

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ROYSTON AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 17TH MARCH, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Tony Hunter (Chair), Ruth Brown, Jean Green, Gerald Morris and Carol Stanier*

In Attendance: *County Councillor Fiona Hill, County Councillor Steve Jarvis, Ashley Hawkins (Community Engagement Officer) and Anna Gouveia (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 1 member of the public, who was a registered speaker.*

33 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Audio recording – 3 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to this Royston and District Area Committee meeting that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online. There was also the opportunity for the public and press to listen to and view proceedings.

The Chair invited the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer to explain how proceedings would work and to confirm that Members and Officers were in attendance.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call to ensure that all Members, Officers and registered speakers could hear and be heard and gave advice regarding the following:

The meeting was being streamed live onto YouTube and recorded via Zoom.

Extracts from the Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol were included with the agenda and the full version was available on the Council's website which included information regarding:

- Live Streaming;
- Noise Interference;
- Rules of Debate;
- Voting; and
- Part 2 Items

Members were requested to ensure that they were familiar with the Protocol.

Voting would be conducted by Members using the raised hand button for this meeting.

The Chair of the Royston and District Area Committee, Councillor Tony Hunter started the meeting proper.

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 15 seconds

There were no apologies for absence.

35 MINUTES - 15 JANUARY 2020 TO 2 DECEMBER 2020

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 25 seconds

The Chair advised that there were 4 sets of Minutes to agree:

- 15 January 2020;
- 1 July 2020;
- 7 October 2020;
- 2 December 2020.

Councillor Carol Stanier pointed out a minor amendment to the Minutes of 1 July 2020.

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed, Councillor Jean Green seconded and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Minutes of the meetings of the Royston and District Committee held on 15 January, 1 July, 7 October and 2 December 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings, subject to a minor amendment to the Minutes of 1 July 2020;
- (2) That, with the authorisation of the Chair, his electronic signature and initials be attached to the Minutes approved in (1) above.

36 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 29 seconds

There was no other business notified.

37 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 54 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recording would be available on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel;
- (3) 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.
- (4) The Chair advised that Councillor Bill Davidson had resigned as a Councillor and therefore as Vice-Chair of the Committee. The Chair passed on the Committee's thanks to Councillor Davidson for all his work with the Committee over the years and wished him and wife Lindsay all the best for the future in their new location.

38 HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

Audio recording – 6 minutes 40 seconds

Sergeant Jonathan Vine, Hertfordshire Constabulary, thanked the Chair for the invitation to address the Committee and provided Members with a verbal presentation including:

- Sergeant Vine had returned to Royston after 7 years away;
- The Covid-19 pandemic had significantly affected policing over the last 12 months;
- There had initially been an increase in domestic violence but this had levelled out;
- A decrease in demand for other policing services had been seen and crime levels were low in certain areas of crime;
- There had been very few Covid breaches in the Royston community;
- There had been a few issues with anti-social behaviour from youths in the town and an Operation had been set up to target and support this group specifically. Unfortunately some of the group had committed a quite serious offence, been charged and were awaiting court. Anti-social behaviour had now reduced significantly as a result;
- The Police had tried to be as visible as possible in the town during the pandemic and had maintained the same staffing levels as the last couple of years;
- There had been a significant reduction in crime in the rural area;
- There had been a few hare coursing incidents but these were few and far between and rural burglary offences had reduced considerably;
- Speeding incidents were an issue in Royston and the wider county and had been high on the public's priority list when consulted;
- The Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner had supplied the Royston force with a speed van and it was hoped that this would enable a lot more work to be done to tackle speeding in the community;
- There had been an increase in graffiti around the town recently and the Police looked forward to working closely with NHDC to tackle this and remove the graffiti quickly;
- The youth provision in the town could be improved in terms of more facilities such as youth clubs which would enable the Police to engage with young people;
- Crime figures for the past year for the area were as provided as follows (covering the area from Baldock Services to Buntingford and the Cambridgeshire border to the Essex border at Nuthampstead):
- Burglary (dwelling) in Royston was down from 21 (some of which were domestic-related) to 7, and in the rural area from 59 to 21 as a result of people working from home so homes were less likely to be targeted;
- Criminal damage was down from 127 the previous year to 112; theft from a motor vehicle was down from 79 to 71 and work was being done to target this, particularly in relation to tradespersons' vans; violence with an injury involved was down from 127 to 83; a slight increase had been seen in shoplifting; overall crime had gone down from 1089 recorded crimes to 894 (a 17.6% reduction);
- The front of the station had been restored;
- Increased visibility in the town was planned over the next 12 months;
- Royston First BID was looking to fund an additional PCSO post in the town;
- More engagement work was planned in schools;
- Preventative work with the elderly in residential homes and care homes was planned to stop the elderly becoming victims of crime, e.g. cybercrime;
- A monthly youth night at the town cinema was being considered to improve engagement with young people;
- Overall Royston was a very safe place to live.

