

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND LEISURE
COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 9 DECEMBER 2013 IN THE ROBING ROOM,
THE CASTLE, HERTFORD AT 7.30PM**

PRESENT: Councillor Miss I Sigmatic, in the Chair

Councillors: P Boyle, Miss C Geall, P Ruffles, Dr L Radford and Miss J Sartin, Mrs B Haddock (for part of the meeting), A Stevenson

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms N L Villa, Town Clerk
Ms M Bolton, Marketing and Events Manager

300. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mrs B Mansfield (work commitment), D Poole (unwell)

301. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

302. THE MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2013 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

303. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT DEALT WITH ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

VOLUNTEERS IN THE TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE (TIC)

It was noted that two volunteers have been recruited to assist in the TIC and that this had positive implications in terms of limiting lone working. Additional volunteers were still coming forward. There was a query about the limitations, if any, of the volunteers compared to full time staff as there was a concern to ensure that there was no dilution of the professionalism of the service offered. It was confirmed that the volunteers played a supporting role which they could grow in to and that they were not a substitute for the professional staff.

SIGNAGE

It was noted that the new signage on the gates is currently empty and needs something displayed within it.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The action sheet be received and noted.

304. QUESTIONS AND/OR STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

305. TOURISM AND PROMOTION – TOWN AND TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

The Committee received a report summarising activity at the Tourist Information Centre (TTIC) and it was noted that the visitor and sales figures continued to be down on the previous year. It had previously been recognised that the lease would be due for renewal in 2015 and that a strategic review would need to take place to ascertain how the TTIC would look going forward and it was queried whether the downward trend in sales was indicative of the long term viability of the Centre in its current location. It was noted that sales may have been affected by the reduced amount of stock and display space available and that a redesign and better use of space may help to reverse this downward trend. It was noted that the statistics were not as complete as usual due to the departure of the TIC Manager and full figures were requested for the next meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.

306. TOURISM AND PROMOTION – HERTFORD TOWN COUNCIL EVENTS

The Committee received a report on the proposed events programme for 2014 as well as feedback of the events that had taken place in 2013.

It was noted that the 'Think Christmas Think Hertford' shopping day which was linked to the nation small business Saturday campaign had been well received by traders and visitors to the town, with one trader commenting that it had been their best trading day for some time. Santa's grotto in St Andrew St received over 200 visitors. It was also felt that the event linked in well with Christmas Tree festival at All Saints' Church. There was feedback that the music in the afternoon was a little loud and something more appropriate and festive should be selected for next year.

It was suggested that a well organised Social Media campaign might help boost awareness and impact in future and it was noted that the Marketing and Events Manager is posting regularly on Facebook and Twitter. It was suggested that a logo be developed for next year which could be used as the profile picture next year, boosting awareness of the event.

It was noted that the Food and Drink Festival had been a huge success on the Saturday but was not as busy on the Sunday and additional events should be considered for the Sunday next year. It was noted that there should be a wet weather routine available for this event if possible.

The Christmas Gala was extremely well attended again this year and the event's continual growth is causing some difficulties with road closures and stewarding. It was agreed that the stewards required additional training, especially for guiding vehicles through crowds, prior to next year's event.

The Committee reviewed the proposed events programme for 2014 and there was a query about whether the Wedding Exhibition would be self funding if it were to be outsourced. The Marketing and Events Manager confirmed that the only cost to the Council would be manning the Castle's own stand and staffing the building. There was a discussion about the Valentines event and whilst there was some concern initially about how the event would be different to what is offered elsewhere in town, the Marketing and Events Manager confirmed that it would be pitched at couples who were married here previously as well as potential wedding hirers and that the Castle's preferred caterer would be doing the catering. It was agreed that the event be run as a pilot and then reviewed.

The proposed art taster sessions were warmly welcomed by Members as it was felt that there was the possibility of too heavy a focus on activities for children on the Open Days. It was agreed not to offer free tea and scones to visitors as this may impact on the fundraising efforts of the charities who often provided this service on Open Days.

