

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 13th October 2025 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: M Herber Town Mayor
J Carroll
E Billington
P Burgess
E Cooper
Y Farrell
D Jones
T McMahon
C Slough

Officers: Ian Haynes Head of Environmental &
Community Services
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 0

Apologies Councillors: E Costello
W Henderson
C Rollins
A Slough
D Taylor

13359 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllrs E Costello, W Henderson, C Rollins, A Slough and D Taylor.

13360 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

13361 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13362 MINUTES

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

Members referenced Minute 13347, highlighting that the penultimate paragraph was not required as it had been recorded previously. It was requested that the relevant text be removed.

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Resolved: To amend the Minutes of the meeting held on 29th September 2025 and for these to be signed at the meeting on 15th December 2025.

13363 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the following committees and considered any recommendations contained therein.

Corporate Services Committee 9th June 2025

Minute number 13236 – Investment Report
To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Councils Banking Arrangements, Investment Strategy & Investments Arrangements Policy

Minute number 13240 – Late Payments and Bad Debt Policy
To recommend to Town Council the adoption of Community Services Manager Town Council's Late Payment and Bad Debts Policy

Minute number 13241 – Complaints Procedure
To recommend to Town Council, the adoption of the Councils Complaints Procedure

Community Services Committee None.

Environment & Leisure Committee 28th April 2025

Planning Committee 2nd & 23rd June, 14th July, 4th & 26th August and 15th September 2025

Staffing Committee None.

Town Partnership Committee 29th April 2025

Members highlighted that Corporate Services Safeguarding Policy (Minute 13242) had already been adopted at the Town Council meeting held on 16th June 2025 (Minute 13259). This item did not, therefore, require Members' approval and could be removed.

Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the adoption of the following:

1. Councils Banking arrangements, Investment Strategy and Investments Arrangement Policy (Minute number 13236)
2. Late Payments and Debt Policy (Minute number 13240)
3. Complaints Procedure (Minute number 13241)

13364 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor had attended forty-nine events which included three events they had hosted. Three charity stalls had been held at HRTC and Houghton Hall Park events and raised significant monies.



The Mayor had also attended the Green Flag and Anglia in Bloom awards. The Mayor expressed pride on behalf of Houghton Regis for the awards received and thanked the grounds team for their hard work.

The Mayor had carried out school visits, attended various charity and civic events and attended the Dial-a-Ride AGM.

13365 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Councillors were requested to provide verbal reports from meetings they had attended of outside organisations or from training courses they had attended on behalf of the Council.

Cllr Farrell informed Members that the Memorial Hall had recently held a successful function. The AGM was due to take place on 14th October 2025.

Cllr Jones informed Members that the BATPC AGM would be held on 16th October 2025. Speakers representing Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council would address the topic of flooding. The local MP was also due to attend.

13366 INTERNAL CONTROLS POLICY

The Council is required, by regulation 6.1 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, to review each financial year the effectiveness of its system of financial control.

The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. Therefore, members will find attached the Town Councils Internal Controls Policy, for review and approving.

Resolved: To review and approve the Town Councils Internal Controls Policy.

13367 UKSPF FUNDING

At the Environment and Leisure Committee meeting on 28th July 2025, Members were advised that, while they had been informed of all UKSPF monies being received, some costs had been paid in the current financial year which had not been budgeted for. The funds had gone into general reserves at the end of the previous financial year and Members were therefore asked to consider the £23,097 expenditure to be taken from general reserves. Members of Environment and Leisure Committee made the following resolution:

To recommend to Town Council that the sum of £23,097 Cost Centre 293 UKSPF, be drawn from general reserves.

Members of Town Council agreed that this was the preferred course of action.



Resolved: To approve the sum of £23,097 Cost Centre 293 UKSPF, be drawn from general reserves.

