

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF HOUGHTON REGIS PARTNERSHIP  
COMMITTEE  
HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PEEL STREET  
ON 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024**

Present: Town Cllrs: J Carroll, Y Farrell, D Jones, C Slough  
CBC Cllrs: C Alderman, S Goodchild, P Hamill, T McMahon  
CBC Sarah Hughes, Community Engagement Manager  
Officers:  
HRTC Clare Evans, Town Clerk  
Officers:  
  
Co-opted J Anderson, T Haines, D Hill, C Regan, R Turner  
members:

Also in attendance: Cllr Owen, Executive Member for Children's Services, CBC

Apologies: D Gibbons, Cllr Baker

Members of the public: 6

**1046 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies were received from D Gibbons and Cllr Baker.

**1047 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The issue of sports hall facilities within Houghton Regis was brought before Members for discussion. The following points were raised:

- The proposal to move sports hall provision to Houstone School would mean a sizeable reduction in the number of hours available for community use.
- Individual members of the community would experience the greatest impact as they would not have the means to book the hall in the same way as groups and organisations.
- Disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community would be affected and have little access to an indoor sports facility.
- Many of the activities currently catered for would not be provided under the proposed scheme.
- The population of Houghton Regis had increased significantly and would continue to grow. Even with the current population, the proposed SLA with Houstone School would not mitigate the losses of the sports hall removal and facilities would remain at a deficit.
- No other indoor provision was available in Houghton Regis and requesting people to use other facilities outside of the town did not accord the leisure strategy.
- Engagement in sport can help address wider social issues such as wellbeing, ASB

etc and a lack of an accessible provision could negatively impact on local services, for example if ABS rises there is increased burden on the police and CBC Community Safety teams

- Wellbeing was an important issue and the provision of a sports hall was an important provision in achieving this.

At the Town Council meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2024, it had been requested that the Town Council take a lead role in addressing the issue of sports hall provision and to be the primary driver in finding a solution. There were two areas that Houghton Regis Town Council were requested to explore with Central Bedfordshire Council. These were:

1. To open formal dialogue to explore the possibility of adding a sports hall to the new build that was currently in progress. Land adjacent to the site was believed to be available for this.
2. In the interim HRTC were requested to approach CBC Assets Department with a view to adopting control of the existing sports hall as a community asset. There was the possibility of:
  - borrowing money from the Public Work Loan Board which offers more favourable interest rates
  - raising the precept

It was believed that a formal dialogue between HRTC and CBC was essential. In the interim, HRTC could take control of the sports hall to operate it as a community asset.

The Deputy Head Teacher at the Academy of Central Bedfordshire addressed Members.

Over 100 students attended the Kingsland campus each year. Of these, 50% had an EHCP or an EHCNA going through and this number would continue to grow. This figure demonstrated the level of vulnerability within the student cohort. 75% of students came under pupil premium free school meals and 50% of these lived within Houghton Regis.

When ACB was first approached about the new leisure centre, they were led to believe that a new sports hall would be included. ACB had subsequently been informed by a member of the council that when they calculated figures in terms of usage, there was no record of ACB usage. ACB had spent approximately £150,000 on sports hall provision over the past decade and without a new space there would be no other options available; therefore, it would not be possible to deliver a curriculum that the students needed and deserved.

The Academy provided students with a 'second chance' and sports formed a large part of this process. The option to travel to Dunstable had been offered but this was not suitable for the most vulnerable students and would not allow for an adequate level of staffing.

The Head of PE informed Members that ACB was an alternative provision for students who had been permanently excluded from a mainstream setting. Some of the students had been permanently excluded from Houghton School and, therefore, would not be able to be able to enter that site. There was no suitable site on the Kingsland campus for sports provision and going to Dunstable would reduce lesson duration from eighty minutes to under sixty minutes.

A councillor from CBC confirmed they had been in dialogue with CBC officers and had highlighted that it was necessary to focus on future figures and the fact that Houghton Regis was a deprived town deserving of a sports hall.

It was explained that the plan for the leisure centre had been put forward quickly with low expectation of winning a new facility. As a result, the sports hall had not formed part of the plan. It was agreed that an interim solution was required while long-term options were discussed. Dialogue would continue with CBC officers in order to progress the issue to executive level.

The Children's Services portfolio holder confirmed that it was likely to be a difficult year in terms of budgets but stated that they would be happy to visit the schools involved to establish what their particular needs were.

