

**HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL**  
**Community Engagement Sub-Committee**  
**Minutes of the meeting held on**  
**20<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at 7.00pm**

Present:	Councillors:	Y Farrell J Carroll E Cooper T McMahon	Chair (Sub)
	Co-opted members	K Wattingham	
	Also in attendance:	Emma Farrier Tim Haines	Land Improvement Holdings, Linnere Devt Bidwell West
	Officers:	Sarah Gelsthorp Saffron Cooper-Hughes Amanda Samuels	Events Manager Events Support Officer Administration Officer
	Members of the public:	1	
Apologies:	Councillors:	C Rollins C Slough	

**CEC80 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies were received from Cllr Rollins (Cllr Carroll substituted) and Cllr Slough.,

**CEC81 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

**CEC82 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS**

None.

**CEC83 MINUTES**

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

The officer recommendation of confirmation of the minutes was not proposed; therefore, the minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2025 will be deferred to the next meeting for approval.

**CEC84 EXTERNAL COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Representatives were invited to provide updates regarding community events.



Linnere

The Christmas event had been well attended, and a similar event was being planned for 2026. Additional Christmas events were being considered and HRTC would be informed when dates were confirmed.

Upcoming events included:

- Breakfast on the Bus was being held in conjunction with Grant Palmer to promote the expanded Jo bus service.
- Soft Play would be held during half term and would be a free event for 100 children.
- A Love Bug Trail was planned around the Farmstead.
- Fit 26 was a series of free fitness classes showcasing what was available and encouraging people to take part
- Silver Birch Park and Oasis Park were due to open in the spring and summer. It was hoped the Town Mayor would be available to open both spaces.

Memorial Hall

The representative from the Memorial Hall informed Members that numbers had increased and there had been several parties for adults and children.

The following events were planned:

- An Easter fair in March
- Afternoon Tea for the over 65s at the end of May
- Two race nights in June and September
- Craft Fair planned for Christmas

The last of the S106 funding had been spent on the hall

Houghton Regis Helpers

Cllr Farrell gave the following update on behalf of Houghton Regis Helpers:

- The AGM was scheduled for Friday 13th February
- Houghton Regis Helpers were working in partnership with the Town Council to distribute HSF funding to households struggling with the cost of living.
- A programme of training had been planned for volunteers
- 4210 jobs were recorded as completed for residents in 2025, which exceeded all previous figures.

*T Haines, the representative from Bidwell West, joined the meeting*

Bidwell West

- Work was underway for the Easter Egg Hunt
- Activities were planned for every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in August
- Community Engagement Days were planned
- It was hoped a large community event would take place in late summer
- Carols would be held in the square with the Salvation Army brass band also taking part.

It was highlighted that some Bidwell West residents remained unaware of available events, and it was suggested that HRTC could perhaps install a community notice board at the pavilion area.

It was hoped that the first phase of the community centre building would open in 2026, but this would be confirmed once details were available.

A member of the public expressed enthusiasm for the events that had taken place but was keen to ensure that areas of the town did not feel excluded from events, referring especially to the Christmas event which had moved to Houghton Hall Park.

The Events Manager responded that dates would be provided for all of the planned events at the next meeting, and that events organised by the Youth and Community Manager would be taking place at a number of sites around the town to encourage optimal involvement.

The Events Manager stressed that this was the first year that the Christmas event had been held at HHP and consideration would be given to the changes required and ways to raise awareness in the community.

The representative from Bidwell West informed Members that the Houghton Regis - Better Together initiative (Peabody and the Houghton Regis Community Development Charity) was able to provide funding for local community groups. The Events Manager requested details of the scheme in order to help promote its availability.

## **CESC85 EVENT MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Events Manager provided a report to Members on past and forthcoming events.

The switching on of the Christmas lights and the tree had both been held on the same date for the first time.

The feedback from Santa's Grotto had been positive; however, it was acknowledged that there was a need for an improved booking system and that the event required more effective promotion. The event had been extremely busy with all 200 tickets for the Santa's Grotto requested within 2 hours. On the day, nobody was turned away if they attended without prior booking.

Members enquired whether information had been gathered on the demographics of attendees. The Events Manager responded that the system had not allowed for this and information had been limited to numbers and times. Members expressed a wish for this information to be available in the future, which the Events Manager confirmed would be referred back to the Head of Environmental and Community Services.

Members also expressed a wish to have more involvement in the choice of events and decision making. The Events Manager suggested that a conversation with the Head of Environmental and Community Services to discuss these matters further. Members agreed they would welcome the opportunity.

Members proposed a 'Festival of Christmas' which would bring together all the different Christmas events taking place around Houghton Regis. It was stated that a more cohesive approach, involving a range of groups and organisations, was needed.

Upcoming events at HHP were:

- 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> February: Teaching Talons
- 28<sup>th</sup> March: Easter Egg Hunt

A co-opted member requested that – following feedback from businesses - an event should be held at Bedford Square.

The representative from Bidwell West suggested that pop-up stalls and activities could potentially take place in Bedford Square during the school holidays. Funding for traders could be sourced, and it would be an opportunity to get the community involved.

The Events Manager confirmed that these points had been noted but might be better addressed at the Community Services Committee.

### **CESC86 YOUTH AND COMMUNITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

Members were presented with a report from the Youth and Community Manager regarding past and forthcoming events.

- Family Fun Days were planned
- Town centre initiatives were in the planning phase
- The Later Living Social Group numbers were growing

The Events Manager informed Members that they would be co-clerking this committee with the Youth and Community Manager. Members enquired if a schedule was available to say who would clerk each meeting. Members suggested that the officers alternated meetings or clerked each meeting together.

The Events Manager confirmed this would be referred back to the Head of Environmental and Community Services.

### **CESC87 NEW EVENT – MAY 2026**

Members were provided with a report from the Events Manager regarding suggestions for a new event for May 2026.

- Houghton's Got Talent
- 1940's themed event
- Cultural festival
- Festival of Spring

Members questioned whether a 1940's event would be too close to the VE Day celebrations in 2025. It was highlighted that a Festival of Spring had been held previously and the format mirrored that of Carnival.

Following further discussion, a festival of food and arts was proposed as a potential event. This could involve the businesses in Bedford Square and provide an opportunity to celebrate the cultural variety within the town.

A Member informed the committee that 15<sup>th</sup> May was the International Day of Families and suggested celebrating this by holding a number of family activities on the Village Green.

The Events Manager stressed that a decision on the location needed to be made and Members expressed a preference for a food and arts event in Bedford Square. The proposed date was 9<sup>th</sup> May but this would conflict with Dunstable Pride. The Events Manager confirmed that 16<sup>th</sup> May would be a suitable alternative.

**Resolved: To confirm a new event for May 2026.**

**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.37pm**

**Dated this 24<sup>th</sup> day of March 2026**



**Chairman**