The following Members commented and asked questions:

- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor Ruth Brown.

Councillor Ruth Brown advised that Trinity Life Church had recently bought The Old School House in Market Hill to develop as a community hub and would like to work with the Police on improving youth provision in Royston.

Sergeant Vine responded to questions as follows:

- There were significant delays in the court process as a result of the pandemic. In terms of what the courts were doing to catch up, Sergeant Vine advised that he could check with the Crown Prosecution Service and provide the Committee with further information;
- Youth clubs and youth facilities such as 'Viv and Andy's' had been very beneficial in the past for 13 to 17 year olds, and provided a way for the Police to engage with young people; the loss of these had led to an increase in anti-social behaviour;
- He would like to work with the community to see the re-establishment of a youth facility where the young people could go one night per week which would enable the Police to engage;
- He reminded everyone to get in contact about any problems in their area.

The Chair thanked Sergeant Vine for his presentation.

39 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - MR ROBERT INWOOD

Audio recording – 26 minutes 15 seconds

Mr Robert Inwood thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in relation to parking charges in Royston, including:

- Mr Inwood advised that he wished to address the Committee regarding the proposed increase in parking charges, not as the Mayor of Royston or as a Town Councillor but as a member of the Royston community;
- The Royston community had been supporting the 'Think Local, Shop Local' initiative wherever possible over the last 18 months, which had led to an increase in footfall and a more vibrant Market;
- Increasing car parking charges at this time would negatively impact the businesses in the town which had already been suffering due to the pandemic;
- Increased charges reported by the press could have a devastating impact on the High Street and also the Market;
- A two-year parking charge freeze would have been beneficial to businesses;
- Mr Inwood offered to work with NHDC Councillors and officers in developing plans which would make Royston even more vibrant;
- He offered to attend full Council to speak on this matter and hoped that Councillors would ask for a recorded vote so that the public could see who had voted for an increase in parking charges in Royston;
- Mr Inwood wished Bill and Lindsay Davidson the best of luck in the future and supported the Council in recognising them for their hard work in the Royston community.

The following Members commented:

- Councillor Tony Hunter

Councillor Hunter clarified that the parking charge increases had been set earlier on the year as part of the budget process and the increases had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting of 16 March 2021. The new tariffs represented a 2% increase for last year and a further 2% increase for this year in line with inflation.

The Chair thanked Mr Inwood for his presentation.

40 ROYSTON PARKING CHARGES

Audio recording – 32 minutes 26 seconds

Members considered the matter of increased car parking tariffs as set out in a report to Cabinet on 16 March 2021 entitled Proposed Increase in Car Parking Tariffs 2021-22.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor Jean Green;
- Councillor Carol Stanier.

Comments from Members included:

- An email detailing the proposed car parking tariff increases had been sent from the Strategic Infrastructure and Projects Manager on 3 March 2021. This had been received by the Chair but not all Committee Members had received it;
- The Chair had wanted the matter to be debated by the Committee so that its feedback could be provided, however a decision had already been made by Cabinet on 16 March 2021 to increase the charges;
- Not every car park across the district should have the same inflationary increase in a 'one size fits all' way, rather each car park should be looked at individually;
- The future was very uncertain with the pandemic and could result in less use of car parks due to commuters continuing to work from home, for example;
- An overarching review of car parks following the pandemic could usefully be conducted to look at how the system could be changed to better suit the needs of the future;
- There was a general feeling that car parking charges should not be put up this year due to the impact the pandemic was already having on businesses and the Town Centre;
- It would have been useful for the Committee to have had the Cabinet Paper circulated with the agenda for this meeting;
- It was surprising that NHDC had not received any comments from Royston First BID;
- Spaces should be set aside for residents in under-utilised areas at The Warren and residents parking season tickets should be provided at a reduced rate;
- There needed to be a balance between car parking charges, support for the Town Centre and the environment;
- The Sustainable Travel Town award required Royston not to have free parking in the Town Centre. People should be encouraged to park outside the Town Centre and stay for as long as possible within the town;
- Longer stay parking tariffs could be reduced and shorter stay tariffs increased to support the Town Centre;
- People also needed to be encouraged to use other means of transport such as cycling, which would require improvements to cycling infrastructure;
- Charging should be made simpler and more flexible, for example, paying on exit, by card, etc.;
- Research could be done on the impact of the Free After 3pm parking initiative on footfall in town, and what other measures might make a difference aside from free parking;

