

Houghton Regis Annual Town's Meeting 8th April 2019

Present: Cllr K Wattingham (Town Mayor)
Clare Evans (Town Clerk)

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WELCOME BY THE TOWN MAYOR

Cllr Wattingham welcomed 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 9th April 2018. A typographical error was noted and duly amended.

The Minutes of the Annual Town's meeting held on 9th April 2018 were approved as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

Corporate Services Committee

The purpose of the committee was to manage the Town Councils' governance and financial affairs. It ensures that the Town Council complies with local government laws, legislation, regulations and proper practices whilst, at the same time seeks to achieve value for money in all of the Town Council's areas of responsibility.

- The committee have met on five occasions in the last year.
- It continually reviews all of the Town Councils policies and where necessary introduces new ones.
- Some of the policies that have 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; Statutory Functions Local Govt Pension Scheme: Statement of Local Discretions.
- The council's policies ensure that the Town Council:
 - Is accountable to residents
 - Has safe and efficient arrangements in place to safeguard public money
 - Is responsible for its financial management
 - Has internal controls in place (Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and internal audit)
 - Have staff who are trained and knowledgeable in the work they do

- The committee has also discussed: Banking Arrangements, Investment Strategy & Investment Arrangements, Public Works Loan Board Repayments Annual Report

Community Services Committee

- The committee had monitored the budget
- Given consideration to the budget for 2018 - 2019
- Received updates from:
 - Events Working Group
 - Combating Crime Working Group
 - CBC Youth Services provider, Groundwork
 - Houghton Regis Town Council Youth Services
 - 20:20 Vision
 - Enviro-crime
 - Speed reduction measures
 - Residents / Action Groups
 - Youth Council
 - Community Transport
- Received Community Development reports on:
 - Shop local
 - Town Centre Attractions
 - Youth Council
 - Time for Tea
 - Play schemes
 - Summer Playscheme
 - Community Day trip
- Had determined a number of grant applications including:

○ Groundwork East	£385.05
○ Parkside 50 plus Club	£500.00
○ Hawthorn Park Community School	£500.00
○ Hub Café	£500.00
○ Meaningful Education	£500.00
○ Networking Dunstable	£500.00
○ Academy of Central Bedfordshire	£500.00
○ Magpas Air Ambulance	£2,500.00
- Has continued the grants, a total of £18,251, for Key Partners including:
 - Citizens Advice
 - Community Action Bedfordshire
 - Keech Hospice
 - South Beds Dial a Ride
 - SORTED
 - Memorial Hall until March 2020
- Agreed for Full House Theatre to become a key partner.
- Continued Youth Service projects to Groundwork including Youth Pop Up Cafes & Social Inclusion Projects and reviewed the establishment of these projects
- Agreed a cleaning contract for the town centre toilets
- Agreed to extend the re-deployable cameras airtime and warranty

- Agreed to extend the Operation Hana contract for high visibility policing
- Agreed to improve the Christmas lights in Bedford Square.
- Agreed to decorate the skate park seating with graffiti art with the aid of a professional graffiti artist.
- Considered town centre display banners
- Agreed to alter the frequency of the Town Crier to bi-annually.

Environment & Leisure Committee

During the course of the year the usual annual functions of the committee were undertaken, including

- Income and expenditure was regularly monitored.
- Consideration was given to the budget for 2019 - 2020
- The term and conditions of hire of sports facilities, plus the fees to be charged, were set.
- The fees for interments and memorial erection in the cemetery were set for the year.

Received updates on:

- HHP Project
- 20:20 Vision
- Village Green outside Gym and Play area
- Parkside Pavilion upgrades
- Cemetery layout
- Moore Crescent recreation ground
- Skate Park seating
- Flagpoles on Village Green
- Parkside Pavilion refurbishment
- Energy Efficiency report

In addition to the regular annual responsibilities of the committee, it has also carried out the following work.

- Approved the Field in Trust dedication for Orchard Close Recreation Ground.
- Agreed to the attendance of Circus Fantasia during the early part of the year.
- Approved the use of the Village Green for the Funfair visits.
- Approved the use of the Village Green for Full House Theatre.
- Agreed the repair works to All Saints churchyard wall.
- Approved a tree survey on council owned trees to protect public safety
- Considered proposals from Luton Lea Catchment Partnership to improve Houghton Brook
- Approved the revised design of the new area cemetery design
- Considered the purchase of defibrillators at Houghton Regis sports pavilions
- Considered alterations of the Village Green Pavilion
- Agreed to open Moore Crescent car park in support of Houghton Hall Park events for a trial period
- Approved the replacement of mowers

- Agreed to a feasibility design solution for the Village Green pavilion

Planning & Licensing Committee

The Planning Committee had:

- met 17 times during the year;
- considered over 90 planning applications including 3 which were more controversial
- had been updated on strategic projects within the town
- continued to work with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. This group were thanked for all their hard work and commitment. The plan is now due to move to the public referendum stage.

MATTERS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

The following questions, queries and comments were made:

It was queried what progress had been made in securing a new burial site for the town. The Chair advised that the council were still looking for options. It was confirmed that 3 or 4 sites had been considered in more detail but there were significant issues to overcome. It was still on the council agenda to progress.

A representative from Houghton Regis Heritage (HRHS) advised that the society had concerns over the condition of the Red House and what it's future role may be. He advised that liaison with Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) had been somewhat drawn out. There was a current planning application relating to this site on the CBC website. It was suggested that work on the building may commence shortly but the building may not be made available for use until All Saints View was opened.

HRHS were keen to seek the views of the local community on the use of this building. A survey would be available on the HRHS website, social media, the HRTC website and in the local press in due course.

It was pointed out that the future use had to be compatible with the space available, should not duplicate services, and should be financially sustainable.

HRHS were happy to hear views at this meeting or for the community to engage in the consultation process in due course.

It was suggested that the HRHS could manage the building and have a classroom or education facility within it, with interpretation on the history of the town.

It was also suggested that it would be nice to see the Festival of Britain sign reinstalled, previously it was outside of the church.

There was some support for the idea of an education facility as it would be great for young people and for HRHS to have a presence within the building. Central Bedfordshire doesn't have a museum, so it would be great place to display artefacts from digs from developments around the town.

It was thought that previously there may have been problems with altering the building to make it accessible. It was queried whether this had been addressed in the planning application. HRHS advised that there remain accessibility issues to upper floors but it was understood that access to the ground floor was fine.

It was queried whether any suggested future use would be advanced by having a business plan. It was confirmed that this was being looked into by HRHS, in support it was hoped to get some financial information from CBC.

It was queried whether there was any update regarding the former Odmans site and the former Netto site. It was advised that both sites were in private ownership and the council had not received any updates. Cllr Carroll advised that the Odmans site had planning permission for 5 flats.

7.25pm The meeting adjourned due to the arrival of 2 further parishioners as there was confusion over the start time of the meeting.

7.30pm The meeting re-convened.

More detail was provided on the current CBC planning application relating to the Red House. It was advised that the application was for external and internal repair work to be completed. The application was comprehensive and contained significant detail. The application does not cover the future use of the building. It was suggested that CBC may use the building as a sales office, if so, this would require planning permission for change of use. HRHS were keen to avoid a commercial use for the building. The decision on the application was due by 8th May. Those present were invited to give their views on the proposed structural work and on the future use of the building.

HRHS advised that they hoped to arrange a public meeting to consider the Red House soon.

The Mayor declared the meeting closed at 7.40pm.

Dated this 6th day of April 2020

CHAIRMAN