

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Monday 22nd January 2024 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: J Carroll Town Mayor
E Billington
P Burgess
E Costello
Y Farrell
W Henderson
M Herber
D Jones
T McMahan
A Slough
C Slough

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Ian Haynes Head of Environmental &
Community Services
Administration Officer
Amanda Samuels

Public: 2

Apologies: Councillors: E Cooper
C Rollins

12663 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Cooper and Rollins.

12664 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12665 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12666 NOTICE OF VACANCY

Members were advised that Ms N Batchelor had resigned from her position as councillor for Houghton Regis Town Council.

The Notice of Vacancy was being advertised.

12667 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2023.

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Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2023 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12668 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Corporate Services Committee	11 th September 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minute number 12541 Petitions Policy • Minute number 12542 H&SAW Policy • Minute number 12543 Internal Audit Planning, Reporting & Review Policy and Internal Audit Specification – Members are reminded that this policy was re-adopted at the Town Council meeting held on the 11th December 2023- minute number 12644
Community Services Committee	None to present
Environment & Leisure Committee	None to present
Planning Committee	27 th November and 18 th December 2023
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	None to present

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

- **Minute number 12541 Petitions Policy;**
- **Minute number 12542 H&SAW Policy.**

12669 TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members received a verbal report on events that had been attended by the Town Mayor. A total of 9 events had been attended since 12th December, most notably at Keech Hospice and the All Saints View Christmas visit.

12670 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

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

Cllr Farrell informed Members that the windows of the Memorial Hall had now been replaced.

Cllr A Slough gave a year review of the Friends of Windsor Drive activities and events. Members were informed that this included winning the CPRE Bedfordshire Living Countryside Award, in addition to bringing the community together to save the land.

12671 2024/25 BUDGET AND PRECEPT

Members of the Town Council were presented with the draft budget for 2024/25 for consideration. Members agreed to accept supplementary information from the Liberal Democrat Group giving amended figures.

A copy of the amended figures was requested and there was a recess for this to be produced.

Members were informed that:

- A budget underspend of £66,265 had been projected for 2023/24, any underspend would be added to general reserves at year end;
- ~~the balance on the earmarked reserves showed £244,000;~~ *for Pavilion Renovation transferred out. JS*
- general reserves were in a healthy state.

Cllr Jones went through the following amendments:

- to set the precept figure at £1,363,800;
- to alter E&L staff salaries budget to £163,500;
- to alter E&L employer's NI budget to £22,232;
- to alter E&L employer's superannuation budget to £44,248;
- precept requested of £1,363,800 divided by tax base of 6894 gave a figure of £197.82 for a Band D property in 2024/25. The Council tax charge for 2023/24 had been £184.66 for a Band D property. This represents an increase of £13.16 for a Band D property equating to a 7.13 % increase in Band D.

Cllr Jones requested that the ^{amended TC} draft budget be agreed and that a precept of £1,363,800 be requested for 2024/25.

Members discussed the draft budget and the alterations put forward.

Resolved: To approve the budget and set a precept of £1,363,800 for 2024/25.

12672 REVIEW OF EAR MARKED RESERVES

Members were requested to review the status of the Council's Ear Marked Reserves:

1. partway through the current financial year (2023/24)
2. the predicted movements in 2024/25

It was highlighted that that there was the potential for a by-election to be called in the current financial year, should this be the case this may impact on the EMR Elections.

Resolved: To note the Schedule of Ear Marked Reserves 2023/24 and the predicted schedule of Ear Marked Reserves 2024/25.

12673 INTERNAL AUDITOR INTERIM REPORT

Members were advised that the interim Internal Audit (IA) for 2023/24 was completed on 29th November 2023 by IAC Audit and Consultancy Ltd.

Members were provided with the following:

1. Cover Letter dated 5th December 2023 detailing the areas covered by the audit
2. Observations – this included detail on the audit test, the IA observation and any IA recommendation. The Clerks response to the recommendation was under the Comments column. Members were requested to consider the Recommendation and the response in the Comments Column.
3. Summary of the audit.

There were 5 observations to be considered. In response, Houghton Regis Town Council had either completed or put steps in place to address the comments from the report.

Resolved: To support the Comments provided on the interim Internal Audit Observations report.

12674 DEVELOPER RECEIPTS

Members were requested to consider the use of developer receipts in 2024/25. It was questioned what monies could be expected and the following figures were provided:

- Sports pitches, changing rooms and car park - £520,000 + RPI contributions
- Countryside site - £345,416
- Bidwell subs - £176,583.31
- 8 storage ponds - £58,681.84
- Residential play area - £28,000
- Leisure Garden – no negotiations taken place
- Public Open Space - £1.2 mil –to be negotiated and a figure to be confirmed.