- Anecdotally the car parks had appeared fuller after 3pm due to the free parking;
- Parking was free in the supermarkets which encouraged people to shop there rather than the Town Centre;
- There had long been a problem in Royston with parking;
- Residents might not want to purchase a season ticket to park in The Warren as complaints had been received from people who were having to pay to park outside their houses;
- Alternatives to cars had to be found to make the Town Centre more environmentally friendly;
- The Council had a budget deficit of £2.2m and sacrifices had to be made to meet the budget;
- The car park run by the Health Centre needed to be looked at differently as people did not always know how long they would need to be at the doctors' surgery and charges should not be increased there;
- Consideration should be given to the elderly who lived further away from the Town Centre and would not be able to walk into town and back with shopping bags;
- The time allowed for consultation on this matter had been brief and unfortunately the Cabinet meeting had been scheduled to take place before the Committee had had a chance to debate the proposals and provide its feedback;
- Cheaper parking would bring more revenue into the Town Centre and therefore made commercial sense;
- It was noted that, as Cabinet had already approved the car parking tariff increases, all the Committee could do was to advise the Executive Member for Planning and Transport of the general view of the Committee and forward to him the suggestions made by Members, as discussed at the meeting.

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed, Councillor Jean Green seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee did not support an inflationary increase of car parking tariffs in Royston at this point in time.

REASON FOR DECISION: To support local residents and the vitality of Royston Town Centre, particularly in light of the Covid 19 pandemic.

41 GRANT APPLICATIONS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 1 hour 7 minutes 18 seconds

The Community Engagement Officer presented the report entitled Grants and Community Update together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 – 2020/21 Financial Year Budget Sheet.

He advised Members that:

- There remained £2465 in the budget and as this was the last meeting of the financial year, it was recommended that the Committee agree to carry forward £1,500 from the current budget to the 2021/22 financial year to continue to support the Free After 3pm Parking Initiative in Royston;
- The remaining underspend of £1,145 could be carried forward to the following year for Community and Environmental Projects;
- There were potential grant applications in the pipeline from Royston Town Youth Football Club, Coombes Community Association and the Royston Choral Society;
- The Community Engagement Officer advised that he had been doing community support volunteering, delivering hand sanitiser and social distancing signage to various groups and signposting businesses to the Covid support grants available to them;

Wednesday, 17th March, 2021

- Two of the Chair's Volunteer Achievement Awards 2021 winners had been from Royston: Friends of Therfield Heath and Royston v Coronavirus;
- Bicycle racks on Market Hill were due to be installed on 7 May 2021 with groundwork being done on 14 April;
- Icknield Walk bus shelter was due to be in place by the summer, subject to Covid and Brexit;
- The installation of the bus shelter on Melbourn Street by the Town Hall may not take place until the end of the year;
- A consultation was due to take place concerning the potential new bandstand in Priory Memorial Gardens;
- Trinity Life Church was submitting an application to develop a community hub, including facilities for young people, to the Community Facilities Capital and District Wide Grants Panel on 24th March 2021.

The following Members made comments and asked questions:

- Councillor Carol Stanier;
- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor Ruth Brown.

The Community Engagement Officer replied to questions as follows:

- The funds carried forward would be in the base budget for 2021/22 under the theme of Community and Environmental Projects;
- There was an issue with getting lighting to the narrow section of the pathway on the public Right of Way at Green Drift.
- County Councillor Steve Jarvis confirmed that it was proposed that there would be a light at the end of the path and the County Council was looking at adopting the road to progress this project;
- Funds had been allocated to refurbish the kitchen at the Town Hall to make it more suitable for people with disabilities and this was with the architects and would then go out to tender for the works;
- Signage was being looked at for the 5km and 10km 'Walk and Talk' routes but was proving difficult due to restrictions.

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed, Councillor Carol Stanier seconded and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee be recommended to endorse the actions taken by the Community Engagement Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Royston;
- (2) That the Committee agrees to the carry forward of £1,500 from the current budget to the 2021/22 financial year to continue to support the Free After 3pm Parking Initiative in Royston;
- (3) That the Committee agrees that any unspent funds from the 2020/21 financial year be allocated to Community & Environmental Projects for 2021/22.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.

42 HIGHWAYS ISSUES

Audio recording – 1 hour 21 minutes 50 seconds

The Chair led a discussion regarding Highways Issues.

