

**HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL
MEETING OF HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 21st September 2020, which was held virtually by Zoom under the provisions of the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020.

Councillors: Christopher Ash-Edwards

Richard Bates

Clare Cheney **

Rachel Cromie

Sandy Ellis **

Christopher Evans

Howard Munding

Stephanie Inglesfield

Matthew Jeffers

James Knight

Clive Laband

Jack Langley

Alastair McPherson

Richard Nicholson

Mike Pulfer

Sujan Wickremaratchi

Apologies Absent***

Also present, 17 Members of the public.

The Town Mayor asked for each Member to confirm that they were present, which is reflected above.

42. Council Prayer

The Town Council prayer, which was read by Town Mayor Cllr Alastair McPherson.

43. Apologies

Cllr C. Cheney – holiday.

Cllr S. Ellis – holiday.

44. Minutes

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20th July 2020, without comment, were taken as read, confirmed as true and duly signed by the Mayor.

45. Declarations of Interest

None

46. Public Forum

Mr Nigel Allyson Ryan spoke in relation to items 9 and 10, future of Clair Hall, on the agenda. Mr Ryan stated that, having enjoyed many an evening at Clair Hall, it was very sad that Clair Hall would be closing. However, in his opinion, being a resident of Haywards Heath for over twenty-five years and having worked/currently working within in the arts, it was a great opportunity. He felt that the closure should be used as way of developing something new, something vibrant and something exciting for the Town. Living in Haywards Heath it is seen as a commuter town, but this needed to change so it can be seen as a destination where people will want to come to. The Town does not have a proper theatre, an art gallery or a cinema, so now is the time to look forward and see what can be provided for a growing Town. As the District Representative on the Royal Society of the Arts, working in schools and with established artists it is sad to see that there is nowhere for these people to perform or displays of their work. He has passion for what could be done and really hopes that something can be done to provide a venue in the wake of Clair Hall closing.

47. To Dispose of any Business Outstanding from the Last Meeting.

It was noted on the matter of 'Black Lives Matters' discussed at the last meeting of the Town Council, a Mayor's Forum would be held focusing on the issue of diversity and equality.

The Clerk's update for the application for funding for a 20mph zone (Butlers Green Road Roundabout to Birch Hotel Roundabout) was deferred as the application required needed to be ready to go, and it seem to have been pre-selected. It was noted that the process had not been wasted as the wish of the Town Council was now on the radar of West Sussex County Council.

48. Mayor's Engagements and Announcements.

The Town Mayor, informed Members that due to the circumstances we find ourselves in, that his diary is very quiet, but at a social distance he had laid a wreath for the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain with the Haywards Heath 172 Squadron Air Cadets at Western Road Cemetery, and observed a two-minute silence for Merchant Navy Day at the Haywards Heath War Memorial. The Town Mayor added that he and the Town Clerk continued liaisons with Haywards Heath Mutual Aid who had currently moth balled their operations, apart from the Emergency Food Hub, at a monthly meeting to see how things are progressing and how the Emergency Food that was operating and how they are managing the food they are holding. In closing the Town Mayor promoted his forum, which would focus on Equality and Diversity, to which leaders of the community had been invited so to see what the Town Council can do to help them and what they can do to help the Town Council.

49. To receive and consider adoption of the Resolutions of the following Committees:

- (i) **Planning Committee - MINS. 25 - 48**
The reception and adoption of the resolutions of the Planning Committees, dated 27th July 2020 - **Mins 25 – 32**, 17th August 2020 - **Mins 33 – 40** and 7th September 2020 - **Mins 41– 48** were moved, seconded and agreed by Council.
- (ii) **Environment & General Purposes Committee - MINS. 10 - 18**
The reception and adoption of the resolutions of the Environment & General Purposes Committee dated 1st September 2020 **Mins 10 - 18** were moved, seconded and agreed by Council.
- (ii) **Policy & Finance Committee - MINS. 12 - 21**
The reception and adoption of the resolutions of the Policy and Finance Committee dated 14th September 2020 **Mins 12 - 21** were moved, seconded and agreed by Council.

