

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Environment & Leisure Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on
5th February 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors: A Slough Chairman
P Burgess
E Cooper
Y Farrell
W Henderson
D Jones (Sub)
T McMahan

Officers: Ian Haynes Head of Environmental &
Amanda Samuels Community Services
Administration Officer

Public: 0

Apologies: Councillors: E Costello

Also present: J Carroll

12686 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Costello. Cllr Jones substituted.

12687 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12688 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

12689 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 18th September 2023.

Resolved: To confirm the minutes of the Environment & Leisure Committee meeting held on 18th September 2023 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

**12690 PLEASURE GROUNDS, PUBLIC WALKS AND OPEN SPACES:
BYELAWS**

RS

Members were informed that certain assets adopted or purchased by Houghton Regis since 1989 did not appear on the schedule of assets; therefore, these were not covered by the Town Council's byelaws.

The last review took place 35 years ago, and it was recommended that a review of the schedule and byelaws occur when changes in administration occur and new assets are adopted. This would provide an opportunity to make necessary amendments, thereby keeping the information current.

The HM Government model byelaws have been revised to align with national legislation. It was suggested that Houghton Regis should look to put an amended version of these before Full Council.

Resolved: To consider and Recommend to Council the revocation of the September 1989 byelaws and the replacement with an adapted version of the "HM Governments model byelaws" to be presented to Council for adoption and submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

12691 HOUGHTON REGIS IN BLOOM INITIATIVE

Members agreed that participation in the Anglia in Bloom campaign would be beneficial on several levels: it would encourage community involvement, contribute to the Town Council's environmental and sustainability-friendly commitment, and reflect the values within the Corporate Plan.

It was embedded within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund initiative, which was currently awaiting approval from Central Bedfordshire Council; however, the initiative would progress irrespective of approval for the funding.

Resolved: To endorse the creation of the Houghton Regis in Bloom and the inaugural entry of the town into the regional Anglia in Bloom campaign in 2024.

12692 COMPLYING WITH BIODIVERSITY DUTY

Houghton Regis benefitted from a variety of open spaces, parks and gardens, which provided numerous benefits to the residents of the area. The Town Council was committed to meeting and improving biodiversity objectives in line with the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (subsequently bolstered by the Environment Act of 2021). A review of these acts had been carried out and a biodiversity statement produced for recommendation to Council.

Members suggested that it might be beneficial to set specific goals and have a means of measuring the progress for each. It was proposed that occasional reviews of the objectives should be held to reflect on what had been achieved and what future goals needed to be set.

Resolved: To consider and Recommend the endorsement of the Houghton Regis Town Council Biodiversity Statement to the Council.

12693 PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

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Members were informed that play areas within Houghton Regis would be ranked and updated in order of need. The smaller play area in Parkside was deemed the most needed improvement, followed by Tithe Farm.

Members were provided with a breakdown of £169,000 S106 contributions: £75,000 was obliged to be spent at the Tithe Farm; £94,000 was available to be spent at Parkside Lower, but a small amount from this some would be contributed towards getting the skate park fenced.

It was suggested that an appropriate sum be allocated in the next budget to consider the annual figure for renewals and ongoing care. As most play areas in Houghton Regis were fenced and safe surfaces in place, it would be possible to focus on replacing equipment as needed. An annual update would include any sites taken on by the Town Council.

Resolved: To endorse the play area improvement programme per the attached Gantt chart and approve the applications to secure S106 monies available for play areas locally.

12694 TITHE FARM RECREATION GROUND SPORTS PROJECT UPDATE

Members were provided with the latest financial report, which gave a breakdown of the project. Funding had been secured from a number of sources, and it was hoped that a portion of this could be used for the old pavilion and provide a little contingency.

An application was required to move the car park entrance; this was made in October, and a response was awaiting. Section 278 needed to be approved by Central Bedfordshire Council before the site could be used, irrespective of whether the car park had been completed. It was confirmed that the car park would have a height barrier but would not be gated, as EV charging points would be in situ.

It was uncertain when UKPN would complete the outstanding works, and this caused some delays. It was raised whether the Town Council could indemnify itself against future costs arising directly from delays in works.

Resolved: To formally instruct and award T&B Contractors to complete the remaining outstanding works at Tithe Farm Recreation Ground, i.e. the car parks and lighting, for a total value of £309,116.86.

12695 PURCHASE OF LAND OFF CEMETERY ROAD

175

Houghton Regis Town Council had been approached with an offer to buy a parcel of land currently owned by the charity Sustrans. The land, which was close to Orchard Close, formed part of a larger green space owned by the Town Council and contained part of the National Cycle Network. Members were informed that the cycle path would remain under the remit of Central Bedfordshire Council. At the same time, the maintenance of grass and hedges would become the responsibility of the Town Council.