13368 COUNCILLOR MEMBERSHIP ON HOUGHTON REGIS PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Members were advised that the Houghton Regis Liberal Democrat Group had requested that Cllr Taylor replace Cllr Farrell on the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee. This change was being sought in order to facilitate the possibility that Cllr Farrell might substitute for any of the other four CBC councillors for the town, all of whom were already members of the committee.

Resolved: To substitute Cllr Farrell with Cllr Taylor on the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee for 2025/26.

13369 CBC CONSULTATION: DEFINING THE HIGH STREET AREAS FOR HIGH STREET RENTAL AUCTIONS (HSRAS)

Members were advised that CBC were seeking views to define the area where High Street Rental Auction (HSRA) powers might be applied. Town/parish councils, residents, businesses and community groups had been invited to share their views on proposed high street areas where new powers could tackle long-term vacant properties.

The new powers would allow local authorities to auction leases for commercial properties that had been vacant for over a year. This was intended to help bring empty units back into use in designated areas.

Members were provided with CBC's proposed high street area for Houghton Regis which encompassed High Street, Bedford Square and Kings Street. Members highlighted some inconsistencies within the suggested boundaries and the omission of some commercial premises, most notably those at All Saints View.

The Head of Environmental and Community Services reminded Members that the Houghton Regis Neighbourhood Plan, which had been legally adopted, had already outlined the town centre. HRTC would therefore request that from 22-34 High Street along The Green and East End to the Chequers roundabout and incorporating All Saints View and The Red House were included.

Members agreed that the town centre as outlined in the Neighbourhood Plan was a more accurate reflection of the town centre boundaries.

13370 ANNUAL RETURN FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 stated that all Category 2 authorities must publish the Annual Governance Accountability Return (AGAR) and the notice of completion of audit before the close of play on 30th September.



However, the Council's appointed external auditor, Mazars, had been unable to complete the audit by this date. As such HRTC was unable to publish the audited AGAR and completion notice by 30th September in line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

A notice had been placed (1st October 2025) on the Council's website and within the Office Noticeboard explaining that HRTC had been unable to publish the audited AGAR and completion notice by 30th September in line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as the council were awaiting the audit report from the external auditor.

The Council would publish the audited AGAR and completion notice as soon as these documents became available from Mazars.

To record disappointment that the AGAR for 2024/25 has not been returned by Mazars as the external auditor by 30th September 2025 and to note that a notice advising of this has been placed on the council website and noticeboard.

13371 MEMORIAL HALL

Members were advised that the freehold ownership of the Houghton Regis Memorial Hall was held by the Town Council; the footprint of the title number BD215262 did not include the 18m of driveway. To ensure there were no future disputes of ownership, Members were asked to approve the first registration of this small parcel of land, which was expected to be within the town council's ownership.

Members agreed that this was a technicality which incurred negligible costs and were willing to proceed as advised.

To approve the first registration of the land between the title number BD215262 and the edge of Drury Lane.


13372 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Members voted on the exclusion of the press and public:

Proposed by: Cllr Jones Seconded by: Cllr C Slough

Votes for: 9

In accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the item set out below on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the general interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.



13373 DUNSTABLE MARKET CHARTER

Members were presented with the legal advice requested in relation to the Dunstable Market Charter. The findings of the report were summarised as follows:

- DTC's market rights originate from a royal charter and are a property right (incorporeal hereditament).
- Competing markets within 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ miles constitute actionable interference.
- Judicial review requires proof of legal error; none currently identified in DTC's actions or policy.
- DTC's policy appears to be currently lawful, consistent, and not irrational; income from licensing is modest and not for collateral purposes.
- Very limited prospect of success for HRTC in pursuing judicial review. However, If, at any future time, DTC's implementation of its Charter Market Rights could realistically be characterised as perverse, irrational, or absurd, or if it is found that DTC is not applying its policy fairly to all parties, then a legal challenge by way of judicial review could be successful.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Dated this 15th day of December 2025

Chairman

