

## TENTERDEN TOWN COUNCIL – EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

### CINEMA FOCUS GROUP

#### MINUTES OF A MEETING ON 1<sup>ST</sup> AUGUST 2017

**Present:** Cllr. Sue Ferguson, Cllr. Rory Knight, Cllr. Mike Carter, Claire Gilbert (Town Council), Carol Parkin, Gill Topley, Robert Somerscales, Kimberley Trow, Vicky Morgan, Wilfred Watters, Tom Evans, Tom Strong, Seren Welch, Nic Phillips, Elaine Mahoney, Dave Hutton and Rob Cowan.

- 1. Apologies for Absence.** Chris Head, Nathan Parker and Lindsay Phillips.
- 2. Minutes.** None.
- 3. Matters Arising.** None.
- 4. Introductions.** The group went round the room introducing themselves and gave a brief outline of their backgrounds. Some members highlighted their links and experience of dealing with cinema providers.
- 5. Chair of Focus Group.** It was agreed that Sue Ferguson would chair the first meeting, with the position being a roving chair to allow other members the opportunity.
- 6. History.**

Sue Ferguson provided the group with a summary of the history of cinemas in Tenterden including the provision of historic photographs. The first cinema in Tenterden was at the Fairings in 1912 which was just one screen with 300 seats. In 1937 the Embassy Cinema opened (where M&Co is currently situated) and was again one screen but with 800 seats.

Sue reported that she had been in discussion with David Stickland, who had been the projectionist at the Embassy, and the Embassy was shut in 1969 due to not enough customers. Even though there was a petition with 2,000 signatures, the cinema still closed and became a supermarket.

The question was asked as to when interest peaked in Tenterden hosting a cinema again; this was around the time that Kino was moving into Hawkhurst and the possible reordering of the Town Hall was being considered 5/6 years ago.

- 7. Cinemas and Film Clubs Nearby.**

Dave Hutton (Sinden Theatre connection) reported that when the Sinden Theatre was opened in 1995, they were not allowed to licence new films as there was another cinema within 10 miles. At the time they formed a cinema club but only second films could be shown. The maximum number of people that attended any one showing was 25 and they only showed a film one night per week. A lot of money was spent on advertising, but still the numbers were low so the organisers stopped the cinema. With DVDs

being produced so quickly, and the low number of attendees, it was not financially viable any more.

Sue Ferguson reported that London Beach Hotel had also tried a cinema club. Wilfred Watters informed the group that he had attended the club and it was not very well organised. The Hotel had tried offering free cinema tickets with each meal brought, but this did not work or draw the crowds in either. Wilfred reported that it was only old films that were being shown.

Sue informed the group that the other cinemas and film clubs nearby were:

- Kino in Hawkhurst (1 screen)
- Kino in Rye (2 screens)
- Ashford Multiplex (Eureka Leisure Park)
- Elwick Place, Ashford (6 screens) being built.

## **8. One Screen or Two?**

8.1 The group discussed whether a Tenterden cinema should be one or two screens. For the blockbuster movies, two screens are required and the film must be run for several weeks. Seren Welch reported that blockbusters have to be run for 3-4 weeks to be viable. The proceeds from opening weekend for a blockbuster all go to the film producers. The following weeks are where the cinema provider starts to generate income. Seren informed the group that family films are the money spinners on new releases as children tend to badger parents and like to see movies more than once too. Gill Topley asked Seren if there was a specification on how many times a movie is played per day; Seren responded that a cinema provider can show the movie as little as once per day.

8.2 Tom Strong reported that cinemas must be DCI Compliant (Digital Cinema Initiatives) to conform to technical standards. Most projectors adhere to these standards nowadays.

8.3 Rob Cowan asked whether single instance cinemas operate one or two screens. Cllr. Mike Carter responded that the independent cinema at Westgate on Sea is operating well.

8.4 Seren Welch informed the group that the UK Film Council had produced a report in November 2005 on the impact of local cinema. It was agreed that this report would be circulated with the minutes for members to read before the next meeting. Film London, Secret Cinema and Roof Top Cinema had also produced reports.

Seren also reported that Kino rely on parties and private events to help with income. Also specialist showings could be provided, i.e. opera, sports events. Seren advised that with the more specialist showings, the Arts Council can subsidise 'bringing London to rural areas'.

8.5 Nic Phillips asked whether Kino had been spoken to with regard to a cinema coming to Tenterden. Mike Carter responded that Kino had visited the Town and were looking for an open shell. Kino indicated that the Town Hall was too constrained as a venue, however, if the right building was available, they would consider coming to Tenterden. Nic reported that Kino in Rye was a brilliant building, which was both central, provided catering and could hold social events.

8.6 Wilfred Watters had been speaking to a contact at Silverscreen who had looked round Tenterden and noted suitable areas. They even had the radical idea of building on East Cross Garden. However, Silverscreen have just built a four screen cinema in Deal. Sue reported that Kino like to move into a 'ready venue' not create a building or refurbish; Wilfred responded that Silverscreen are only interested in a new build.

