

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 3rd October 2022 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: P Burgess
J Carroll
E Cooper
Y Farrell
S Goodchild
D Jones
T McMahon
R Morgan
A Slough
C Slough
S Thorne
K Wattingham

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Public: 4

Apologies: Councillors: C Copleston
M S Kennedy

12182 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Copleston and Kennedy.

12183 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A member of Friends of Windsor Drive Community Open Space requested confirmation of support from the Town Council regarding the halt on development of Windsor Drive and whether that support would continue if the decision to develop Windsor Drive was reversed at a future date.

It was confirmed that the Town Council view on the development of Windsor Drive had not changed.

Concerns were raised regarding cemetery and it was requested whether there was a commitment to continue to keep a cemetery in the town?

It was advised that there is no risk or threat to the existing cemetery, the Town Council, through the Cemetery Sub-Committee, has made a commitment to continue to look for a suitable site.

A member of the public asked if the site at Grendall Lane had been completely ruled out?

It was confirmed that this site had been ruled out.



12184 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12185 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2022.

Members highlighted some inaccuracies within the minutes, it was agreed for the minutes of 20th June 2022 to be represented at the next Town Council meeting scheduled for 19th December 2022.

12186 COMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUP MINUTES

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

Corporate Services Committee	None to present. Members received the draft minutes of Corporate Services Committee held on 30 th May 2022. At this meeting the following policy was considered, and it was requested that this be brought forward to Town Council: <i>Minute Number: 12047 Code of Conduct To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Code of Conduct as based on the template provided by the Local Government Association</i>
Community Services Committee	7 th February and 4 th July 2022 Members were referred to: <i>Minute 12119 Town Centre Toilet – Appointment of Contractor To request that Town Council authorise the use of General Reserves up to £2000 to fund this contract in 2022/23.</i>
Environment & Leisure Committee	13 th June 2022.
Planning Committee	6 th and 27 th June, 18 th July, 8 th and 30 th August 2022.
Town Partnership Committee	None to present.

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

Office Provisions Sub Committee	None to present.
Proposed New Cemetery Working Group	19 th July 2021 and 18 th July 2022.

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- Resolved:** To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the recommendations contained therein as follows;
- To approve the use of General Reserves up to £2000 to fund the town centre toilet cleaning contract in 2022/23.
 - To approve the adoption of the Town Councils Code of Conduct as based on the template provided by the Local Government Association subject to the alteration discussed.

12187 TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

Members were advised that the Town Mayor had attended over 30 events in and around the local area. Highlights had included Central Bedfordshire Council Awards Ceremony, Inspiring Music Event, Houghton Regis Town Council Carnival, Mayor of Linslade Charity Dinner, Skate Park Event, Open Air Cinema and University of Bedfordshire Civic Degree Ceremony.

The Deputy Mayor advised members she had attended Hospice at Home Event, Luton and Dunstable Bingo and 1st and 3rd Scouts and the Lord Lieutenant Thanksgiving meal.

12188 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 Jones advised members he had attended BATCP, it was advised that there were four town or parish councils who were not members of the BATPC. The AGM arrangements had been confirmed as Henlow Park Pavilion on Thursday 20th October 2022. Speakers in attendance would be Charlotte Eisenheart NALC's Members Services Manager and Tamsin Ellway from Environmental Agency, Flood Resilience Advisor. The move to the new offices has been delayed by legal formalities and a draft lease was awaited.

Also attended was a meeting of the Houghton Regis North Stakeholder Group. It had been advised that Linmere had no intentions of funding links within Tithe Farm Recreation Ground, however, they would focus on links within their own land.

Allotment availability in HRN1 had also been queried at the meeting, as had access to the Farmstead and Lidl from Parkside. It had been confirmed that all planning applications had been agreed apart from infill sites.

There had been criticism of Central Bedfordshire Council of its failure to provide the proposed new primary school for the new residents of Houghton Regis.

