

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF HOUGHTON REGIS PARTNERSHIP  
COMMITTEE  
HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PEEL STREET  
ON 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

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

Also in attendance: 0

Apologies: Cllr C Slough

Members of the public: 7

**1060 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies were received from Cllr C Slough.

**1061 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Members of the public updated the Committee on developments since the special meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 (Minute numbers 1056 and 1059) in relation to the current leisure centre.

It was understood that the new leisure centre would open 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 with the current leisure centre closing late March 2025.

The draft Community Use Agreement (CUA) was a publicly accessible document available via the CBC Planning Portal. The members of the public raised the following issues:

- It does not ringfence the rights of Houghton Regis residents to access broader leisure services.
- It was estimated there would be a deficit of 48-50% leisure access per week across the year, with the potential for further reductions of up to 75 days access per year if required by Houghton with only 2-weeks' notice.
- Clarity was required as to whether the agreement would allow for walk-in or pre-booked casual use. Casual access at this level needed to be protected and staffing needed to allow for this irrespective of advance bookings.

- The CUA did not address whether the school management company would provide First Aid, Public Liability, risk assessments etc.
- CUA stated ‘Established within twelve months from the date of this agreement’. Concerns were expressed that the CUA had not been approved and the current leisure centre was due to close on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Thus there would be a significant gap between closing the current leisure centre and the sports hall at Houghton school being made available.
- The draft CUA made no reference to a representative from HRTC forming part of the Management Committee.
- CUA stated ‘the Chair shall be the representative of the school’. This person would have the casting vote if necessary to resolve tied decisions.

The members of the public in attendance felt the CUA needed to be challenged as the CUA, as it stood, would not accommodate many of the users accessing the current facilities.

Enabling HRTC to manage the current sports hall as an interim measure was a matter of urgency.

It was further claimed that the current usage data as used by CBC was flawed as it recorded external bookings as 1 user regardless of the number of participants taking part in that booking.

Cllr Hamill advised that he had submitted questions at the Sustainable Communities meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2025. It was felt that the responses had been inaccurate and Cllr Hamill would look to challenge some of these inaccuracies.

Members were urged to keep pursuing a solution.

A representative of the Houghton Regis Badminton Club shared a copy of the statement made at CBC Full Council, highlighting the deficit in sports hall provision to the residents of Houghton Regis.

The representative from the Academy of Central Bedfordshire (ACB) addressed Members saying that notice had been received of the sports hall closure taking place on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025. This meant that ACB would have no access to indoor sports facilities in eight weeks.

Cllr Hamill confirmed that he would ask to include sports hall provision as an agenda item at the next Sustainable Communities meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> February and speak with the relevant portfolio holders. In the interim, it was necessary to keep the current sports hall open until a solution was found.

Members of the public felt that responses from CBC had so far been defensive and a narrative, which needed to be challenged.

Members agreed to bring forward agenda item 7 ‘Update on Sports Hall’ for discussion.

## **1062 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS**

None.

## **1063 MINUTES**

It was agreed that the Minutes of 22<sup>nd</sup> October would be approved following a minor amendment to the wording in Minute 1050.

**Resolved:**       **To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024, subject to amendment, and 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.**

*The agenda item regarding the sports hall update was brought forward, as agreed by Members, following Questions from the Public.*

#### **1064    UPDATE ON SPORTS HALL**

Members were advised that an Expression of Interest (EoI) under the Community Asset Transfer process was submitted on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2024 and receipt had been acknowledged. An update was awaited from CBC.

The CBC Community Engagement Manager confirmed that officers would be meeting to discuss the EoI, and HRTC would receive feedback in due course.

It was questioned whether CBC were now in possession of the correct statistics, since it was feared inaccurate data could impact the decision in respect of the EoI. The Town Clerk responded that the submitted EoI had stressed that the sports hall would be run in a non-competitive way in respect of other providers; it also highlighted the impact the loss of the facility would have on Houghton Regis residents, schools and clubs. Members believed that CBC should be made aware of the discrepancies in usage level statistics as this would reinforce the case for maintaining the sports hall. The Town Clerk agreed to revisit the EoI to further support and determine the value of continued access to the sports hall.

The Chair put forward that the Committee acknowledged the discrepancies in order to formally record dissatisfaction with the discrepancies, and the necessity of establishing actual numbers. Members suggested that CBC view the recording of the meeting and answer the questions raised at the meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> February.

A timeline from CBC would be beneficial in respect of its response to HRTC's EoI and potential progress to the submission of a business case. With significant time limitations, the closure of the sports hall should be halted while the process proceeded.

The CBC Community Engagement Manager confirmed that a meeting was due imminently to appraise the EoI and the merits of the proposal. It was hoped feedback would be provided during the following week. It was not possible to give a timescale on the ensuing process.

