**Minutes of the Eastbourne & District Chamber of Commerce Ltd**

**T/A Eastbourne *unLtd* Chamber of Commerce**

**Annual General Meeting**

**Thursday 23rd July 2020**

**Commenced at 6.15pm**

**Sovereign Harbour Yacht Club, Eastbourne and online via Zoom**

**PRESENT**

**Richard Garland President**

**Christina Ewbank Chief Executive**

**Malcolm Preece (Price & Co) Auditor**

**And 25 Members, Staff and Guests physically plus 29 online**

**Housekeeping**

Christina Ewbank went through housekeeping for Covid-19 safety and for the members attending via Zoom. All members and guests were provided with clean masks and asked to observe physical distancing measures. The open windows provided fresh air ventilation throughout the meeting. The meeting attendees completed track and trace slips which will be kept for 21 days.

She also introduced the anonymous voting App, Slido, and password to allow all members voting rights whether in the room or online. The password was also shared to members via email and on the rolling slide presentation.

She then passed over to the President, Richard Garland, who introduced Charles Erb Commodore of the Sovereign Harbour Yacht Club.

**1 Welcome** Charles Erb of Sovereign Harbour Yacht Club welcomed all present to the refurbished Sovereign Harbour Suite at the Yacht Club before the meeting commenced. He thanked the President for hosting the meeting at the Yacht Club and talked about access to SHYC and the many services available to Chamber members.

RG introduced guests and the top table and online; Malcolm Preece Auditor, Christina Ewbank CEO; Caroline Ansell MP, Cllr David Tutt, Cllr Penny Di Cara, Cllr Tony Freebody, Cllr Paul Metcalfe MBE, Cllr Margaret Bannister, Cllr Jane Lamb, Cllr Robert Smart, Cllr Steve Holt, Leading on the Eastbourne Recovery Group and BID CEO. Also, Becky Jackson, County Co-ordinator of the Rough Sleeper Initiative and Darlene Sellick the Social Care Specialist working with the Street Community, would be joining the meeting at 6.45pm.

**2** **Notice of Meeting** The formal notice convening the meeting was proposed by Dave Brinson, seconded by Shoes and taken as read on a 100% Slido vote.

**3** **Apologies** TheChief Executive read the list of apologies from Members, Guests and Directors. Apologies received included Rob Cottrill, Tim Whelan, Ian Fitzpatrick, Phil Evans, Neville Beckhurst Treasurer, Ashley Pugh, Mark McFadden, Brid and Derek Phelan, Paul Brown, Mark Battershill, William Pearson and Chris Beveridge.

**4 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 20th June 2019** had been posted on line in accordance with the Constitution and were taken as read. Approval of the Minutes was carried unanimously in a proposal by Dinah Ouzman seconded by Chris Baker.

**5 Annual Accounts and Auditor’s Report to 31st December 2019** The President said abbreviated accounts had been displayed on the website for over 21 days and distributed via an e-shot in accordance with the Constitution.

Malcolm Preece of Price & Co confirmed that a full audit of the 2019 accounts had been carried out and was found to be satisfactory. His full report is given here:

**AUDITORS REPORT for 2020**

**Malcolm Preece of Price & Co**

Good evening to all at this AGM in person or online.

We have completed our audit work and the full draft accounts for the year to 31 December 2019 are available on the chamber website. These are only in draft so far as they are awaiting approval.

The main changes in the accounts arise from the changes to buildings in the year – the Chamber now has new premises in Gildredge Road financed by a bank loan, and the former premises in Hyde Gardens are now held as an investment property. In the 2019 accounts this has resulted in increased depreciation, property repairs and interest charges.

Membership income was slightly reduced at £68,000, rental income increased slightly to £42,000, and the meetings and events organised by the chamber made a better surplus this year. The gross surplus increased by 1% to £116,000

The overheads this year were higher at £93,000, mainly from the property changes already mentioned, so The Chamber made an operating surplus this year of just over £9,000 and reserves increased to £604,000.

