

# TENTERDEN TOWN COUNCIL – EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

## CINEMA FOCUS GROUP

### MINUTES OF A MEETING ON 9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2020

**Present:** Alan Bates, Colin Campbell, Cllr. Mike Carter, Angela Chivers, Tom Evans (Chair), Cllr. Sue Ferguson, Claire Gilbert (Deputy Town Clerk), Paul Hale, Chris Head, Elaine Mahoney, Carol Parkin, Nic Phillips, Fran Sharp, Bob Somerscales and Gill Topley.

- 1. Introduction and Welcome.** Angela Chivers was welcomed to the meeting. Angela has been advising the working groups on legal issues.
- 2. Videoconference Protocol.** Tom Evans outlined how the first virtual meeting of the Focus Group will be conducted.
- 3. Apologies.** None received, however, Barbara Lawrence and Wilfred Watters were absent.
- 4. Minutes of Previous Meeting.** The minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020 were agreed.

#### **5. Matters Arising.**

- 5.1 Feedback from Town Hall Exhibition. Nic Phillips commented that the cinema exhibition was excellent; there was clarity and the bullet points made clear what the ambition was. Nic congratulated the team.

Claire Gilbert reported that the results of the public survey had only just been analysed and the ratings for all three projects came out favourable. These figures will be presented to the Town Council at their next meeting in May 2020.

Congratulations were expressed to the Council for the organisation of the exhibition and for making it happen.

#### **6. Draft Building Feasibility Study Review – Comments from Focus Group to pass to Stefanie Fischer & Ron Inglis.**

- 6.1 It was commented that it was a shame the final figures were missing from the report. Tom reported that they will be included in the final version of the report, which will be issued two weeks after BFF receive our comments on the first draft.
- 6.2 Alan Bates reported that it was a great report. The area that could do with change is the description of all the energy saving and carbon reduction chapter where sections about ideas which are not being recommended or adopted should be taken out and put in as an appendix; focus on 'what doing' and not 'what not doing'. Appendix A1 should have the proposed plans of the new cinema first so that the drawings of the existing building are presented second.
- 6.3 Tom reported that the report missing an Executive Summary and is the most important part. Whether or not Stefanie and the Team decide to put

in detail of the heating and environmental solutions, they still need to be put in the text with reference to the appendix.

- 6.4 Colin Campbell commented on the diagrams. The orientation of the actual cinema unit has been changed and that is obvious. What is not obvious is the cinema section has been moved slightly further into the garden by at least a metre. The glass cover/conservatory that links the building to the cinema is much clearer and you can get to the auditorium more easily, but more importantly it probably deflects any noise from patio area and noise from White Lion.

Tom reported that the revised plan does extend further by two to four metres into the garden. The auditorium is bigger and in turning it round the footprint is larger. This has increased the number of seats in Screen One so 10 more seats overall. It does reduce the area of Millennium Garden space in comparison to the previous draft. They have also added a lavatory in the screen block. The narrow passage past the screen block has also been addressed.

- 6.5 Chris Head commented that the noise and smells that come from the White Lion's kitchen are an issue and there needs to be a passing reference to this in the document. Cllr. Mike Carter commented that there needs to be a provisional sum in the development budget to pay the White Lion to sort out their extractor fans; perhaps this could be considered. Angela Chivers suggested contacting Environmental Health regarding the smells and noise. Tom commented that the fans had been an established feature for many years and it was unlikely that any change could be enforced. Cllr. Sue Ferguson commented that the extractor fans are more parallel with the auditorium than the patio.

- 6.6 Alan was not sure if there had been any discussions with the owners of Central Garage, but Pierre Edmonds had said that when he built the two houses adjacent to the Millennium Garden, he did have access from the White Lion car park, so had set up an agreement with both the owners of Central Garage and the White Lion. Mike reported that a steel frame could go up quickly with a further two/three trips by a crane to get the auditorium built.

Tom asked for any further comments on the draft study to be sent to him by midday on Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The comments will be sent off to Burrell, Foley, Fischer and the Focus Group copied in.