2000 – Cllr Haddock left the meeting

In relation to Rock at the Castle, it was noted that security was a Council responsibility and therefore the security company used previously would be required again. The proposals to have a Council run beer tent was discussed and considered complicated so it was agreed not to pursue this proposal but to review the fees charged to the existing provider and to consider inviting an organisation such as Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) to provide a real ale tent in addition to the beer tent.

The proposal for an Open Air Cinema was well received and it was felt that a classic film should be chosen for showing, which would take place in the evening. It was confirmed that those attending would pay for tickets in advance and that ticket prices would be in the region of £5.

Members were not keen on the proposal to move the Christmas Gala to a Sunday as this had been tried previously and had not generated the same level of interest or atmosphere.

There was a query as to whether all of these additional events can be accommodated within the existing budget and the Marketing and Events Manager confirmed that she believed it was achievable.

It was noted by the Town Clerk that there is no town centre event planned of the summer and that the possibility of a continental market, perhaps shared with other towns, should be explored.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.

- b) The Committee **approves** the proposed events for 2014.

307. TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

The Committee received a report summarising the various projects designed to assist the economic health and development of the town centre during the current financial difficulties.

It was agreed that the list of priorities previously agreed for the Town Centre Co-ordinator needed review. It was also noted that it was important to ensure that the networking events attended by the Town Centre Co-ordinator should be reviewed regularly to ensure that these activities added value to the role.

The Marketing and Events Manager updated Members on usage of the GoHertford website, which included 3000 new users in the run up to Christmas gala with the average time spent on the site being approximately 2 minutes.

The Committee was pleased to note that shop vacancy levels were reducing, with new businesses regularly opening in the Town. The Committee were also grateful to the Hertfordshire Mercury for its support in publicising various town centre events in recent months.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the progress made on delivering the Council's Town Centre priorities and the planned activities.
- b) The Committee agrees that a report is submitted to the next meeting to cover further priorities for the town centre for 2014/15.

308. VENUE HIRE PRICE REPORT

The Committee received a revised price structure for both wedding and corporate hire of the Castle.

There was a discussion about difficulties associated with assessing the indirect costs of having the building available for hire and the Finance Manager was working with the Marketing and Events Manager to produce a more realistic apportionment of staff salaries to activities in order to attempt to arrive at a representative percentage. Staff had been asked to keep timesheets to assist with this process. The Town Clerk stated that this exercise was overdue for the entire organisation as the existing apportionments had been calculated prior to her appointment six years ago and that she would ask the Finance Manager to undertake a review.

It was queried whether a charity rate still exists for the Castle and the Marketing and Events Manager confirmed that charity hire for the Castle was low so no special rate had been included. The Town Clerk confirmed that she has delegated authority to negotiate, within reason, to secure bookings and that any significant variation, or offering of the facilities for free, were always discussed with the Chairman prior to approval.

The Committee noted the request for an uplift in the existing marketing budget from £5,000 per annum to £15,000, which was a considerable amount to consider in the absence of an accurate cost analysis for hire. The Town Clerk noted that the budget available now is the same as that available in 2002/03 and the Committee confirmed that this was one of the budgets which had been reduced in recent years. It was therefore suggested that it be increased to somewhere in the region of £10,000 to £12,000 depending on demands on the budget for other projects.

There was a positive response to the proposed dedicated website for the venue. The Marketing and Events Manager confirmed that she would like to create a virtual tour to be posted on this website which would give potential hirers a much better feel for the space and generate a more positive response than the existing pages on the Council's website.

The Committee considered the proposal to investigate the feasibility of removing the wall in between the Mayor's Parlour and Salisbury Room in order to increase capacity available to potential hirers and for the Council's own civic events. The general feeling was that whilst the wall may not be original, the space was designed to be two rooms as there are two fire places and the wall was certainly of an age which meant it should be due respect. Concern was expressed that the Council was becoming too focused on wedding and hires which remain a small part of its service offer and that the structure of the building should not be changed to accommodate hires when the long term viability of hiring is still unclear. It was felt that the cost associated with removal of the wall and the erection of good quality wood panelling was prohibitive. The Members were however pleased with the progress of the refurbishment of the rest of the building.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.
- b) The Committee **approves** a total marketing budget for 2014/15 of between £10,000 - £12,000 subject to demand on the budget from other projects
- c) The Committee **does not approve** the proposal to investigate the costs and feasibility of removing the wall between the Mayor's Parlour and Salisbury Room.

