

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 13th December 2021 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: J Carroll
C Copleston
D Jones
K Wattingham
R Morgan

Councillors in attendance virtually: E Cooper
Y Farrell
S Goodchild
M S Kennedy
T McMahon
A Slough
C Slough
S Thorne

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk

Public: 5

Apologies: Councillors: D Dixon-Wilkinson

11875 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr D Dixon-Wilkinson

It was advised that due to a new variant of Covid, and a shift in government guidance, some members were in attendance virtually to ensure the enablement of social distancing in the Council Chamber. Members in attendance virtually were permitted to take part in discussions, however due to legislation would not be permitted to vote.

11876 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

11877 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

11878 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4th October 2021.

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4th October 2021 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

11879 COMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUP MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the following committees and consider any recommendations contained therein

Corporate Services Committee	21 st September 2021
Community Services Committee	6 th September and 25 th October 2021
Environment & Leisure Committee	20 th September 2021
Planning Committee	27 th September, 18 th October and 8 th November 2021
Town Partnership Committee	20 th July 2021

To receive the minutes of the following sub-committee and consider any recommendations contained therein

To receive the minutes of the following sub-committee and consider any recommendations contained therein

New Office Provisions Sub-Committee	None to present
New Cemetery Sub-Committee	None to present

Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the recommendations contained therein as follows:

- 11774 Employee Assistance Programme**
- 11777 Freedom of Information and Model Scheme of Publication**
- 11778 Communications Policy and Strategy**
- 11779 Local Government Pension Scheme; Statement of Local Discretions**
- 11780 Press Protocols**
- 11781 Risk Management Plan**
- 11782 Banking Arrangement, Investment Strategy Investment Arrangement Policy**

11880 TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members received a verbal report on events that had been attended by the Town Mayor.

Members were advised that a total of 83 engagements had been attended, these included:

- Silver bench event
- Media talks
- Service of thanksgiving and reflection
- Launch of head way
- Civic reception
- Civic service
- 60th anniversary at college
- Halloween event
- Poppy appeal
- Armistice day
- Remembrance Service

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor for her support.

Members expressed their gratitude to the Mayor for her continuous work and support in the community.

Members received an update from the Deputy Mayor.

Members were advised that the switching the lights on at the Luton and Dunstable Hospital was of particular pleasure and the experience had been enjoyed.

11881 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Members provided verbal reports from meetings they had attended of outside organisations or from training courses they had attended on behalf of the Council.

Cllr McMahon advised members that she had attended a virtual NALC Conference focussing on community engagement, disappointment had been expressed at the meeting regarding the non-re-instatement of virtual meetings for all council meetings. Members were advised that a new chair had been appointed of NALC.

Cllr Goodchild advised members she had attended 74th AGM of BATPC, the highlights of the meeting were two guest speakers speaking on the Queens Green Canopy and East West Rail.

Cllr Jones advised that he had also attended the BATPC AGM. He had also attended two additional BATPC meetings, including the:

Finance and General Purpose meeting on 1st November, which gave consideration to the relocation of the BATPC offices to enable improved disability access and to the Environmental Committee Regulation consultation, and:

County Committee meeting held 11th November, members were advised that the budget for 2022/2023 had included a 1% raise in fees.

Cllr Kennedy advised members that he had been unable to attend the Houghton Hall Park Strategic Management Group Meeting, however he expressed concerns regarding the future funding of Houghton Hall Park due to the end of Heritage funding contribution.

Members were advised that the joint venture agreement between Houghton Regis Town Council and Central Bedfordshire Council required any financial deficit to be funded at the rate of 80% Central Bedfordshire Council and 20% Houghton Regis Town Council which had been predicted to amount to £25,000 for HRTC in 2022/23.

11882 USE OF RESERVES BY E&L

Members were advised that at the Environment & Leisure Committee on 15th November 2021 requests were made to Town Council for authorisation to spend from General Reserves.

Requests were made for the following:

- Tree survey work outcomes – Minute 11843, £17,000
- Public seating on Parkside Recreation ground - Minute 11850, £1300

Members were advised of the following:

- At 1st April 2021 the level of General Reserves was £366,508
- At the October Town Council meeting the following was agreed:
 1. That £35,000 be transferred out of New Office Provision Earmarked Reserve into General Reserves.
 2. That £100,000 be transferred out of General Reserves into Pavilion Renovation Earmarked Reserve
- It was projected that spend in 2021/22 will use £13,888 of General Reserves. This contribution from General Reserves includes in the Projected spend use of reserves for the additional tree work (approx. £19,000, comprising £17000 for tree survey work outcomes plus £2000 for ad hoc work) and for 2 new benches in Parkside Recreation Ground (approx. £1300).
- The projected level of General Reserves at 31st March 2022 was therefore £287,620
- As members were aware it was considered good practice to have approximately 3 months net revenue expenditure in General reserves. Based on spend in 2021/22 this equated to a General reserve level of around £225,000.