Cllr Thorne advised members that she had attended Citizens Advice AGM, the speaker in attendance discussed the foodbank for which various proposals had been considered to ensure people get the support they need.

Cllr Burgess advised members that she had attended Lime Tree Academy and had been impressed with the improvements that had been made to the school.



Cllr Goodchild advised members that she had also attended the Lime Tree Academy's open day and advised members feedback had been very positive.

Cllr Goodchild also attended the Citizens Advice AGM, the speaker in attendance focussed on the foodbank, Members were advised there had been a significant number of people who had utilised the foodbank.

Cllr Farrell advised members that the Memorial Hall was still thriving and had been undergoing improvements and was currently in good repair. The accounts had been approved and members were advised of the date of the Memorial Hall AGM as 4th October 2022.

Cllr Goodchild advised members that she had been in collaboration with Central Bedfordshire Council to try to improve voucher distribution in Houghton Regis for access to the foodbank, which would enable residents from Houghton Regis to utilise this commodity to its fullest.

12189 COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE FOR FRIENDS OF WINDSOR DRIVE COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE (FOWDCOS)

Members were advised that the FoWDCOS invited the council to nominate a councillor representative to be part of the Friends Group. The Friends Group had advised:

'We feel this would add a valuable dimension to the dynamics of the constituted group for the following reasons:

1. A councillor would, hopefully bring knowledge and experience of Council policy, process and procedures which may help the FoWDCOS understand the best approach and protocols we should observe and follow to support our aims and objectives;
2. A councillor could advise on local updates and related matters which may have a bearing on the aims and objectives of the FoWDCOS;
3. A councillor could, via opportunities such as the Council AGM, formally report back to and update the Council on their interaction with the FoWDCOS, keeping them abreast of our work towards achieving our aims and objectives.'

The Group had advised that they meet almost weekly, they do however appreciate that this was likely to be too frequent for a councillor given their other commitments and suggested that monthly or 6 weekly attendance would be suitable.

Cllr A Slough volunteered to represent Houghton Regis Town Council and support FoWDCOS.

Nominated by: Cllr Carroll seconded by: S Goodchild

Members voted in favour of Cllr A Slough to act as the council's representative on the Friends of Windsor Drive Community Open Space group and attend meetings.

Resolved: To nominate Cllr A Slough to act as the council's representative on the Friends of Windsor Drive Community Open Space.

12190 AUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2021/22



Members received the Covering Letter and the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for consideration.

Members noted that the external auditor had raised the following matter under Section 3 of the Return

'Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

It came to our attention that the Council had not met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 in publishing the 2020/21 AGAR exactly one day before the period of 30 working days to inspect the accounts. This was reported by the Internal Auditor. The Council correctly answered no to the relevant assertion in the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement and has complied with the Regulations in 2022.'

It was advised that no matters were raised in the covering letter as minor scope for improvement.

- Resolved:**
- 1. To approve and accept the Annual Return including the external auditor's certificate;**
 - 2. To note the comment in Section 3 of the AGAR and to ensure that the publishing requirements as set out in the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 continue to be met in subsequent years.**

12191 EXTERNAL AUDITOR APPOINTMENT

Under the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015, Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments (SAAA) is responsible for appointing external auditors to all applicable opted-in smaller authorities, for setting the terms of appointment for limited assurance reviews and for managing the contracts with the appointed audit firms. Smaller authorities are those whose gross annual income or expenditure is less than £6.5 million.

The next 5-year appointing period runs from 2022-23 until 2026-27 and SAAA have undertaken a procurement exercise to appoint auditors to each County area from 1st April 2022.

Members were advised that there was an option for smaller authorities to opt-out of the next round of 5-year audit appointments.

However, all authorities require an appointed external auditor. If the council did decide to opt out, the council would be required to appoint its own external auditor.

