

HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 2nd September 2021

Councillors: Christopher Ash-Edwards
Richard Bates
Clare Cheney
Rachel Cromie
Sandy Ellis
Christopher Evans
Howard Muddin
Stephanie Inglesfield
Matthew Jeffers
James Knight
Clive Laband
Jack Langley
Alastair McPherson
Richard Nicholson *
Mike Pulfer
Sujan Wickremaratchi **

Apologies Absent***

Also, present: Town Clerk and three residents.

Before the meeting commenced the Town Mayor welcomed everyone back to the Council Chamber for the first physical meeting of the Town Council since March 2020.

22. Council Prayer

The Town Council prayer, which was read by the Town Mayor Howard Muddin.

23. Apologies

Sujan Wickremaratchi – holiday.

24. Public Forum

Mr Bright made representation on the matter of Clair Hall in the form of a proposal, which he asked for the Town Council to support. It was acknowledged that the proposal had been circulated that day so he did not expect a response to his representation at the meeting. The basis of the proposal was,

- To keep Clair Hall open on a 'meanwhile' basis, after the current NHS use, with preparation of a business plan by MSDC while long-term planning takes place.
- Based on the fact that in July 2020 the Government prohibited the closure of performing arts centres, offering grants to such venues to keep them open, and these grants were still available. MSDC's 14th September 2020 report on Clair Hall already contains the following preliminary business plan elements as a starting point.
- The Arts Council has reported that there is under-provision of performing arts facilities in Mid Sussex, so Haywards Heath cannot afford to lose Clair Hall for even a short time.

- It was stated that contrary to statements made by some Councillors, there is no large equivalent to Clair Hall in HH or the surrounding area, and venues for smaller events are also mostly dated - and in the meantime the population continues to grow.
- In the light of Covid-related costs which the community will have to fund over many years, the building should now be minimally refurbished under the 'Meanwhile' principle, while we all discuss ideas, plans and funding for a proper replacement in the same location. The community deserves this.

As a response it was asked that all Town and MSDC Councillors to support the plea for Clair Hall to remain open (after the current NHS use) under these above suggested conditions. The Town Mayor thanked Mr Bright and state that a response would be forthcoming.

25. Minutes

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council held on 5th May 2021 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Mayor.

26. Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Bates, Cromie. Ellis, Knight, Laband and Pulfer all declared a personal interest as Mid Sussex District Council Councillors.

27. Town Council Response to the Future of Clair Hall Consultation.

Members considered the recommended response to the Clair Hall consultation, as presented, with three matters initially being drawn to the attention of the Council.

It was felt that the inclusion of the requirement to meet the standards of the Equality (not Equalities) Act 2010 was not required as it was a legal requirement for the development of any new building. It was therefore felt insulting to tell MSDC officers and/or any future architects that they should comply with the law.

Then the meeting of the Planning Working Group, which formulated the representation, was raised as it was deemed to be a productive and useful discussion supported by illustrations that had been tabled by architect Mr Nigel Ryan. It was hoped that the vision of a new building as presented would motive more discussion and stimulate a more robust consultation response from the community. So, it was asked that the illustrations be used to create more/assist debate with residents alongside the Town Council's response. At this point it was asked if a costing to the building as designed had been ascertained as asked at the working group? It was countered that the drawing was a vision and that no cost had been put on the proposal. In response to the answer, it was felt it was no good putting up a proposal that would costs millions to build as it would raise expectations. Furthermore, the real issue was, whilst everyone would love to see a new building the drive should be to get the existing building up and running in 2022 for public use. It was felt it was ridiculous that the building has been used for two years since it was deemed unfit for use by Mid Sussex District Council. Leading on from this, it was moved that the sentence '*it should be retained with minimum functionality and minimum expenditure*' should be removed as it should not be for Town Council to put such provisos on any re-opening. Minimum function and minimum usage meant to the mover that it would never reopen where all should be focusing on maximising income. The interpretation of the such was challenged by the view that the sentence meant the building would be open for sufficient periods to meet the needs bestowed upon it whilst ensuring it is warm, lit and functional for the needs required. Opening any further would-be pouring money in for no return. On the matter of tax payer's money, it was also felt that residents would be concerned that money

was being spent on a building that was to be replaced, whilst remembering that tax payer's money comes from across the District not just Haywards Heath in this case. It was asked how long could the building last with 'minimum functionality and minimum expenditure' if the funding was not found for a new building. With no response forthcoming it was felt to be disappointing especially with a number of MSDC Councillors in the room. Generally, in response it was felt that the Town Council should not get in front of itself as it did not own Clair Hall and will not be party to the funding of the building, as that was down to MSDC whether to retain or rebuild, so Members should focus on the questions that had been asked during the consultation. All Councillors were thanked for helping with the formulation of the response, which had been through two working groups with the public drop-in session in between the two meetings so Members could fine tune the content of the response.

As the matter drew to close, the Town Clerk stated that debate had concluded and that the three matters tabled needed to be agreed, or voted upon by the Town Council. All three matters were seconded individually and voted upon in turn namely;

- 1) Removal of reference to the Equality Act 2010. This was unanimously agreed by Members and the Town Clerk was instructed to strike out the reference.
- 2) Removal of the sentence '*it should be retained with minimum functionality and minimum expenditure*'. This was voted upon and voted down with a recorded vote requested as 2 for namely Cllrs Bates and Inglesfield and 12 against namely Cllrs Ash-Edwards, Cheney, Cromie, Ellis, Evans, Munding, Jeffers, Knight, Laband, McPherson, Pulfer and Langley. The sentence remained.
- 3) Use the illustrations tabled by Mr Ryan with the Town Council's response was agreed unanimously.

Town Mayor in considering the representations made during debate and recorded above considered that a vote needed to be taken on the Town Council's overarching response. This was agreed and it was again asked that the vote be a named vote. With this there were 12 votes in favour of the representation namely Cllrs Ash-Edwards, Cheney, Cromie, Ellis, Evans, Munding, Inglesfield, Jeffers, Knight, Laband, McPherson and Pulfer, 1 against namely Cllr Langley and 1 abstention Cllr Bates, with this,

Members **RESOLVED** the **Town Council's response for the Future of Clair Hall Consultation as presented with the omission of reference to the Equality Act 2010. In addition, it was agreed that the artist impressions of a potential replacement for Clair Hall be used to support the representation when required,**

28. Urgent Items
None

Meeting Closed at 8.05pm