2020 will be more challenging with the impact of coronavirus, and realistically it is likely that membership fees will reduce in the future as not all businesses survive. However, the Chamber’s reserves and bank balances at 31 December 2019, and careful monitoring of resources, should ensure the Chamber can continue to function.

No issues came to our attention during the audit which we would need to report to members so we are able to sign off an unqualified audit report on the accounts.

There were no questions for Malcolm or Christina. The accounts were proposed by Catherine Clifford, seconded by Dave Brinson and carried by a 100% Slido vote.

**6 President’s Report for 2019/20**

This time last year no one foresaw the challenges of the last 6 months. The Chamber, having weathered many economic storms over its 125 years, in this time of global crisis has provided a local, connected and reassuring voice. We moved quickly to support independent businesses at their most vulnerable, and at a personal and local level, kept everyone connected and continued to be the voice of Eastbourne business at a Regional and National level.

I am proud to have led a gender-neutral board that drives the values of inclusivity, respectfulness and welcoming support. I could not have wished to have worked with a more honest and open group of people, all genuinely working to make our Town a better place. Our pre-Covid plans have not gone away and we shall continue the strategic outlook we adopted at the beginning of the year, in the pursuit of even greater support to our valued membership.

Pre-lockdown, our work included,

* helping introduce an Outreach Centre supporting the street community, which at one point was assisting over 150 people a day.
* We helped support the “yes” vote for the successful BID campaign, and establish the street ambassadors.
* Through SELEP we have supported the Fishermans Quay development and provided a strong voice for the Exceat Bridge development, which is now at the consultation stage.
* We secured new Chamber and BID premises, allowing us to create a welcoming fresh office and meeting space.
* We secured European funding for Leadership and Start-up programmes, and have,
* continued to help grow a regular vibrant street market in the town.

As lockdown became imminent the Chamber moved quickly to bring together the town’s Civic, public sector and business leaders to provide a forum to lead us all through these uncertain times and this has helped us all remain focused on our security, health and prosperity.

Daily members bulletins, provided an up to the minute, go to source of information on everything from Gov’t announcements to local support groups, and not only did we ensure all those businesses that qualified for a grant received one, we continue to lobby for the support of those that are still in need of help to recover.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and many members have told us how much they valued the personal help and boost to their morale the Chamber has provided. Our work will not stop and we shall continue to fight for access to grants and loans and support for all our members.

As a Chamber we have valued the willingness and openness of all the organisations we have worked with over the last year. Being ‘better together’ and providing immense leadership our thanks go out to Eastbourne Borough Council (directors, support staff and Councillors), Caroline our illustrious MP, MPs throughout Wealden, East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police, Eastbourne Hospitality Association, the BID directors, EcoAct, Locate East Sussex, Education Partnerships, FSB and our ACES colleagues throughout East Sussex.

Connecting people has always been the heartbeat of the Chamber and earlier this year we fired up the Young Chamber Group, establishing support for our Town’s entrepreneurs, emerging business leaders and of course prospective Chamber members. And to bring even more focus to the renewal, growth and prosperity of the Town’s businesses, we have established the Eastbourne Business Alliance, which will bring the EHA, BID, Edeal and Chamber even closer together.

The last 6 months has highlighted how important we are to each other. The Chamber and BID teams, led by Christina and Stephen, as well as our members have all been amazing – shown strength of character in fighting to keep businesses alive, adapting to new ways of working, communicating, negotiating, persuading and supporting – and all for our collective benefits.

All that remains is for me to wish your new incoming president, Nicky Fisher, a great year and I promise to provide my continued support as a friend, co-director and past president.

– thank you all.

The adoption of the report was proposed by Derek Godfrey, seconded by Dinah Ouzman and agreed on a 100% Slido vote.

**7 Election of President 2019/2020** A nomination had been received for Vice President Nicky Fisher to be elected to the position of President. Nicky has been an active director of the Chamber since 2010 and is a partner at Herron Fisher, accredited insolvency practitioners and business recovery specialists

Nicky Fisher’s Election was proposed by Shoes and seconded by Dinah Ouzman with the unanimous approval of all members present, both physically and online, and was followed by a round of applause.

