

Questions for Cabinet – 21 November 2007

Office Accommodation Report 218/07

Question – J Staples
<p>That you should consider closing what is a very successful gallery seems incredible. I cannot believe there is no alternative to this closure. Is it that there is so much paper work that the well being and creativity of the town must be sacrificed?</p>
Answer
<p>There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes can provide one of those options.</p>
Question – C Wykes
<p>The gallery provides a beautiful, non-intimidating venue for local artists and I have attended various events and exhibitions with my family. I would like to know of other venues which you have in mind that provide the same ambience, and suspect that nowhere would fulfil the community's need as well.</p>
Answer
<p>There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes can provide one of those options.</p>
Question – C Buchan, Arts Officer, Lewes District Council
<p>A) Does the council appreciate the fact that Thebes Gallery has achieved a nationwide reputation for the quality of its exhibitions - many by artists and craftspeople of international status - and for its contribution to the community with exhibitions by local organisations and new artists?</p> <p>B) Does the council appreciate that the arts are crucial to the economy of this district?</p> <p>C) Does the council realise how damaged its reputation will be if it closes such an important venue, which was funded in part by the Arts Council?</p>
Answer
<p>A) The quality of the material generated by local artists will not be curtailed by the closure of Thebes. There are other options available to display the material of local artists and the district Council will be involved in the continuing review of those options.</p> <p>B) The District Council has given substantial support to the local arts over the years. The role of the arts in the local tourism economy will continue to have support from the District Council.</p> <p>C) The funding from the Arts Council was given specifically for the exhibition relating</p>

to the Heart of Reeds project and is not an issue.

Question – Mr R Steadman

Are the members fully aware of the implications of the loss of the Thebes Gallery to the reputation of Lewes as a centre for the arts, a gallery which has a long record for the quality and diversity of its exhibitions which provide an essential outlet for many professional and amateur artists to display their work and which is well loved by Lewes residents and many from the surrounding areas?

Answer

Thebes has provided a convenient and inexpensive outlet for local exhibitions. There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes can provide one of those options.

Question – K Guthrie

Thebes Gallery offers a unique and valuable exhibition space for artists, who may not otherwise have the opportunity to show their work within a gallery environment. The visual arts, in all forms, need support if they are to thrive. Thebes Gallery plays an important part in the cultural life of Lewes, not only for encouraging visitors to the town throughout the year, but also in enabling artists to work together in groups to produce work for an exhibition. Artists often work alone, staging an exhibition with others provides an essential opportunity to share problems and grow, as well as making some much-needed income for the artists concerned. Artists need time to prepare for an exhibition in order to produce work of a high standard, and grow creatively. If the planned closure of Thebes goes ahead, will a permanent exhibition space be made available within Lewes that will allow enough time for a planned exhibition programme?

Answer

The answer to the question contained in the last sentence. There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes provides one of those options. The Cultural Services Team will work in association with the Town Council and look at other options for public gallery space in the District.

Question – D Barrett Rossi

Why is it SO necessary to take over Thebes? which already has it's own valid and appreciated reasons for existing? As a gallery the spaces really work for the exhibitors and visitors. Will this space be just as appreciated for its new change of use?

Answer

Thebes annexe was office accommodation for many years and has to be returned to that use to enable one of the Council's buildings to be disposed of so that the Council can reduce its operating costs. The Cultural Services Team will work in association with the Town Council and look at other options for public gallery space in the District.

Question – Mr N Brown

Why is LDC closing Thebes Gallery?

Thebes Gallery is a fantastic Arts resource and it seems ridiculous for LDC to even contemplate shutting it down.

Part of the attraction of life in Lewes is the vibrant cultural scene - it is generally of a high standard and accessible to many. To close one of its well-loved venues seems puzzling.

I would ask LDC to reconsider the closure of Thebes Gallery, and find alternative office space elsewhere in the town.

Answer

Thebes annexe was office accommodation for many years and has to be returned to that use to enable one of the Council's buildings to be disposed of so that the Council can reduce its operating costs. The Cultural Services Team will work in association with the Town Council and look at other options for public gallery space in the District.

