

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF HOUGHTON REGIS PARTNERSHIP
COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PEEL STREET
ON 21st OCTOBER 2025**

Present: Town Cllrs: J Carroll, E Cooper, D Jones, C Slough
CBC Cllrs C Alderman, S Goodchild, P Hamill, T McMahon
CBC Officers: S Hughes, Community Engagement Manager
HRTC Officers: C Evans, Town Clerk
A Samuels, Administration Officer

Co-opted members: J Anderson, D Gibbons, C Regan, T Haines

Also in attendance: B Gaynor, Place Programme Manager, CBC (virtual)

Apologies: Cllr Herber, Cllr Taylor

Members of the public:

1099 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Herber (Cllr Carroll substituted) and Cllr Taylor (Cllr Cooper substituted).

Apologies were received from Cllr S Watkins who was unable to attend due to ill health. Cllr Watkins had been scheduled to speak on Agenda Item 5: Houghton Regis Sports Hall.

Stephen Mooring was unable to attend the meeting; Beverley Gaynor attended in his place.

1100 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

1101 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

1102 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 29th July 2025.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 29th July 2025 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

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1103 HOUGHTON REGIS SPORTS HALL

Members had been invited to submit comments relating to the current level of accessibility of the Houstone Sports Hall for consideration by CBC. Cllr Watkins had been due to attend the meeting virtually to provide a verbal response to the points raised but had sent his apologies due to illness.

The Chair and the Town Clerk shared Cllr Watkins' written response which addressed the areas raised by Members (*written response from Cllr Watkins attached*).

Cllr Hamill had composed a letter to Cllr Watkins which he invited Members of the Committee to endorse so that it was from the Partnership Committee. Cllr Hamill requested the opportunity to share the letter with Members so that it was recorded for transparency. It was agreed for the letter to be read by Cllr Hamill and circulated following the meeting.

Members voiced frustration on a number of points: CBC's response, which was not felt to address the points raised satisfactorily; the failure of CBC to send a representative; and the lack of any meaningful data being made available to Members.

It was questioned whether this topic was due to appear on the CBC agenda for Sustainable Communities Committee and when would be the optimum time to provide feedback to that committee. It was highlighted that it was possible to raise the matter at Sustainable Communities, even if it was not scheduled on the agenda; however, the Chair of the Town Partnership Committee could request that it was brought to Sustainable Communities. Members agreed that it would be better to do this once the relevant data was available.

The Town Clerk informed Members that Cllr Watkins had offered to attend a future Town Council or committee meeting in person. Members believed that it was unlikely to be beneficial without access to the usage data and information clarifying whether issues had arisen in respect of the booking system.

Members felt the data should be in the public domain and that an explanation should be provided if CBC or the management group were unable to supply the information. It was suggested that the data could be accessed via another route, e.g. Sports Plus in the first instance, or make a request under the Freedom of Information Act. Members agreed that the information should not be deemed commercially sensitive since it related to a public provision under the CUA.

The Chair confirmed that they would email Town Partnership a list of actions arising from this discussion (and other items on the agenda) so that these could be followed up by Members.

1104 TOWN CENTRE BENCHMARKING & HIGH STREET RENTAL AUCTION

Beverley Gaynor, Place Programme Manager at CBC, provided an update on town centre benchmarking and High Street Rental Auction.

CBC was conducting a consultation process seeking views to define the area where High Street Rental Auction (HSRA) powers might be applied. The Local Plan

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designated High Street, Bedford Square and King Street as the town centre within Houghton Regis.

The new powers would allow local authorities to auction leases for commercial properties that had been vacant in excess of a year, or over 366 days in a two-year period. This was intended to help bring empty units back into use in the designated areas.

The Town Clerk confirmed that HRTC had already submitted their response suggesting a more comprehensive area was covered. It was suggested that the Town Centre as designated in the Neighbourhood Plan would be a more accurate reference point.

In response to a question regarding accessibility to the auction process by charities and social enterprises, the CBC officer informed the Partnership that they would seek clarity on this point.

The CBC officer provided an update on the benchmarking surveys that had been conducted. The surveys covered: commercial offer; footfall, car parking; business confidence and user perceptions.

It was notable that 100% of businesses had reported increased turnover and were more optimistic than other nearby towns for the upcoming year. In respect of challenges, the main issues were appearance and safety. A full report was anticipated to be available in November.

1105 COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS & TERMS OF REFERENCE

The HR Partnership Committee had supported a report being presented to the October Partnership meeting on the Committee Functions and Terms of Reference (CF&ToR) (Minute 1092).