Richard Garland removed the Chain of Office and handed it to Christina Ewbank for safe keeping. Nicky Fisher took over as Chair of the meeting via Zoom.

**8 Election of Officers and Board of Directors -** The Chamber seeks to represent the membership in whatever way possible and similarly, the Board of Directors seeks to be fully representative of the membership as a whole.

**Vice President:** Nominations have been received for the position of Vice President for Shoes of Evil Empire Inns, (The Eagle, Dew Drop Inn and The Rainbow, formerly known as The Counting House) and Russell Colbran, Managing Director of the family owned builders Colbran and Wingrove which has been established in the area for over 50 years.

Proposed by Dinah Ouzman and seconded by Derek Godfrey. These nominations for Vice President were carried by a 100% Slido vote.

**Hon. Treasurer:** Neville Beckhurst of Plummer Parsons (Accountancy) was the only nominee and was formally proposed by Matt Huddart and seconded by Russell Colbran and agreed unanimously by a 100% Slido vote.

Nicky Fisher declared Neville Beckhurst remain as Treasurer and Shoes and Russell Colbran as Vice Presidents to a round of applause from those present.

Nicky then declared that three directors had stood down due to pressure of work:

* Prital Moskal
* Hardy Ovaisi and
* Tamryn Steinschauer

And thanked them for their support during the year.

**Additional directors continuing in office, under the Constitution:**

Tim Cobb

Rebecca Conroy

Richard Garland

Zoe Lau

Mark McFadden

Mina O’Brien

Dinah Ouzman

Ashley Pugh

Linda Salway

Shoes

Stephen Holt

**Directors seeking re-election (under the constitution):**

In accordance with the constitution a third of the directors must either stand down and offer themselves for re-election or resign. As three directors have resigned, the director seeking re-election is:

Matt Huddart of The View Hotel

There was one new nomination received to join the Board.

Sarah Dyer Operations Manager of Stagecoach Eastbourne

 [Her biography is available on our Directors page of the website]

All the directors standing for re-election along with the new director nominated were formally proposed by Phil Ouzman, seconded by Colin Davis and approved unanimously by the members present and online.

Nicky Fisher thanked the Board for their continued service, hard work and commitment.

**9 Election of Auditors for the financial year 2019/20**

In Neville Beckhurst’s absence Christina Ewbank announced that Malcolm Preece of Price and Co were subject to regular review and were recommended as auditors.

Proposed by Dave Brinson and seconded by Shoes and approved unanimously by the members present and online.

**10 New President’s Address for 2020/21**

**Nicky Fisher**

I am delighted to take over the role of president from Richard – he will be a very hard act to follow and I wish to thank him for all his hard work and effort over the past two years.

Now a little about me.

I was born and bred in Eastbourne.

I started working for Hart Reade as a trainee Legal Executive and after three years I changed tack and went to work for Bradshaw and Co Chartered Accountants where I obtained my AAT qualification, before moving on to take my Chartered exams. I transferred into their Insolvency department and took my insolvency exams instead.

In 2000 I took a job in London to gain more experience, but after commuting for 2 years including through the floods, I decided to move to Surrey to have more time with my son. That didn’t work as he decided to stay at his school and board instead!!

I love the town and as soon as I decided to set up my own insolvency practice in 2006 with Chris Herron we opened an office in Eastbourne and rented a small room from a solicitor. In 2010 we bought our current offices in Seaside to have a larger and more permanent base in the town.

I am really looking forward to representing the town that I love.

It has been a challenging time for all of us over the past four months and as a tourist town we are especially hard hit and I am keen to see the town come out of the pandemic in a better shape than it went in.

Every challenge brings an opportunity and we need to embrace the opportunities that are out there and make the best of the ever changing environment. We haven’t seen the end of the problems, but it is an opportunity for the town. We need to find those opportunities; we need to work with Legal and General to help the Beacon Centre survive – it is key to the town’s survival.

The market is thriving and helping footfall – we need to encourage people to shop local.