Members were advised that opting out was a significant decision. Detailed information on what it meant to opt out and how to opt out could be found at www.saaa.co.uk

Key implications were:

- an opted-out authority regardless of size (including exempt authorities) must appoint an appropriate external auditor;
- the appointed auditor must be a registered auditor as defined by the Companies Act and a member of Institute of Chartered Accountants (England and Wales).



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- an opted-out authority must convene an appropriate independent auditor panel which meets the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (LAAA). Detailed guidance on auditor panels could be found in Schedule 4 of the LAAA Act and from CIPFA;
 - an opted-out authority would need to develop its own specification for its external audit contract, would need to negotiate the price for this work on an individual basis and would need to manage the contract, including any disputes, and any independence issues that may arise;
 - an opted-out authority must ensure full compliance with the relevant requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act and supporting Regulations;
 - any opted-out authority that does not successfully appoint an appropriate external auditor in the correct manner and notify SAAA who their external auditor is by 30th November 2022 would have an external auditor appointed for it by the Secretary of State through SAAA. This would result in additional costs of £300 which would have to be met by the authority.

Members discussed the implications of opting out, and agreed to remain in the central external auditor appointment arrangements.

Resolved: Not to opt out of the central external auditor appointment arrangements.

12192 CLIMATE CHANGE

Members considered steps to help to address climate change.

Members were advised that public feedback to support this initiative had been positive and several members of the Youth Council were keen to support this work.

Members were advised this this initiative fitted in with the Town Council Vision, however, concerns were raised regarding the current economic climate as it seemed to be more costly to be environmentally accountable.


Members were advised that strategies could be included in the officers draft budget which would then be circulated before Christmas ready for the finalised budget in January.

It was suggested, rather than declare a climate emergency, to financially prepare for it by including finance and resources in the budgetary process for 2023/2024 in order for the newly elected council in 2023 to make the decision whether to proceed with this strategy.

Members were encouraged to join the Climate Emergency Network through NALC which provided resources and ideas to support the Climate Emergency.

It was suggested that there would likely be future funding available to support climate emergency initiatives.

It was clarified that to declare a climate emergency, it would allow the council to state their position as significantly concerned, and would look to shape and minimise the impact on climate, this would be worked in conjunction with finances and the council policies in place.



Members were advised that within the report, it was highlighted there was a lack of staff resources and capacity to support the implementation of a green taskforce and the administrative support that would be required.

Members were advised that a joint meeting had been arranged for Houghton Regis Town Council, Leighton Linlade Town Council, Dunstable Town Council and Central Bedfordshire Council to discuss matters and strategies surrounding the climate emergency.

Members discussed cost free options that the council could undertake however, it was highlighted that despite some actions or activities being cost free, staff time would still be required to implement any suggested ideas.

An amendment was proposed by Cllr A Slough to read: *To declare a climate emergency.*
Seconded by: Cllr McMahon
The officer recommendation read: *To consider declaring a climate emergency.*

Members voted in favour of the amended recommendation; accordingly this became the substantive motion.

Members voted in favour of the substantive motion.

Resolved: To declare a climate emergency.

12193 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW UPDATE

Members were advised that in October 2021 consideration was given to the desirability of seeking an early community governance review. The council agreed to make representations to CBC to seek an early parish boundary review in particular in relation to the parish boundary with Chalton.

Members were updated that Chalton Parish Council had recommended no change at this current time.

CBC have advised:

- the Central Bedfordshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2021 does not come into effect until May 2023 and therefore it is unlikely that any support from the Local Government Boundary Committee for England (LGBCE) would be given for a period of time;
- the LGBCE review did not include any potential development of the land east of Houghton Regis as the forecast electorate was for only 5 years ahead and whilst that situation might have now changed any extension of the parish boundary would conflict with the revised warding arrangements that would come into force in May.

Accordingly, CBC were unable to carry out an early CGR, however CBC resolved to carry out a CGR of the whole of the council area in 2023/24 and it may be at that time HRTC's request could be considered

Members received this report for information.