50. Remembrance Sunday and School Remembrance Service.

The Town Clerk presented a report that recommended alternative arrangements for this year's Remembrance Sunday service and a suggestion of how to honour the pending retirement of Reverend Ray Smith from St Wilfrid's Church. Members noted the unfortunate need to scale down this year's Remembrance Sunday service to a small contingent of six because of the Covid-19 restrictions in place. It was questioned if there was a need for the Town Council to be represented at church services across the Town that morning also. The Town Clerk responded by saying no, as normal practise would be for all Councillors and Staff to be at the Ward Memorial because that is all the Council's resources would allow. Furthermore, local churches were subject to a restriction of numbers. In noting those attending in the group of six as suggested, it was asked if a place became available that thought be given to diversifying the group. This was deemed to be a sensible suggestion, but there was a reminder that those

present are the usual people who have supported the Town Council for many years with the service. Generally, the Town Council reserved its right to change its position on the event itself and the decision on the alternative arrangements were being made in line with changes to Government advice. However, the Town Council was being asked to cancel the normal arrangements for the service with the best alternative option on the advice and legislative basis at the time of the meeting. Then Members without question supported the move to purchase Reverend Smith a token of the Town Council's appreciating for his service and it was moved that thanks be recorded for his service of 24 years to the residents of the Town, and indeed Haywards Heath generally.

Members **RESOLVED** to,

- a) **Cancel the Remembrance Sunday Service and Parade and the Schools' Remembrance Service 2020.**
- b) **Agree, with the right to change on legislative advice from the Government, an alternative manner in which to hold this year's Remembrance Sunday Service maintaining the rule of six.**
- c) **That the Town Council make an acknowledgement to Reverend Ray Smith for his service to the Town to the maximum of £100 from the hospitality budget.**

51. Motion (1/2020) by Cllr Michael Pulfer regarding the Town Council's position on the future of Clair Hall

Cllr Pulfer presented his motion as follows, which was seconded by Cllr Laband, which read,

To note the possible permanent closure and demolition of Clair Hall and to welcome the Town Council's inclusion in re-establishing modern community facilities.

At this point Cllr Bates moved an alternative motion with the additional wording to be considered and was seconded by Cllr Inglesfield, which read,

That Haywards Heath Town Council recognises that Mid Sussex District Council, as part of the Haywards Heath Regeneration Masterplan intends to replace Clair Hall. That Haywards Heath Town Council feels Clair Hall can still operate as at present, subject to Covid-19 restrictions until a new complex has been agreed. That a different form of management is needed to facilitate events at Clair Hall when it opens again

At this point a matter of order was raised on the motion, but the Town Mayor allowed the amended motion to move forward with the Town Clerk.

Those who spoke for Cllr Bates amended motion made the following points. It was felt that the degree of consultation with the community had been dismal and there had been little scrutiny on the decision made to close the building, which was echoed and opposed by the 2,000 plus signatures plus petition made. It was then stated that not providing a new and superior facility was contrary to the Mid Sussex District Plan and Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan. This was on the basis that no replacement had been provided, nor even funded, along with no tangible business plan being put forward or land allocated for such replacement. It was felt that the reasoning of Covid 19 for the closure was not acceptable as the pandemic was a short-term problem. The expenditure of one million pounds quoted, stated to be over twenty years, needed to spent so that meant the word 'opportunity' for a new facility could be progressed. It also was felt questionable that the utilisation rate of the hall was 50%, as it was claimed that bookings have been turned away. It was thought that the hall should stay open, whilst investment and a credible plan was looked into for a new hall, which needed to be developed in consultation with the local community so that the educational and cultural facility could continue to run in the meantime for the residents of the Town.