309. CASTLE BASEMENT

The Committee received a report outlining a proposal to create an authentic kitchen in one of the rooms in the basement to enhance the visitor experience. The Committee warmly welcomed the suggestions but asked that planning advice be sought before any major changes are undertaken. It was felt that the proposals were a true reflection of the use of the room which enhances the educational role of the Council in relation to the Castle.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.

- b) The Committee **approves** the inclusion £2000 in the proposed budget for 2014/15.

310. CCTV STATISTICS

The Committee received a report from the Finance Manager outlining the recent CCTV statistics.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.

311. PLANNING TRANSPORT AND TRAFFIC - PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee had received copies of the minutes of the Planning Sub Committee meetings held on 30 September, 14 October, 28 October, 11 November, 25 November..

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The minutes of the Planning Sub Committee be received.

312. HERTFORD TOWN COUNCIL WEBSITE

The Committee received a report from the Marketing and Events Manager about the new Town Council website which will include, free of additional cost, the dedicated venue hire page. It was confirmed that the Council is close to placing an order and starting development of the site. The Members noted the increased traffic on Facebook and Twitter and recorded their thanks to the Marketing and Events Manager for undertaking this work.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) That Committee **notes** the report.

313. PARKING CONSULTATION

The Committee had been asked to note the forthcoming new parking reform proposals to support local shops and high streets being put forward by the government. Cllr Sartin had reviewed the consultation which had just been published and noted that whilst the questions asked for very general, it was appropriate for the Council to respond.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **delegate** authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with Cllr Sartin, to respond to the consultation.

314. NOTICEBOARDS

The Committee were asked to consider a potential location for the installation of a Town Council Noticeboard somewhere outside of the town centre. The Town Clerk confirmed that it was unlikely that the Council would be able to purchase two noticeboards this financial year due to the costs involved in installation but that only one was realistically achievable. It was agreed that additional provision was desirable and that as prudent management of the budget to date was likely to result in a significant year end surplus, the Town Clerk should be empowered to overspend the noticeboard budget in consultation with the Chairman if necessary to ensure that the project moves forward. It was agreed that Sele ward, possibly close to the shops, would be an appropriate place.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** Sele ward as an appropriate location for the noticeboard, the exact location of which to be agreed between the Town Clerk and ward members.
- b) The Committee **delegates** authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, to exceed the budget if required to ensure that the project moves forward.

315. FINANCE – FIRST HALF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 2013/14

The Committee received a report on the income and expenditure for 2013/14 TO 30TH September 2013.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the income and expenditure to 30th September for 2013/14

316. FINANCE – DRAFT BUDGET 2014/15

The Committee had received a second draft of the proposed budget for 2014/15 which was broadly unchanged from the previous version presented to the Committee.

The Committee noted that the suggested budget of £2000 for additional noticeboards was unlikely to be sufficient and requested that this be increased to £5,000 to be funded from the New Homes Bonus. It was noted that the town signage and maps and Taxi Marshalls should also be funded from the New Homes Bonus.

The decisions made earlier on the agenda were noted for inclusion in the budget namely £10,000 - £12,000 total budget for marketing activities and £2000 for Castle Basement displays.

There was a discussion around the requirement for upgrades to the kitchen and it was agreed to budget £5,000.

It was noted that the anticipated income from hires had not been increased for 2014/15 and that an increase would be appropriate to reflect the likely increase in hire due to the refurbishment and increased marketing budget.

The Town Clerk drew Members attention to the issues in the Conservatory and asked whether the Committee would like to seek additional funding for repair/refurbishment as part of the Downshire Suite improvements or whether it wished the matter to be considered by the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee. The latter was agreed.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) Subject to the changes outlined above, the Committee **notes** the draft budget and recommends its adoption to the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee.

The meeting closed at 2150.