

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Environment & Leisure Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on

13th January 2025 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: A Slough Chairman
J Carroll (Sub)
Y Farrell
W Henderson
T McMahon
C Rollins
D Taylor

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

Public: 0

Apologies: Councillors: P Burgess

13081 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Burgess (Cllr Carroll substituted).

13082 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13083 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

13084 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30th September 2024.

Resolved: To confirm the minutes of the Environment & Leisure Committee meeting held on 30th September 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13085 TITHE FARM RECREATION GROUND SPORTS PROJECT UPDATE

Members were informed that the Section 278 was still outstanding on the Tithe Farm Recreation Ground Sports Project.

The original entrance could be used, although it was in need of improvement, and the site was operational. The 21-year lease for pitch, pavilion and car park had been reviewed by solicitors and would be signed following checks by HRTC and Beds FA. Local teams had been using the facility and feedback had been positive.

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There would be an overspend but funds had been included in the emerging budget for 2025/26. There were insufficient funds for the entrance, but it was hoped that funds in next year's budget would be help cover this.

13086 HOUGHTON HALL PARK

The day-to-day management of Houghton Hall Park had transferred to Houghton Regis Town Council on 23rd December 2024.

HRTC now controlled the website and social media, and a new email address had been created. CBC officer access had ended future updates/posts would be the responsibility of HRTC.

A meeting of the Management Advisory Group was due, followed by a meeting of the Board. The financing for the JVA had been agreed and it was hoped CBC would soon issue a purchase order for 23rd December– 31st March. A breakdown of costings would be presented to the Board.

A number of projects were planned, including updating the website and subtly altering the logo to reflect the Houghton Regis colours.

Of the three members of staff from Houghton Hall Park, two had transferred to HRTC while the third member had not. This vacancy would be advertised. The community gardener was collaborating with the grounds team on works to be done and there was a financial commitment to improving the grounds. The Park Ranger had joined HRTC's grounds team

The running of the building would be overseen by HRTC while the building itself continued to be the responsibility of Central Bedfordshire Council. Members were keen to see improvement to the upkeep of the house and it was confirmed that there was an earmarked reserve which could be used to this end if necessary.

13087 UKSPF UPDATE

CBC had given approval for landscaping to commence at All Saints View and six raised planters would be situated at the site. The giant precinct planters had been ordered and were ready for installation. Sleeper beds would be created and filled with drought-tolerant planting. Quotes were being gathered as the initial proposal had changed.

Funds had been received for hanging baskets and floral displays around the town centre. It was confirmed that there was the potential to extend the floral displays to additional local centres in the future.

13088 TERRA CROFT LEISURE GARDEN UPDATE

- Waiting list up from 223 in September 2024 to 232
- 47 plots rated green
- 1 plot rated red

Original plot holders were reaching the third year which was a point where interest could potentially decline. If plot holders retained their allotment beyond this point, the likelihood was they would become long-term users.

There was no update on the second allotment at Bidwell West, but discussions had been taking place.

In response to questions from Members, the Head of Environmental and Community Services confirmed that:

- A breakdown of user demographics and times of demand could be provided.
- All plot holders were residents of Houghton Regis.
- A quote had been received on the compostable toilets, but comparable quotes were also being sought.
- There had been no complaints from plot holders regarding wind damage at the site.
- A meeting was due regarding the Linnere allotment.

13089 HORTICULTURE OPERATIVE LEVEL 2 APPRENTICESHIP

Due to a recent flexible retirement, an opportunity had opened up for the Town Council to consider introducing a horticultural apprenticeship programme, with low to zero cost to the budget.

The course would allow candidates to choose a pathway that suited their skills and job role, including Horticulture, Parks, Gardens and Green Space, Landscaping, or Sports Turf Groundsman. Students would also have the opportunity to study for additional professional qualifications, such as safe use of pesticides, hedge trimmers, and powered cultivators.

It was highlighted that while in-house provision of an apprenticeship would be more expensive, it would allow greater flexibility and ensure quality.

It was hoped that on completion of the course a position would be available at HRTC for the student. There was also the aspiration that it would be possible to grow the grounds team through the apprenticeship route as opportunities became available.

A fixed-term contract for two years would be offered to the candidate. This would allow sufficient time to explore increasing the staffing budget to retain an exceptional apprentice on completion of study.

Resolved: To delegate authority to the Head of Environmental & Community Services to liaise with suitable providers to create a horticultural operative level 2 apprenticeship scheme.

13090 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

Members were provided with the income and expenditure report, with appropriate commentary, for the Environment & Leisure Services Committee.

It was highlighted that income from burial fees had declined; however, three months of the financial year remained.

Electricity at Tithe Farm was still high, but part of the cost could be passed on to Beds FA as part of the running cost.

Money from lettings would go over budget, which would balance finances out. Bidwell had also been budgeted for but there had been no expenditure as it had not yet passed to HRTC.

Houghton Hall Park was included because of the staff transfer. The only costs were for one week in December and would not affect the budget.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.59pm

Dated this 28th day of April 2025

Chairman

