

**Meeting of the Council
25 February 2016**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET
(Minute 59)**

Details of proposed amendments received from the Green Party Councillors

General Fund Revenue Budget 2016/2017 Amendments:

- 1. I MOVE THAT the Council sets aside up to £5,000 from the service priority budget to produce a business case for a sustainable homes fund on the basis that any such future scheme is break even to the Lewes District Council tax payer.**

The council's solar panel installation program has been of benefit to council home tenants, to the environment, and has raised funds for the council. Whilst the drop in the Feed-In-Tariff (FIT) looks at first glance to affect the viability of continuing such a program, in fact calculations from the Department of Energy and Climate Change indicate that it may well be worth continuing such a program. In addition, other new sustainable technologies such as air-source heat pumps could be a great investment for the council. The budget for a business case for a sustainable homes fund should enable the council to fully explore these investments that could reap returns for District residents, the environment and the council.

The case for continuing solar panel installation

Over 525 council houses throughout Lewes District have already benefitted from the installation of solar panels. Tenants reportedly immediately felt the benefits, with electricity for free during hours of daylight, and in some cases electricity bills up to 40% lower. At the same time, the funds raised through this scheme can be re-invested in council service.

The drop in the feed-in-tariff changes the viability of a future of the solar panel installation program. The feed-in-tariff was to be lowered from 12.47p for every KWh to only 1.63p per KWh; however it is only to be reduced to 4.39p per KWh.

The Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) and the Solar Trade Association (STA) both agree that rooftop photo-voltaics (PV) should still yield about 5% per annum (this was DECC's target return when setting the new tariffs), although this does include the reduced cost of electricity for tenants. As this 5% is better than interest rates that can be earned currently, break-even on PV should be reached after 13 years (the Feed-In-Tariff provides support for 20 years).

The costs of PV installations are expected to drop quite rapidly following the FIT cuts. Currently 4 KW installations cost about £6000, but this could fall to as little as £4000 if DECC are correct that manufacturers, suppliers and installers are making excessive profits and will respond to market forces.

In addition to the cost savings, solar panels make council properties more valuable and more attractive to tenants. If local firms are used for the installation, this also creates local employment.

Air-source Heat Pumps

According to Ofgem, the domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is about to be refocused on heat-pumps rather than biomass. LDC has already looked at replacing storage heaters with air-source heat pumps. Given the changes in the RHI, and the drive to meet heat targets, this might prove to be a worthwhile investment for the council.

- 2. I MOVE THAT the Council sets aside a further £39,000 into the hardship fund that is being established to support vulnerable families from the imposition of a minimum contribution to council tax from 1 April 2016.**

This would double the amount that is being proposed in the budget and make sure that where there is genuine hardship the Council can assist those families who are moving to the 20% minimum payment of council tax. The new rate of council tax means that even those families who are surviving on benefits will be

required to pay some council tax, which could mean genuine hardship for those at the bottom end of the income scale or with any extra unexpected expenses. An increase in the hardship fund would enabled targeted assistance for the most vulnerable and poorest in our District.

3. I MOVE THAT – The Council sets aside up to £12,000 to assist with the relocation of the Skatehouse youth facility currently situated on the North Street site that is bound for development. This can be funded from reserves. The money can be allocated contingent on the Skatehouse finding a suitable venue.

Three popular youth recreation facilities are going to be displaced by the North Street Quarter joint District Council and Santon development venture. These are the Skatehouse (an indoor skateboarding facility), the Dance Academy (a dance studio), and Starfish (a music studio). All three are Community Interest Companies who provide more than just recreation: as well as chances to get active, they provide education, training, and pastoral care; offering a safe place for children and teenagers to meet (that parents are happy for them to visit), all at a low-cost to users.

The combined number of visits to these three venues every week has been estimated at 3000, although several of these will be repeat visits, so the total number of visitors will be lower. Apart from these three popular and excellent facilities, Lewes is particularly lacking in facilities for older children and teenagers, especially in the centre of town.

The Dance Academy and Starfish are in Phase 2-3 of the development, so have 2 - 3 more years in their present accommodation; however the Skatehouse lease ends in April. As the Skatehouse needs to move now, there is no possibility for its future to be funded through the Section 106 money from the North Street development, as this will not be released until Phase 2. As there will be more funding possibilities for the other youth venues, providing some funding for the Skatehouse does not necessarily set a precedent.

The Skatehouse is different from an outdoor skate park, not just because a roof makes it an all-weather facility, but also because there is supervision from 1st Aid trained, CRB-checked adults. The Skatehouse also runs various training and sponsorship schemes, rewarding star skaters with sponsorship that enables them to enter competitions. The director of Skatehouse England has said that it is the best and largest indoor skate park in the South East.

The value that local people place on the Skatehouse is shown by the petition (to be presented at the council meeting on 25th Feb) asking for LDC to help find a new venue and fund the relocation; on 9th Feb the petition is already over 3000 signatures.

According to the Skatehouse figures, at least 250 children, teenagers and young adults use their facilities every week, the majority of these come from Lewes, but a sizable minority travel from elsewhere in the District. The graphs below show the results of a survey on Sat Feb 6th looking at the ages of the skaters and where they came from, from a sample of 81 users who visited on that day. 62% (50 skaters) were between the ages of 11 - 20 years old. 36% of skaters came from Lewes (29 people), 26% from Ringmer or Newhaven, and the remainder from elsewhere.