The Community Engagement Manager provided the CBC response to questions raised at the Partnership meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 (minute 1059):

In response to queries regarding the modelling and figures it was stated that:

- *The leisure facility strategy assessment was carried out in line with Sport England methodology.*

- *Future need was assessed via the Sport England Facilities Planning Model (FPM) which looked at future housing growth and participation levels. Details of this could be found on the Sport England website.*
- *The modelling system was bespoke for local authorities and included local usage data.*
- *Following an assessment, a four-court sports hall had been deemed adequate to demand. There had been a decline in sports participation.*
- *The strategy had recommended the provision of a new sports hall with any new leisure centre for Houghton Regis; however, at this time the potential for a new secondary school adjacent to the potential leisure centre was not known.*
- *A feasibility study had concluded that provision at the centre and the school would result in over-provision and impact both facilities.*
- *Houstone school would provide sufficient capacity to accommodate the majority of community use outside school hours. Some displaced community use during school hours could be accommodated at the Dunstable Centre*

In response to queries on consultation, it was stated that:

- *Consultation was carried out prior to adoption of the Leisure Facility Strategy in 2021 and further consultation took place in early 2022.*

In response to queries on the Community Use Agreement, it was stated that:

- *A link had been provided and was on the CBC website*
- *Community use maximised use of facilities and reduced impact on public funding.*

In response to queries on usage, it was stated that:

- *Feedback during the consultation period the council had evaluated usage of the current sports hall showed an average of 10% before 4.30pm and 25% after 4.30 on weekdays compared to total capacity.*

At this point, Members questioned why the statement had not been made available prior to the meeting and it was requested that the report be circulated, in writing, among the committee at the soonest opportunity. The Community Engagement Manager confirmed authorisation to share the statement was being sought.

The final point of the response from CBC was:

- *The consultation process identified that activities not requiring a sports hall could be accommodated at the new centre. Those requiring a sports hall could be accommodated at the Dunstable centre, or in at the school in the evening.*

The CUA would not come into effect until the school had signed off on the building and it was questioned when was this likely to be. The Community Engagement Manager was unable to provide further information on discharge of the planning conditions.

There was frustration that the CBC response was a reiteration of previous points and did not address the questions raised. The data discrepancies were referenced again, and it was highlighted that the figures had been gathered during a period that included Covid and did not take recent population growth into account. Furthermore, Houghton Regis did not reflect national trends in sports participation and should be regarded in its own right.

The Community Engagement Manager was asked for a response to the question: ‘As Houghton Regis is the fastest growing town in the UK, what were CBC plans to accommodate the growing population in terms of sports hall facilities going forward?’ The

Community Engagement Manager enquired if the data source regarding population growth was available but noted the question and confirmed that a response from CBC would be sought.

A member of the public informed the Committee that headcounts were not taken at sports halls, just bookings, which did not reflect the true usage figures. Confirmation of this system would be made in writing and supported by local leisure facilities.

The Town Clerk drafted a suggested resolution for consideration by Members:

1. This committee supports the EoI as submitted by HRTC.
2. The committee requests that CBC considers and reflects on the challenges made by community representatives on the accuracy of the data CBC has used, especially including, but not restricted to:
  - The data spanning 2017-2021 which includes Covid periods.
  - The data collected was prior to significant part of the growth of Houghton Regis.
  - The usage data of Houghton Regis leisure centre is flawed as an external booking by a club is recorded as one booking, regardless of the number of participants in the club. This has been verified by the current operator and further detail can be supplied if required.
3. The existing leisure centre is anticipated to be closed on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and the new leisure centre is due to open in early April. Due to the tight timescales involved and the lack of a firm timeline for consideration of the Expression of Interest (EoI) and the subsequent anticipated business plan, this committee requests that CBC, by working in partnership with HRTC facilitate the sports hall remaining open until longer-term solutions as presented through the EoI are duly considered and determined. This is to support in particular the ACB who are at risk of having no accessible PE space to support their vulnerable young people and the existing sports club users, many of whom are unlikely to be able to access facilities outside of HR.

It was proposed by the Chair that a meeting be scheduled for April in the event of HRTC being able to progress with the EoI, in order that Members could be updated on the business plan.

It was suggested a recommendation from Sustainable Communities could be made to Executive to keep the sports hall open.

Members were asked to vote on the proposal and voted unanimously in favour.