## **7. Tenterden Cinema Company Reports and Next Actions.**

- 7.1 Route Map – Tom reported that this is out of the window now due to Covid-19 and we are not sure what state the world will be in after the pandemic. The movie industry has currently stopped and we hope that the operators will still be there when we come out of this. The route map been suspended for now.
- 7.2 Legal and Financial – Colin reported on the finances for the Tenterden Cinema Company. Each of the five individuals had put in £300 each and the Company was using the Town Council's bank account as their temporary bank for now. It is not urgent to open a Company account, so this is on hold. With regard to expenditure, Colin reported that there was still £300 in the account and more would be deposited if needed.

### 7.2.1 *Legal & Financial Issues.*

Alan reported that he had been doing financial modelling looking at issues of viability and fundraising options in light of the much more schematic operators budget presented by Ron Inglis; the working group had seen Ron's report had in depth discussions with him. The report has shown the cinema less profitable than Chris' initial estimate; what this means for financing for the construction needs to be carefully thought about.

Alan reported that he is now on Version 5 of the spreadsheet and had gone through a whole list of scenarios on how to obtain finance; it is not such as good a money-making venture as it could be. As a way forward, we need to obtain as much as we can in donations from the community. Cost control will be critical, especially with regard to the build. Tom reported that the sort of revenue that we are going to get from an operator will not be adequate to pay rent to the Council and to finance investment on a two million build cost. If the cinema does go ahead, the Council might need to consider not receiving rent from the Tenterden Cinema Company.

Alan reported that from day one, the gain in asset value is to the Council; they have very low risk and they do not have anything other than the value of the lease. We need to look at the scenario of no payment for the lease but look at the building being much more value to the community and Council in the end.

Colin reported that another important factor is the economic situation we are facing when lockdown ends. There will be a collapse in rental value of high street properties and this will have quite a substantial impact. The value of the site will increase dramatically to the freeholder and the risk is going to be with the people who put money into it.

Mike reported that the cinema project is a major part of the High Street regeneration and could be a project that brings the town out of the issues from lockdown.

Angela commented that the Tenterden Cinema Company were going to look at what the Council were looking for, i.e. rent, etc. Tom reported that he had raised the issue with the Council and suggested that a sub-committee might be set up but no discussions have taken place.

Chris Head commented that the project will not be viable unless the Council makes concessions on the rent. Chris asked if it was wise to show in the feasibility study a notional rent of £50,000 a year, payable by the operator. Tom reported that to finance the building alone the rent would have to be higher, however, it was felt that this is a consultants 'external' view and that any operator will have their own more detailed and solid figures which will change; it will not affect negotiations. It was agreed that this is a historical figure and by the time we get around to negotiations, things will be different.

Paul Hale asked if the final feasibility study is going to be published. Claire Gilbert reported that if the Focus Group felt that it needed to be confidential for the time being, then this would need to be proposed to Council. Sue suggested that it be made public for transparency and Mike and Colin also agreed. Paul's concerns were around the report containing extensive

information that the operator would see, particularly as it goes into detail about rental costs. Alan reported that we must remember that modelling on rent is the cost to the operator and payable to the Tenterden Cinema Company. It is different to the rent that might be payable to the Council from the Company.

Tom commented that the report does not address the impact on the operator of the cost of fitting out and how it could be recouped. There is no option but to publish the study as a public report, since it was commissioned by the Council from public funds. Paul commented that this is report is a negotiating document with operators so there are two elements involved: Feasibility and Operator.

Angela reported that if we are going to see if the Council regard this as a community project and not charge a market rent, then it is almost impossible to justify that if the Cinema Company is getting £50,000 rent from an operator.

Tom reported that the company, and the rent it received from an operator, would be the only means of making any return to investors. All modelling has been looking at a blend of different ways of raising and balances between them. Donations could be part of the mix but it was not credible that two million could be raised via donations. The feasibility study is not a negotiating document, but a feasibility document for the Town Council. The Tenterden Cinema Ltd, Town Council and preferred operator will negotiate between each other. Mike commented that we need at least four competitors to come in on this and compete for prices.