Although it was not recommended that General Reserves be used for revenue expenses such as the tree work identified above, members were advised this work was essential for health and safety and as such should not be delayed. Members may like to consider the appropriateness of using general reserves for the seating in Parkside, this was a project which could be budgeted for in 2022/23.

It was queried how members of the public would engage and contribute their feedback to the placement of the seating in Parkside. Members were advised that a planned social media release had been prepared, notices would be placed in council noticeboards and Parkside Action Group would be requested for their feedback. Members were advised that in relation to dementia friendly colours, in line with the dementia friendly strategy, with red having been the popular choice of members, it was advised red had been unavailable on the seating with arms.

Members were supportive of purchasing the seating for Parkside.

Members were advised that the discussion of the tree survey works had been discussed at the Environment and Leisure Committee meeting where members had been advised that the outcome of the survey had highlighted additional work that needed to be carried out.

Resolved: To approve the use of General reserves for the following:

- **Tree survey work outcomes – £17,000**
- **Public seating on Parkside Recreation ground - £1300**

11883 POPPY WREATHS

It had been requested that the council consider the timing of the relocation of the poppy wreaths from around the memorial stone to the Memorial Hall Garden. This was previously considered at the Town Council meeting on 7th October 2019. Members received the previously presented officers report for information.

Members were requested to confirm the previous Council resolution.

Members were advised that resident feedback had prompted the re-discussion of this item. Feedback had indicated a preference that the wreaths remain at the Memorial Stone for a longer length of time before removal.

Members were reminded of the previous discussion in 2019 whereby it had been agreed the relocation of the wreaths to the Memorial Hall was to ensure they remained in a respectful condition for a longer length of time.

Resolved: To confirm Minute 10092 as follows:
‘To continue to maintain poppies and wreaths around the memorial stone until end of November each year. After this period to seek to relocate them to the Memorial Hall garden and to offer to dispose of them early in the New Year if required by the Memorial Hall.’

11884 BEDFORD SQUARE COMMUNITY CENTRE CONSULTATION

Members were updated on the CBC consultation on the future use of Bedford Square Community Centre (BSCC).

Members highlighted the need for the community centre to remain for the community and suggested that the lack of availability for community use could damage the community.

Members were updated on the timeline of the next stages;
27th January the results of the consultation will be presented to the CBC Corporate Resources meeting;
8th February the outcome would be presented to the CBC Executive Committee meeting.

Members requested a response be compiled to Central Bedfordshire Council highlighting and supporting the resolutions made by the committee.

Members agreed for a representative of Houghton Regis Town Council to attend the two Central Bedfordshire Council meetings.

Resolved: To respond to the CBC consultation on the Future Use of Houghton Regis Community Centre as follows:

- 1. The BSCC should remain in full community use; it is at the centre of the community, and it provides a basis for a network of local support, community cohesion, consultations and events, building health and wellbeing opportunities, and social wealth.**
- 2. The loss of the BSCC is contrary to the Houghton Regis emerging Neighbourhood Plan which seeks retention of the Community Centre**
- 3. The BSCC supports other services located within the Bedford Square centre and also within the wider Houghton Regis town centre. It contributes to the vibrancy of the town centre and the local community.**

- 4. The condition of the centre and the internal facilities make it an adaptable and flexible space, ideally placed to be at the heart of the community. The centre would benefit from a more accessible booking system, local marketing to improve awareness and a more affordable price structure in relation to out of office hours bookings to make it a vibrant and well used facility which is able to serve the needs of the community of Houghton Regis**

11885 PARISH BOUNDARY REVIEW

Members recalled that at the Town Council meeting on 4th October consideration was given to the possibility of an early Community Governance Review (CGR).

The following Resolution was passed:

That the Council respond to CBC, expressing its interest in having an early Community Governance Review, and in particular its view that the parish boundary with Chalton parish should be amended in the interests of future fair and efficient local government arrangements.

Ahead of this it was requested that contact be made with Chalton Parish Council to explore their views on this.

Members were advised that Chalton Parish Council had been contacted and would consider this at their Parish Council meeting in January.

It was agreed that the council action the previously passed resolution.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.01pm

Dated this 24th day of January 2022

Chairman