

EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

Town Premises Working Party

Notes of the meeting held at 10.00am on Monday 9th May virtually via Zoom.

Present

Councillor Cherry Nicholas	CN	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Brian Bailey	BB	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Steve Gazzard	SG	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Tim Dumper	TD	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Maddie Chapman	MC	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Bruce De Saram	BDS	Exmouth Town Council
Lisa Bowman	LB	Town Clerk/Officer
Mollie Carey	MC	Admin/note taker

Apologies

Councillor Alex Sadiq	AS	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Brian Toyne	BT	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Frank Cullis	FC	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Angela Boatwright	AB	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Pauline Stott		

Welcome and apologies

SG welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were noted.

Approval of the notes of the meeting held on 7th March 2022

Councillor Brian Bailey proposed, and Councillor Maddy Chapman seconded that the notes be accepted as a true record of the meeting held on 7th March 2022.

Update from the Town Clerk on the outcome of discussions with EDDC regarding the future use of the Town Hall

LB provided an update on the outcome of two recent meetings with EDDC as follows:

Meeting with Libby Jarrett, Lucy Atkinson and Tim Child on 22nd April 2022 –

Libby Jarrett had reported that evidence collected by EDDC suggests that most EDDC customers are comfortable with the appointment and online system currently in place and it is felt that EDDC customers have adapted well so EDDC do not see the need for a reception at Exmouth Town Hall.

They recognise that our customer base is different but suggested that we might like to look at the scope for offering appointments rather than encouraging drop-in services. LB had explained that our location in the Town Centre encourages people to drop in and that the services we offer do not all warrant a formal appointment service, which would arguably be very time consuming to manage. LB also reiterated that the wider issue is about accessibility of the Town Council and the visibility of the Town (and District Council) and the perception that the building is closed to the public!

In summary, there is no hope of reception being manned in the foreseeable future or of the front doors being open. Instead, EDDC is looking at installing an intercom on the side door in the car park and possibly putting a canopy style porch roof on the side door so that people don't have to stand in the rain whilst they wait for somebody to let them in.

LB had expressed the Council's dissatisfaction with the current and proposed arrangements and asked if they would consider opening the front doors and manning reception for even a few mornings a week, but this was not deemed practical or necessary from their perspective.

The discussion had also touched on the scope for ETC to potentially include the ground floor when our current lease expires in January and agreed that this could be picked up as part of the lease renewal negotiations. However, it had been noted that our IT network would need to be reconfigured and there is a risk that we would end up dealing with lots of drop-in EDDC clients.

Meeting with Tim Child and Mark Williams on 3rd May 2022 – This meeting had been organised in response to the Working Party's request that LB should investigate the scope for an asset transfer of the Town Hall to the Town Council or the scope to purchase it using a Public Works Loan Board Loan. Mark Williams had explained that the draft asset transfer policy at EDDC had not yet been adopted and looked unlikely on the basis of the Beer trials. In any event, the Town Hall would be excluded from the potential asset list (as would Phear Park compound and Clayton House). In terms of a potential purchase, Tim Child agreed to look up the latest valuation but there was little or no appetite to enter discussions about a potential transfer and instead the focus had switched to the possibility for the Town Council to occupy alternative space in the Town Hall under the terms of a new lease and to that affect the Working Party were asked to put together a statement of need which

details how much space we need and what type of space. Tim Child reiterated that the District Council is still exploring the scope for an intercom system.

LB reported that she had subsequently received an email from Tim Child confirming that the latest asset valuation from December 2019 placed a value on the Town Hall of £860K as office accommodation. This is an asset valuation for accounting purposes so subject to a number of caveats and assumptions and Members were urged not to take this as a straightforward market value as it does not allow for more valuable alternative uses and is already a few years out of date.

In terms of taking forward the lease renewal by exploring the opportunity for the Town Council to occupy more space on the ground floor including a reception facility, Tim Child had again requested an ETC statement of needs – in an ideal world and with a blank canvas how much space would we require and how would those spaces be used. EDDC will then meet the Town Council on-site to look at how practically this could be delivered. We have ample time prior to the lease renewal so at this stage it would be exploratory only and merely to conclude whether or not a reconfiguration of areas occupied is practical. Once a view has been reached, we can then move forwards to the actual lease renewal itself.

In response to the updates provided by LB, TD commented that he believed that public buildings should be open in the context of the cost-of-living crisis and BdeS felt that it was not a satisfactory outcome. Doubts were expressed about the canopy and questions were asked about access to the Registrar.

It was suggested and subsequently agreed that Michelmores should be consulted to see if EDDC had breached the lease and that the Exmouth District Councillors need to make a stand and put forward a motion to the District Council regarding the need to reopen the Town Hall. SG will draft the wording for a motion accordingly.

Update on the identification of alternative premises for the Town Council.

LB and SG reported that they had visited the Beacon Vaults premises on Beacon Hill as they are currently for sale, but they were not deemed suitable as Council premises. No other premises have been identified and Councillors were asked to keep an eye out.

The meeting finished at 11.00am.