

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Community Engagement Sub-Committee
Draft Minutes of the meeting held on
23rd September 2025 at 7.00pm

| | | | |
|------------|------------------|---|--|
| Present: | Councillors: | Y Farrell E Cooper C Slough | Chair |
| | Co-opted members | K Wattingham | |
| | Officers: | Ian Haynes Saffron Cooper-Hughes Amanda Samuels | Head of Environmental & Community Services Events Support Officer Administration Officer |
| | Public: | 1 | |
| Apologies: | Councillor: | Cllr Rollins Cllr McMahon | |

CESC63 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr McMahon and Cllr Rollins.

CESC64 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

CESC65 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

CESC66 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2025.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Community Engagement Sub-Committee meeting held on 24th June 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed accordingly.

CESC67 EXTERNAL COMMUNITY EVENTS

Representatives were invited to provide updates regarding community events.

The representative from Friends of Windsor Drive reported that activities had been taking place on the field, including Legs, Bums and Tums sessions which were due to run until October end. Grants had been sourced to support events in 2026.



A request was made that, when planning events, HRTC considered the field at Windsor Drive as a potential venue.

The All Saints Church representative updated Members as follows:

- Church stalls had operated at Carnival and Houghton Rocks.
- All Saints Church had been open to the public to mark Heritage week. 112 visitors had attended the first Saturday and 33 on the second Saturday.
- There were now 200 recipients of the newsletter who were not members of the congregation.
- Guided tours were now being offered on Tuesday afternoons during term time and Thursday afternoons by arrangement.
- The church held a coffee morning every Saturday and once a month the proceeds were shared with a charity. Upcoming charity event dates were: 25th October, which would be in support of breast cancer charity Wear it Pink; and 15th November, the charity to be confirmed.

CESC68 EVENT MANAGERS REPORT

Members were provided with a report from the Events Manager regarding past and forthcoming events.

Events to date

- Carnival. There were fewer attendees this year and it was felt that exceptionally hot weather had impacted attendance.
- The open-air cinema had been well received with over 500 people attending screenings.
- The two open-air theatre events had also been well attended with excellent feedback received on the day. The Quantum Theatre Group had been provisionally booked for 2026.
- Houghton Rocks had taken place; feedback on this would be discussed at the next meeting.
- The Heritage event had been well received and would potentially run again next year. This would be discussed further at the next meeting.

Upcoming events

- Halloween at Houghton Hall Park: this would include a Halloween trail based on Mark Bolan's book The Witch and the Moon; fancy dress; face painting; and a Bowerbird ghost-themed activity.
- Fireworks display: to include food, retail and fairground.
- Christmas at Houghton Hall Park: Santa's Grotto would be held in a heated marquee in the kitchen garden. Robbie the Train and reindeer would also form part of the event.

The Head of Environmental and Community Services informed Members that the intention was for an external party to organise this year's Santa float. A meeting was scheduled with the Dunstable Rotary Club to discuss whether Houghton Regis could be included under their arrangements. In return, HRTC would provide a financial contribution.

The Christmas event scheduled at Houghton Hall Park was supported by Members; however, they were keen to maintain the involvement of the library which had been the



CESC70 CARNIVAL 2026

The Carnival 2026 was scheduled for Saturday 11th July 2026. Members were asked to consider calling the event 'Houghton Regis Carnival' instead of changing the theme each year.

Unfortunately, the response to the carnival parade had been disappointing in recent years, and the number of participating groups had been declining. The safety surrounding the parade was an important factor for consideration, in addition to the increased measures that needed to be factored in. However, the parade had been taking place since the 1980s, and there was a historic element to it.

Members were requested to discuss the feasibility of increasing interest in the carnival parade, amending the route and/or format, or cancelling the parade element of the event.

The Head of Environmental and Community Services informed Members of the introduction of Martin's Law, the common name of the Terrorism Protection of Premises Act 2025. This established a tiered system of the responsibilities of venues based on capacities (both internal and external) and the practical steps required to mitigate risk.

Risk assessment of vulnerabilities would make planning more time consuming and significantly more expensive if the current carnival format was maintained. With declining participants, it was questionable whether the additional cost would be justifiable.

The Head of Environmental and Community Services proposed that a walking parade was introduced in place of the parade. The suggested route would start at Moore Crescent, on to the visitor centre, through Houghton Hall Park and on to Village Green. Banners, arches or other structures would visually enhance the route


Members agreed that to continue holding the parade on the roads was impractical in light of road safety issues. A walking route on the Village Green would reassure participants about safety and potentially attract more groups. In addition, the current route was too long for some of the very young participants, especially when the weather conditions were challenging. The proposed format would address the problem.

It was acknowledged that the historical element should be taken into consideration and, therefore, any decisions should not be taken lightly. It was agreed that the community needed to be informed in advance of any changes that were implemented. It was also felt that an invitation should be extended to members from participating groups to take part in discussions with HRTC and provide feedback.

In regard to carnival themes, Members were in agreement that themes should be limited to years when there were special events or commemorations, e.g. 50th anniversary of HRTC.

The Head of Environmental and Community Services emphasised once more that this could be made a visually appealing event and employing a videographer could promote upcoming events and increase resident engagement.

Resolved: To discuss the elements of the Carnival moving forward.



historical venue. Members questioned how HRTC might continue to support the library. The Head of Environmental and Community Services responded that it was possible that stalls could be set up on site but that a formal request needed to be submitted by the library as confirmation of their support.

Members voiced concern that areas including the library, Bedford Square and Windsor Drive were being overlooked. The Head of Environmental and Community Services highlighted several factors involved in decision making:

- Increasing numbers meant that the library was becoming outgrown as a venue. The move to Houghton Hall Park enabled a more immersive event.
- Setting up and taking down the grotto had historically been constrained by the needs of the library. The proposed changes allowed for greater flexibility.
- Budgets were also a factor: expenses at Houghton Hall Park would be covered under its budget.
- As the town grew, there was a need to spread events over the wards.

This was the first major change in some time, and the transition would be monitored and assessed. There would be the potential to employ alternative venues in the future.

It was confirmed that the day would continue to be free, gifts would be distributed and photo opportunities with Regis the Lion available. A request had been submitted to Dunstable Town Council for seven stalls.

In response to Members concerns regarding the library, the Head of Environmental and Community Services confirmed that HRTC would reach out to the library to come and update Members on their upcoming plans, and to ascertain what measures HRTC could take to provide continued support.

CESC69 REPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY SERVICES MANAGER

Members were provided with a report from the Community Services Manager regarding the recent Summer Fun Activities.

Family Fun Days had been distributed evenly across the town.

- Skate Jam, Tithe Farm Recreation Ground
- Crazy Golf, Houghton Hall Park
- Inflatable Fun, Parkside Recreation Ground
- Mobile Farm, Thorn Park
- Birds of Prey and Garden Games, Village Green
- Laser Tag, Thorn Park
- Southend Coach Trip
- Magician, HHP

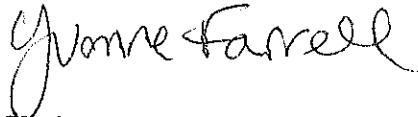
The Head of Environmental and Community Services suggested that events similar to the birds of prey or crazy golf could potentially be held at Windsor Drive.

It was hoped that the calendar of events in the coming year would maintain a similar format but with the possible relocation of some events to areas such as Linnere and Windsor Drive.



The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.09 pm

Dated this 25th day of November 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gonne Farrell'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chairman