Questions – A Johnson

- 1 Will there be a new Thebes Gallery?
- 2 If so, when and where will it be available to the local art community?
- 3 Since Thebes is central to the local artistic community, has the Council considered the implications for local shops? Like many other people I know, I have both exhibited at Thebes and am a regular visitor to the exhibitions there. I live in Eastbourne and, when I visit, I take the opportunity to shop for clothes, presents, food and art materials and I have lunch in any number of the local restaurants.

Answer

- 1 & 2 There is no immediate replacement for the space in the Thebes Annex but the refurbished All Saints Centre will be available early in the new year and there are other options in the district for gallery space.
- 3 to Temporary art exhibitions are part of a broad range of facilities that the town has offer. There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes provides one of those options. The Cultural Services Team will work in association with the Town Council and look at other options for public gallery space in the District.

Question – Ms C Berridge	
1	What is the District Council's rationale for closing Thebes Gallery?
2	Has the council any intention of selling Thebes Gallery building subsequent to its closure?
Answer	
1	Thebes annexe was office accommodation for many years and has to be returned to that use to enable one of the Council's buildings to be disposed of so that the Council can reduce its operating costs. The Cultural Services Team will work in association with the Town Council and look at other options for public gallery space in the District.
2	Thebes annexe is part of the curtilage of Lewes House which is one of the four office buildings in use by LDC in Lewes. The Council has no plans to sell any part of any building within the curtilage of Lewes House.
Question – E Mason	
1	What consultation with the public has been made regarding the closure of Thebes Gallery? If any consultation, is it available to the public?
2.	What are the figures and arguments to show that office use is a better use of the space for Lewes Council resources than a well run gallery space? This needs to be considered bearing in mind the considerable add on income to the town the gallery can bring.
3.	Who is taking responsibility for this decision and who is proposing this?
Answer	
1	The space in Thebes Annexe was given over to exhibition space on an informal basis. There was no consultation with the public before it was given over to that use. There has been no consultation on the Council's review of its office accommodation including the proposal to revert this space to office accommodation but in the consultation on the budget for 2007/08 the Council identified that it would look for reductions in its operating budget including a review of office accommodation.
2	The income the gallery brings is set out in paragraph 17 of the report to the Cabinet.
3	The Cabinet will take the decision.
Question – S O'Kane	
Does the council consider the loss of a hugely popular cultural amenity which benefits the surrounding businesses enormously, worth it for the gain of just a few desk spaces?	
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The amenity of public gallery space in the district does not have to be lost. Thebes has provided a convenient and inexpensive outlet for local exhibitions. There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes can provide one of those options. The disposal of 3a Fisher Street will provide the Council with a substantial capital receipt that will be used for the upkeep of other buildings in the town. We will lose 3,379 square feet of office floor space in 3a Fisher Street. We can do that because we have converted some essential records such as Land Charges to electronic storage and we will squeeze the space in all the other buildings.

Question – Cllr A Dean, Lewes Town Council

If provision for the arts in this district is considered as important as the chief executive claims, why were notices sent out informing the public that the gallery was to close before the matter had been discussed with elected members of the council?

Answer

The Chief Executive sent a letter to the individuals and organisations that had been involved in hiring the gallery to give notice of the proposal prior to the consideration of the Cabinet.

Question – P Smy

In the last month the Thebes gallery has not only housed exhibitions by local artists, but has been the venue for a storytelling event and workshops for local children linked to the national 'The Big Draw' promotion. Over the last year it has been the only local venue open to the general public to display work by prison inmates and school children proud to exhibit their coursework. This is a non-intimidating community venue for local people to sample the Arts. Where else would the counsellors go in Lewes to experience the forementioned workshops/ events and artwork with their children/grandchildren/neighbours were Thebes gallery to be closed?

Answer

There are other venues in the town for local meetings of the type described including Southover Grange and Town Hall. There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes provide one of those options.

Question P Jane Wateridge

In light of public reaction to the councils unpopular decision to close Thebes Gallery in order to use the space for offices, would you please rethink your plans for this historic public building?

Answer

The amenity of public gallery space in the district does not have to be lost. Thebes has provided a convenient and inexpensive outlet for local exhibitions. There are other options for providing space for art exhibitions in Lewes. The refurbished All Saints Centre 100 yards away from Thebes [Page 5 of 6](#) provide one of those options.

