

# Press Release



30<sup>th</sup> August 2017

## **Town Council reaffirms commitment to Crowborough Enterprise Hub**

### **CCA welcomes vote for funding plan at special meeting**

Crowborough Town Council has reaffirmed its commitment to turning the former Wealden District Council offices at Pine Grove into an Enterprise Hub for small businesses and a new home for the council offices and chamber. At the specially convened meeting yesterday (29<sup>th</sup> August), the council also approved a funding plan to take the project through to conclusion that could see the hub open for business in summer 2018.

The meeting was called following an extensive and detailed assessment of the building works required to bring the Pine Grove building up to standard and convert a substantial part of it into a flexible space for small business units. MacConvilles, a leading firm of chartered quantity surveyors and architectural consultants, undertook the project.

An attempt, led by Cllr Kay Moss, to have the public and press excluded from the meeting on the grounds that confidential financial details would need to be discussed, was defeated. The Mayor, Cllr Peter Ellefsen, advised members that it was possible to discuss the cost options set out in the Town Clerk's report on Pine Grove without directly mentioning figures. He set out guidelines for discussing issues that could affect future tenders for the renovation work.

With only two items on the agenda, councillors had to decide first whether to continue with the project and, if so, how to fund the additional costs envisaged by MacConvilles. Only three of the 15 councillors present voted against continuing with the project, two of whom are also Wealden District councillors

representing Crowborough wards – Cllr Kay Moss and Cllr Greg Rose. The other dissenter was Cllr David Neeves.

Cllr George Moss, who leads the council’s Enterprise Hub project group, then explained the work undertaken by MacConvilles and urged councillors to adopt a comprehensive refurbishment plan that would include new windows and roof lights. This would allow businesses to move in without the prospect of additional work being necessary in the near future. Councillors approved this plan and agreed the funding formula. Some 95 per cent of the money was already reserved (loans and grants) leaving only a “four-figure sum” that would be met from general reserves, if needed.

Before the meeting got underway, the councillors heard questions and statements from members of the public including Jeremy Woolger, President and Chairman of Crowborough and District Chamber of Commerce, and Chantal Wilson, Chairman of Crowborough Community Association. They both urged the council to proceed with the Pine Grove project as soon as practically possible and stressed the importance of the Enterprise Hub to business growth in the area and to the future prosperity of Crowborough in general.

After the meeting, Mrs Wilson said: “We are so pleased that the council decided to discuss the project in public at last. I would like to thank the mayor for making this possible. I appreciate that it made the discussion awkward but open democracy matters to council tax payers, especially when projects of great importance to the town are being discussed.

“We are really looking forward to having the hub up and running next door to Crowborough Community Centre. With businesses and community working alongside each other, there will be benefits for all involved.”

***For more information:***

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**Crowborough Community Association**

*The Crowborough Community Association has been active in Crowborough since 1975, when it opened the original CCA Hall in Park Road, built in 1925 as a Guide hut. It was ‘home’ to many of the town’s local organisations until momentum for a new community centre swelled following a public consultation by Wealden District Council on future retail development in the town. With funding from Crowborough Town Council and the National Lottery and on land donated by Wealden District Council, the new Crowborough Community Centre, costing £3.2 million, opened in 2012. It is now very much at the heart of the community with an average of 260 bookings each month for a large number of clubs, associations and individuals. The Centre is now financially self-supporting having exceeded bookings and income targets.*