Parking charges are an issue and the Chamber and the BID tried to get the increase stopped but there was no negotiating! The Beacon are not increasing their charges, it is just the on street parking, perhaps they will be successful in getting retailers to offer free parking if you spend £x.

We can develop tourism and embrace staycations when so many people do not want to get on a plane – we have a lot to offer.

I suspect that a number of people will decide not to work in the big city and move to the seaside to either work from home or set up a new business – we need to tell the world that Eastbourne is a good place to do business.

With more businesses around it should help those existing businesses survive especially those in the town centre who will lose business because people are not going into the town centre to work or to do their shopping anymore. Where are the sandwich shops going to get their business now?

There is going to be a degree of change – what is the town centre for now? Some of the town centre needs to be repurposed, with so many empty retail units it is good to see that agreements have been reached to fill some of the windows of Debenhams and T J Hughes with art – we are going to need to do a lot more to make the town a vibrant place to be. With restaurants and bars spilling out on to the street it might start to look like we are a European holiday destination not a British one! We need to make the town centre a great place to sit out and meet people in a safe and secure environment.

Outdoors is the way to go!

With the reduction in traffic during lockdown we experienced substantially better air quality and with so many more people taking daily exercise now is the time to get people on their bikes. The Chamber has worked hard over the past few years to get more cycle lanes – now we have a greater opportunity of this coming to fruition.

Unfortunately, there are going to be some redundancies and we have already seen announcements of large corporate lay offs. East Sussex College Group have a “million pledge” to provide free training for everyone to upskill and/or learn something different. The college is investing £1m in adult education to support economic recovery in Sussex working in partnership with a range of organisations. I encourage you to look at their website and see what interests you; there are courses for furloughed staff, courses for employers and managers to train in mental health first aid to support their teams, courses for adults claiming universal credit directly linked to job opportunities and many more.

The Chamber did an excellent job in producing a daily newsletter during lockdown and my thanks go to Christina and the team for putting together such a comprehensive document that has received much praise. This newsletter is now going out ad hoc when necessary and I hope you have all benefited from receiving this bulletin.

The Chamber knows that many of you enjoy our networking events, and whilst we have been running some on line, various members have hosted webinars and we have joined forces with other local chambers. We are hoping to get some socially distanced face-to-face events running soon. If anyone has any ideas about an event we could put on please do let me or one of the team know. We need to make people feel comfortable, whilst providing support for businesses old and new.

We are planning a breakfast picnic in August and a walk in September – watch out for more news about these in due course.

We have a large membership, one of the best in the country, but we would still love to welcome new members, so if you know anyone who you think could benefit from membership please do let me or one of the team know.

Whilst we are still in uncertain times, these are also exciting times for the town and I am delighted to be leading an excellent board of local business people to help move the town forward to come out of this bigger, better and bolder.

The President asked whether there were any questions. None were asked and so the address was proposed by Dinah Ouzman, Seconded by Derek Godfrey and passed by a Slido vote of 100%.

**11 Any Other Business**

AOB was invited, but none was forthcoming.

The President thanked the 22 Premier Members for their invaluable support:

1. *AFH Payroll*
2. *Aspect Metalcraft*
3. *Axisops*
4. *Brewers*
5. *Caffyns Audi*
6. *Earslfield Court Luxury Care Home*
7. *Eastbourne Motoring Centre*
8. *Gardners Books*
9. *GBS Insurance Services*
10. *Go Plastic Pallets*
11. *Gradient Consultants*
12. *Herron Fisher*
13. *Hydro Hotel*
14. *Mayo Wynne Baxter*
15. *RYP Well-Being*
16. *Southern IT*
17. *Sovereign Harbour Yacht Club*
18. *Sportswise*
19. *St Wilfrid’s Hospice*
20. *Switchplane*
21. *Tradesmith*
22. *UK Private Investigators*

Nicky Fisher thanked members and guests for their participation in the first Hybrid Chamber AGM held by Eastbourne Chamber of Commerce.

There was no other formal business and so the AGM closed at 6.45pm.

After the formal AGM closed the Chamber moved on to presentations and keynote speakers.