The Skatehouse has calculated that relocating would cost a total of about £20,000, however they can provide volunteer man-hours equivalent to £8000, and so would only require £12,000 from council funding. They will retain and re-use the skeletal support structures but would need to replace the top part of the skate ramps.

The breakdown is as follows:

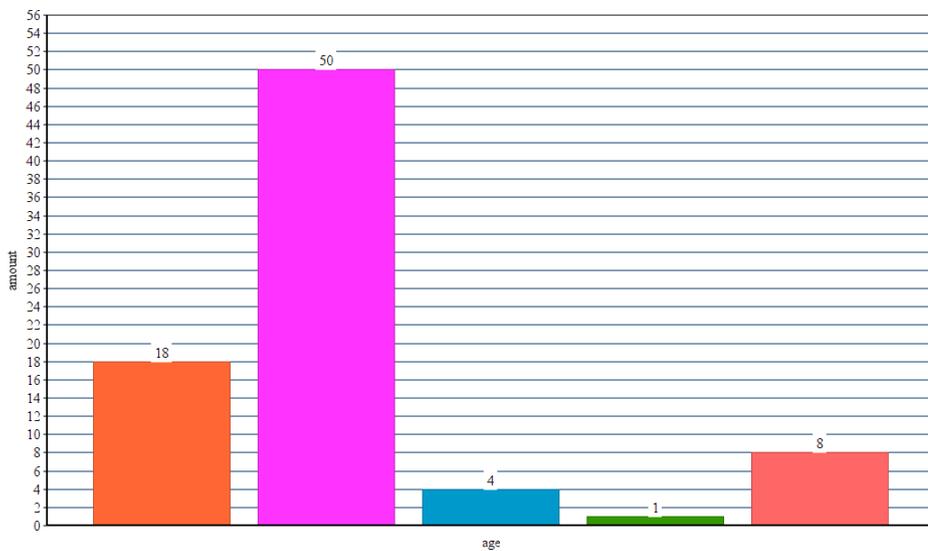
Amount	From	Details
£8000	The Skatehouse	1000+ man hours (approx 6 volunteers full time for 4 weeks)
£12,000	LDC	£10,000 plywood and building materials (cost of building a third of the present structure was £3000, so this is the scaled-up cost for the full park) £1,500 van hire costs

		£500	contingency
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The Skatehouse has been in discussion with LDC officers, Santon, Wave Leisure and others to explore possible new venues. They are re-writing their business plan, and are confident that they can now afford to pay more rent, and still offer the same or an increased service to users, thus giving them more options for where they can move. Whilst they would like to remain in Lewes, they have also been considering Newhaven, where 14% of their users came from in the sample survey. The Skatehouse have been in discussion with Santon about the possibility of temporarily storing their equipment whilst they look for a new venue, if (as is likely) they have not found a venue before the end of their lease.

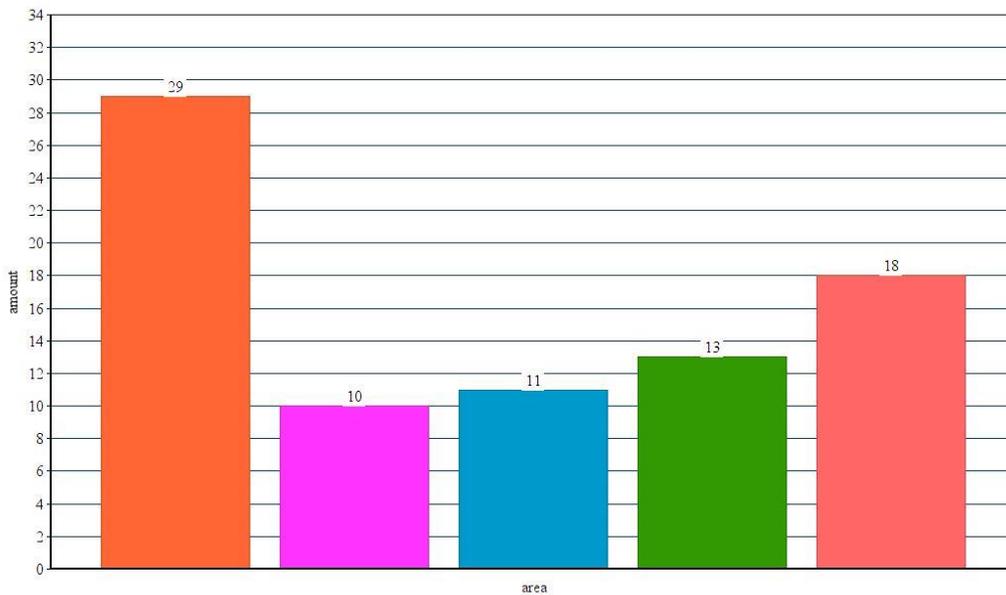
If this money is allocated from the LDC budget to aid the continuation of this facility, it could be contingent on the Skatehouse finding a suitable venue before the end of the financial year.

sample of users sat 6th feb 2016



1-10 11-20 21-30 31-40 40+

sample of users sat 6th feb 2016



Lewes Ringmer Newhaven Brighton Other