County Councillor Fiona Hill gave the Committee a verbal update on highways issues including:

- There had been a lot of drainage works carried out, particularly in the villages;
- Drainage works in Picknag Road and London Road in Barley were almost complete;
- Works near Hobbs Hayes in Reed were complete and further works were planned for early next financial year elsewhere in Reed;
- Works were scheduled for the next financial year at Mill Road and Melbourn Road on the corner, at Stamford Avenue, Old North Road and Green Street/ Morton Street;
- Long overdue resurfacing works were taking place in Old North Road and Kneesworth Street near the station by the Queens Road Junction;
- Pram crossings were scheduled for York Way and Orchard Road next financial year;
- The speed indicator device was now in Reed on the A10 and the device in Newmarket Road had been turned;
- Speed and volume surveys were currently taking place in Newmarket Road and Melbourn Road;
- Police would be carrying out speed checks as resources allowed as a number had been requested in Royston and the villages;
- The feasibility study in Burns Road had been completed and recommendations were awaited;
- Funding was being sought for the safer crossing over the A505 and it had been agreed by the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership in the Melbourn Greenway. Crossings in other areas were being looked at to make this safer for cyclists and pedestrians;
- £7m had been allocated in the County Council budget for the next three years for 20mph zones and £10m had been allocated for drainage and sustainability schemes.

County Councillor Steve Jarvis gave the Committee a verbal update on highways issues including:

- Resurfacing works to the path outside what had been Morrisons had been completed following repeated delays;
- Re-consultation on Layston Park had taken place - some residents had wanted more yellow lines, some had wanted fewer. Revised proposals had now been put forward;
- Work was being arranged to deal with congestion caused by parking on the heath on the Therfield Road;
- Work was planned on the Litlington junction of the A505 to prevent traffic turning right out of the junction. Preliminary investigations would take place soon with the majority of the work planned for September;
- Resurfacing on footways in Green Drift was due to be completed.

The Chair thanked County Councillors Hill and Jarvis for their updates.

43 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 1 hour 27 minutes 45 seconds

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

Citizens Advice North Herts

Councillor Ruth Brown advised that:

- They were experiencing increased demand for their services and expected this to continue to increase;
- They were only doing face-to-face work in Letchworth at the moment and were operating a mixed model of delivery;
- There was no news on when face-to-face services would re-open in Royston or Hitchin at the present time, but this was under consideration;
- NHDC had agreed an additional £50,000 funding for this year because of the demand they were experiencing for their services.

Royston First BID

Councillor Ruth Brown advised that:

- The 'Shop Safe, Shop Local' campaign jointly run by North Herts and East Herts continued to receive funding from the EU with hand sanitiser being provided;
- An Easter Bunny trail would be organised to encourage footfall into the Town;
- The Christmas lights which had been organised with the Town Council had been a great success with no negative comments;
- BID levies had been received from many businesses and the remainder had been topped up by a grant from NHDC so funding was secure;
- The AGM was on Wednesday 28th April at 5.30pm on Zoom and they were looking for more members for their Advisory Council and one member to represent local businesses for their Board.

Town Twinning

Councillor Ruth Brown advised that:

- A bilingual quiz had been held with French twin town La Loupe on 6 March on Zoom which had gone really well.

Melbourn Area Youth Development

Councillor Carol Stanier advised that:

- Councillor Stanier had recently become the representative for this organisation;
- They had not been able to run scheduled workshops due to lockdown;
- They were hoping to hold the workshops at Easter but were aware that if these did not take place they would need to return their grant to NHDC;
- They had sufficient funds secured to run two years' worth of clubs;
- They were very concerned about the impact of lockdown on young people not having social interactions and had been sending packs out to homes and refurbishing laptops to ensure young people could take part in digital activities;
- The youth work contractor Groundwork had had some staff changes and were struggling to recruit staff so different options were being considered such as holiday-only clubs;

Wednesday, 17th March, 2021

- They were looking for a bigger venue which could be in Royston if there was anywhere suitable;
- There was a further meeting the following week.

Coombes Community Centre

Councillor Carol Stanier advised that:

- The Centre had a new trustee with all the necessary skills and were always looking for other people;
- Bookings were coming in from interested groups so finances were adequate;
- A new nursery was starting in what had been the Rainbow playgroup meeting room;
- There was an ongoing problem with the drains which would be looked at by NHDC.

North Herts CVS

Councillor Tony Hunter advised that:

- North Herts CVS had some new trustees;
- They ended the year with a grant from Lloyds Bank Foundation which was close to £30,000;
- They have been working really hard during the pandemic across the district and the Chair passed on his thanks to all staff.

The meeting closed at 9.07 pm

Chair