

**HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Community Engagement Sub-Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on
Tuesday 17th September 2024 at 7.00pm**

Present: Councillors: T McMahon Chairman
E Cooper
C Rollins
A Slough

Co-opted Members J Batchelor

Officers: Sarah Gelsthorp Civic and Events
Manager
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Also Present: Cllr C Slough
Father D Galanzino

Apologies: Councillor: Y Farrell

CEC12 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Farrell.

CEC13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

CEC14 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 25th June 2024

Resolved: To confirm the minutes of the Community Engagement Sub-Committee meeting held on 25th June 2024.

CEC15 CO-OPTIONS

Members queried the process of co-option applications as these had been submitted later than usual in the year. Members were informed that the process would normally take place at the first meeting; however, it had been necessary for Members to agree to co-options at the first meeting and applications could only now be reviewed.

Members were provided with copies of the co-options and were requested to consider the applications. Members agreed to accept both co-options.

Resolved: To co-opt Ken Wattingham and Jeanette Batchelor on to the Community Engagement Sub Committee, to serve until May 2025.

CEC16 LINMERE EVENTS

A representative from Linnmere was unavailable to provide an update.

CEC17 BIDWELL WEST EVENTS

A representative from the Bidwell West Community was unavailable to provide an update

CEC18 FIREWORKS EVENT

A verbal update was given regarding the progress of the Fireworks Display 2024.

It was confirmed that a fireworks event would be taking place on Sunday 3rd November. A fireworks company had been hired, Billy Lee was confirmed for hosting duties, and sound and lighting was being investigated. Two sites were under consideration and the final venue was expected to be confirmed by early October. If the preferred venue was confirmed, food stalls and fairground rides would also be organised for the event. Members were informed that the event was expected to follow a similar pattern to previous events and would be free. Availability to assist on the day would be requested in early October.

Members questioned whether it was possible to purchase some radios for this and similar events, as these would provide a simple and effective means of communication. The Civic and Events Manager agreed to investigate this further.

Resolved: To note the report

CEC19 CHRISTMAS 2024

A verbal update was given regarding the progress of the Christmas 2024.

A picture of the proposed replacement costume for Regis the Lion was circulated among Members. The costume would be green and gold and include a blue cape with the Houghton Regis logo on the back. Members were advised that the purchase would be funded by the UKSPF and should arrive in time for Christmas events.

The Santa Float was scheduled to take place, once again, and would incorporate visits to a number of static locations, each for approximately 30 minutes, over a two-day period. The suggested dates were the 2nd and 3rd of December; however, this was subject to confirmation.

The Mayor's Carol Service and tree lighting had been scheduled for 7th December and Santa's Grotto was scheduled for 14th December; however, an event was planned by Dunstable Town Council for 14th December and, consequently, Houghton Regis Town Council had been refused a licence to hold a market. HRTC was consequently limited to two options:

- Limit the Santa's Grotto event to four stalls
- Change the date of the Santa's Grotto event

Dunstable Town Council was scheduled to hold a committee meeting in November to discuss the Market Charter issue, but this would leave insufficient time for the HRTC Christmas events to be organised or advertised in the Town Crier. It was, therefore, necessary to decide how to proceed prior to the November meeting.

The Civic and Events Manager expressed a preference to hold both Santa's Grotto and the Mayor's Carol Service on 7th December. It was acknowledged that this would necessitate a significant number of hours involvement from volunteers, but the alternative of limiting stall numbers to four was not considered a satisfactory option.

Members questioned what the likely outcome would be if the event went ahead on 14th December. Members were advised that the Town Clerk had investigated this and that HRTC could incur penalties for proceeding with the event. The Sub-Committee was questioned what the implications of ignoring any incurred penalties were likely to be. The Civic and Events Manager informed Members that the Town Clerk was currently seeking further advice from NALC, but that the penalty could be as much as 10% of an organisation's annual turnover.

Members were not in favour of changing the Santa's Grotto date as this would involve long hours and could affect the recruitment of volunteers. It was felt that the refusal by Dunstable Town Council to issue a licence should be challenged as the issue had continued over many years without a satisfactory resolution. While understanding the frustration of the Sub-Committee, the Civic and Events Manager expressed unwillingness to proceed in full knowledge of the regulations and the risk of repercussions impacting Houghton Regis residents. It was also felt that proceeding with the event on 14th December might prove detrimental to the discussions scheduled by Dunstable Town Council for November.

One suggested option was to hold Santa's Grotto on 7th and reschedule the Mayor's Carol Service event to 8th December. Father Galanzino was able to confirm that All Saints Church would be available on the Sunday if there was consensus to move the carol service from Saturday 7th. Members thanked Father Galanzino for his assistance while acknowledging that events would then be concentrated at the start of the month.

Members had three potential options:

- Hold both Santa's Grotto and the Mayor's Carol Service on 7th December
- Hold Santa's Grotto on 7th December and the Mayor's Carol Service on 8th December
- Proceed as planned with the Mayor's Carol Service on 7th December and Santa's Grotto on 14th December

Members agreed that holding both events over 7-8th December was a possible alternative; however, Members remained unhappy at the impact the licence refusal was likely to have in terms of additional work and potential expense. The Civic and Events Manager highlighted that all arrangements were in place for 7th December and providers would have to be contacted for an event on 8th December; therefore, the preference would be to hold both events on 7th December.

Members felt the issue required broader discussion and noted that a Town Council meeting was scheduled for 14th October. It was questioned whether the issue could be included on the meeting agenda and, if so, whether would this allow for sufficient time to make event arrangements. The deadline for the Town Crier would be missed but the event date could be marked as 'to be announced'.

Members expressed a preference for the Santa's Grotto to proceed on 14th December and for the Market Charter to be discussed at Town Council. It was confirmed that all

feedback from Members would be shared with the Town Clerk and the Head of Environmental and Community Services.

Resolved: To note the report.

CESC20 REPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY SERVICES MANAGER

Members were provided with a report from the Community Services Manager regarding the summer schedule of activities.

Resolved: To note the report

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 20.12 pm

Dated this day of 26th November 2024

Chairman

DRAFT