

# HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

## Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026 7.00pm.

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

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk  
Ian Haynes Head of Environmental &  
Community Services  
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 1

Apologies Councillor: E Costello

### 13494 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Costello.

### 13495 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

### 13496 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

### 13497 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 29<sup>th</sup> September and 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

**Resolved:** To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> September and 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

**13498 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES**

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

Corporate Services Committee	None
Community Services Committee	None
Environment & Leisure Committee	None
Planning Committee	17 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2025 and 8 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2025
Staffing Committee	None
Town Partnership Committee	None

To receive the minutes of the following sub-committee and consider any recommendations contained therein.

New Cemetery Sub-Committee None

**Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above.**

**13499 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor had attended 12 community events including visits to care homes and local schools, and other civic activities.

The Mayor had completed GDPR training in compliance with data protection responsibilities.

**13500 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED**

Cllr Farrell confirmed that the Memorial Hall was about to take possession of new tables and chairs.

Cllr Jones informed Members that the Hospice at Home Volunteers had been in receipt of generous donations. The charity was operating out of Dunstable once more.

**13501 GENERAL RESERVES**

Members were advised of the following:

At 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 the level of General Reserves was £398,116

During 2025/26 Town Council has agreed the following use of General reserves: £22,499 to cover UKSPF work where expenses were incurred in 2025/26 but the supporting funding was received in 2024/25 (Minute 13464)

£11,000 fund the cost of independent investment advice for 2025/2026 financial year (Minute 13471)

£3,500 fund HR administration software (Minute 13474)

The costs associated with the investment advice and with the HR software would be split across 2025/26 and 2026/27 (prepayment). Accordingly, the required level of use of General Reserves in 2025/26 for these 2 elements would be approximately £2,250 for the investment advice and £875 for the HR software.

The use of general reserves listed above is included in the Projected Spend column of the draft budget.

The Projected 2025/26 budget showed a net contribution to General Reserves of £46,436.

As such projected level of General Reserves at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 was therefore anticipated to be £444,552.

It is considered good practice to have approximately 3 months net revenue expenditure (NRE) in General reserves, calculated by taking the total projected spend and subtracting from expenditure within the capital cost centres of 199, 299 and 399, to provide total revenue expenditure. This was then divided by 12 and multiplied by 3 to give an approximation of 3 months net revenue expenditure.

However, during 2025/26, a significant level of s106 had been received by HRTC for Thorn Park (£3,154,956 in 261-1077). Within the 2025/26 accounts this had been transferred into an EMR (261-4991). A transfer out of this EMR had also taken place to offset unbudgeted for costs (£253,083). In addition, within 261 a number of large purchases have been made to support the management and maintenance of this site. Ordinarily these would have been accounted for with a capital budget but have been coded to 261 to match the s106 income coding. As cost centre 261 was a revenue line within the budget this large transfer into an EMR and the capital purchases have significantly distorted the net revenue calculation. To adjust for this, these 'expenses' have been extracted from the NRE calculation.

Taking into account the above information and based on spend in 2025/26, an approximation of 3 months NRE and consequently the advised level of General Reserves equated to £421,034.

It was not recommended that General Reserves be used for revenue (day to day) expenses and in 2026/27 it was not recommended that the Council uses GR to fund any unbudgeted for expenses.

### **13502 2026/27 BUDGET AND PRECEPT**

Town Council was presented with the 2026/27 draft budget for consideration and requested to approve a budget for 2026/27 and set a precept.

The Town Clerk informed Members that the draft budget showed a deficit of £52,270 which required consideration.

A Member representing the Liberal Democrat Group suggested a precept of £1,798,590 based on the following alterations to the draft budget:

