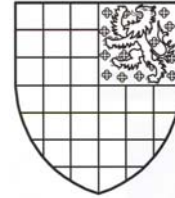


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

INFORMATION – Wednesday 1st February 2012

Lewes Community Cinema Project - FACTS

LEWES Town Council has become aware of various public concerns since announcing its intention to directly manage popular cinema at the All Saints Centre. Regrettably, much of the communication we have observed on the internet in recent days is inaccurate, ill-informed and sometimes extremely misleading. We hope that the facts below will help to clarify any misunderstanding, and explain the Council's position.

Status of the current commercial film operator

Lewes Cinema Ltd is a registered private limited company who rent the Council's All Saints Centre on an hourly-rate basis, as do all users. The rates we charge for the hire of the Centre vary between £10.75 and £19.40 per hour (varying according to the day/time-of-day). Lewes Cinema Ltd utilize facilities, such as the purpose-built projection booth and screen, which were already in place when they first came to Lewes and had been operated for many years by Lewes Film Club – a long-standing partner organization to the Council. Lewes Cinema Ltd is a company set-up by the proprietor specifically to cover their operation in Lewes – she and her husband operate across Sussex, currently at twelve other venues, in different corporate guises (See www.cinemacinema.co.uk or www.TouringCinema.com for more details). The company, registered in Chichester, has chosen to operate for many years using premises and facilities that it hires by the hour, and not invested in a more secure trading position. Lewes Cinema Ltd have no involvement in the management or operation of the All Saints Centre. They are not local; they visit only in connection with their fortnightly screenings or to mount advance-publicity posters.

Are we planning to make huge changes to the film-goers experience at All Saints?

We are NOT planning to increase ticket prices or make any other major change to the experience – just provide some rather more comfortable seats, with better screen-viewing angles, that will also benefit users who come to All Saints for theatre and music events. Nothing is being closed, or significantly changed - movies will continue on a regular basis for a wide variety of audiences, as now, including all the latest popular releases. Film programming, hire, publicity and screenings will be organised for the council by Lewes Film Club, who will continue their complementary programme of classic and Art House films on alternate weekends, independent of this agreement.

When did we advise Lewes Cinema Ltd?

A letter was sent by first-class post on Friday 20th January, the day following the Council's decision, properly addressed to their local premises. An entry on Lewes Cinema's *Facebook* page on Tuesday January 24th, confirms their awareness of the content. No press statement was released until the Council was assured that Lewes Cinema Ltd had received this notification, and the first public announcement was carried by Viva Lewes online magazine on Thursday 26th January, and followed by the Sussex Express on Friday 27th. Our letter invited discussion of the matter, but no acknowledgement of this offer has been received to date.

Have we got our sums wrong?

We obviously don't think so! We have the benefit of advice from the 25-year-old local Lewes Film Club, a Councillor with half a lifetime's experience in the cinema industry, and we have observed audience-numbers at All Saints for many years. Six councillors worked through the planning with four experienced members of Lewes Film Club, and Council agreed that this was a plan that should be pursued.

Did we consult Lewes Cinema Ltd?

Lewes Cinema Ltd have no involvement in the management or operation of the Centre. They attend All Saints only to conduct twice-monthly screenings or to mount publicity posters. Being a parish council, our first commitment is towards local voluntary groups and organizations, and this supports the intention of the church authorities when the building was given to us to be used as a Community, Arts, and Youth centre. For this reason we did not seek agreements with any commercial companies, and our discussions have been with Lewes Film Club, supported by the happy coincidence that one of our Councillors has a wealth of experience in the cinema and film industry.

Background to our decision

The Council regrets the effect upon the proprietors of Lewes Cinema Ltd, but has a primary responsibility to consider benefits to the local community. Councillors see the main benefits of their decision as feeding any profits back into the community, while maintaining the role of All Saints as a much-loved place to watch popular films – saving filmgoers from travelling to Uckfield; Brighton; Eastbourne, or Hailsham - and reinforcement of the Centre as a community asset. As a parish council, we are in the privileged position of not needing to make commercial profits from our operations, and able to decide how much subsidy is reasonable from public funds to operate any of our services. If we sought commercial levels of profit from rent of our buildings and services then many thriving community groups, charities, and other small local organizations would not be able to afford them. Lewes is blessed with many such groups who benefit from the availability of rooms; halls; and other services at our affordable prices. That is an important part of what gives any town its unique character, and fundamental to the operations of larger, urban, parish Councils like Lewes. A service run “at a loss” does not signify incompetence, as many people wrongly assume, but we do look at areas where income can be generated and used to reduce our demands upon local Council-tax payers – All Saints was one such area – and Councillors feel that profits from film should remain in the town.

For more information, please contact

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