


Lewes District Council
Estates & Valuation Services

MARKET TOWER, MARKET STREET, LEWES.
(NEW LEASE TO LEWES OPERATIC SOCIETY)



O.S. MAP REF:
TQ 4110SE

DEED PACKET NO:
26

SCALE:
AS SHOWN

PLAN NO:
Appendix A
LED 51/96

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REV:

A Short History of the Town Tower in Lewes

There was no royal charter for the Lewes town market, which originally stretched from Westgate to St Nicholas's Church on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The congestion, noise and smell of market activity caused considerable nuisance to the local residents.

In 1791, The Market Commissioners met for the first time and decided to exercise new powers granted by a Private Act of Parliament to remove the provisions market from Castlegate Corner to a more convenient site.



The idea for the Tower was first conceived in 1786, when a Town Meeting resolved that a public subscription be opened to build a tower to house the Town Bell 'Old Gabriel' and the Town Clock. They agreed with Lord Hampden of Glynde to lay out the market on land he owned to the East of the Crown Inn.

The Town Tower, now known as the Market Tower, was built in 1792; the same year in which Tom Paine published his seminal work: 'The Rights of Man'. Local masons were paid £353 to build the tower which was the town's first secular building and made a strong civic declaration of the emerging importance of the town. It housed the town bell, the town clock and the town jail. A vaulted area at street level provided a market place.

The provisions market was held every weekday, the start and finish being signalled by the tolling of Old Gabriel'. The Market Commissioners fixed the tolls to be levied on sales of meat, fish, butter, herbs, vegetables and fruit. The markets for corn, wool, cattle and horses were held elsewhere.

The structure was of red brick in the style of historicism. On its east wall, which is the main facade, a handsome painted terracotta cartouche was installed with the town arms in the centre and with floral swags on either side, all in relief.

'Old Gabriel'

The Town Bell, 'Old Gabriel' was cast by the Frenchman John Tonne between 1529 and 1536. It has a large shield with the royal arms of Henry VIII, a figure of St. Catherine, a medallion of Henry VIII, a crown, and a Tudor rose. It is inscribed in Latin 'Gabrielis menti dedens habio nomen' (I have the name of Gabriel) and has a later inscription cut upon showing 1792 as the date of its removal to the Market Tower.



'Old Gabriel' is the largest pre-reformation bell in Sussex; it may have been cast for Lewes Priory, because it seem unlikely that any Lewes Parish Church would have been able to have borne the cost of such a large and costly bell



'Old Gabriel', had hung in the partly ruined church of St Nicholas that stood on the site of the present War Memorial at the top of School Hill until it was demolished in 1761.



Courtesy of Edward Reeves Lewes

The Town Clock also came from St Nicholas Church Tower. It must be distinguished from the old Market Clock which now hangs adjacent to St Michael's Church in the High Street. The old Market Clock was originally housed above the old market house which stood at the North side of Castlegate at the top of the High Street. Thus, in the nature of the many idiosyncrasies of Lewes, the Town Clock is now in the Market Tower and the old Market Clock that now hangs in the High Street has become commonly referred to as the Town Clock.



In 1800 the east wing was converted into a lock-up - a room to house persons, including 'Trampers' (beggars), arrested to appear before local magistrates, and to shelter 'poor travellers'. Previously the Borough's 'Black Hole' for miscreants was in a bastion of the medieval West Gate, which was pulled down about 1790.

In 1880 the west wing, formerly an open niche allowing access to the market and to the stair up to the bell, was deemed a 'great nuisance' and was walled up and fitted out as a shop. The photograph on the right, taken before 1880, shows the shop in the west wing used as an order office for wine and brandy sold by Henry Wingham, inn keeper of the Crown. In 1808 The High Constables also raised Gabriel (its gudgeons being tightened) so that it could be better heard.

The last meeting of the Market Commissioners was recorded in the Market Minute Book in 1840.

Above: Britain's first WI Market in the Market Tower, Lewes, circa 1920.

By 1872, the market had been disused for some years and the site had become a disgrace and nuisance. The Market Commissioners handed the site over to the High Constables for the benefit of the Borough. The sum of £450 was raised by public subscription to build a room, 30 feet by 20 feet, to house public meetings.

By 1887, the wings had been converted into offices for Borough officials, probably for the Borough Surveyor and the inspector of nuisances. Possibly by this time, the wings had been given their distinctive Gothic windows, plaques and a castellated roof line.

The fire officers and the fire fighting engine and equipment were moved into the market yard in 1892, until a purpose built fire station was constructed at the bottom of North Street.

In modern times the Market Tower has been in use as the headquarters of the Lewes Operatic Society. In 2009, the Society kindly agreed to relinquish space on the ground floor to enable greater public access to this historic building.



