

**At a meeting of the LEISTON-cum-SIZEWELL TOWN COUNCIL
held in the COMMUNITY CENTRE, King Georges Avenue, Leiston, on TUESDAY,
8th MARCH 2011, at 7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor A. M. Cooper (in the chair)
Councillor D. E. Bailey
Councillor D. Boast
Councillor Mrs S. M. Geater
Councillor C.S. Ginger
Councillor T. J. Hawkins
Councillor T.E. Hodgson
Councillor F. R. Huxley
Councillor Mrs A. V. Nunn
Councillor A. J. Nunn
Councillor N Parker

156. **Apologies.** Apologies were accepted from Cllr Morrissey, Cllr Howard and Cllr Mr J Geater.
157. **Open Access Youth Provision.** The Chairman introduced Mr Keith Jennings from Suffolk County Council who explained the policy with regard to the Open Access Youth Provision in the town. Basically, the County Council, who run the youth club on the High School site at the moment, will be pulling out and closing it at the end of May. Unless a group comes forward with plans to run the club themselves then this will be the end of open access youth provision in Leiston after over 30 years. Members questioned Mr Jennings on what sort of responsibilities, commitment and governance would have to be looked at and taken on by a such a group should it come forward and delved into the financial implications of such a venture as well. Broadly speaking, on the positive side the Headteacher at the High School had indicated a willingness to take over the current premises including all the running costs, and had also indicated that he would be very supportive of the premises being used in the evening still as a youth club. On the negative side was the fact that the County Council would no longer be able to provide any of their trained staff to run the club even should a group come forward willing to purchase staff time from them. Keith felt that his consultation revolved around whether the Youth Club was needed or indeed wanted by the young people of the town and that this should be what any prospective organiser takes into account before registering an interest. He explained that free training for youth workers (to get up to the required quality standards) would be provided by the Young Suffolk organisation. The employment and wages would therefore be the responsibility of the new group. They would need insurance (which could be obtained possibly through Young Suffolk or the County) but most of all, they would need revenue. Mr Jennings explained that there was a divestment fund set aside to help groups get going but it was limited, extremely difficult to tap into and would not last long at all – any group would therefore need to be sustainable very quickly.

At 7.15pm it was proposed by Cllr Huxley, seconded by Cllr Hawkins and agreed that Standing Orders be suspended to allow the public to ask questions.

158. **Public questions.** Mr Briggs asked for assurance that all the equipment that the children had raised money for and bought plus all the funds held currently by the support group would remain the property of the support group (and not be taken back by County). Mr

Jennings gave verbal assurance but undertook to get written confirmation that this was the case adding that the condition would be that the money and equipment, should the support group disband, had to be divested to another group in the town and used only for youth provision and the benefit of young people. It was pointed out that the figures used in the County report for attendance was very inaccurate and misleading but Mr Jennings just pointed out that, unfortunately, even if the figures had been treble, it would still have been closed.

7.32pm Council resumed.

159. **Leiston Library – consultation.** The Chairman introduced Lynda Farnworth from the Library Authority who was asked to explain, as best she could, what had to be done to stop the County Council from closing Leiston Library. The stock answer to most questions was for the ideas, thoughts and questions to be put into any response to the consultation as an expression of interest that had to be made by 30th April. It was not clear what savings had to be made at Leiston however for it to be safe as the 30% quoted seemed to be a red herring as it applied to the overall total Library service budget and over 3 years – it might have to be more (to keep the “County” Libraries funded for instance) or it might be less if the County manage to trim the back office and the support service that would be needed to continue to support the Library. The one clear point was that the staff at Leiston would no longer be employed by Suffolk County Council as they would either face redundancy (if the library closed) or, ideally, be taken on to work for any group that came forward to manage the library. There were many issues raised about the latter however with the TUPE regulations needing to be clarified as the burden being passed to voluntary organisations could well be immense. Lynda undertook to find out more about the legal aspects of this although a quick answer appeared unlikely. In the meantime she was very keen to engage with any group that showed an interest in helping to shape the libraries future so that she could advise and help them put together a business plan. Changing location of the library might need to be considered by any proposal coming forward and what services could co-locate with it were also ideas that needed to be explored. Lynda was asked whether a lay hand could run the library to which she firmly advised that the most valuable resource any new group could have was the current manager working in the same capacity using all her years of training and experience. This could be seen as essential really as it would be extremely difficult to step straight in and run a good service without adequate and intensive training otherwise. Members felt that Leiston had a good case geographically to be considered a County library. Lynda pointed out again that, despite what seemed to be a very firm classification in the consultation document, this wasn't set in concrete and the case should be put in any expression of interest. There were questions on the recent news that American and other commercial companies were interested in taking over the library service (leading to fears of how many of the current libraries would be considered unprofitable) but Lynda was unable to comment on this. Finally members expressed their concern that community groups who did come forward to run the library in an unpaid capacity, working hard to raise funds etc. could well have the goalposts moved again in the future as the County decides to cut funding even further. Lynda was hopeful that this would not be the case.

At 7.55pm it was proposed by Cllr Huxley, seconded by Cllr Hawkins and agreed that Standing Orders be suspended to allow the public to ask questions

160. **Public Questions.** Mr Steve Smedley announced that he was very interested in heading up and organising a Community Interest Group to look at ways of saving the library. He asked for volunteers from those at the meeting and asked everyone to pass on the message to those who could not attend. During his and other questions it was made clear that the consultation strongly assumes a change in how libraries operate and that the status quo was not an option. Librarians are the heart of any library however and this would not change. The legalities were discussed with the County having to provide a

network of libraries across the county. It was agreed by all at the meeting that Leiston had to be part of that network.

8.20pm Council resumed.

161. **Questions to the chairman.** The Chairman thanked Lynda Farnworth and Keith Jennings for attending and addressing members concerns and, with no more questions forthcoming, closed the meeting.

There being no more business the meeting finished at 8.25 pm.

----- Chair

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