

Mr Mayor, Colleagues, Members of the Public,

As we have heard - the Council, underpinned by the work of the officers, - has much to be congratulated upon- keeping up with the digital world and hopefully leading the way to engage and promote independence for the majority.

The new, innovative approach of using specific platforms and partnership working and the Well-Being team's progress, - Think Family are prime examples of how Councils can interact positively with their customers or clients. We also welcome the progress on our prime sites and will monitor the developments carefully.

The role of the Liberal Democrat opposition though, is to scrutinise and challenge decisions and approaches which may address the sustainability of the authority but do not address the needs of the clients – our residents.

We understand that the Conservative government is withdrawing its financial support in the next two or three years, thereby transferring its debts to us, which is why we, as Liberal Democrats are frustrated that the debt free Council we facilitated whilst in power, (through the transfer of assets to Worthing Homes as our preferred RSL), is a thing of the past. This leads me onto our views on housing.

The Government's New Home Bonus, which this budget heavily relies upon, is based on the council's ability to perform and build –it's just statistics and targets – it's not based on local residents' need as can be evidenced by the fact that it is measured by indicators such as a need for 181 band D homes – we know that a band D home is out to the financial reach of most of our residents on an average salary around £25k.

We need one, two and three bed homes - smaller units for those 1000 people still on the housing register for whom we have a duty of care both legally and morally. Our target should be to provide housing for them first.

Moving on to our older generation - Under the affordable housing umbrella Liberal Democrats would welcome more of the "Extra Care " model, a flexible half way house or modern Convalescence home if you will. This will help to reduce the virus effect of bed blocking. We could engage a triage approach, with the Council working in partnership with the NHS and a local philanthropic developer to provide a real life saving and cost effective service. We need to act now - not sit and await our fate governed by the outcomes of the STPs (Sustainability Transformation Plans).

Mr Mayor, we all know that these issues are just symptoms of need – and the situation is not going to improve over time if we don't promote Worthing as the place to be.

The people of Worthing need support via decent paid jobs, and want interests outside their work environment to promote the healthy lifestyle we promote. A minimal increase in the living wage will not offset the increases on food prices and energy bills- which highlights the real need for advice and support in energy efficiency and the council energy switch so shamefully dumped after minimal advertising.

Through planning we should welcome, include and provide for small enterprises and medium organisations, leisure type businesses, churches, self-defence or whatever creative use and activity people can provide. We need our residents to stay in Worthing - not have to travel to Arun or Horsham instead.

We need the public to understand how and why decisions are made and therefore we need to be more transparent in all our financial dealings including this budget and viability.

It is also a well-known fact that the Worthing population is getting younger – it has changed to a more family orientated community – our offer should therefore be more inclusive, innovative and sensitive to

them. Supporting Public transport – particularly in the evenings and at the weekend would be a good place to start.

If you agree that the population has changed- more divergent, more energetic, more lively you might even say – then why are we stuck in the past with our approach to the cultural scene?

Our theatres Director, Amanda has done an amazing job with the cultural offer, great names and events but the Theatres are still losing money, and have done so for at least the last five budgets. - So why are we still making the same mistakes? We are supposed to learn from our mistakes not just repeat them. We sincerely hope the New Sports and Leisure Strategy will address this issue.

NO more black holes.

Let us be clear - we are supportive of the Theatres and culture – and a variety of entertainment – each to their own wrestling or whatever, BUT in stressful and testing times like now – we have to reconsider what our values for the Town are.

Are we a Council who favours those with disposable money in their pockets to spend on theatre / cinema tickets which are subsidised by the wider population including those on pensions and benefits through their council tax? Let's face it - It's unlikely that those people and those who are JAMS even would be able to afford to go to the theatre regularly enough to make it viable for the theatres.

Or are we a Council which supports all of the community on all economic levels – are we a fair council or are we looking after ourselves as an institution?

Always the optimist – I'd hope that you would be for the majority of the community and fairness - share the burden across the teams.

Therefore we would recommend two amendments to the budget:

1. That the Extra spend of £160,000 (or significant part of) proposed for Worthing Theatres be transferred to Tourism to promote Worthing as a destination of first choice;
And secondly that
2. The Tourism budget for Worthing should stand alone for monitoring purposes and not be reported as part of the shared arrangements with Adur DC budget

Reasons:

Whist being aware and accepting of critical mass- economy of numbers and partnerships

Worthing needs to exert its own individuality, its own independence and take back control of our Town.

Other budgets across the Council have had to make severe savings and cuts – the Theatres must now be treated in the same fair handed manner and be self- funding.

By raising awareness of Worthing through Tourism, through our B and B's for example -the knock on impact should help the Theatres to ultimately improve their situation via the bigger picture and not in isolation. Currently marketing through the Tourist Information Centre is not enough.

From the public's perspective;

Worthing's economy and jobs rely heavily on the many small and medium organisations and its service industry. Due to the Brexit fuelled unintended outcomes we have already lost a large chunk of finances through the reluctance of German families to send their offspring to Worthing Language Schools.

Whether we class ourselves as a seaside Town or a Town by the Sea - we need Tourism to be put back into the heart of Worthing

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We trust you will support either or both the amendments .

Thank you.

Cllr Hazel Thorpe (Leader Liberal Democrats)

Cllr Bob Smytherman (Dep. Leader Liberal Democrats)