The CBC Community Engagement Manager had sought advice on the appetite within CBC to review the CF&ToR and in what form the review should take place: would CBC support an individual CF&ToR or was the intention to roll out a consistent CF&ToR across all committees? CBC had been unable to provide confirmation and in the absence of this information it was felt that the Partnership Committee could not proceed at this time.

It was suggested that contact be made with other joint committees outside of Bedfordshire where the arrangement was working effectively. The Chair confirmed this would be included on the action list.

It was suggested that contact be made with other nearby Partnership Committees to gauge their appetite for changing the CF&ToR as a joint approach to CBC would be supportive.

Resolved: **To request that the Partnership Committees in Biggleswade, Dunstable and Leighton Linslade be contacted to explore their views on the suitability of the current Partnership Committee Functions and Terms of Reference.**

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1106 SCHOOL ORGANISATIONAL PLAN

At the last meeting it was requested that a report be included on this agenda on the CBC School Organisational Plan. The Community Engagement Manager informed Members that Cllr Watkins had been due to make a statement to the Partnership. The Community Engagement Manager read out the statement which said that the School Place Planning Annual Review was being finalised and that it would not be appropriate to make a response before processes were completed.

Members said that this matter needed to be addressed by an executive member. Members proposed that a message was addressed to CBC Executive expressing disappointment with the lack of executive representation at Partnership, regarding both this matter and the sports hall. The Chair confirmed they would compose a draft for Members to comment on and approve.

Members of the Partnership respected the process but felt that an update on how the School Organisational plan was progressing was not an unreasonable request. There was an acknowledged need for a school by September 2027 in Thorn; however, communities had not received a response to requests for updates and no reassurance of CBC's commitment to the plan. Members were concerned that the commitments to a new school would not be met.

The Chair sought Members opinions on whether to address the sports hall and the School Organisational Plan in the same email or separately. Members agreed that the items should be addressed separately: one expressing disappointment at the lack of CBC representation regarding the sports hall; and the other inviting Cllr Owen to attend the next Partnership meeting to discuss the School Organisational Plan.

1107 TOWN CENTRE MONITORING & MANAGEMENT

Members were advised that it was with the HRTC Corporate Plan that at least 2 key action areas be identified. The Town Council had undertaken various pieces of work to support and enhance the town centre in line with the Action Plan, possibly the most apparent and visual was the planting and hanging baskets along High Street. Other ongoing areas of HRTC work also aligned with the Action Plan.

The Town Clerk advised Members that more detail was available in the update report from the Town Council.

1108 COMMUNITY BUILDINGS IN HOUGHTON REGIS

The Committee's workplan include reference to the following community buildings, an update is provided:

HRN 2 Community Building: Members were informed that work continued with the Houghton Regis Community Development Charity to progress the phased development of a community facility. Heads of Terms were being exchanged, and it was expected that the planning application for phase one would be submitted at the end of November 2025.

Townsend Centre: The works required prior to the relocation of the day service from the Townsend Centre to the leisure centre had been completed. Staff would move to

the new facility in November. No expressions of interest had been made for the Townsend Centre, and the property had been declared surplus; therefore, it would be put on the open market once it was vacant.

Cllr Hamill requested that regular updates were received once the relocation was completed in order to establish how successfully the service functioned at the new site.

1109 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Members were invited to consider the Partnership Committee workplan for 2025/26. This had been extended to include the following items:

- Sports hall provision
- Review of the Committee Functions & Terms of Reference

At the last meeting it was requested that Health remained on the Workplan; this was confirmed.

The invitation to Cllr Owen had been added to the workplan. The Town Clerk added that items likely to arise for January included a slightly fuller report on the town centre benchmarking exercise and an update from Cllr Watkins regarding the sports hall.

1110 HRTC UPDATE REPORT

Members had received and noted HRTC update report.

1111 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE CO-OPTION

Members were invited to consider whether they would like to explore the possibility of seeking to co-opt further local stakeholders onto the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee. In this regard the Terms of Reference for the Committee stated:

Co-option

To support engagement with local stakeholders the Town Joint Committee can co-opt members from local representative groups, as appropriate up to a maximum of 15. Each co-opted Member will be able to engage fully in all discussions but will not have any voting rights. Co-opted members can be removed from the Town Joint Committee. Decision making around removals can either be taken by the whole Town Joint Committee or by joint agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair, depending on each Town Joint Committee's preference.

1112 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 the 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.

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The Town Clerk questioned whether a representative from Highways would be attending the November 2025 meeting. The Community Engagement Manager confirmed that a member from Highways would be in attendance.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.59 pm

Dated this 27th day of January 2026

Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alastair Alderman".