

Houghton Regis Annual Town's Meeting 9th April 2018

Present: Cllr Ms J Hillyard (Town Mayor)

Clare Evans (Town Clerk)

33 including 4 non parishioners

WELCOME BY THE TOWN MAYOR

Cllr Ms J Hillyard welcomed all those present to the meeting, provided emergency and general housekeeping advice, advised that the meeting was being audio recorded and summarised the format of the meeting.

MINUTES

The meeting was requested to confirm the accuracy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th April 2017. The following comments were made:

- It was suggested that the number of people present was higher than had been recorded;
- It was advised that the circulation figures associated with the Clanger publication should have recoded as 600 copies were made available and around 1500 people reached online.

These alterations were proposed by Mr Winter and seconded by Ms Burgess. The meeting voted on the proposal:

Those in favour 13

Against 0

The proposal to amend the minutes was carried.

The amended Minutes of the Annual Town's meeting held on 10th April 2017 were approved as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

PRESENTATION ON THE HOUGHTON REGIS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The meeting received a presentation from the Town Council's planning consultant on the emerging Houghton Regis Neighbourhood Plan (NHP). The following points were made:

- The process for formulating and developing the NHP was outlined
- How the NHP fits in with strategic planning documents
- Responses to the NHP questionnaire were encouraged
- There were many good reasons for an area to have a NHP including enhanced certainty over local development, local consultation and involvement, and a locally based strategic planning document

- The NHP for Houghton Regis faced a number of challenges including integration of the strategic growth areas with existing areas, the location of new facilities, opportunities for more housing and the protection of open spaces
- A group has been set up to progress the NHP
- The next step was to produce a draft NHP. This would be presented to HRTC for adoption and would then be subject to public consultation which may result in some amendments. The plan would then be presented to CBC and a local referendum would then be held. If over 50% support the plan it then becomes a strategic planning document

The following additional comments were made by those present at the meeting:

- Concerns expressed over the lack of through routes from existing areas into the growth areas
- Residents were encouraged to engage in and monitor official processes
- It was confirmed that without a NHP and a current local plan the area was vulnerable to development pressures. These pressures would be better managed with an agreed NHP
- Representatives from the NHP Steering Group advised of their support for the process and encouraged feedback through the questionnaire
- The NHP process and the questionnaire had been shared through a variety of means including the Clanger, Town Crier, social media, the HRTC website and through noticeboards and posters. In addition, representatives from the Steering Group had attended Santa's Grotto to help promote
- It was suggested that very localised events should be held throughout the town
- It was suggested that the town was a commuter / dormitory town which may be why it was difficult to engage people
- It was queried whether there were any proposals to assist the youth of the town through priority housing. It was advised that the group had spoken about housing mix but as yet there were no fixed proposals
- The following additional communication methods were spoken about: local press, community events such as off-road bike events, through schools, churches, HHP café, retail outlets, a dedicated social media page for the NHP.
- It was suggested that a prize be offered for completion of the questionnaire

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

Corporate Services Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr D Abbott, advised:

That while this committee was perhaps the least glamorous, it forms the backbone of the Council. It regularly reviews procedures and policies to ensure that the Council's finances adhere to legislation, and that policies and procedures remain fit for purpose for our growing Town.

Community Services Committee

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair of the Committee, Cllr Ms Hillyard, advised that the Community Services Committee had continued to:

Monitor the budget of the Committee

Received updates from:

- Events Working Group
- Combating Crime Working Group
- CBC Youth Services provider, Groundwork
- Received a report from Kids in Action
- 20:20 Vision including Enviro-crime, speed reduction measures, Residents / Action Groups, Youth Council and Community Transport

Received Community Development reports on:

- Shop local
- Town Centre Attractions
- Get growing event
- Youth Council
- Play schemes

Had determined a number of grant applications including

- Recycled Teenagers
- 1st / 3rd HR Scouts
- Networking at Dunstable
- Best Bar None Awards
- Houghton Regis Academy
- Singing Café
- All Saints Parish Church
- Full House Theatre
- SCOOCH

Has continued the grants, a total of £18,251, for Key Partners including:

- Citizens Advice
- Voluntary & Community Action South Beds
- Keech Hospice
- South Beds Dial a Ride
- SORTED

Approved Key Partner status for Memorial Hall until March 2020.

In addition, the Committee had also:

- Extended the Youth Pop Up Cafes so that it was held weekly. The cafes provide a fun and safe learning environment for young people
- Utilised the councils 3 redeployable CCTV cameras which were moved in response to emerging issues
- Managed the council's contract with Bedfordshire Police for Operation Hana to provide high visibility policing in the town in targeted areas
- Set up a graffiti removal project
- Ordered event clothing for volunteers who help at events

Environment & Leisure Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Mrs McMahon, advised on the Environment & Leisure Committee the following:

- An outline was provided of the redevelopment of redundant basketball court on the Green. The works were starting on 23rd April and the official opening was planned for 19th May at the Royal Wedding celebration
- HHP was now open and the official opening was planned for 20th May
- 2 flag poles had been installed on the Green, the flags would be raised on 19th May at the Royal Wedding celebration
- Parkside Pavilion had recently been fenced off and in May would be comprehensively refurbished. It was hoped that this refurbishment would be rolled out across other sites.