Members believed that leaving this issue unresolved until the meeting in January was unacceptable and that a course of action was required sooner. More information was required on the Service Level Agreement and the views of the schools involved. It was felt that a meaningful discussion was needed between CBC, HRTC and other representatives.

While there was general agreement that the leisure centre would be a welcome addition to the town, it was necessary to provide amenities for all sectors of the community.

The Chair clarified that since this issue was not a formal agenda item it was not possible to make any decisions. There were two options available to Members:

1. This item could be added to the agenda for January's meeting
2. A special meeting could be called to facilitate an earlier discussion

It was suggested the item could be discussed formally under Item 5 'Community Buildings in Houghton Regis'; however, it was questioned whether there was sufficient information or time to discuss the subject meaningfully. Members agreed that calling a special meeting was the preferred option and the Town Clerk confirmed that the information would be gathered and liaison take place with a view to a special meeting in November.

Verification was requested on whether the opening of the leisure centre had been delayed to 2025.

**1048 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS**

None.

**1049 MINUTES**

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

Members had requested an exploration of means by which minutes could be distributed within CBC. Members were informed that the Monitoring Officer response had stated there was currently no such provision in the CBC Constitution. Any changes to procedure would require an amendment to the Constitution, which would need to be considered by the General Purposes Committee before being presented to Council for approval. If the intention was for minutes to be shared for information, the Monitoring Officer would ask Committee Services to look at ways in which the publication and links to minutes could be highlighted more effectively. Members had two options for consideration:

- Pursue seeking a change to council procedure rules to allow minutes to go into the CBC full council agenda as an item to be noted
- Ask the Monitoring Officer to look at ways of making the minutes more widely accessible.

Members were requested to consider their preferred choice prior to this becoming an agenda item at a future meeting.

A co-opted member felt it would be helpful if a portion of Town Partnership meetings could be dedicated to updates from CBC members on how agenda items and actions had been progressed. The Chair agreed to further explore the possibility of incorporating updates into future meetings.

**Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.**

**1050 COMMUNITY BUILDINGS IN HOUGHTON REGIS**

Representatives from the Houghton Regis Scout Group and the Houghton Regis Memorial Hall gave a presentation to Members on improvements secured through effective partnership working and s106 funding.

The Committee was informed that the Scout group was formed of approximately 80 members aged 6-14 and was based in a 1980s building. Improvements had been made to the building following s106 funding and included: a new ceiling and floor in the main hall; improved wheelchair access; CCTV and fencing and smart heating.

The scout hall provided a safe and secure space for other members of the community including the CHUMS Babyloss service and CBC fostering services.

A representative from the Memorial Hall informed Members that funding had allowed for a new path to be installed at the front and side of the building, a new boiler had also been installed and a refurbished kitchen. There were projects proposed for 2025 that included: a new car park gate; new lighting for the stage; benches for outside; new lights for the foyer and new chairs for the hall. Further news would be announced soon.

A verbal update was provided by Sarah Hughes, Community Engagement Manager, CBC and the Town Clerk, HRTC on:

- Bidwell Community Building
- Bedford Square Community Centre
- Aspirations for a community space in Parkside
- Red House
- HR Day Centre
- Townsend Centre

The Community Engagement Manager informed Members that transfer of the land was due to be discussed at the December Executive.

The Chair read out a response from CBC stating that it would be sufficient for the Town Council to express their interest in the Bedford Square Community Centre. The response continued that it was uncertain whether the centre would continue to supply service needs; however, should it not be required for this purpose, more meaningful discussions could be held regarding the return of this asset. The Chair was awaiting notification of relevant dates but would pursue the matter further if necessary.

Members expressed disappointment in the response, feeling it did not address the matter adequately, and requested that it be forwarded as an action to the Town Council, as a matter of urgency, to discuss what further action could be taken. The Town Clerk confirmed they would move this forward.

The Community Engagement Manager confirmed the Houghton Regis Day Centre would be vacated once the space at All Saints View was ready. The Townsend Centre was dependent on the delivery timescale for the new leisure centre.

The Town Clerk had been in discussions with the relevant CBC officer regarding the Red House and confirmed that it was available to purchase at its market value. Discussions had been taking place with the Heritage Society about putting a business case together.

The purchase and fit-out costs of the Red House would be a challenge, although it was felt it may be difficult to establish an income from the building to cover its costs it was felt that the social value for a central community facility should also be factored in.

Members agreed that it was unsatisfactory that the property was still not visible after an extensive renovation had been carried out. It was confirmed that CBC usually carried out work to the property prior to Remembrance Day and this was expected to take place again this year.

