

Houghton Regis Annual Town's Meeting
Minutes of the meeting held
on
11th April 2022

Present: Cllr C Copleston (Town Mayor)
Clare Evans (Town Clerk)
19 Parishioners

WELCOME BY THE TOWN MAYOR

Cllr Copleston welcomed all those present to the meeting.

MINUTES

The meeting was requested to confirm the accuracy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 25th May 2021. A typographical error was noted and duly amended.

The Minutes of the Annual Town's meeting held on 25th May 2021 were approved as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

Corporate Services Committee

The Corporate Services Committee functions in order to manage the Town Council's governance and financial affairs. It ensured that the Town Council complied with local government laws, legislation, regulations and proper practices whilst, at the same time sought to achieve value for money in all of the Town Council's areas of responsibility.

- This committee met on five occasions in the last year.
- It continually reviewed all of the Town Councils policies and where necessary introduced new ones.

Some of the policies that had been reviewed in the last year were:

- IT Use Policy;
- Capability Policy;
- Freedom of Information & Model Scheme of Publication;
- Risk Management Plan;
- Late payments & bad debts policy;
- Officer/Member protocol;
- Training Statement of Intent;
- Local Govt Pension Scheme: Statement of Local Discretions.

Why policies are important – Policies ensure that the Town Council:

- Is accountability to residents
- Has safe and efficient arrangements in place to safeguard public money
- Is responsible for its financial management
- Has internal Controls in place i.e. Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and internal audit
- Have staff who are trained and knowledgeable in the work they do

Other items discussed were:

- Banking Arrangements, Investment Strategy & Investment Arrangements
- Public Works Loan Board Repayments and borrowing

Community Services Committee

- This committee met on five occasions in the last year.
- This committee had:

Monitored the budget of the Committee
Received updates from:

- Events Working Group
- Combating Crime Working Group
- CBC Youth Services provider, Groundwork
- Houghton Regis Town Council Youth Services
- 2020:2024 Vision

Received Community Development reports on:

- Youth Work in Houghton Regis
- Bulk Waste Removal Scheme
- Secured VERU Grant funding
- Youth Council
- Pop-up-Café
- Later Living Social Group
- Summer Playschemes
- Community Day trips

Large Capital Grants were awarded to:

- Singing Café

Has continued grants for Key Partners including:

- Citizens Advice
- Community Action Bedfordshire
- Keech Hospice

- South Beds Dial a Ride
- SORTED
- Memorial Hall
- Full House Theatre
- Houghton Regis Heritage Society

A special grant had been introduced for the holding of Street Parties for the Queens Jubilee.

In addition, the Committee had also undertaken the following:

- Continued Youth Service projects to Groundwork including Youth Pop Up Cafes & Social Inclusion Projects and reviewed the establishment of these projects
- Planned Easter and Summer family trips and activities.
- Planned 4 Community Activities
- Planned 4 HRLLSG Activities
- Collated and distributed welcome packs to new residents
- Consideration given to providing a sustainable Christmas tree

Environment & Leisure Committee

This Committee takes care of the outside spaces

- Tithe Farm Recreation Ground had a new Pavilion and community space and 3g pitch planned with funding aided by the Football Foundation
- Benches had been placed in Parkside Recreation ground and two more were budgeted for
- Allotments were coming forth
- Play areas maintained by the Town Council continued to be looked after, however, funding was limited, nevertheless, it was hoped that they would be able to complete limited upgrades
- Fruit trees had been planted as part of the Welcome Back fund and the Queens Jubilee
- Water Hippos had been utilised in town council properties

It was highlighted that the benches had been painted red to support the Dementia friendly strategy.

Planning & Licensing Committee

When a local planning authority received a planning application, it was bound by law to publicise it. Alongside inviting the public to comment, local planning authorities had to consult a range of organisations, one being Town/Parish councils, whose interests may be affected by a proposed development. Others could include, for example, the local highways authority if the development could mean an increase in traffic. Issues concerning waste, water or air pollution were referred to the Environment Agency, and Natural England assesses applications that could affect wildlife.

Members of the public had a few weeks to comment on a planning application. The deadline for comments is 21 days from the date a site notice was put up or notice was served on neighbours. Parish and town councils had 21 days from the date they were notified to make an official comment.

Local planning authorities would either approve the application, sometimes with conditions or obligations, or refuse it. In either case, the authority must give reasons for its decision. Local planning authorities should usually make a decision within eight weeks. If it took longer, the applicant could appeal to the Secretary of State with responsibility for planning.

Houghton Regis Town Councils planning committee had considered 114 planning applications as well as a number of works to trees, either due to them being located in the conservation area, or because they have TPO's on them.

The planning committee had also provided suggestions for street names for the various new developments around the town along with being consulted on highway traffic notices or proposed changes to traffic regulations.

Neighbourhood Plan

Houghton Regis Town Councils Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was made up of six community representatives, five Town Councillors and one Central Bedfordshire Council representative and was established on the 26th September 2017.

Neighbourhood Plans were introduced by the Localism Act 2011 as a way to allow local communities to identify the challenges facing their areas and to put forward potential solutions.

Houghton Regis Town Councils draft Neighbourhood Plan, before being submitted formally to Central Bedfordshire Council for consideration, had to undergo a statutory 6 week public consultation process, in accordance with Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. This consultation ran from Monday 9th August 2021 to Friday 24th September 2021. The consultation sought to ensure that the Plan had been drafted in line with the views and requirements of the community and that it also accorded with Central Bedfordshire Councils Local Plan.