12194 HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME FEEDBACK



Members were reminded that it was agreed (Town Council 21st March 2022) to make an application to the CBC Rural Match Funding - Integrated Programme 2022/23 and 2023/24 for improved town entrance features.

The application was assessed and CBC decided it could be progressed with further assessment required to determine deliverability, potential improvements and affordability.

The following feedback was provided:

Bedford Road – In view of the ongoing development in the area, this may be difficult to pick a suitable location at this time, especially as existing signage and speed limits are changing / under review. CBC have suggested that this town entrance feature is put on hold until the development effecting Bedford Road is complete, and there is a clearer picture over where best to site a gateway.

Houghton Regis Town Council called for the signage to be placed on the roundabout on Northern bypass

Sundon Road – **CBC have suggested** that the gateway signage would be well placed, from an aesthetic view point, on Sundon Road near its junction with School Road. However, this location is after the entrance to one of the new residential developments (Waterslade Way). CBC are seeking confirmation from HRTC as to whether this would be acceptable. Although this suggestion was made by CBC, it was highlighted to members that the resolution in March 2022 did not include a feature in this location. Members had requested that an approach be made to Linnere to discuss options. This approach was duly made. Although receptive to the concept of a gateway feature, it has not been possible to progress this further.

Houghton Regis Town Council want the signage on the parish boundary, on the B5790, on the roundabout.

Park Road North – CBC have suggested that the village gateway is moved further south to incorporate Moore Crescent. There was also the potential to extend the 30mph speed limit to start at the location of the new gateway (this would require consultation). There is also a sign by the petrol station which requires replacing.

Houghton Road (B5120) – Due to the location, and no clear divide in residential zones on Dunstable and Houghton Regis border, CBC have suggested that the existing sign on a post was the most suitable solution here. CBC have recommended that this remains as is.

Houghton Regis Town Council agree the position however, the existing sign needs replacement / improvement. Houghton Regis Town Council would like one on the other side of the road too, suggested to be placed at the junction with Douglas Crescent.

Members were reminded that the scheme required a 50% funding contribution from HRTC. At the Council meeting in March 2022, it was agreed to fund any works out of General Reserves.

Resolved: To formulate a response CBC based on the above comments.



Members were invited to consider if and how the Council may like to mark the reign of HM Queen Elizabeth II. Members received a report and should members desire to see a memorial feature, it would be helpful to have some ideas so that it can be incorporated as part of the budget setting process. Ideas and thoughts were welcomed.

Members discussed several ideas for memorialising and honouring the 70 year reign of Queen Elizabeth II. It was agreed that very careful consideration was required to ensure that whatever style and type of memorialisation is right for the town.

12196 CHRISTMAS RECEPTION OPENING

The following Christmas reception opening hours were suggested:

Friday 23 rd December 2022	Open 9am to 1pm
Monday 26 th December 2022	Closed
Tuesday 27 th December 2022	Closed
*Wednesday 28 th December 2022	Closed
*Thursday 29 th December 2022	Closed
*Friday 30 th December 2022	Closed
Monday 2 nd January 2023	Closed
Tuesday 3 rd January 2023	Normal reception hours resume

** During these times, the Council could be contacted on: 01582 708540 or by email info@houghtonregis.org.uk*

Telephone services would remain, the grounds staff would check the play areas and pavilions on 28th December and 30th December and staff would be on call should an emergency situation arise. Members were reminded that the town council does not provide any core front line services such as social services, housing and highways. These were provided by the principal authority.

Resolved: To approve the reception opening hours between Christmas and New Year as follows:

Friday 23rd December 2022	Open 9am to 1pm
Monday 26th December 2022	Closed
Tuesday 27th December 2022	Closed
Wednesday 28th December 2022	Closed
Thursday 29th December 2022	Closed
Friday 30th December 2022	Closed
Monday 2nd January 2023	Closed
Tuesday 3rd January 2023	Normal reception hours resume

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.56pm

Dated this 19th day of December 2022


Chairman

