

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ROYSTON AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE HARDWICKE HALL, ROYSTON TOWN HALL, MELBOURN
STREET, ROYSTON
ON TUESDAY, 8TH MARCH, 2022 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Tony Hunter (Chair), Councillor Sarah Dingley (Vice-Chair), Ruth Brown, Adam Compton, Gerald Morris and Carol Stanier*

In Attendance: *James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Ashley Hawkins (Community Engagement Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting Herts County Councillor Fiona Hill and approximately 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

25 WELCOME

Audio recording – 37 seconds

The Chair welcomed Members, Officers and public participants to the meeting.

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 26 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jean Green.

27 MINUTES - 20 OCTOBER 2021

Audio Recording – 1 minute 39 seconds

Councillor Gerald Morris proposed and Councillor Sarah Dingley seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 October 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

28 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 03 seconds

There was no other business notified.

29 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 20 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;

- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

30 ROYSTON FIRST UPDATE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 45 seconds

The Chair advised that Royston First were unable to attend this Committee meeting.

31 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 2 minutes 58 seconds

Sergeant Jon Vine, from Herts Police Safer Neighbourhood Team, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal update on the work being done in the Royston and District Area, including:

- There had been a few staffing changes in Royston, but the numbers of officers remained the same, with 3 Police Constables and 4 PCSOs covering both the town and rural areas with 4 cars and 1 quad bike.
- The following crime statistics were provided; all crime has gone up from 872 incidents in 2020/21 to 897 in 2021/22.
- Burglary at a dwelling had risen to 12 this year from 11 last year. Some of these were technical offences, which did not necessarily mean a crime had taken place and when these were removed it left only 4 instances of burglary at a dwelling. Generally burglars came from outside the district.
- Burglary from a business had risen from 21 last year to 23 this year.
- Theft of tools from vehicles had reduced dramatically since last year. However, there had been an increase in instances of theft of metal from vehicles, such as catalytic convertors. This was attributed to the increasing price of metal and the police were working to highlight this issue to motorists.
- There were 327 offences of violence against a person recorded for 2021/22.
- The night-time economy had greatly improved from previously and Operation Artemis was no longer required.
- Reports of shoplifting were down.
- There had been a decrease in anti-social behaviour, dropping to 300 this year from 332 in 2020/21. But there was an increase in pseudo gang related drug activity, which had been driven by new people coming to the town. Whilst this was not a problem at this stage, there was a desire to, using intelligence led policing, stamp this out before it developed into a wider issue.
- The three priorities for the area, set every 6 months, were now; theft from a motor vehicle, speeding and anti-social behaviour.
- Overall the picture in Royston was good, with very few specific issues to report.
- The police had struggled to engage with young people during the pandemic, so officers were unable to form relationships and connections with younger residents.
- There had been a “mini police” workshop held at a local primary school with 7 and 8 year olds, where PCSOs ran an 8-week course looking at topics such as, stranger danger, being a good citizen and internet safety. This course culminated in a trip to the police station. It was hoped this could be expanded further.
- With an increase of report of dog thefts, the Dog Watch scheme was reinvigorated but there had been no reported dog thefts.
- While there was a lot of bad news about police in the news at the moment, the team in and around Royston were doing a lot of good work which was not necessarily reported on.

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- At a recent meeting a venue had been offered for a youth project, funded from various sources including the Herts County Council Locality Budget. The project was due to start at the Limitless Club in April 2022. This would involve learning skills, music and performance skills, which would hopefully culminate in a live performance from attendees.
- There had been a WhatsApp group set up for the rural areas which had around 290 members and was managed by a former police officer. While this is not run by Herts Police, it gives a great channel of communication to report suspicious activity or crime in the rural areas and make residents and landowners aware.
- The SNT are currently looking at whether CCTV could be set up in rural areas and then images shared via this WhatsApp group, which would hopefully deter criminals from coming to the area in the first place.
- With the previous ANPR cameras around the town, the publicity on these reduced crime more than the cameras themselves.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Sarah Dingley
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Gerald Morris

In response to questions, Sergeant Vine advised:

- The use of the rural WhatsApp group was ideal for the sharing of images and, because this is a private group, there is minimal police involvement. The CCTV images collected would be from private land.
- There were various camera options available nowadays, so it would be possible to get something suitable in place.
- The work to engage young people in the town would not solve all issues of crime, but will help get young people engaged with the police and get people actively supporting police schemes in the town.
- The "Mini Police" event was an annual project across the district. It had positive outcomes for both the young attendees and the officers running the course.
- Reports of hare coursing seemed to have been fairly average, but he did not have the exact figures available. There had been a move away from doing this on foot, to doing it from a car within a field. It was hoped a crushed car could be displayed around Royston to highlight the punishments available for this type of crime and to deter those thinking of committing the crime.

