**Notes for Council Meetings – oral reports.**

**Grant for Three Choirs.**

The Council has supported Three Choirs for many years, and annually puts aside roughly one third of the anticipated grant. This year sees the festival in Hereford for what is arguably the 300th festival.

Three years ago the Council made a grant of £32,500 towards the main costs of the festival and also hosted stewards lunches and provided refreshments at the closing event for performers and guests. The additional costs which were paid directly by the council to suppliers came to £3,760.

This year the Council has set aside £36,000 for the grant, noting rising costs and the larger scale of the 300th festival. The Council is till expecting at this stage to host one stewards lunch, and to provide refreshments for the closing event. Accordingly, the Council is in a position to release the main grant earlier than in previous years to assist with the cash flow of the festival, provided it is confident that this is an acceptable risk. The organisers have asked for release of the main grant as soon as possible soon as possible to fund up-front costs including booking orchestra, singers, staging etc. Given the high level of confidence that the festival will take place and will make a major impact on tourism (all hotel rooms are now booked in Hereford and the surrounding area for the week) members may well consider this is reasonable.

Secondly, the organisers have referred to a possible additional £4,000 which has been considered which if granted will be invested in Three Choirs Pus. This is the element of the festival that brings music out onto the streets and engages wider audiences than would normally be interested in classical choral music, which remains the central genre of the festival. However, this additional money is earmarked to cover hospitality costs arising from the stewards lunch and closing event so it would not be prudent to commit it to a general grant payment unless the offer of hospitality was withdrawn. I therefore recommend that the Council retains the £4,000 for its original purpose, if there is a reduced need for this Council can then decide whether to return any unspent portion of the funds to balances for another purpose or to provide additional grant funding for the main festival.

**Belgian Flag**

We are awaiting a cost estimate from Integral for the hanging of the replica flag from a bracket in the Chamber, Herefordshire’s relevant officers have all approved the idea. We have received a detailed report (as far as can be done) regarding the original and firm statement from the Belgian Embassy that they are prepared to pay up to 50% of the cost of restoration which is highly specialised work and is estimated at up to £6,000. This has been verified by two conservators. The framing and glazing of a restored flag will be sub-contracted. The main need is to remove the wool backing, the sulphur content of which is going to cause continuing decay until the flag is completely lost, and remounting the flag in its present condition, ie still showing substantial wear and tear, in a new frame with UV filtered glass. It is not possible to restore the flag at anything likes its original condition, hence the purchase of the replica which has already been undertaken.

Council are asked if they wish to approve spending between £1,500-£3,000 taking into account the offer from the Belgian Embassy, to take action to conserve the original flag. It would be sensible to install a plaque near the two flags explaining why they are there and referring interested visitors to the further information about the history of the Belgian refugees in Hereford that is now available.

**Three Choirs Parking**

The organisers have contacted Chris Jenner, Herefordshire’s Head of Technical and Parking Services to ask for the use of St Martin’s No 2 car park, which is the smaller long stay facility at the rear of the main St Martin’s car park. They wish to block book it for up to 120 singers from all over the three counties involved in the festival from mid morning until late in the evening on a number of rehearsal days. Herefordshire are minded to support that and ward councillors have indicated they have no objections. Council’s agreement that they are happy for me to write to Chris Jenner and confirm that position on behalf of the whole council would be welcome.

Herefordshire will be introducing free parking in all car parks from 6 pm on all days during the festival.

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