The following additional comments were made by those present at the meeting:

- Concerns were expressed that current football pitch availability was insufficient. With the growth of the town even more pitches would be required. A request was made to approach CBC for additional provision. It was commented that there were pitches available on the Kingsland site
- It was suggested that the redundant red-gra area on the Kingsland site could be used for an adventure playground. It was suggested that this would be a good site as it was fenced off already, was secure and had been empty for years
- It was confirmed that graffiti on electrical boxes could be removed
- It was advised that a rumour had been heard that the Houghton Regis library was being merged with Dunstable library. Cllr Goodchild advised that this was not the case and it was an aspiration of Library Services at CBC to extend the libraries opening hours
- Some concerns were expressed that the library had been closed on a few Saturdays since Christmas due to staff shortages
- It was queried who was funding the play provision on the Green. It was confirmed that it was HRTC funding this project
- Support was expressed for the use of the Kingsland site as it was considered to be a good and cheap solution

Planning & Licensing Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Carroll, advised on the Planning Committee the following:

- New buildings and plans were starting to come in
- HRN1 were holding a consultation event on 19th April (2-8pm) on ARP1
- A planning application for 97 houses had been submitted by HRN2
- There was a display at the rear of the hall on planning matters

The following additional comments were made by those present at the meeting:

- It was advised that HRTC were a statutory consultee on planning applications. The NHP was important because of this

- There was a facebook page, HR Planning Applications to help monitor planning matters
- It was queried why so many trees were being cut down along Thorn Turn. It was advised that CBC were building 2 large warehouses on the site, upon completion they would implement a planting scheme
- Many people view the recordings of the council meetings, perhaps this could be a further way of communicating out about the NHP

MATTERS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

The following questions, queries and comments were made:

Due to a number of break-ins it was requested that the security at HHP café be improved especially as it was open later and employed young people. It was advised that this was a matter for CBC, although HRTC were a partner / stakeholder. The suggestion would be feed back to Board members. A stronger rear door had however been installed.

The drain in the corner by Churchfield Rd had not been cleared. It was advised that this was a CBC issue. Cllr Goodchild advised that CBC had identified this area as being very problematic for parking. It was advised that blocked drains should be cleared by end of April.

It was queried whether the council still had a contract with Bedfordshire Police to provide high visibility policing in the town. It was confirmed that this was the case. In response the number of hours provided was requested and it was stated that it was not felt that the patrols were obvious or visible. Confirmation on the number of hours of patrols under this contract would be provided.

Mr Giugno addressed the meeting and advised that he was one of the candidates in the forthcoming election. Appreciation was given to the current town council Chair for all her work in raising the profile of the town. Some concerns were expressed that other councillors had tried to undermine her work, in particular the labour group were accused of intimidation. Derogatory remarks were made about another local resident. A comment was made that it was hoped that the clerk would produce the minutes of the meeting correctly this year. Reference was made to the funding being offered by Whitbread to local good causes and it was questioned when this funding was being provided and who was deciding where it was going. It was felt that this should be resolved by HRTC as CBC ward councillors hold no influence at CBC. The importance of community was stressed. Appreciation was also given to Streetlife for the good work they undertake. Support was expressed for one of the other candidates standing at the election.

In response the local resident just referred too, replied by denying the accusations. The chair requested that the the recording be ceased due to the escalating personal comments being made, it was felt by the Chair that these were not appropriate for the annual towns meeting.

A suggestion was made of opening a community café on Parkside. There was an empty shop available. The café in Downside was a good example. It was suggested that HRTC could pay the shop rent.

It was queried whether there was a plan to extend the doctors surgery to cope with additional residents. It was advised that this was a regional health board decision. It was agreed that it was important to get services up and running before houses were built.

Concerns were expressed that the burial space in Houghton Regis was very limited. A new burial ground was needed. It was advised that HRTC were working on this.

Concerns were expressed that developer promises were not always delivered.

It was queried what was going to happen about the Odman's site and the former Netto's site. In relation to the Odman's site it was advised that planning permission had been sought for 5 flats. This had been refused. It was advised that an archaeological dig had to be completed before any planning application could be considered. In relation to the former Netto site it was commented that there were 100 parking spaces available on this site. It was frustrating that this couldn't be opened up help alleviate the town centre parking problems. Morrisons own this site but had not been willing to talk about options.

It was advised that a survey of Tithe Farm Road car park had been completed which showed that 44% of spaces were occupied by the same vehicle between 9am and 4pm. However this car park was privately owned but managed by CBC. The cost of any works which were completed were passed on by the owner to the shop keepers. A retail group had been established in response to a significant but unexpected maintenance bill last year. It was suggested that Tithe Farm car park be resurfaced.

It was queried whether provision at the L&D hospital would be increased. It was advised that the relationship between CBC and the hospital was robust and they were working together on this matter.

The Chair of the meeting confirmed that matters raised would be sent on as appropriate.

Residential parking was also a significant issue in the town, although it was felt that this was a national issue as well.

Concerns were expressed that the social club had been lost 10 years or so ago and now there was nowhere to go.

It was queried who would train the doctors to work in the new medical centres.

It was queried when answers would be supplied to the questions raised. Some matters raised relate to CBC and these would be forwarded on but no timescale could be given as to when responses may be received. It was hoped that the query about Whitbread could be responded to in the next few days. Other matters which relate to the town council would be progressed.

Previously it was advised that an aspiration of the town council had been to work with partners to develop a new community building with council offices on HRN2. It was confirmed that work had been progressing but was still ongoing.

It was suggested that the Town Crier could be used to disseminate responses to questions raised.

It was queried whether there was an update on the £125m grant application. It was advised that there was a Partnership meeting tomorrow, the question would be asked there.

Although there had been some negative comments made at the meeting, thanks were expressed to councillors for the work that they do especially as they have to fit it in around their own lives.

The Mayor declared the meeting closed at 8.55pm.

Dated this 9th day of April 2019

CHAIRMAN

DRAFT