The Community Engagement Officer advised that there was potentially some Section 106 money available to support the youth project. The Area Committee could give grant funding to a scheme, should an application be received.

The Chair thanked Sergeant Vine for his presentation.

The Chair invited Mr Nicholas Shaw to give a verbal presentation in support of the grant application for Barley Town House. Mr Shaw thanked the Chair for the opportunity and advised:

- The Town House had been built in 1530 and had served various functions throughout the centuries.
- It is now heavily used as a wedding venue, as smaller venues became more popular and this had a positive impact on interest in the Town House. The cost of a weekend hire (Friday to Sunday) for a wedding was £1500 and hirers were free to do as they wished with the space during this time.
- Due to the age of the building, a lot of maintenance was required to maintain standards.

- The south facing side of the building had seen the timber rot in the sun and there was ongoing work to replace and repair this at the moment, which was hoped would last another 10-20 years.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown

In response to questions, Mr Shaw advised that they had received a £10,000 grant from the government and still had some of these funds remaining. At the moment the Town House was losing money as the building still had to be run, but with groups emerging from the pandemic, it was expected income would start to rise. The cost of the refurbishment should not necessarily be increased due to the listed status of the building, as some parts can be reused.

The Chair thanked Mr Shaw for his presentation.

32 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 45 minutes 15 seconds

Grant Application

The Community Engagement Officer advised that the details of the remaining grant funds were included in the report and that there would be £1130 to carry forward if tonight's application was approved.

The Community Engagement Officer confirmed that the base budget was £6000 for the civic year 2021/22, but was unsure whether this would be the same for the civic year 2022/23.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Gerald Morris seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £500 be awarded to Barley Town House to assist with costs for essential repair and renovation works to the south facing windows, frames, doors, and timber at the building as outlined in 8.1.1.

Free After 3pm Parking in Royston

The Chair led a discussion on Free After 3pm Parking in Royston scheme and the following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Adam Compton
- County Councillor Fiona Hill

The following points were raised in the debate:

- There was no evidence that the scheme encourages people into the town and increases footfall. Royston First were looking into this at the moment.
- When the scheme started, there was an estimated figure provided of how many people were entering and exiting car parks, as no data was available for this, and the funds have been granted for the scheme ever since. There was a clear visible increase in cars in the car parks after 3pm.
- The amount given by NHDC should be explored to see whether this is an appropriate amount and the percentage of NHDCs contribution. If it is deemed excessive then monies could be recovered and put back into the grant funds.

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- It has always been difficult to find exact figures to support the scheme, due to the nature of different charges at Royston car parks.
- The expansion of the RingGo app across car parks should help to provide data to support the scheme, but this was not used across all parking in town.
- NHDC are looking at whether this scheme increases footfall and any decision on this should be based on firm evidence of benefit.
- It is not necessarily understood by car park users that the Council provide funds for this scheme.

Councillor Tony Hunter, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Adam Compton seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocate £1,500 from the 2021/22 base budget for the Free After 3pm Parking Initiative as outlined in 8.3.1.

Royston High Street Planters

The Chair led a discussion on Royston High Street planters and the following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Sarah Dingley
- County Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Fiona Hill
- Councillor Adam Compton

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Retailers in the town had already had a difficult time and were just starting to recover and the planters are taking up vital parking spaces in the town centre and often these planters are empty or dilapidated.
- Parking would still be available for deliveries and disabled users and the money granted would help to improve the look of the planters.
- New black planters were planned, with funds approved by Royston Town Council, and additional funding provided from the Herts County Council Locality Budget.
- Several residents had raised concerns that the planters had prevented people from going for a quick trip into town.
- While there was not always an issue with the parking on the High Street, it was exacerbated on market days.
- Cars circling for spaces in the town centre had reduced with the move to disabled and delivery vehicle parking only.
- The 20 minute short stay parking would not achieve much in terms of town centre recovery. These are generally quick trips and prevent people from extending their stay in the town centre.
- The original consultation on the planters with businesses in the town centre had recorded only 7 objections, and some of these were removed with some small changes to the scheme.
- Similar market towns had demonstrated that if you take away short term parking and introduce a 'pay-on-exit' scheme you increase time and money spent in the town.
- The cost of these planters seems high, but this is to cover maintenance of planters and contents which represents the highest cost, as well as the initial installation.