Courtesy of Edward Reeves Lewes

References:

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- Smith Verena (editor). 1972. *The Town Book of Lewes 1702-1837* Sussex Record Society, Barbican House Lewes. Farncombe & Co, Lewes, UK.
- Brent Colin. 1993. *Georgian Lewes 1714-1830 The Heyday of a County Town*. Colin Brent Books, Lewes, UK.
- Brent Colin. 2004. *Pre-Georgian Lewes c890-1714 The Emergence of a County Town*. Colin Brent Books, Lewes, UK.

TRANSITION TOWN LEWES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
LEWES DISTRICT COUNCIL
19 JAN 2010
CCPY
REFER



Latchetts

Potters lane

Lewes

BN7 1JP

14.01.10

Dear John

LEWES LOCAL Produce MARKET

Following our meeting on Thursday Jan 14th, I would like to put forward the following proposal for cabinet consideration.

Transition Town Lewes Food Group in conjunction with L.T.P. proposes that we run a weekly produce market from the Market Tower on a weekday.

The Food Group is a voluntary organisation currently working on becoming a Community Interest Company [CIC]. We have a bank account, a chair, secretary and treasurer and a constitution. Our overall aim is to work towards sustainable food production, supply and access in Lewes District.

The main aims of this proposal will be;-

- To support distribution methods which reduce carbon emissions.
- To reclaim and develop a sustainable, local food culture.
- To increase access to healthy seasonal food for all.
- To provide an outlet for very small amateur sellers, new producers and use surpluses from allotments.

The Target customer would be lower income families and individuals who need prices to be within their budgets.

There will be an employed Market Manager who will take and manage bookings, keep records, clean the premises, remove rubbish and support the stall holders.

He/she will be supported by the Officers and volunteer members of the Food Group CIC. The volunteers will themselves benefit from access to fresh food and working with the community.

The stallholders will be a mixture of professional growers and amateur groups and individuals. The produce will be fresh, seasonal and local.

Once the produce market is established we have plans for other types of market, community events, food education and further outreach, [e.g. the distribution of surplus food to target groups;-families on low income, the less mobile.etc] which would make good use of the site.

Initially, we would need a rent-free period to allow the Market Tower to flourish. We intend this to be a sustainable enterprise with only set-up grants.

Food Group CIC is actively seeking funding elsewhere to provide the capital for the initial set-up, including Lewes Town Council and the local Primary Care Trust.

The Food Group acknowledges with thanks the support given by the Lewes Town Partnership in developing this idea.

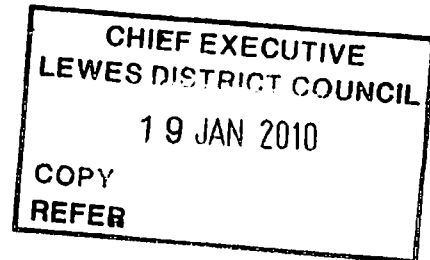
I should be happy to answer any questions relating to the project, and will willingly attend the cabinet meeting on February 10th if that is required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Polly Senter', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Polly Senter

DRAFT 4 December 2009



Food Group Draft Purpose Statement

The aim of the Group shall be to further the aims of TTL i.e. to mobilise and facilitate community action in the Lewes district in order to respond effectively and positively to climate change and peak oil. Specifically we aim to help the Lewes community find ways to feed itself while reducing carbon emissions and using less energy.

Aims.

- To support the transition to a low carbon, low energy food cycle [PRODUCTION = DISTRIBUTION = CONSUMPTION] while minimizing food waste at all stages.
[Non-food waste, see Waste Group <http://transitiontowns.org/Lewes/Waste>]
- To work towards organic methods and produced minimising environmental damage. [Now in line with Government doc. National Food Strategy
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/strategy/index.htm>]
- To support distribution methods which reduce carbon emissions .
- To reclaim and develop a sustainable, local food culture.
- To increase access to healthy food for all.
- To increase our local sufficiency by empowering the community.

We do this by:

- Educating
- Raising awareness
- Running model projects

Scope

Geography - centred around BN7 and BN8 [BN 9?]

Everyone – inclusive of the whole population.

Why we are doing this

We are concerned that the issues of peak oil and climate change and now global economic instability, will challenge local food security beyond the control of governments .Grass roots actions and preparedness will support national actions and help build community resilience.

This document is reviewed regularly.

Transition Town Lewes Food Group

Bank ;-

a/c number 089299 65337 446 00

The Co-operative Bank plc, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale, WN8
6NY

Officers;-

Chair : Polly Senter, Latchetts , Potter's Lane, Lewes B7 1JP

Treasurer: Eileen Bull, 6, Hill Rise, Lewes, BN7 1DB

Secretary: Ann Link, 10, Sheepfold, Lewes BN7 1QH