**Keynote Speakers**

**The Rough Sleeper Initiative**

Christina introduced Becky Jackson and Darlene Sellick to present the Countywide Rough Sleeper Initiative and answer questions afterwards from the floor and online.

It was confirmed that a rough sleeper count is done each day in Eastbourne and that 14 specialists work with rough sleepers and the street community to help them find safe housing. They have housed 67 people during lockdown and 50 prior to that. It was noted what a difference it would have made if 117 people were still sleeping rough in our town centre and promenade.

Just two years ago the rough sleeper count was done once a year; no specialists were employed to work with the homeless and there were about 75 rough sleepers in the town. Today, the daily count has revealed 12 rough sleepers in Eastbourne as of July 23rd.

The RSI service is continuing to work with those housed to ensure they have the wraparound services they need. This includes mental health support, drug and alcohol abuse support, basic furniture and guidance on managing a household, as needed. They are also working to house the 12 existing rough sleepers and any more who find themselves homeless, often through no fault of their own.

Thanks to the Chamber, the Council, the Police and match-funding from Your Eastbourne BID, a street community centre has been set up out of the town centre at weekends to support the street community. The attendance has averaged 150 people each Saturday and Sunday which gives this community a safe place to meet, eat good healthy food and is a refuge where drug-taking and alcohol are not allowed. This stopped during lockdown but should start again soon.

The Chamber has worked closely with Neighbourhood First, the Police and the Outreach Team to clear anti-social behaviour from the Pavilion Gardens and will continue to monitor the town, promenade and gardens and act as necessary.

Darlene Sellick answered a question about the number of homeless people coming to Eastbourne from other towns and explained that the RSI does not attract rough sleepers to Eastbourne as generally they don’t want to engage with the team. It takes a while for the outreach team to build trust with the homeless community and get them mentally ready to move off the streets. Darlene explained that rough sleepers are more likely to migrate to the town for the free food handed out by voluntary groups and for the perceived good weather.

If members become aware of new sleep sites, begging or homeless people, please email info@eastbournechamber.co.uk and we will pass it on.

**Caroline Ansell MP**

Christina then introduced Caroline Ansell, MP for Eastbourne and Willingdon, and thanked her for all her support and lobbying during the Covid lockdown. It made a real difference to Chamber members getting the support the business community needed - and continues to need.

Caroline then ran through the support the government has arranged for the business community since lockdown started and said the government would continue to offer support. She also mentioned support for victims of domestic abuse and asked members to keep an eye out for staff or neighbours who may be affected. If you become aware of abuse, don’t turn a blind eye – you must report it.

She also talked about the need to ensure that disadvantaged people have digital access for education and communication while the virus is keeping us apart. The government has provided funding to make sure everyone gets the digital access they need.

Questions were asked about the new A27. Caroline said that the roadworks taking place on the bridge between Polegate lights and the new Cophall Roundabout is not the start of a new road. Caroline explained that £85 million was set aside for minor improvements to the existing A27 including these roadworks which are likely to be the installation of a short dual carriageway to alleviate delays at Polegate.

She supports and is continuing to fight for an offline road from Cophall to Beddingham without any junctions. This would take through traffic away from the existing route, allowing the existing road to return to being a meandering country road while the new A27 would be north of the railway line, away from the South Downs National Park. This will take several years, however, as the new road will need to avoid ancient woodland and sites of Special Scientific Interest and a public consultation will be required.

Caroline explained that even with improvements in digital connectivity improving the road network will improve the local economy radically. The South East is the second most economically developed area in the country after London and it needs a good road network to continue to underpin the national economy.

Caroline was also asked about government support announced for the creative industry. Will it reach as far as Eastbourne? Caroline said that the funds available to the creative sector are not just for the ‘crown jewels’ in London. They will help support jobs all over the country and she is fighting to get Eastbourne its fair share.

After the presentations the CEO thanked all the members and guests who had attended the AGM for their support and contribution and invited Chamber members and guests in the Yacht Club to continue to network and enjoy the refreshments provided. She reminded everyone to maintain physical distancing and wear their masks when they weren’t eating or drinking.