Report to Lowestoft Town Council regarding Temporary Office Space.

We were cognisant of the kindness that Waveney District Council have allowed the new Town Council is letting us use the facilities at Riverside during the formation of the Town Council however we recognised that this was a short-term arrangement. Additionally, there have been problems with space for staff to work together and with booking meeting space etc which has complicated the initial progress of the Town Council.

The Town Council hopes, in time, to be able to make a permanent home at the Town Hall in the High Street however the premises are not fit for this purpose at this time and we will have to research and develop plans for its future as well as raise funds to ensure that the Grade II building is maintained for the town in a better condition than it has been transferred to us. We foresee that this could potentially take at least a year. Bearing this in mind it was felt important that we find a temporary home for the town council. Initially, at least finding office space in which to house the staff that we will be recruiting in the autumn.

Due to the pressure of work for the Town Clerk and Mayor, I took on this search. The criteria that we set was that the space should be easily accessible and in the Lowestoft area and able to house up to four staff.

There is not a large amount of office space available for short term lease in Lowestoft. I initially conducted an online search and then spoke to various agents and reported back to the Mayor.

I have had to rule out premises due to them being on first or second floors with no disabled access. This was the case with premises at the Old Police Station. There was first floor office space which had lift access however it was to the rear of the building and the rooms would only have held the members of staff. An additional room that was possibly large enough to use for meetings was only accessible via stairs and would have been very expensive to make accessible. There was a stand-alone building to the side of the station however the main office space here was on the first floor and only had a set of stairs and a stairlift. Both of these options would have cost us in the region of £750 - £1000 in rent alone.

There is office space at Riverside Business Centre however this would have run to in excess of £2000 per month and would still have given us limited space.

There is a second-floor suite of offices at Waveney Chambers which has lift service unfortunately they are looking for a long-term lease. I was offered a short lease on offices in the High Street but they were first and second floor with only stair access.

There are offices available at Mobbs Way but technically this is out of our area. I also had to rule out some office space in Kirkley due to lack of access as well as another premise that had some ground floor office space but the majority was on the first and second floor with no disabled access.

This left us with two sets of premises that the Mayor and I have visited together. These are both shared use venues. One would be with the foodbank in Gas Works Road and the other with the CAB in St Margaret’s House in Gordon Road. Both organisation would be happy to work with the Town Council.

The premises in Gas Works Road have the benefit of being ground floor only and could be may fully disabled friendly. There could be separate access for the Town Council staff with a reception style office for staff and a separate office for the clerk. There would be access to shared toilets and kitchen and the use of a shared meeting space. However, the meeting space is central to the building and all the offices and the food bank area lead off of it and you have to pass through it to go from one space to another. There is plenty of parking.

The premises at St Margaret’s House would be a mixture of first and ground floor. At present the proposal would be for us to have two offices on the first floor. One is large enough to hold 2- 3 staff and the other would be suitable for the Town Clerk. They are all fully furnished with modern office furniture. Alongside these is a meeting room which can hold up to 10 people which we could share the use of and would be suitable for staff meetings, small internal meetings or working groups to meet in where appropriate. There is a small kitchen on the first floor along with ample toilets.

On the ground floor, there is disabled access both front and rear as well as disable facilities. There are a variety of meeting rooms which would be available for us to use if necessary although the CAB would have priority over them. However, if we do employ a member of staff who could not manage the stairs then the CAB would be flexible regarding office space. In addition to this there is the conference room which the CAB rarely use. This is the old Registrar’s weeding venue for those of you who know it. It as ramp access and is just big enough to hold a full council meeting with some public in attendance. It would certainly be ample for any committee meetings etc. This room would be shared use but we would be able to book our meetings in advance and work out the shared usage amicably.

The CAB would run the reception for us as it would be shared. They generally only see clients up to 3pm at the latest although the staff generally work until 5pm. We tend to have meetings in the afternoon or evening with only some morning meetings. There is private car parking to the rear of the building accessed via a barrier.

Both the Mayor and myself would recommend the Council looking to work with the CAB and housing our temporary home at St Margaret’s House on an initial one-year lease with the option to extend to 18 months or two years depending on the Town Hall. We have discussed some initial figures with the CAB and these have been referred to the Finance and Governance Committee. We would need to draw up paperwork and finalise some details but if the Full Council approves then we would suggest that we have a working party to enable us to move forward on the Town Councils behalf under the financial spending limits agreed by the F&G committee. The working party would consist of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor (if available), the Town Clerk, the Chair of the Finance and Governance Committee, the Chair of Personnel and one or two other councillors as decided by Full Council.

Formal Proposal

This Council approves the recommendation to lease space from the CAB at St Margaret’s House, Gordon Road, Lowestoft for a period of one year initially within the financial limits agreed by the Finance and Governance Committee whilst the Town Hall is made suitable for our use. The Council will set up a working party consisting of the Mayor, Deputy, Mayor, Town Clerk, Chairs of Finance and Governance and Personnel plus two councillors to finalise the arrangements.