Code Number	Description	Budget Figure	Suggested Figure	Saving	Budget Balance
	From Amended Officer Draft Budget				-52,270
	Proposed Amendments and Allocations				
		-	-		
101-1076	Precept received	1,781,230	1,798,590	17,360	-34,910
190-4011	Rates	9,300	10,500	-1,200	-36,110
190-4022	Postage	6,500	2,500	4,000	-32,110
190-4992	Tfr from EMR 330 (re Professional Fees)	-8,000	0	-8,000	
199-1095	PWLB Loan	0	-326,000	326,000	285,890
199-4805	CAP - New Equipment (incl. IT)	5,000	3,000	2,000	287,890
199-4883	Project H	0	300,000	-300,000	-12,110
199-4991	Tfr to Strategic Projects EMR	118,000	0	118,000	105,890
199-????	New Office Provision	0	45,000	-45,000	60,890
242-4011	Rates	5,000	4,700	300	61,190
271-1084	Burial Fees	-12,000	-10,000	-2,000	59,190
271-4011	Rates	1,500	1,850	-350	58,840
273-4012	Water Rates	600	1,200	-600	58,240
291-4011	Rates	17,000	34,000	-17,000	41,240
291-4040	Tree Maintenance	6,000	11,240	-5,240	36,000
299-4858	Play Areas and Equipment	15,000	50,000	-35,000	1,000
302-4006	Protective Clothing	1,000	2,000	-1,000	0
		-	-		
		1,616,330	1,668,600	52,270	

These suggestions were proposed.

The following areas were discussed:

1. Project H – In order for funding to be recorded, a cost of £300,000 had been suggested with an additional £26,000 for consultancy costs. This figure had been entered against Public Works Loan Board
2. Strategic Projects Ear Marked Reserve – An EMR of £118,000 had been introduced into the budget, although there was little explanation against it. The suggested alterations removed this EMR but showed significant contributions to 2 existing EMRs

3. Rates – these were considered to be difficult to predict and a number of alterations were suggested reflecting on actuals in recent years.

The Town Clerk responded that the capital figures for Project H had been deliberately omitted as a decision was yet to be made whether funding would be via a loan or using existing reserves. The suggested Public Works Loan Board figure needed to match expenditure since retrospective funding could not be included. The £118,000 in strategic projects could then be used to either part fund the capital works of the project or the associated loan repayments.

A Labour representative confirmed that they had suggested minor amendments to the budget which had been included in the Liberal Democrat suggestions.

The Labour representative voiced some concern regarding the Public Works Loans Board and Strategic Projects EMR as there had been no consultation on these items prior to the meeting. There was unease with the creation of an EMR that failed to provide specific detail.

A short recess was requested for political groups to discuss these matters further.

*The meeting went into recess.*

In light of the discussions that had taken place the representative from the Liberal Democrats withdrew the proposed amendments.

Members addressed suggested amendments individually and agreed for the following to be put forward:

Code Number	Description	Budget Figure	Suggested Figure	ng
190-4011	Rates	9,300	10,500	-1,200
190-4022	Postage	6,500	2,500	4,000
	Tfr from EMR 330 (re Professional			
190-4992	Fees)	-8,000	0	
199-4805	CAP - New Equipment (incl. IT)	5,000	3,000	2,000
242-4011	Rates	5,000	4,700	300
271-1084	Burial Fees	-12,000	-10,000	-2,000
271-4011	Rates	1,500	1,850	-350
273-4012	Water Rates	600	1,200	-600
291-4011	Rates	17,000	34,000	-17,000
291-4040	Tree Maintenance	6,000	11,240	-5,240
302-4006	Protective Clothing	1,000	2,000	-1,000

The Town Clerk acknowledged there was an anomaly in that rates for the proposed new workshop unit were not in the budget, while rent had been included.

Members were of the opinion that the proposed Strategic Projects EMR would need to be dedicated solely to Project H and be renamed to reflect this.

*MLP*

The Town Clerk informed Members that the suggested £326,000 loan and Project H were linked; therefore, it was necessary to either retain both items or for both to be removed.

Councillors voiced concern at the inclusion of a loan that had not yet been agreed. The Town Clerk suggested a vote to determine the preferred option.

Members voted as follows:

In favour of inclusion of Project H expenditure and loan:	4
Against inclusion of Project H expenditure and loan:	9

On being put to the vote it was decided that Project H expenditure and associated loan be omitted from the budget.

Regarding the creation of a Strategic Projects EMR or transferral into existing EMRs, Members were requested to proceed with either: a) New Office Provision of £45,000 and a transfer of £35,000 into play areas; or b) dismiss both.

Members requested figures for both of these options were generated:

*The meeting went into recess while officers generated amended figures.*

On resuming the meeting, Members were provided with handouts presenting two variations of the budget:

**Version A**

EMR Project H £118,000  
Precept increase of 11.8%  
Band D increase of 4.3%

**Version B**

EMR Project H £80,000  
Precept increase of 9.6%  
Band D increase of 2.1%

On being put to the vote, Members voted in favour of Version B.

