visitors and restrict audience or visitor numbers to events to 50% of a room/hall's normal capacity. This policy will be regularly reviewed following monitoring of published Covid-19 conditions.

FC2021/36

**PELLS LAND EXCHANGE PROPOSALS:**

Council considered report (*FC008/2021, copy in the Minute Book*) apprising Members of amendments proposed by Lewes District Council to the previously approved exchange of land in the ownership of the Town Brook Trust

The background to this matter was that a land-swap proposal had been made in early 2018 by Lewes District Council (LDC) in respect of land held by the Town Brook Trust – The Pells swimming pool and recreation ground - to better-align boundaries with the proposed North Street Quarter development. A plan was appended to illustrate this. A Working Party was set up to consider the matter in detail and after careful consideration of detail, confirmed its view regarding the overall potential increase in land area; the inherent benefits of some of the land, and the opportunity to tidy boundary lines.

A conditional agreement was recommended, provided there was no cost to the Council (as Town Brook Trust); no technical reasons were discovered regarding the vestigial Brook, and valuations adequate to satisfy the Charities Act regulations supported the exchange.

Agenda and Minutes of these meetings (18/9/2018; 24/4/2019 and 25/2/2020) are published on the Council's website and show all relevant reports, plans etc. Final recommendations were agreed by Council on 27th February 2020, and the relevant Minute extract (FC2019/109.7) reads:

“The Council (as Town Brook Trust) agrees to the three land areas proposed at the Pells (plans in Minute book), subject to agreement with Lewes District Council that:

- > All associated costs of valuation; technical assessment; legal transfer, and boundary relocation (enclosure) costs shall be met by Lewes District Council, and no cost shall fall to the Town Council
- > Independent specialist valuation of the land areas concerned is undertaken.
- > ‘Area B’, containing the historic Town Brook, shall be cleared of existing industrial debris and general detritus and the profile of the vestigial watercourse retained, with fencing to both boundaries retained (as now) including reinstatement when development adjacent to the area's Eastern boundary is completed.”

That position was relayed to LDC immediately and the matter had remained with them since then.

LDC had recently submitted proposals including draft Heads of Terms for exchange and an independent valuation report. Details were considered subject to business confidentiality although there were general aspects to which Council's attention is drawn:

o LDC has discovered, in carrying-out detailed work on the title boundaries, that one of the parcels of freehold land which they had proposed to swap (Area B) takes in part of the Lease demise of another property holding. It was therefore not possible to include this land parcel in the exchange and the Heads of Terms related to the LDC owned parcels A and C only.

o The area of land owned by the Town Council which would be transferred (Area D) is less than the original area valued.

o There was a proposed ‘balancing payment’ payable by LDC to the Town Council as part of the exchange, in addition to LDC's two land parcels, to account for the difference in area.

o The valuation report noted the date of valuations as October 2019, and it was not immediately clear if the subsequent sale of the North Street development land (and attendant change in development prospects) has any material implications for either value or the proposals in general terms, and this should be established.

**It was resolved that:**

**FC2020/123.1** Proposals for amendments to the exchange of land at the Pells, as described in

report FC008/2021 (*copy in the Minute book*) are referred to the Pells Land Exchange Working Party for detailed assessment; and preliminary legal advice should be sought, as appropriate.

FC2021/37

**UPDATE ON MATTERS IN PROGRESS:**

An update on progress with the annual plan of major work had been distributed with the agenda (*copy in minute book*) and TC elaborated on various salient points.

FC2021/38

**NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT:**

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

› Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Proposals

*Dates to note etc* for forthcoming meetings and events were:

- › The Audit Panel would meet for a review of the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2021/22 on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> August 6:00pm, **online**.
- › The next Planning Committee will be Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August 7:00pm in the Council Chamber (**face-to-face meeting**)
- › Commemorations Committee Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> August 3:00pm , **online**
- › The next Council meeting will take place on **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2021** at 7:30pm, with a deadline for agenda items to reach TC by noon on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> August.
- › The next cycle of applications (Cycle 2 of 4) to the Council's grants programme has a deadline for applications (now online-only) of 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 with an online meeting of the Grant Panel on Weds 15<sup>th</sup> September to formulate recommendations to Council on 7<sup>th</sup> October.
- › TBC – Open Council Working Party - others in due course.

There would be a members' Surgery within the Town Hall indoor market as usual, on the first Tuesday of the month – 3<sup>rd</sup> August. Cllrs Catlin and Dr Baah would attend. The next would be 7<sup>th</sup> September, and the Mayor asked volunteers to let him know if they planned to attend. That would be displaced by Lewes Operatic Society use of the Corn Exchange, and would take place in either the Yarrow room or an alternative to be confirmed.

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

*The meeting ended at 8.35pm*

Signed:

Date: .....



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**QUESTION RECEIVED:**

From: Rita Ellis  
Sent: 26 July 2021 16:00  
To: Steve Brigden <TownClerk@lewes-tc.gov.uk>  
Subject: Town Hall opening

Dear Town Clerk,

As a council taxpayer I have always taken a close interest in the business of the Town Council ,attending meeting regularly. I am dismayed to learn that the Town Hall reception is only open between 10 and 12 which severely limits access for those who have dealings with the Council. I shall be attending the meeting on Thursday but could not find information about the agenda on the notice board outside the Town Hall. Can you tell me when the Town Hall will return to its normal opening hours?

Yours Sincerely

Rita Ellis

**ANSWER:**

At the present moment we have a number of staff absent through sickness and enforced isolation, and vacant posts due to the promotion/redeployment of others.

Reception will open when we are able to sustain it.

The Covid lockdown period has shown us that our Reception service was just as effective by telephone and email and face-to-face Reception hours were not all needed, so what was 'normal' before Covid will not return in the same form. With the movement of staff to other posts we are taking the opportunity to refocus the effort where it is most needed and the vacant Reception post will be replaced by a Communications Officer who will deal with such things as social media.

The meeting Agenda is posted in the noticeboard and on the website as normal.

I attach a copy for your convenience.

To minimize risk to everyone, this meeting will be held in the Corn Exchange as it allows considerably better ventilation and spacing apart of attendees.

Please use the Fisher Street entrance.

Please note the general arrangements will be:

- You will all be required to wear a face mask (these will be provided if needed).
- Hand sanitizing gel and disposable gloves will be freely available.
- You will be separated by an appropriate distance and seated on plastic chairs – sanitized before and after your use. You may wish to bring your own cushion!
- You will be asked to vacate the room promptly to allow sanitizing to be carried out.