Those against the motion felt that pouring money into a building that had been closed for six months was not prudent and a focus should be on the replacement of a new hall. It was suggested that the Town deserved better on the grounds that the hall was built for use as by all members of the family, but now it is very clear that if residents wanted to see a show, they look elsewhere first, as people do not want to sit in an uncomfortable venue with poor acoustics and with poor ancillary facilities. It was also felt that the hall was not doing its job, with the declining numbers and 30% of users being from yoga classes. Whilst not dismissing such an activity, it does not promote the desired usage of the hall. Under the point of Covid-19, it was countered that the effects of a pandemic will not be temporary as the financial effect and social repercussions will be long lasting with people's way of life changing forever, which will bring a new way of living along with a need to socialise more locally. A new facility should accommodate changes to people's habits when travelling to undertake their recreational activities around arts and culture, as people may not choose to travel into London or Brighton. It was felt generally the pandemic puts the future of Clair Hall into perspective and the need for a new facility. Furthermore, prolonging Clair Hall's operation may be worthy, but the required maintenance including of asbestos and the chance of legionnaires disease should not be risked. The language used about Covid 19 being temporary was a contested again, as it was felt that no-one will know where we will be in the next month, or year, so opening a building, whilst many other more substantial venues are closing, to promote crowds to gather would not be prudent. It was felt if these were ordinary times then there may be merit in looking at re-opening, but these are not in ordinary times. It was felt that the down time being experienced gave the opportunity to provide a modern facility, as social distancing may be around for many years to come so there was a need to look at how to use the space Clair Hall offers and make the new facility more flexible, profitable and a safer place to go. So, when residents/our children look back they will see that a future proofed hall was provided through forward thinking and community engagement. In summary, of those against the motion, it was felt a creative, forward thinking and future proofed building was needed and not to have a prolonged opening, which would result in the same conversation being had in 5-10 years' time, so a better facility for a better Town could be provided, and not a facility that need more tax payer's money spent on it. With this a **recorded vote was taken;**

With four votes in favour of the amended motion, namely Richard Bates, Richard Nicholson, Stephanie Inglesfield and Jack Langley and ten against Chris Ash-Edwards, Rachel Cromie, Christopher Evans, Howard Muddin, Matthew Jeffers, James Knight, Clive Laband, Alastair McPherson, Mike Pulfer and Sujan Wickremaratchi

This resulted in Members returning to the original motion,

Discussion then continued and again it was felt that Clair Hall was no longer fit for purpose with uncomfortable seating and compromised viewing. It was felt that smaller bookings could be accommodated across the Town in other venues that were crying out for hirings and revenue. This was supported by a statement that a community facility was needed, which needs be to inclusive for all community needs and to support the next generation. Investment was needed in a modern facility, which was inviting for family and friends to be able to meet together and be able to enjoy arts and culture. It was stated Cllr Bates did not state that he wanted to see the building put elsewhere. It was also felt it was disappointing that as the mover of the alternative motion he was not given the chance to speak at the end of debate. In addition, concerns were raised about blood donation appointments, which were still deemed to be being held at the Clair Hall, but they were not being cancelled and/or people were being re-directed out of the Town and not being able to attend when the need for such was crucial. Clair Hall's immediate future was the crux of the amended motion as it had not been thought about, and this point was rather missed in the previous debate. It was felt that the original motion being debated said nothing.

All were reminded what Cllr Pulfer's motion read that the Town Council was pleased to note that Mid Sussex District Council were finalising the Town Centre Masterplan, which would include commissioning work for the regeneration of modern facilities in the Town Centre with Haywards Heath Town Council being a major consultee. It was then stated that a very strong message should be sent to Mid Sussex District Council from the Town Council that it absolutely must provide new facilities and the Town Council would not settle for less. It was felt that the Town Council would not be doing its job if this was not done. With regards to the point about blood donation it was not a Town Council role to issue residents with information and the mover of the amended motion as a District Councillor should be able to access such information.

It was stated that Clair Hall, granted, is not the greatest venue, but it is much easier to demolish something than plan for something new, and there is no plan to replace. The good words said went to people's hearts, but it was felt that they are 'pie in the sky' with no funds in the bank, no signature on paper to build a new hall then it will not be believed. It was picked up on that Covid-19 has changed things for ever including the finances of local government and there was no money to build a new hall. As a result, that the Clair Hall should be kept going, as the cost is known. Once the money and commitment were in place then the project can move forward, but all that was being heard was promises being made.

