

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF SOUTH SIDE TASK AND FINISH GROUP
MONDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 10.00 AM

Present: Councillors V Harvey
 T Morris
 S Owen (Vice-Chair)
 C Palmer (Chair)
 B Spurr
 S Hemmings

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio, Town Clerk
 V Cannon Head of Cultural & Economic
 Services
 M Jahn, Committee Officer
 S Caldbeck, Central Bedfordshire Council
 J Barkat, Business & Facilities Manager Rufus
 Centre, Flitwick
 M Kirby, Director of Community Services,
 Chippenham TC
 Julie Hook, Head of Venues, Chippenham TC
 M Barnett, Head of Museum and Heritage
 Chippenham
 Ingrid Hooley, Programming Enabling
 Manager, Central Bedfordshire Council

Members of the public: 0

07/SS APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence had been received

08/SS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests, including the nature of those interests, which they had in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.

Councillor Palmer declared an interest as a member of LB Society and LB Archeological and History Society. Councillor Harvey declared an interest as a Member of LB Society and LB Friends of the Earth.

09/SS QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

10/SS VENUE EXAMPLES

By invitation, guests from the Rufus Centre in Flitwick and The Neeld and The History Museum at Chippenham gave an overview of how the venues delivered their services, what groups used the facilities, governance of the venues and the annual running costs and practices involved.

Rufus Centre, Flitwick Town Council

Jonathan Barkat informed Members the centre had 30 fully serviced offices, conference and meetings rooms and the main hall which could seat approximately 250 people. There was also a bar/café which opened Monday to Saturday between the hours of 0800 to 1600 hours and opened for events on a Friday evening. The Town Council, which owned the building, was based in the centre and community events were regularly held there. The centre was run as a community facility with a room set aside for charitable and community groups free of charge. In normal times the centre operated 6 days a week with tenants having 24 hour and 7 days a week access.

A question was raised as to which type of hiring proved the most profitable and it was confirmed the regular meeting room hirers provided a regular income in 'normal times'. Weddings could also be held in the centre and these generated a large income when bookings were received. A virtual office had been introduced within the last few months and also hot desking was being reviewed for the near future.

The vision for the future would be expansion and the possibility of creating a hotel on site, extend the car park and increase tenant's office space. It was confirmed that the centre would make approximately £50,000 profit per annum but in the present climate a true reflection was not possible with reduced hiring income because of COVID with the aim being to keep the business side separate from the Council element. A more accurate picture would be known by next year.

The Neeld, Chippenham Town Council

Matt Kirby informed members that both venues were located in the town centre.

Julie Hook informed members about The Neeld. It could be used for weddings, dances, concerts and themed fairs as the retractable seating allowed the space needed to be adapted to what purpose was required. Primarily the centre was run at cost to the Council for the benefit of the community and not for profit. Community groups used the facilities for dance and theatre groups and are charged community rates with a corporate rate for businesses. The size of the venue offers versatility of use and provides a great community hub for meeting up. It was noted that the size of a venue could be influential to whether or not it was on the touring circuit, i.e. host national touring shows and performances. The Neeld did receive touring shows.

The venue had a bar/café which was seen as an important income stream. It was felt that more could be made of the facility to boost income further.

A question about available parking was raised and Julie commented that town centre parking was used but the limit of two hour parking in one car park did not facilitate attendance of matinee shows. This impacted on the amount of matinee shows programmed and income. Free parking after 6.00pm worked well for evening shows.

Chippenham Museum

Melissa Barnett informed members that the museum was created by Chippenham Town Council with the support of the community, Wiltshire Council and other local charities.

There are 30,000 users of the museum annually being mainly local people with some tourists visiting. The building was located in the centre of the town with free entry. It was run and supported by Chippenham Town Council and had 70 volunteers and 100 Friends of the Museum.

Members were informed that a museum was an expensive option with many insurance and legal requirements but offered educational opportunities to local schools and visitors to the town. A Heritage Centre would be an easier option initially to encourage visitors whilst also offering hidden values to volunteers with a sense of belonging celebrating the history of a town.

It was suggested that Emma Carver of the Arts Council England, Museums, be a point of contact to offer advice and information if this option was pursued. Members agreed that Leighton Buzzard had a proactive history society who would be interested in this project and they had a wealth of artefacts which were scattered around different premises in the town at present and could benefit from being catalogued and displayed in one place.

A question was raised as to whether the residents of Chippenham valued the museum and it was confirmed they were one hundred percent behind it and it gave a sense of pride to celebrate their own history in this way. The cost of running the museum was £250,000 a year and costs for The Neeld were £300,000 with income of £150,000. The Neeld running costs included costs incurred for running the Council offices as the buildings were cojoined and venues were run as community projects. Marketing and promotion would be planned to improve income potential in the future.

Funding the two venues was being managed through a supported service led approach, not as separate businesses. The Neeld budget lines incorporate the Council's office facilities (part of the same building).

Thanks were given to all the guests for attending the meeting and giving their presentations and advice, it was helpful to hear how the facilities worked whilst giving consideration to the land south of the High Street in Leighton Buzzard.

RESOLVED to note the information.

11/SS MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

(a) The Committee received the minutes of the South Side Task and Finish Group of 11 January 2021. Two minor changes were requested in minute reference 06/SS, second paragraph on the first line to change “would” to “could” and in paragraph 3 the Development Brief of 2016 be changed to 2017.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the South Side Task and Finish Group meeting held on 11 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

(b) A suggestion was made for a preliminary paper to be put together giving the options suggested from these meetings. These options could then be looked at in more detail and either discarded or reviewed as necessary. Members agreed a vision document giving the options discussed would be a good idea however it might be better to wait until the Options Analysis had been completed by Cornerstone. This was due to be completed by the end of March 2021. After discussion, it was suggested that a summary document be prepared by Vivien Cannon with the assistance of Sam Caldbeck from CBC.

12/SS FUTURE MEETING DATE

The date for the next meeting was set for Monday 22 March 2021, at 10.00am

13/SS EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded on the grounds of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. The public and press to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of detailed discussion regarding: documentation for Land South of the High Street.

14/SS DOCUMENTATION FOR LAND SOUTH OF THE HIGH STREET

Members received an update and documentation on work pertaining to plans for the area land south of the High Street. It was confirmed that a new Development Study would not be required to progress the planning applications for a new development on land south of the High Street. The 2012 document would be used with consideration given to current needs and how High Street retail had changed and what would be required and needed now in this environment.

Consideration would be given to the initial overview of feedback from the Options Analysis Document being prepared by Cornerstone at the next meeting of the group. Sam Caldbeck explained the final document is unlikely to be ready for sharing by the next meeting date, yet he would be able to

offer an overview.

It was suggested that other venue organisations be invited to give presentations to the group. No invitations would be extended immediately. In the meantime the venue questions along with the background introduction would be circulated for group members to use.

The meeting closed at 12.02 pm.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A CORRECT AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2021.

Chair

22 MARCH 2021