

## Southover Grange Sub-Committee

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Southover Grange Sub-Committee** held in the **Newton Room, Southover Grange, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Monday, 5 October 2009** at 10.00am

**Present:**

Councillor A C De Vecchi (Chair)

Councillors J N MacCleary and H J F Sheppard.

### Minutes

### Action

**102 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**103 Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved:

**103.1** That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting during the discussion of Report No 191/09 entitled "Southover Grange", as there is likely to be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**104 Southover Grange**

The Sub-Committee considered Report No 191/09 relating to the external repair of Southover Grange, Southover Road, Lewes and proposals for the vacant first floor flat and ground floor of that building. The Sub Committee inspected the part of the building which was occupied by the Council and later looked at the Registrar's accommodation.

The Sub Committee noted that Southover Grange was a listed building which required substantial ongoing maintenance in future years in the sum of about £250,000 over the next five years. The Council needed to obtain

the best financial return it could from leasing the building, or any part of the building, to offset such costs. The officers had investigated the potential for the building being taken over by the National Trust and the Landmark Trust, (on more than one occasion) without success.

The ground floor had long been a popular venue for wedding receptions and private social functions and, until recently, had been used as a children's day nursery. It also had meeting rooms which had been used by various groups and societies in Lewes. However, its standard of internal decoration had deteriorated and the external fabric was showing signs of wear.

The Council had commissioned a consultant architect who specialised in historic buildings to assess the need for repair. The Report stated that treatment of the timbers which had been undertaken a few years ago had been successful and there had not been any deterioration in the roof. However, in view of its age, the Grange was in need of a substantial amount of backlog maintenance, none of which was structural.

Paragraph 6 of the Report set out details of the estimated cost of the external repairs which were required and paragraph 7 outlined details of a grant application which had been made to English Heritage towards the cost of the works, the outcome of which would be known by the end of January 2010.

Paragraphs 10, 11 and 13 of the Report set out details of the current use of the building. The Report suggested that the Registrar's accommodation which was occupied by East Sussex County Council on the first floor could continue to function during the time that the external repair works were being undertaken. However, there would be some inconvenience caused by the scaffolding and some loss in the ambience of the building as a whole and, therefore, East Sussex County Council might want to consider an alternative Registrar's wedding room during that time.

Paragraphs 15 to 18 of the Report set out details of East Sussex County Council's current occupation of the building however, it was concerned that its current first floor accommodation did not comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Appendix A to the Report detailed initial terms which had been proposed by that Council on which it would take a lease of the ground floor of the building for the Registration Service.

The consultant architect, Mr Stuart Page, had hoped to attend the meeting to give a baseline cost estimate of the internal repair and redecoration costs which were necessary in order to bring the internal appearance and facilities in the building up to a reasonable standard for the longer term. Unfortunately Mr Page had been taken ill and could not attend the meeting. His comments would be reported to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

Mr Andy Cottell and Ms Alison Bryson of the Registrar's Service of East Sussex County Council attended the Sub-Committee meeting and explained the wish of the Registrar's Service to move out of their current

first floor accommodation at the Grange and to relocate to the ground floor. That Service was receiving an increasing number of complaints that the access to the first floor did not meet DDA standards. Mr Cottell commented that it was the responsibility of East Sussex County Council to provide a Registrar's Service that met the requirements of the DDA.

The Sub Committee considered the significant community use that had taken place in the Grange for some years and the potential for a higher level of income from the ground floor than was likely to be offered by East Sussex County Council for occupation by the Registrar's Service.

The Officers reported that English Heritage had indicated that its available funding was very small and there was no guarantee of a grant. The Sub-Committee considered the financial risk involved in commissioning Mr Stuart Page to proceed with the preparation of the specification for the contract and the tenders from contractors and concluded that the work should go ahead despite the uncertainty of the grant from English Heritage.

Resolved:

- 104.1** That the officers be authorised to engage Mr Stuart Page to make preparation for the contract for the external repairs to Southover Grange, Lewes, estimated to be in the sum of £152,000 including fees, as detailed in Report No 191/09;
- 104.2** That it be noted that an application has been made to English Heritage that could produce the sum of £50,000 as a grant towards the repair works;
- 104.3** That the Cabinet be asked to make funding available above the £102,000 allocated in the budget in the event that the application to English Heritage fails;
- 104.4** That the comments of the two officers from East Sussex County Council who attended part of this meeting of the Southover Grange Sub-Committee and who explained the use that East Sussex County Council would make of the ground floor of the Grange if that Council was successful in its bid for a lease in respect of the building, be noted; and
- 104.5** That the Sub Committee meet again to consider the preliminary advice of the District Valuer on the market conditions and likely values for letting the vacant parts of the Grange. Following receipt of that advice, the Sub Committee will determine a course of action for the disposal of a lease of the vacant first floor flat and the ground floor as one unit.

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Reasons for the Decisions:

To enable the contract for the repair works to Southover Grange, Lewes, to start on 1 April 2010.

To enable the Council to test the market to obtain the best consideration reasonably available for the disposal of the first floor flat and the ground floor of the Grange.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

A C De Vecchi  
Chair