

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Community Engagement Sub-Committee
Draft Minutes of the meeting held on
24th March 2026 at 7.00pm

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| Present: | Councillors: | Y Farrell E Cooper T McMahon C Rollins C Slough | Chair |
| | Also in attendance: | E Farrier T Haines H Lawrence | Land Improvement Holdings, Linnere Devt Bidwell West Houghton Regis Baptist Church |
| | Officers: | Sarah Gelsthorp Tara Earnshaw | Events Manager Administration Officer |
| Apologies: | Co-opted members: | K Wattingham | |

CESC88 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from co-opted member K Wattingham

CESC89 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

CESC90 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

CESC91 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 25th November 2025 and 20th January 2026.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Community Engagement Sub-Committee meetings held on 25th November 2025 and 20th January 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed accordingly.

CESC92 EXTERNAL COMMUNITY EVENTS

Representatives provided the following updates on community events:

Linnere

- Soft Play over the Easter period: this would be a ticketed but free event
- Roam café, Easter egg painting in the park and pizza afternoon – dates to be confirmed

- Messy Play booked every Tuesday morning in the Farmstead hall space – run by a private organisation and a fee charged
- Adult fitness classes on Mondays and Wednesdays
- Gymnastics would be held in the hall after Easter. Fees applied
- Bounce Camp was planned for late May
- A new play park would open in Oasis Park in April.
- Hockett Street had opened and a cycle route a children's walking route were planned for the area

Bidwell West

- Thorn Easter Egg Hunt would be held on Easter Saturday
- In partnership with Messy Church, a pop-up event was planned and would include crafts and activities. Regular Messy Church sessions were held on the third Saturday of the month at the Farmstead.
- Regular litter picks continued to take place
- 27th May: Community Engagement Day. This was an opportunity for residents to meet with representatives from the police, councillors etc.
- 21st April: the Community Forum would provide an update on the previous year
- 5th July: car boot sale in the pavilion car park at Thorn

Houghton Regis Baptist Church

- A 50th Anniversary Golden Gala had been held in September 2025 to celebrate over 50 years of the HRBC. This had been a success and a similar event was planned for this year.
- Carols by Candlelight held every year. A new banner made by sewing club Look What I've Sewn for You for the church.
- There were five regular community user groups who paid donation to cover utilities and it was hoped that this was something that could be expanded
- Church members had assisted with the Dunstable Food Bank
- There were plans for a Welcome Café to be open for all on alternate Wednesdays
- Continued to take part in local events including Carnival

Houghton Regis Helpers

- AGM was held on 13th February
- Working in partnership with HRTC, Jewels and two local schools HRH had distributed household support funding from CBC
- Between February–March supermarket e-vouchers had been provided to over 100 households. Household Support Fund money had also provided pre-paid meter top-ups and household items.

Memorial Hall

- Still sourcing suitable furniture
- Easter Fair on 29th March
- Afternoon Tea which had sold out
- There were plans to refurbish the parquet floor

All Saints Church

- A number of successful coffee mornings had taken place with the February event raising over £100 for Signposts.
- Church Graffiti had taken place in February
- Funds were being raised for Headway on the coming Saturday. There would be displays from All Saints Heritage and the theme was The Gothic Revolution
- A quiz night would be held at St Thomas's on the same day
- Two scout groups had visited All Saints. Both groups had received a slide show, and a heritage tour had also been provided to one group
- A Spring Fair was scheduled for 25th April
- The monthly newsletter had over 200 subscribers.

CESC93 EVENT MANAGER'S REPORT

The Events Manager updated Members on past and forthcoming events.

- Half term activities had been held in February. Teaching Talons had been at Houghton Hall Park (HHP) for three days and in excess of 300 people visiting per day
- An Easter Egg Hunt was scheduled for the coming Saturday at HHP and would include craft activities, an Easter Egg trail, facepainting and stalls
- Medieval Mayhem was scheduled for 2nd and 8th April. This was a free event that would include dragon puppets, a dragon egg trail around the park and craft activities
- The 2026/27 programme of events was as follows:
 - 23rd May Dog Show HHP
 - 27th / 28th May Half-term activities HHP
 - 6th June Classics in the Park car show
 - 11th July Carnival
 - 25th July Arts and Culture event (rescheduled from May)
 - 28th July Skate Jam
 - 29th July Open Air Cinema
 - 18th August Open Air Theatre
 - 29th August Houghton Rocks
 - 19th September Heritage Day at HHP
 - 6th November Fireworks
 - 8th November Remembrance Sunday
 - 11th November Armistice Day
 - 5th December Christmas Light Switch On
 - 12th December Santa's Grotto
 - 20th March 2027 Easter Egg Hunt