- Resolved:**
- 1. This committee supports the EoI as submitted by HRTC.**
  - 2. The committee requests that CBC considers and reflects on the challenges made by community representatives on the accuracy of the data CBC has used, especially including, but not restricted to:**
    - The data spanning 2017-2021 which includes Covid periods.**
    - The data collected was prior to significant part of the growth of Houghton Regis.**
    - The usage data of Houghton Regis leisure centre is flawed as an external booking by a club is recorded as one booking, regardless of the number of participants in the club. This has been verified by the current operator and further detail can be supplied if required.**
  - 3. The existing leisure centre is anticipated to be closed on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and the new leisure centre is due to open in early April. Due to the tight timescales involved and the lack of a firm timeline for consideration of the Expression of Interest (EoI) and the subsequent anticipated business plan, this committee requests that CBC, by working in partnership with HRTC facilitate the sports hall remaining open until longer-term solutions as presented through the EoI are duly considered and determined. This is to support in particular the ACB who are at risk of having no accessible PE space to support their vulnerable young people and the existing sports club users, many of whom are unlikely to be able to access facilities outside of HR.**

#### **1065 INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW INTEGRATED CARE BOARD PLACE TEAM**

The representative from the CBC Place Team was unable to attend the meeting. The Town Clerk agreed to seek to schedule a suitable date for this item to be discussed separately.

#### **1066 COMMUNITY BUILDINGS IN HOUGHTON REGIS**

The Community Engagement Manager read out a statement from CBC on the current lease of Bedford Square Community Centre:

- CBC Executive approved in 2022 that the HR resource centre in Bedford Square would continue with its dual education and community use on a permanent basis. The agreement with the college spanned 5 years, 1 August 2022 – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2027, with a break clause after 3 years (August 2025).**

- Ownership of the college had since transferred to Bedford College Group and the Assets department would be engaging with the college in the coming months. There were no current plans to execute the break clause.

Members suggested that Town Partnership requested a public consultation on the current arrangement.

There were some questions regarding the dates of the lease. The Community Engagement Manager was unable to provide a response regarding lease dates but confirmed that a consultation had taken place on the community resource centre.

Regarding a further public consultation, it was understood that only Executive could approve such items. Members felt a representation should be made to CBC for a public consultation to take place on future use, once the contract had concluded. The Chair confirmed this would be requested at Sustainable Communities prior to the end of the contract.

## **1067 COUNCIL BUDGETS 2025/26**

### *Update on CBC Budget 2025/26*

The CBC Community Engagement Manager informed Members that budget proposals were available on the website. Public consultation would close on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and the budget determined at a meeting in late February.

### *Update on HRTC Budget 2025/26*

The officer draft budget was presented for consideration to the Town Council meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> January, and a link to the agenda for that meeting was provided. The Town Clerk informed Members that adjustments had been made at the meeting to reduce the precept.

## **1068 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE WORKPLAN**

It was highlighted to the Partnership Committee the forward plan of key decisions to be made by the Executive at Central Bedfordshire Council and the workplans for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

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

It was requested that the results of the 'Have Your Say' on school organisation be included in the Work Plan item 'Education (inc. Primary School places).

There were questions regarding the status of Transfer of Assets; however, it was highlighted that this was something that would be addressed by individual councils and not under the Partnership Committee.

The Town Clerk suggested consideration of two items:

- There was a Devolution White Paper – would the Committee be interested to receive more information on this?
- Community Governance Review – would Members like to receive a briefing on the process?

Members agreed that further information on both items would be welcome.

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**1069 CBC UPDATE REPORT**

The CBC update report was provided for information.

Members questioned the accuracy of the report as the status regarding several items was incorrect.

There had been assurances made to residents that Clarkes Way would be resurfaced once Phase II at All Saints View had been completed. There was now some doubt as to whether this would be carried out. It was questioned why, if the work had been cancelled, this had not been communicated?

Traffic management and capacity for Windsor Drive was included on the report but was no longer required.

Members requested the results of the Active Travel engagement at Tithe Farm Primary School.

Parking around primary schools continued to cause significant problems, and it was questioned why PCNs were not being issued. Cllr Hamill agreed to take up the issue of hotspots for illegal parking with the parking enforcement team.

It was requested that the Committee monitor the impact of the reduction in Houghton Regis services as it had been a difficult period for residents.

**1070 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE CO-OPTION**

It had been requested that potential co-option onto this committee remain on the agenda as a Standing Agenda item.

Members were invited to consider whether they would like to explore the possibility of seeking to co-opt local stakeholders onto the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee.

The list of Co-opted Members should be reviewed annually, by the Partnership Committee

**1071 ITEMS REQUESTING ATTENTION BY CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

Members had been advised of the CBC process to determine further consideration, at CBC committee level, of items and issues.

Members of this committee were able to use this process to forward items for CBC's attention via the CBC Joint Committee Chair or CBC Joint Committee Vice Chair.

As such members were requested to identify and confirm if there were any requested items for CBC's attention.

**1072 PROPOSED DATES FOR MEETINGS FOR 2025/26**



The proposed dates for the Houghton Regis Partnership meetings for 2025/26 were:

29<sup>th</sup> July 2025

21<sup>st</sup> October 2025

27<sup>th</sup> January 2026

28<sup>th</sup> April 2026

**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.29pm**

**Dated this 29<sup>th</sup> day of April 2025**

**Chairman**

DRAFT