Following this consultation, the Neighbourhood Plan had to be amended. These amendments, along with other out of date information, were currently being worked on by the group. Once done the whole document would then be submitted to Central Bedfordshire Council, as required, for a Regulation 16 consultation and following that an independent examination would be carried out. The Plan, if successful at examination, would then proceed to a local referendum to ensure that it received local support. Work on the Neighbourhood Plan stopped during the pandemic but as soon as it were able to, the group set back to work starting with the statutory public consultation.

Members of non-profit organisations were invited to speak

Parkside Ward Action Group

It was advised that the group was formed in 2019 as a response to residents wanting to make Parkside a happier and healthier place to live. 2022 had seen Parkside Ward Action Group work successfully with the Town Council to install new seating. The group ran a successful stall at the Leisure Centre open day, they were looking to run family sports and were hoping to organise a picnic for the Queens Jubilee. They would like to have a hub of some kind, a place for the community to come together.

Friends of Windsor drive.

It was advised that, as residents who had elected both Central Bedfordshire Council and Town Councillors into their positions, they felt they had the right to ask for confirmation that the councillors were accurately reflecting their stance on Windsor Drive. Having established there were no Houghton Regis Town Councillors on the Central Bedfordshire Council Development Management Committee, thus, meaning that none of the Houghton Regis Town Council councillors would be officially required to vote either for or against Central Bedfordshire Council's proposals to build on Windsor drive, and having confirmed that it would be down to an individual councillor to determine if they support a specific issue or not, members of the council were asked to confirm which councillors were in support of the proposals to develop Windsor Drive. It was also requested which councillors had abstained from stating whether they support the development or not.

MATTERS ARISING FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Concerns were raised regarding Sycamore Road and the lack of safe crossing areas for children to cross to access the play area, it was highlighted that there was only one Zebra crossing and the speed bumps had been removed. The park was more children friendly, however, it was not safe for children to access and use. It was highlighted that Drovers Road has a 20mph limit because of the school, however, there were three schools along that stretch of road without safety measures.

It was advised by Cllr Goodchild that this issue was something she was tackling and part of the Town Council's vision was safety around schools. She advised that the school did not qualify for school crossing patrol.

Concerns were raised regarding commercial vehicles parking in residential areas and on the corners of streets. It was asked what was being done to make these residents aware of their inconsiderate actions.

Cllr Copleston acknowledged that this had become a growing problem across the town, with households owning multiple vehicles, the vehicle capacity has outgrown the town.

Concerns were raised regarding rubbish being dumped by the style, wires and cables that had been stripped had been left.

Cllr Copleston highlighted that Town Ranger had been working tirelessly to make the town look better and would continue working hard to improve the town.

It was requested that the Town Council declare an environmental emergency and establish a Green Taskforce as a matter of urgency. It was also suggested that the town council should make an official complaint about the loss of community access to Bedford Square Community Centre through Central Bedfordshire Council's complaint procedures and take the matter further if necessary.

A member of public asked whether Houghton Regis Town Council would collectively state that they were against developing the open space at Windsor Drive, specifically that they were against Central Bedfordshire Council's proposals to build new homes on open space?

It was advised that this would be addressed when Central Bedfordshire Council bring forward their proposals.

It was highlighted that residents were unhappy about the length of time it had taken to progress the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly with regards to registering Windsor Drive as an open space. It was asked whether Houghton Regis Town Council had done enough to support the Neighbourhood Plan Team in getting the plan adopted.

It was advised that things had moved as fast as they could, however, the steering group was made up of volunteers, and external influences had held the proceedings up.

Concerns were raised regarding Houghton Park and the lack of facilities in the area. The paths are uneven, and green space had been lost to the new school building and Homes for England. The park areas for children were accessible only by crossing roads with fast moving traffic. A resident highlighted that the owner of Kingsland had promised that he would rectify the treeline in this area. The trees were ineffectual as a buffer zone.

It was requested that Windsor Drive be added to the next Town Council meeting.

It was advised that discussions had taken place and would be discussed further when Central Bedfordshire Council put forward their application.

Concerns regarding pot-holes were raised. It was explained that the Town Council do not have an input and would report street matters in the same manner, using the same processes as residents.

Information was requested on the open space at Windsor drive was transferred from Central Bedfordshire Council Leisure to Central Bedfordshire Council Housing Revenue.

This was to be investigated and fed back.

It was requested that a more advanced and efficient system be considered for hybrid meetings.

It was requested that sports pitches be marked out at Windsor Drive so they could be used for practice sessions.

It was acknowledged that many of the issues raised were Central Bedfordshire Council's responsibility. It was suggested that the feedback received from residents be presented to Central Bedfordshire Council.

Concerns were raised regarding facilities for young families in the new developments. It was suggested that residents did not know what activities there were in the town.

It was highlighted that there were many groups active in the town, offering activities for all ages, Cllr Goodchild offered to share this information directly with the resident. It was suggested that a list of groups is included in future editions of the Town Crier and posters displayed.

Thanks were offered to the Town Clerk and the councillors of Houghton Regis Town Council as it was stated that they do a great job in the town.

The Town Mayor advised residents that she had the honour and privilege of visiting many community groups and highlighted how proud she was of how hard they work despite struggling to obtain funding.

Concerns were raised regarding the Bedford Square Community Centre and the redirection of use. The reallocation of use had forced Community Groups to seek new venues in the town, however the size of the groups had proven to large to be accommodated anywhere else. The issue of the removal of resources was raised, as they had been placed in inaccessible storage facility, therefore the user groups were unable to retrieve their property.

A noticeboard was requested to be erected on Windsor Drive, it was advised that Houghton Regis Town Council would not have the authority to erect structures on Windsor Drive, there was also the complication over who would pay for it.

The Town Mayor thanked all attendees for attending the Annual Town's meeting.

The Mayor declared the meeting closed at 8.33pm.

Dated this 11th day of April 2022

CHAIRMAN