Councillor Tony Hunter, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocate £500 from the 2021/22 base budget for the annual maintenance of the planters on Royston High Street as outlined in 8.3.2.

Grants and Community Update

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed and Councillor Sarah Dingley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee agrees that any unspent funds from the 2021/22 financial year be allocated to Community & Environmental Initiatives for the 2022/23 period.
- (2) That the Committee endorse the actions taken by the Community Engagement Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Royston

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Officer.
- (2) This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.
- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.
- (4) The Committee is asked on an annual basis to provide financial support from its base budget for the Free After 3pm Parking Initiative.
- (5) The Committee is requested to provide financial support from its base budget for the maintenance of the planters on Royston High Street.

33 HIGHWAYS ISSUES

Audio recording – 72 minutes 40 seconds

The Chair led a discussion regarding Highways Issues and invited Herts County Councillor Fiona Hill to provide an update to the Committee, including:

- Parish Councils had been updated with Highways schemes planned in the villages.
- Footpath schemes around Royston had been completed with funds from the Highways Locality Budget, including Coltsfoot Drive, Lingfield Road, Wheatfield Crescent, Kingsway and Victoria Crescent.
- Pram crossings had been created on Mill Road/Lumen Road.
- Investigatory works had been programmed on Queens Road.
- Footpath schemes had been proposed for Melbourn Road, Maple Way, Mill Road, Serby Avenue and Parthia Close. A new speed indicator device was planned for Melbourn Road.
- The Integrated Works Programme for 21/22 had seen some schemes delayed due to recent weather conditions, but work should be completed on A10, A505, Yeats Close, Lingfield Road, Orchard Road, York Road, Shakespeare and Hardy Drive in the coming weeks.

- After our objections to the 50mph speed limit on Baldock Road, an extension to the 40mph zone had been consulted on.
- The speed indicator on the A10 at Reed was due to be moved.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Adam Compton

In response to questions, County Councillor Hill advised that there were planned footpath works for Serby Avenue and not road resurfacing. Any new defects should be reported.

34 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 76 minutes 38 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on ward matters and outside organisations. The following issues were discussed:

Melbourn Area Youth Development Club

Councillor Carol Stanier advised:

- Funding had been provided by the Committee for the Club, but this could not be spent due to the Covid restrictions at the time.
- Before Christmas 2021, there was a consultation with the young attendees to see what they would like to see from their club. Some suggestions were sports and baking, but also computer gaming, which organisers were keen to explore and see how this could be supported at the Club.
- There was another meeting planning in the next few weeks which would look at the consultation responses further.

Royston First

Councillor Ruth Brown advised:

- The BID were looking at putting together a promotional video for Royston using a drone to film, which would build on and update a previous version.
- Surveys were being conducted around footfall in the town.
- EU funding was available and, working with East Herts, some of these funds would be spent on exploring High Street recovery from Covid.
- There had been an ambition to work more collaboratively and the Christmas lights switch on had seen the Town Council, Town Manager and BID work together to run this pilot event.
- Royston Markets Committee now had a member of the BID on their board.

Town Twinning

Councillor Ruth Brown highlighted that the Twinning Group would be making their first trip to France for two years at the end of May 2022. There was a North Herts Twinning Workshop planning for the 19 March 2022 to discuss ideas, policies/projects and a joint diary of events, and encouraged all to attend.

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Platinum Jubilee Events

Councillor Sarah Dingley advised that a Picnic in the Park event was planned for the Platinum Jubilee weekend, as this was felt most suitable to support local street parties, as well as provide an opportunity for those in flats or without green spaces available. The BID would be running trails through the town.

Councillor Ruth Brown noted that the Market would be doing something for the Jubilee celebrations.

County Councillor Fiona Hill advised that County were making it easier to close roads for street parties and the deadline for this was 21 April 2022. There was some money available from the Locality Budget to support events, if this was required.

The meeting closed at 8.53 pm

Chair