Following questions from Members about CBC's plans for the Townsend Centre and the Houghton Regis Day Centre land the Community Engagement Manager responded this would be decided by the landlord. Members were keen to know how the sites would be utilised and it was thought that discussions should be arranged with the portfolio manager to gather more information.

There were aspirations for a community space in Parkside and it was suggested that this might potentially become a day centre.

## **1051 CONSULTATION ON THE PRINCIPLES TO INFORM THE SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN**

The Executive Member for Children's Services and the Head of Capital Planning provided Members with a presentation on the CBC School Organisational Plan.

Councils were required to provide a clear strategic plan on school places where there were increases/decreases in numbers. This was not only to provide transparency but clarity about the future needs within an education system that included a significant number of academies. While councils had a legal duty to provide school places the power to deliver places was often in the hands of autonomous organisations.

A consultation process was taking place until November and the Plan was to ensure:

- Enough school places were available
- Securing and delivering investment
- Forecasting school places informed by population data
- Key principles informing the SOP for the next 5 years

There were 7 proposed principles:

1. to provide local schools for local children
2. create schools of sufficient size that would be financially and educationally viable
3. the ability to support expansion or link to expanding schools
4. the potential to promote and support robust partnerships and learning communities
5. to seek opportunities to create inspirational learning environments
6. to promote diversity of provision in Central Bedfordshire
7. to support vulnerable learners in area special schools and integrate appropriate Special Education Needs provision within mainstream schools

Results from the consultation and a full revised plan would be presented to the Children's Review Committee in January. This meeting would inform the report that would be taken to Executive.

It was questioned how the consultation was being promoted to parents and carers outside of social media and it was confirmed that there was access to all parents via schools. It was highlighted that the meeting at the Houghton Regis Library had not been well attended and while the reason for this could not be accounted for, it was confirmed that an engagement event had been arranged for Bidwell. There was still considerable dissatisfaction from some members of the Committee that there may be a significantly low turnout for such an important issue. The Community Engagement Manager suggested that a possible reasons for the turnout was bad weather and the time of day; another factor may have been that the omission of the full address. The team would ensure that future events were effectively promoted.

The consultation was in advance of replacing an SOP which was due to lapse. Following consultation, officers working on revised school roll numbers and forecasts would have completed their work. CBC members would be asked to present the numbers for their area and the officer forecasts based on these figures for 3 chunks of the capital programme. These were:

- The 3 tier to 2 tier transformation programme
- Special school places in relevant areas to avoid taxi rides to and from school
- New school places occasioned by new build areas

Numbers would be presented to CBC to establish priorities and inform budget decisions. Councillors were advised to look out for meeting invitations and attend to give voice to their opinions.

In response to questions from the Committee the following was confirmed:

- Location, especially for primary schools, was important and the principles had been formed to feed into the process. Any feedback regarding location would be most welcome.
- Regarding timelines, the work would be completed before the budget.
- It was noted that consideration needed to be given to the current clusters and whether Houghton Regis should continue to be included with Dunstable.
- Data and numbers were felt to be satisfactory and would be published in the future. It was emphasised that this stage of the process the focus needed to be on the Principles

## **1052 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE WORKPLAN**

- a) Members were provided with the CBC Forward Plan of Key Decisions from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025.
- b) Members were invited to consider the items listed and to identify any future Partnership agenda items arising.

Members were invited to consider the Partnership Committee workplan for 2024/25.

## **1053 HRTC UPDATE REPORT**

The HRTC update report was attached for information.

Given time constrictions the Town Clerk invited questions from Members rather than go through the report.

It was asked if feedback was received from parents regarding events. The Town Clerk responded that although feedback was not formally gathered, officers and councillors spoke to many attendees to gain feedback.

#### **1054 LOCATION/ VENUE OPTIONS FOR HRPC MEETINGS**

Members were invited to consider the venue for future Partnership Committee meetings. There were two options currently available:

- HRTC Council Chamber
- All Saints View

Members expressed a preference to continue with the Chamber as a venue. It was felt that there were issues with the All Saints site, including:

- The seating was not as conducive to interaction between Members
- The acoustics and sound quality were unsatisfactory
- Ventilation was poor in the summer

The Chamber provided a central and consistent venue and people knew where it was. Mixing venues was not felt to be a suitable option as it was unlikely to encourage people to attend. While other sites could be investigated as a potential venue, Members were reminded that this might incur a cost which would require budgeting.

The preference was for the Chamber.

**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9pm.**

**Dated this                      day of                      2024**

**Chairman**