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Southover Grange Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Southover Grange Sub-Committee** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Tuesday, 8 November 2005** at 12.30pm

Present:

Councillor E W Lee (Chair)
Councillors A C De Vecchi and S I C James

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2 Southover Grange – Tulip Tree Progress Report

The Sub-Committee considered Report No 264/05 which set out details of the current condition of the tulip tree which was located in Southover Grange gardens, Lewes.

The tree had been infected with honey fungus and was in a state of decline. The Cabinet had therefore approved the reduction of the tree and a review of its condition on an annual basis in order to ensure the continued health and safety of visitors to the gardens.

Appendix A to the Report comprised a Risk Assessment of the tree which had been undertaken on 31 August 2005 by Broad Oak Tree Consultants Limited which had concluded that the tree had died due to the fungus and that the level of decay had reduced the ability of the lower trunk to continue to support the crown of a fully sized tree. The Consultants had recommended that it be further reduced to a height of eight metres and that fencing be maintained to its radius around the base of the tree. It had been estimated that on-going decay of the remaining branches and trunk would result in complete failure within ten years.

The Community Services Manager reported that, since the publication of the Report, further correspondence relating to the proposals therein had been received from John Chaplin (Lewes Tree Group) and John May (Tree News), entitled "Tulip Tree - Response Paper - 21 October 2005", copies of which were circulated to all councillors at the meeting and made available to the public attending the meeting (a copy of which is also contained in the Minute Book).

It was reported that Mr May had been unable to attend the meeting due to ill health but the Chair invited Mr Chaplin to address the Sub-Committee on matters relating to the Response Paper document.

The Chair thanked Mr Chaplin and Mr May for their constructive dialogue with the Council in respect of the tulip tree and proposals to establish Southover Grange as an Evelyn Heritage Centre. She also thanked Lewes Tree Group for its dialogue in respect of the bat survey which had been undertaken in 2005 and for its assistance in identifying available funding for improvements to Southover Grange and its gardens.

Resolved:

- 2.1** That the current condition of the tulip tree in Southover Grange gardens, Lewes, as detailed in the Consultant's Report at Appendix A to Report No 264/05, be noted;
- 2.2** That the document entitled "Tulip Tree - Response Paper – 21 October 2005" which had been prepared by John Chaplin (Lewes Tree Group) and John May (Tree News), a copy of which had been circulated at the meeting, be received and noted; and
- 2.3** That the Cabinet be recommended to authorise the Director of Finance and Community Services to:
 - (a)** undertake the felling and complete removal of the tulip tree and its associated root structure in order to protect the health and safety of visitors to the gardens; and
 - (b)** undertake improvements to the mulberry tree in consultation with interested parties, including the provision of protective fencing to that specimen.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The Cabinet previously agreed a course of action to maintain the tulip tree as a "veteran tree". However, following the commissioning of the first annual independent survey of the tree, it was considered that it had died and was a risk to the health and safety of visitors to the gardens.

Alternative Option Considered and Rejected:

That, with regard to 2.3 above:

"That the tree be reduced through planned management, as detailed in the Consultant's Report, in order to maintain access to the adjacent pedestrian path and to protect the health and safety of visitors to the gardens."

3 Southover Grange – Project Proposal

The Sub-Committee considered Report No 265/05 which provided outline details of a project and associated funding package which, if implemented, would enable the refurbishment of Southover Grange, Lewes, and related improvements to its gardens.

The Grange dated from the early sixteenth century and had been largely in private ownership until the middle of the last century when the structure and its gardens were acquired by the former Lewes Urban District Council before transference to Lewes District Council in 1974.

Southover Grange was the childhood home of the Diarist, John Evelyn, where he lived for ten years with his maternal step-grandmother from the age of six.

As well as his diary, Evelyn had developed a wide range of interests including the cultivation of trees and the designing of several gardens. His diaries and manuscripts were housed in the British Library Museum together with several unpublished works including his detailed gardening encyclopedia "Elysium Britannicum".

There was no permanent display of Evelyn's works but, as 2006 would be the tri-centenary of his birth, the Royal Society was keen to mark the occasion as widely as possible.

The proposal to improve the gardens had stemmed from some arboriculturalists who had encouraged the Council to consider longer term management arrangements and improvements which could be supported through external funding bids. The Report therefore suggested that the opportunity be taken to link that proposal with the establishment of Southover Grange as an Evelyn Heritage Centre which could be used to tell the Evelyn Story in an accessible yet contemporary format which would attract visitors and provide an educational resource as well as raising the profile of Evelyn. Details of the proposed funding arrangements were set out in the Report.

If the proposal was accepted, a Project Team would need to be assembled in order to work-up the Stage 1 bid, further details of which were set out in paragraph 4.9 of the Report.

The Community Funding Officer circulated, to all councillors and the public attending the meeting, a document entitled "Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) - Heritage Grants - The Application Process" (a copy of which is contained in the Minute Book), which set out details of the process that needed to be implemented when applications were submitted for grants from the Fund. He drew councillors' attention to the requirement that, in the event of the application being successful, the Council would need to provide 20% (approximately £200,000) of the project costs with the remainder being the subject of the grant application.

Resolved:

- 3.1** That the Cabinet be recommended to authorise the Director of Finance and Community Services to submit an external funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to establish Southover Grange, Lewes as an Evelyn Heritage Centre, as detailed in Report No 265/05; and
- 3.2** That, subject to securing the necessary levels of external funding, as referred to in 3.1 above, the Cabinet be recommended to establish Southover Grange as an Evelyn Heritage Centre.

Reasons for the Decision:

In 2003 the Sub-Committee had made a series of recommendations to the Cabinet over the future of Southover Grange including the undertaking of priority repairs, whilst funding opportunities were explored, and the appointment of consultants to identify potential alternative uses for the building.

A Report by PMP in 2004 had suggest that the Council should consider a range of options for alternative uses of the Grange including its establishment as a visitor centre as part of the portfolio of historic Lewes buildings.

The meeting ended at 1.26pm

E W Lee
Chair