SG confirmed that the fireworks display would be held at Thorn

CESC94 YOUTH AND COMMUNITY MANAGER'S REPORT

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

The Youth and Community Manager informed Members that, in addition to the Skate Jam, the following events and activities were planned:

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| 28 th July | Crazy Golf and Garden Games, Parkside |
| 30 th | Sensory Day, Village Green |
| 4 th August | Inflatable and Garden Games, Parkside |
| 6 th August | Roller Disco, Farmstead |
| 11 th August | Go-karting, Thorn Park |

A sensory tent was being created and would be installed at all events as a calm space.

Town centre initiatives included:

Tabletop Sale in Bedford Square
Crafty November
Later Living continued to meet twice per month; One meeting was tea and a treat; the other involved an additional activity. The Later Living volunteers also planned trips to various destinations.

Cllr Slough suggested that All Saints Church could provide an historical presentation/display if that would be of interest to the younger community.

CEC95 ARTS AND CULTURAL EVENT – MAY 2026

Members were informed that the Arts and Cultural Event had been rescheduled to 25th July to avoid clashes with other local events taking place in May. It was hoped that the Bedford Square Atrium and Community Centre would be available for use on the revised date.

It was anticipated that the event would include stalls, photography, art and music.

CEC96 CARNIVAL

The Carnival was scheduled for Saturday 11th July 2026.

The following items had been arranged:

- Last of the Summer Ukuleles (1 hour performance)
- Krisgar Children's Entertainment
- Circus Skills Workshop (all day)
- Roberts Family Band

A band was being considered for an afternoon performance (depending on available space in the programme) and local dance groups had been approached to take part.

The people powered parade has been advertised and had received some expressions of interest.

Stallholders had come forward, and additional activities were being investigated.

Members asked for it to be emphasised that the parade would not be on the road as in previous years; however, there was support for the new arrangements.

The Events Manager confirmed that consideration would be given to the layout of the event to enhance participation while avoiding congestion.

CESC97 HOUGHTON ROCKS

Houghton Rocks was taking place on Saturday 29th August 2026.

The following bands had been booked:

- Leech
- The Long Riders

The drum kit, stage and sound had all been confirmed for the event. Members were reminded that there would be a single annual dog show and car show each year; therefore, neither of these events would form part of Houghton Rocks.

The Events Manager confirmed the following:

- Tenth anniversary cups were being produced, and Lion patches had already been received.
- The warm-up act remained the same as previous years
- Members had been provided with a list of potential bands for the day
- Consideration was still being given to the act for the finale
- A host for the event was yet to be confirmed.

Members were invited to provide any ideas or suggestions they might have for the event.

CESC98 SANTA'S GROTTO 2026

Members were requested to confirm whether they would prefer to hold the Santa's Grotto and Craft Stalls etc at the Bedford Square Atrium / Houghton Regis Library (subject to permissions) or at Houghton Hall Park and the Kitchen Garden.

Members acknowledged that the event at Houghton Hall Park had been very successful; however, there was a consensus that the venue should revert back to the library and atrium site. It was felt that the advantages of doing this were: an opportunity to promote library use; make Bedford Square a more welcoming space; better accessibility and more facilities; and, suitability for winter weather conditions.

There were challenges with both the setting up of the event and taking everything back down again. The Events Manager confirmed they would discuss these arrangements with the library.

It was suggested that the text 'Houghton Hall Park and the Kitchen Garden' be removed from the recommendation.

Proposed by: Cllr Slough Seconded by: Cllr McMahon

Members voted unanimously in favour of the amendment

Members were requested to vote on the substantive.

Proposed by: Cllr McMahon Tm Seconded by: Cllr Rollins

Members voted unanimously in favour.

Resolved: To confirm that the Santa's Grotto event is to be held at the Bedford Square Atrium / Houghton Regis Library.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Dated this 9th day of June 2026

Chairman

DRAFT