## **9. Possible Land and Venues in Tenterden.**

9.1 Rob Cowan from the Woolpack Hotel offered the idea of using the Woolpack Barn area as a suitable venue. The gravel and garden area could be used as a car park with the barn demolished and a new building constructed in the shape of a horseshoe that links into the Town Hall. It could house a purpose built two screen Cinema, market in the forecourt, food stalls, etc. to bring in additional revenue. The Woolpack is currently owned by Enterprise Inns and Rob advised that they might consider leasing the land or selling it to the Town Council. However, a feasibility study would need to be conducted.

9.2 Sue Ferguson advised that HSBC was empty and has a great forecourt. However, it is currently owned by the Edmonds Brothers and would require a lot of refurbishment. Business rates and rent would also need to be considered.

9.3 Sue also advised that The Pebbles (currently leased to White Stuff) is owned by the Town Council. However, the lease to White Stuff does not cease until 2021 and will require major refurbishment.

9.4 Dave Hutton asked why the art/performing arts centre that was proposed for the Recreation Ground several years ago did not go ahead. Mike Carter responded that it did not go ahead as it was not viable.

9.5 The Town Hall would not be big enough as it currently is; fixed seats would need to be installed and the building refurbished. Mike Carter reported that the front of the building was listed; however, the rear of the building was a newer build.

9.6 Sue Ferguson asked if anyone had actually spoken to the Edmonds Brothers. Mike Carter responded that it is public money that would be going into the project, which may well fail. The building has got to be able to regenerate; using Council owned land or properties would be less controversial. The Recreation Ground would not be a suitable site as a skate park and MUGA were being proposed.

9.7 Other possible venues for the Cinema would be Lloyds Bank, Greyhound Galleries and M&Co, all of which are owned by the Edmonds Brothers.

9.8 Sue Ferguson reported that Glebe Hall (top of Church Road) was owned by the Church Commissioners in addition to Glebe Field. A new build cinema could be built into the land, however, this required further discussion.

9.9 Sue reported that the Tenterden Club was another possible venue; the Club also owns the freehold to St. Mildred's Church Hall (currently on a long lease to the Church) located next door. With the reordering of St. Mildred's

Church, the hall might not be needed. The upper floor of the Club covers St Mildred's Church Hall, has a stage and 200+ capacity. However, the Club's roof was currently not high enough for a cinema. The upstairs part can be completely cut off from the Club itself as there is a separate entrance and a lift could be installed. There is no parking at the Club; however, disabled bays could be put in place outside the Club.

9.10 Gill Topley asked if the Hospice Shop at Bridewell Lane was a possible venue; it was indicated that this might also be owned by the Edmonds.

9.11 Sue Ferguson reported that the land the other side of the railway line at Station Road could be considered. However, there might be issues with crossing the line itself for purposes other than using the railway.

## **10. Funding.**

10.1 Cllr. Rory Knight asked what the options were regarding the cinema; does it need to be on Council land so that the Council own it? Mike Carter reported that there are issues with not all Councillors being on board with the cinema idea. Sue responded that it comes down to how the Tent1 money can be spent, i.e. the Council cannot put money into a commercial venture. If it was a community project, this might sway it.

10.2 Mike Carter reported that Kino in Rye cost 1.3 million to get up and running. £800,000 was the cost of the building and the balance was put in by Kino. Crowd funding helped to put together the balance. Renting the property to Kino makes a £35/40,000 return. Sue reported that there were two types of crowd funding: normal crowd funding and crowd funding with rewards. Money may also be available via the Tent1 funds.

10.3 Kimberley Trow asked if Enterprise Inns were interested in selling/leasing their land. Rob Cowan responded that they are amenable to further discussion and he would create the introduction to the Council. Rob Cowan suggested the possibility of buying the pub/hotel outright with the opportunity to sell off portions. Batchellor Monkhouse would need to be asked for advice on dealing with any progress with Enterprise Inns. Sue suggested the Town Hall Focus Group were spoken to given the idea of approaching Enterprise Inns.

10.4 Tom Evans requested clarification on once the discussions start, what are the lines of responsibility; i.e. there needs to be a decision making structure. Mike Carter responded that a possible venue needs to be sourced first.

10.5 Seren Welch advised that Crowd Funder could come in and present on how to action their scheme. Seren agreed to look at similar arts venues around the 1.3 million mark for crowd funding ideas and would also contact Film London.

**11. Any Other Business.**

11.1 Sue asked that a cinema provider is not just restricted to Kino, but that Silverscreen and Picturehouse are also approached.

11.2 Kimberley suggested that if Enterprise Inns were interested, an architect would need to be sought before costs could be investigated.

**12. Date of Next Meeting.** To be confirmed, but would be in approximately six weeks time.