#### *7.2.2. Fund-raising Preparations.*

Paul has been in touch with both of the interested operators who are currently in lockdown.

Elaine Mahoney suggested that the Executive Summary should contain the caveat that the feasibility report had been written before the coronavirus crisis and that some assumptions might be invalidated by the impact of the pandemic. Tom said he would forward this recommendation to BFF.

### **8. Press and Community Relations.**

Nic Phillips reported that he has been contacting stars to solicit their support for the Tenterden cinema project. He had been in touch with Tilda Swinton who is a massive fan of independent local cinemas; she has volunteered to do a film clip supporting a Tenterden Cinema. Anna Calder-Marshall and her son Tom Burke are both on board and will help. Nic had also been in touch with Lucy Speed and Jan Francis and is trying to get hold on Linda Bassett. Nic had also sent a letter off to Tom Hanks and George Clooney. Nic has been contacting soap stars as well. He has asked those who would like to be on board to hold fire for now but will be asking them to do a short self-film message (30/40 secs), which they will allow us to quote from and with a photo of themselves. All stars wishing to participate would be given a promise to be invited to the opening gala.

Elaine suggested contacting Joanna Lumley. Nic has contacted her agent, but received a negative response. Mike suggested Jenny Carr, a makeup artist who received an Oscar; Mike will forward the details to Nic.

Tom asked at what point do we announce that the stars are backing the project. Nic reported that we need to know the Council's response to this report before going any further. It was suggested that the Tenterden Cinema website could be used as the sales tool for attracting interest including the clips from the stars. Mike also suggested contacting the Doodle Man and perhaps he could come up with a cinema drawing. Claire agreed to contact him via the Council's Admin Team.

## **9. Website.**

Sue reported that we are now near the 60 days' notice for moving the domain over, so it is close to being sorted out.

## **10. Next Steps.**

- 10.1 Tom reported that the steps need to be phased. Until the Focus Group know the Council's views on the feasibility study, we do not want to go ahead and book the celebrities.
- 10.2 Claire reported that a brief update will be provided to the External Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020 on where the group are, however, when the full report comes in, Councillors will need time to read and process the information. Mike suggested waiting for the build cost to come through before taking to Council. It was suggested that the study be presented to the Council in a similar way to the last presentation conducted by Tom.
- 10.3 Nic reported that now is the time to collect video messages whilst stars are in lockdown so ready to go when back up and running. Nic will formulate a letter to run by the Focus Group which suggests what we would like and with a proviso that it will not be seen by anyone until the project is approved to go forward.
- 10.4 *Social Media*. Paul reported that his daughter Eloise is happy to help co-ordinate with Sue on social media in order to be the 'youth angle'. Sue reported that it would be good to get a different angle on posts and useful to be able to link in from others. Social media accounts of Tenterden Cinema are very small now but could be shared and retweeted via Sue's other platforms. It was suggested that Eloise and Carol Parkin could also be admins on the Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Tom asked when we could go live on social media? Sue responded that once the feasibility report is published, images could be picked off the report and links provided to the full report. The website needs development for visuals. Carol reported that she would be happy to pick out the key points from feasibility report for the social media postings. Nic reported that the document at the exhibition had all the bullet points that were discussed and talks about the history, etc. of the Pebbles. All it would need is the updated plans and any updates on costings.

## **11. Any Other Business**

- 11.1 Tom reported that as soon as the full feasibility report comes in, it needs to be circulated and on the Council's agenda.
- 11.2 Mike asked if we can follow the Lewes and Uckfield cinemas to see how they react to coming out of Covid-19 and how they pull through it.

11.3 Alan reported that in 2/3 months' time we need to try and get the pre-planning application work started. We will not be in a position to do fundraising from community, but if we could ask the Town Council to fund detailed design work for planning application it would be a start. Mike commented that the £500,000 set aside for the Pebbles is available to be used for the detailed design.

**12. Date of Next Meeting** – as soon as the full feasibility report is in, a meeting will be set.