Members agreed that the acquisition would be a positive step as it would provide a buffer against the industrial units close to the site and enable Houghton Regis to improve sightlines in the area.

Resolved: To consider and Recommend the purchase of Title Deed BD230229 to the Council on 18th March for a maximum value of £4,500.

12696 VILLAGE GREEN – CIRCUS AND FAIR VISITS 2025

Members agreed that the proposed deposit of £500 would be a suitable incentive for organisers to remove posters once the events had finished. This would also limit the damage to public assets.

The proposed dates for fair and circus visits were considered and determined as follows:

- *Tom Smith's Fun Fair – The Village Green – 7th-21st May*
Members felt that two weeks was an unacceptably long period for the village green to be used. It was suggested that the organisers be contacted to reduce the time to 5 days.
- *Tom Smith's Fun Fair – Parkside Recreation Ground – 22nd-29th July*
It was questioned how popular this event had proven on prior occasions; however, no objections were raised to the event going ahead.
- *Tom Smith's Fun Fair – 2nd-9th September*
The proposed dates clashed with the Houghton Rocks event, and the site would be unavailable.
- *John Lawsons Circus – The Village Green – 14th-23rd October*
Members were happy for the circus event to go ahead as usual.
- *Gumbles Amusements Ltd – The Village Green – 4th-6th May*
Members refused this request as the event fell outside the usual parameters for events and would be held over the May Bank Holiday.

Members felt it would be beneficial to review their approach to circus and fun fair events, considering the suitability of the location and timescale involved. There should be a recovery period between events to limit damage to public areas. Additionally, a time limit should be placed on events, and event organisers should be asked to review their timescales for pulling on and pulling off. Defined parameters could then inform future decisions. At present, no limits exist, which has damaged public areas and undermined the biodiversity aims of the Town Council.

Resolved: To approve introducing a £500 deposit to cover flyposting and reinstatement per event.
To determine the fair and circus visit dates on The Village Green and Parkside Recreation Ground.

12697 COMMUNITY FACILITIES AT BIDWELL WEST (FORMERLY KNOWN AS HRN2)

Members were informed that a request had been received from Houghton Regis Community Development Charity regarding the maintenance of the site at Bidwell West. The site was close to the storage pond, which Houghton Regis Town Council will soon maintain.

The charity wished to lease the site for community use and was looking to install a temporary building on the site and potentially a community garden.

Members were advised that the Town Council would adopt grass-cutting responsibilities from the date of transfer for 12 months in order to facilitate community use. It was not anticipated that these duties would be time-intensive and that the costs involved would be negligible.

Members agreed that the benefits to the community would outweigh the cost involved in this temporary arrangement.

Resolved: To determine whether a temporary arrangement for the cutting of amenity grass is undertaken free of charge for a maximum of 12 months from the transfer date to help facilitate community use.

12698 TERRA CROFT LEISURE GARDENS UPDATE

Members were informed that the waiting list for allotments had gone down. The site was doing well, and the next inspections for plots left in November were due to take place on 13th February.

Significant storm damage had been done to structures on the site, and allotment holders were advised of the need to weigh structures down.

It was felt that the expectations of potential allotment holders needed to be managed as they were often unaware of the time required to maintain the plots. In addition, holders were only required to cultivate once a year; however, there was potential to cultivate throughout the year.



12699 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

Members were provided with the Income and Expenditure Report for information purposes.

It was noted that the capital expenditure on Tithe Farm distorted the budget for this committee; therefore, a clearer picture was likely to emerge in the coming year.

Income streams were significantly less due to the Section 106 contributions. The request for the release of these had been submitted but had not yet reflected on the income over-expenditure. It was also noted that the deferred income had not yet been transferred.

12700 ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE FEES 2024/25

Members were advised of a proposed 3% fee increase to be applied for 2024/25. This would apply to cricket fees, bowls fees and land hire for fun fairs and circuses. There would be no increase on allotments and the football pitch fees would be reviewed separately, thereby avoiding a mid-season increase. The fee for use of the Village Green for residents and community groups would remain at £6.00.

Members agreed with the proposed rise but felt that figures should be rounded down for simplification.

It was confirmed that VAT did not apply to sport-related events; however, VAT would continue to be added to events at Moore Crescent that were not sport-related.

Resolved: To set fees under the control of the Environment & Leisure Committee for 2024/2025 at a 3% increase on 2023/24 on highlighted fees

12701 ADULT OUTDOOR GYM FOR PARKSIDE RECREATION GROUND LOCATION

Members were asked to consider the proposed site of the adult outdoor gym. It was agreed that the proposed site was well placed, sufficiently distant from the children's play area and close to parking facilities.

Resolved: To agree to the location of the adult outdoor gym for Parkside Recreation Ground as shown.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

Dated this 29th day of April 2024

Chairman