It was proposed that the budget, as amended, be adopted and request a precept for 2026/27 of £1,819,350. All Members voted in favour.

**Resolved: To approve the draft budget as amended and set a precept for 2026/27 of £1,819,350.**

### 13503 REVIEW OF EAR MARKED RESERVES

To enable Members to review the status of the Council's Ear Marked Reserves:

1. partway through the current financial year (2025/26)
2. the predicted movements in 2026/27

The Town Clerk highlighted that these figures would require adjusting to reflect the amended budget.

**Resolved: To note the amended Schedule of Ear Marked Reserves 2025/26 and the predicted schedule of Ear Marked Reserves 2026/27.**

**13504 CBC BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Members were advised of the CBC Budget Consultation currently underway.

The key milestones in the timetable for CBC to agree its budget in February 2026 were set out as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Body</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
January	All Overview & Scrutiny Committees	Consideration of efficiencies and savings and draft budget proposals.
7 <sup>th</sup> January 2026	Public	Budget papers made available to Public and Public Consultation commences.
17 <sup>th</sup> February 2026	Executive	Recommends Final Budget
26 <sup>th</sup> February 2026	Council	Approves Budget
5 <sup>th</sup> March 2026	Council	Reserve Council Meeting in case of delay in receiving notification of other precepts.

Members were invited to consider the CBC Budget Consultation and to submit individual responses if desired.

**13505 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (CGR)**

Town Council had deferred consideration of the second stage of the CGR at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December to enable further consideration of the recommendations (Minute 13470).

The Draft recommendations from CBC were:

1. that the parish name of Houghton Regis should remain unchanged
2. increase the number of parish councillors on Houghton Regis Town Council from 14 to 17
3. create a new parish ward of Thorn with 3 members (see map)
4. reduce Houghton Hall parish ward from 5 to 4, retain Tithe Farm with 5 members
5. increase Parkside Ward from 4 to 5 to accommodate the Linnere Development
6. undertake a further community governance review of the parish within five years to ensure effective community governance arrangements in light of the development at Linnere
7. reject the proposal to extend the parish boundary into the parish of Chalton

The established informal group of Cllrs (D Jones, M Herber, T McMahon, J Carroll and C Slough) met to discuss the draft recommendations from CBC.

Draft Recommendations 1 – 6 were supported by the councillors; however, it was requested that, for clarity, the wording of Draft Recommendation 6 be altered to: *undertake a further community governance review of the parish in 2030 to align with the local elections in 2031.*

With regard to Draft CBC Recommendation 7, Members wished to express disappointment that CBC were minded to reject the proposal to extend the parish boundary into the parish of Chalton.

Members requested an addition to the end of Draft Recommendation 7: *reconsiders its recommendation to reject the proposal to extend the parish boundary into the parish of Chalton.*

Members voted in favour of this addition.

**Resolved:** In relation to the Stage 2 Community Governance Review consultation to:

**Support the draft recommendations as follows:**

**Draft Recommendation 1: that the parish name of Houghton Regis should remain unchanged**

**Draft Recommendation 2: increase the number of parish councillors on Houghton Regis Town Council from 14 to 17**

**Draft Recommendation 3: create a new parish ward of Thorn with 3 members (see map)**

**Draft Recommendation 4: reduce Houghton Hall parish ward from 5 to 4, retain Tithe Farm with 5 members**

**Draft Recommendation 5: increase Parkside Ward from 4 to 5 to accommodate the Linnere Development**

**Request a wording change for clarification to as follows:**

**Draft Recommendation 6: undertake a further community governance review of the parish in 2030 to align with the local elections in 2031 to ensure effective community governance arrangements in light of the development at Linnere**

**Express disappointment over Draft Recommendation 7, namely that CBC are minded to reject the proposal to extend the parish boundary into the parish of Chalton.**

**The rejection of the HRTC proposal would appear to be contrary to provisions within the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's report Guidance on Community Governance Reviews (2010), specifically the points made which consider identities and interests of local communities; effective and convenient local government, the impact on community cohesion of community governance arrangements and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish.**

**In view of this, HRTC respectfully requests that CBC reconsiders its recommendation to reject the proposal to extend the parish boundary into the parish of Chalton.**

**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.39pm**

**Dated this 16<sup>th</sup> day of March 2026**

**Chairman**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Leber". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.