Members noted the guidance in the agenda report on the anticipated areas of spend of these receipts.

12675 POSSIBLE TRANSFER OF COMMUNITY ASSETS

Members were requested to consider the question / statement put at the Town Partnership meeting on 14th November 2023 regarding the possibly of the future transfer of community assets in Houghton Regis to HRTC.

We note at the request of this committees chair and vice chair, a reference to an update on The Redhouse has been included in the workplan at item 12 on the agenda.

We propose an amendment to this and ask that a review of all CBC-owned Houghton Regis assets be held, in the spirit of the Localism Act 2011 which states there are now new rights and powers for local communities.

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The Act makes it easier for local people to take over the amenities they love, and keep them part of local life. To that point we ask for CBC and the town council to work together to make sure all suitable amenities are transferred to Houghton Regis Town Council for the betterment of residents of this town.

No monetary gain should be made in transferring amenities to the Town Council, and the principal authority should keep their cost to the minimum.

A list of potential amenities to be transferred include;

- *Parkside Recreation Ground*
- *Tithe Farm Recreation Ground*
- *Grendel Lane*
- *The Red House*
- *Bedford Square Community Centre*
- *Houghton Regis Day Centre*
- *Windsor Drive Open Space*
- *The Scout Headquarters at Cemetery Road*
- *and CBC owned play areas in Houghton Regis.*

A list of CBC assets was included as part of the question statement; however, Members were asked to consider additional assets and to put forward any suggestions.

The HRTC Corporate Plan 2024-2028 had been formally considered and adopted (December 2023) and as a council there was now a clear steer on the work of the council going forwards. There were many aspects of the Corporate Plan that would be supported should all or some of the asset transfers be completed. At the current preliminary stage, the report supported Pillar 4, Objective 4.4:

4 Management and Operations: To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Town Council as the key local service provider

4.4 Work with CBC and other stakeholders to explore opportunities for the adoption of additional community assets by the Town Council.

Members were advised that the statement made was quite embracing and raised many issues for consideration. Some strategic questions in relation to asset transfers included:

1. The corporate desirability of the suggested transfers by HRTC – did it fit with / support the Council's Corporate Plan?
2. The view / position of CBC – would CBC support the transfer?
3. The community benefit / gain – what would be the community benefit to any transfer, would the service be delivered in a better way, was there an identified need, was there a possibility that the asset or service would be a risk, was there local demand for local delivery?
4. What were the operational implications – staff resource, equipment etc, was the asset being used in its most beneficial way?
5. What were the financial implications – what were the capital implications, what were the revenue implications, was there a risk of charging the tax-payer twice (double taxation), how would the town council fund the operational management of an increased number of assets?

Although the list provided within the question / statement related to local community-based assets, each asset was individual / unique in its own way and responses to the questions listed above would differ. As such, rather than a blanket approach to asset transfer, it was suggested that, should members feel there would be benefit in exploring possibilities further, each asset needed to be considered on its own merits.

Members recommended the following assets also be considered:

Community Garden in Enfield Close
Residential play areas in Parkside
Bedford Square Community Centre

Resolved: In support of Objective 4.4 of the HRTC Corporate Plan, to begin to explore the potential transfer of community-based assets to HRTC and for further reports to be made in due course.

12676 HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL DOMAIN NAME CHANGE

At the Corporate Services meeting held on the 4th December 2023, Members supported a recommendation (minute number 12630) to change the Town Councils domain name to the following preferred domain name:
houghtonregis.gov.uk

Members were requested to consider implementing this change in 2023/24 in order that the change of domain name could be in place for the launch of the new website in April 2024. It was hoped that the domain name could be confirmed in time for the next issue of the Town Crier and for inclusion in the Corporate Plan.

Resolved: To support the recommendation from the Corporate Services Committee to a change to the Town Councils Domain Name – houghtonregis.gov.uk

12677 TOWN BRANDING SCHEME UPDATE

A verbal report was provided to Members on the development of a town branding scheme. Members were invited to consider the branding logo mock ups.

A green and gold colour scheme was supported. Members discussed the options and it was requested that further variations on the generally preferred Option 1 be developed. It was also suggested that it would be a positive step to incorporate the town's heritage in the logo in some way.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.50pm

Dated this 18th day of March 2024

Chairman

