

Report for Lewes Town Council of the AGM of the Lewes Town Partnership

16th October 7.30pm at the Phoenix Centre

About a third of the membership of the LTP were present either in person or by proxy. The meeting therefore was quorate and able to cover the AGM business (approving the previous AGM minutes and agreeing the Annual Report and Accounts for 2016/17) before Nikki Plummer the Chair of the Board of Directors raised the main topic for the meeting.

This special resolution was: *For the members to approve the proposal of the Directors to pursue the winding up the organisation.*

Although the membership of LTP has been steadily growing and the newsletter is sent out to over 100 groups it has been felt that there are increasingly new and different ways that people can and do get involved in developments to the town. The Board of the LTP appreciates that its methods of working are highly admin heavy and may not any longer touch all of the relevant places where people engage in conversations about important issues. In a town like Lewes in an era of social media, with the production now of the Neighbourhood Plan and the approval of planning for North Street then other networking forums probably exist to pick up its roles and that it is time to call it a day. Nikki stated that the Board were not convinced that the partnership presented a good use of scarce public money.

The Board will meet in November to formally commence the closure of the organisation and work through the distribution of any outstanding funds as discussed by the members at the AGM. A reserve has always been kept aside to cover the costs of final auditing and requirements of Companies House. Two outstanding projects remain and will be carried on beyond closure: these are the production of the third edition of the Cycle Lewes map leaflet where designated funds are already identified and work on the *Access Guide to Lewes* by the Lewes Area Access Group.

Looking back at 15 years of the Lewes Town Partnership

The meeting then received a presentation and celebration of the 15 years of the Lewes Town Partnership since its creation in 2003 by Debby Matthews Company Secretary and Development Worker; some of its people, achievements, lessons and challenges. She has created a timeline showing how the partnership had worked over the years and the different activities it carried out. Debby reported she has had apologies and best wishes for the meeting from John Webber and Jackie Blackwell and from Rosie Eggar and Tim Locke who had all contributed to the work of the LTP over the years.

Beginnings: Following the flood of 2000 in Lewes and with the Government's initiatives pressing for local community engagement South Downs Council for Voluntary Service worked with Lewes District Council to create five local community partnerships (these were for Lewes, Newhaven, Seaford, a joint Peacehaven/ Telscombe one and one for the rural villages) to feed into the local Community Strategy. A separate organisation was formed in 2003 as the "Lewes Town Partnership" with a membership of local organisations and the directors taken from the membership. It was to be formally constituted, not to be single-issue but to embrace all aspects of the town's needs, to support local consultations and have a medium long term viewpoint.

Initial phase 2003-6: A Market Town Healthcheck was carried out to identify the issues that are of concern to the towns people. Some of the issues that were picked up were around the need for managed development so as not to spoil the essence of the town. Also there was a focus on sustainable tourism, recycling, parking and town congestion, support for improved leisure facilities

and local jobs. Many of the issues were picked up by the Board as possible further activities and projects.

Forming the partnership 2006 – 9: This period saw more work on community engagement but less on developing projects, which came in the next phase of the partnership

Developing and delivering 2009 – 11: a development worker Jackie Blackwell was employed for the partnership through the South Downs CVS and under the chairmanship of John Webber the membership increased. Also there was a re-focussing on community projects that worked with local people and groups to address various issues of concern. These included the ENGAGE events at Priory School where young people could find out about what groups exist and how these add value to the town; the creation of the Friday Food Market; commercial cardboard recycling; *Fume Free Friday* raising awareness of clean air, walking and cycling; a drop in Eco Day at the Town Hall with examples of ways of improving your carbon footprint. Work went on with local schools to improve the walk to school amongst other activities and events.

Continuing the work 2011 – 2014: With the ending of local community strategies the support of the Lewes District Council for the LTP development worker was lost. An approach was made to Lewes Town Council to continue the work with an annual grant. The Board has been grateful for this ongoing support and a Lewes town councillor sits on the Board as an Observer to act as an intermediary and report back. With the closure of South Downs CVS the Board took over paying the development worker as a freelance position. The role of Chair passed to Rosie Eggar with Debby Matthews and Tim Locke at different times paid to provide support to the Board.

During this phase new projects were developed to improve the tourism experience with the production of the *Lewes Walks* leaflet, which went to two editions of 10,000 each all of which have now been distributed. Networking meetings were held looking at how to make the best of the *Gentleman of the Road* festival, the North Street Quarter developments, cycling and walking strategies and use of community facilities. The website was created in July 2011 and a regular newsletter of news and information provided by the members has been sent out monthly.

Refocussing and reflecting 2014 – 2017: With Nikki Plummer as its Chair the Board felt it important to explore what the members wanted from the partnership. An independent researcher was engaged to carry out research and talk to the members and find out what they valued most and what things they would like improved. The researcher found that the things that were valued most were: the newsletter as a way of finding out what other groups are doing and to share their own news and also the networking events. Suggestions included help with social media and a training event was set up to this effect and well attended. It was suggested that a flyer be produced to show what membership of LTP provides, which was done. Groups were asked if they forwarded on the newsletter to their own members and many said they do, although by no means all thought about doing it.

During this period there have been two successful Fossil Festivals bringing many families into Lewes from outside. The *Car Free Days Out* leaflet was produced with South Downs National Park support and has been very well used by the Tourist Information Centre to help encourage walking locally for visitors and locals alike. There was a Saturday morning drop-in event in the House of Friendship in the Spring 2017 which acted not just as a place for the public to find out how to get help but also for member groups of the partnership to meet and find out what each other is doing or providing in the way of help for those in the town who may be less well off or under pressure.