

Chief Executive (as Proper Officer)
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
Maidstone
ME15 6JQ

15 November 2020

RULE 33 – REVIEW OF SERVICE COMMITTEE DECISIONS

ECONOMIC REGENERATION & LEISURE (“ERL”) COMMITTEE: HAZLITT THEATRE

We write to request that the decision made by the ERL committee during closed session on Thursday 12 November 2020, at Item 16 & concerning the Hazlitt Theatre, be referred to the Policy & Resources Committee for review. Our reasons for requesting this review are: -

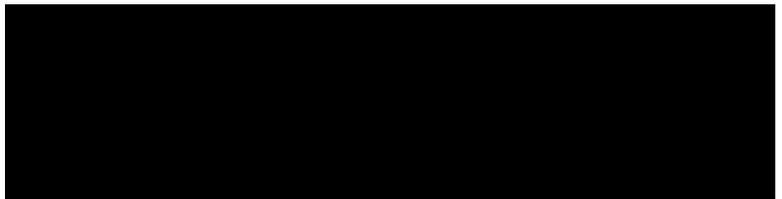
1. The Hazlitt Theatre is a valuable community asset. It features in many peoples’ memories of Maidstone and family life. It is essential to the sense of Maidstone as the County Town and provides valuable facilities for all manner of activities. Once the pandemic is behind us, the people of Maidstone want it re-opened.
2. The ERL committee had only a short period - a matter of a couple days it appears - in which to consider the papers relating to the Hazlitt. This was alongside a substantial report, also issued only a few days ahead of the meeting, concerning options for maintaining the Museum service in the face of budget constraints; we understand this proved very time consuming for members prior to the meeting. It is possible therefore that any decision concerning the Hazlitt did not receive sufficient contemplation.
3. ERL members appear to have been unable to take soundings from their wider councillor colleagues, for example. Likewise, the fate of the Hazlitt had not, prior to Thursday’s meeting, been subject to any form of public engagement or consultation.
4. The scale of public concern arising from press reports following the Council’s press-release Friday evening has been massive. Within just twenty-four (24) hours, more than 2,300 residents had signed an online petition whilst 3,300 residents had joined a new Facebook group entitled “Save the Hazlitt”.

5. The residents of Maidstone require assurance that their voices will be heard.
6. In our view, a sound decision by the Council is one that will, irrespective of what steps are taken in the interim to reduce costs whilst the theatre is closed, provide a viable basis for the Hazlitt to re-open once the pandemic is over. The Council and the Theatre Operators should ensure that there is a credible plan for doing this.

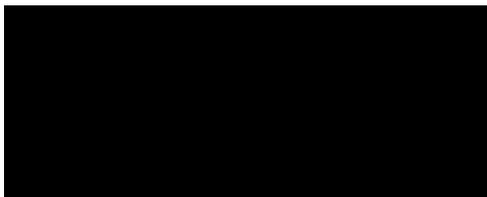
Signed:



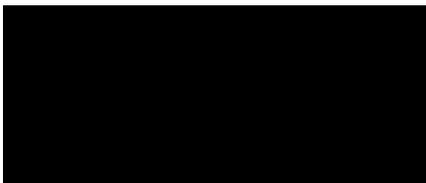
**Jonathan Purle
Bridge Ward (Con)**



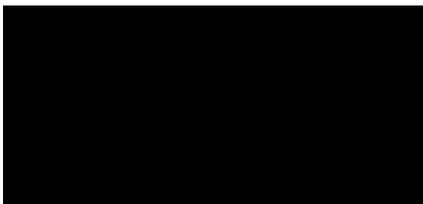
**Ashleigh Kimmance
Heath Ward (LDem)**



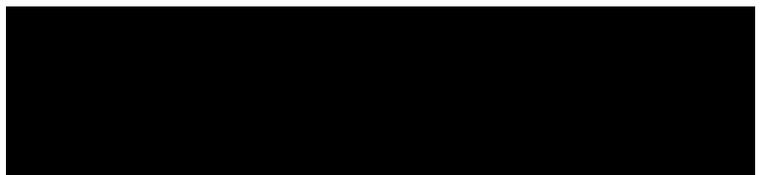
**Lottie Parfitt-Reid
Coxheath & Hunton (Con)**



**Eddie Powell
Shepway South (Ind Maidstone)**



**Louise Brice
Staplehurst (Con)**



**Michelle Hastie
North Ward (LDem)**