It was felt a long-term view was needed and it was countered that it was stated that there was no money to build a new hall. In fact, all of the conversation was around what can be put in place, not to just service our community, but it must serve our local business in what will be a very hard recession. Everyone needed to unite to ensure timely delivery of a community facility that all the community will feel they have ownership of.

It was felt that there was clear inconsistency in the arguments as it was being said that a new state of the art facility was needed for Haywards Heath to bring people together, but there was no money to keep the existing facility open. There was only one way forward that could be seen was to demolish Clair Hall and build residential flats and build a new Clair Hall from the funding received from the development. However, there is no certainty or plan and so there needs to be an open and honest dialogue about such. So, it was noted that the proposed option is a car park, which was documented seemed to be a well thought out plan against nothing on table for a new hall. Again, it was stated that the loss of Clair Hall was directly against the policy of the Town Council's Neighbourhood (10.5 policy L1), which was voted to resist the closure of Clair Hall until an alternative exists.

It was felt disappointing that, in line with the number of social media comments, that more people were not with the Town Council for the meeting, but the well-informed comments from Mr Ryan were welcomed. It was felt that focusing on the cost was misleading and re-opening the existing defunct building would be pouring money down the drain. There could be no support for continuing a substandard venue that is not sustainable, unfit for purposes, past its sell by date and that the public have decided to vote overwhelming with their feet, not to use. It was felt that there was continued support for development that provides sustainable facilities for the Town. These objectives are embedded in the Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan and the Town Council's Destination Haywards Heath document. It was felt that the matter has become a political football and there should be a focus on providing a better facility for the Town, so everyone should be heartened that all Town Councillors support the need for such.

The Town Mayor felt that it was an emotive subject and felt that it had been for years and stated that new management options and alternatives had been discussed since 2017 as part of the Destination Haywards Heath document. He said that coming from an active background in the arts personally along with his family it was exciting being Mayor in a time that the Town was finally talking about the future of Clair Hall and the arts and cultural offering in the Town. He felt that if he was told that the Town was losing its theatre and creative space, he would be worried, but that was not case. He was a huge supporter of the arts and the community and had enjoyed many events at Clair Hall and will be sad to see it go. It was felt it was not the state of the arts facility

the Town deserves and it had been depressing to see such a venue being underutilised. The Town needs community space where everyone wants to go to, and Haywards Heath needs to be a destination, and where Clair Hall has served the town well a new facility is now needed.

It was felt that change could be unsettling and along with progression would take time. It was not about Clair Hall closing; it was about what will open instead. He called for residents to tell him what they want from a new facility and felt that the time is right, in the current climate, for there to be a pause in the arts and cultural provision for the Town so that the future of Clair Hall be looked at.

In summary of debate, it was about the future and the past and the Mayor thanked those who had spoken and expressed their views. It was felt there is a need to look to the future and what is best for Haywards Heath. Does the Town stay with what it knows, or aspire to better things? Many arguments have been made but whatever the outcome of the vote on the motion it was hoped that all can come together and work together for the good of the Town.

At the end of discussion, a **recorded vote was taken**

A recorded vote was taken with ten votes for the original motion, namely Chris Ash-Edwards, Rachel Cromie, Christopher Evans, Howard Mundin, Matthew Jeffers, James Knight, Clive Laband, Alastair McPherson, Mike Pulfer and Sujan Wickremaratchi and four against Richard Bates, Richard Nicholson, Stephanie Inglesfield and Jack Langley

Members **RESOLVED** to note the possible permanent closure and demolition of Clair Hall and to welcome the Town Council's inclusion in re-establishing modern community facilities.

52. Mid Sussex District Council Consultation – Clair Hall Asset of Community Value

There were no objections made to the request of Haywards Heath Community Interest Company's request that Clair Hall be made an Asset of Community Value, then,

Members **RESOLVED** to make no objection, therefore no comment on the application made by Haywards Heath Community Interest Company to register Clair Hall as an Asset of Community Value.

53. To consider any urgent items, the Mayor has received.

None

54. Members RESOLVED to exclude the public and the press.

None.

Meeting Closed at 9pm