

FRIENDS OF HIGH TOWN
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, AUGUST 11TH 2015

1. Attendees: David Landau, Chairman
 Maureen Allen, Secretary
 Alex Bain-Stewart, JP
 Lyn Bliss
 Russell Cartwright
 Kath Gerrard
 Kim Greig
 Aysegul Gurbuz, Local Councillor (High Town)
 Helen Jones
 Luke Middleton
 Lisa Wright

2. Apologies: Simon Barrow, Annie Bygrave, Peter Brooks, Wendi Childs, Martin Godden, Chris Grabham, Jan Horner, Philip Horner, Ryad Kohodabocus, Andrew Malcolm, Fiona Morton, Saida Moujahid, Joan Samuel, Csaba Sipeki, Dan Warwick

3. Minutes of the last meeting

David Landau said that if anyone wished to make any changes or amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting these should be sent to the secretary within the next couple of days.

4. Matters Arising

a) High Town Road Conservation Area

Russell Cartwright confirmed that he had written to and contacted the council on the properties which were currently contravening the rules concerning conservation. He was unsure if Gemma Davies' responsibilities had been taken over by another officer. At that time he had no further information.

b) Hightown Community Sports and Arts Centre

Lyn Bliss said that she was keen to get involvement on the Committee for the Centre and to see any Annual Reports. She had written with documentation affirming that local involvement had been intended when the Centre came into being. She was still awaiting a reply to her letter.

c) Luton Tackling the On-the-Street Sex Trade Meetings

DL said that this had been raised by Raj Desai at the previous meeting. The next public meeting to discuss this subject would be sometime in September. At present DL did not have a date, but he would be circulating the details of the meeting to all members of FoHT as soon as he had them.

Councillor Aysegul Gurbuz gave an update on discussions on action to tackle prostitution in the area. She said that fines had not been issued to the prostitutes as they needed to work in

order to pay any fine. The police were now changing their approach and were looking to make arrests and to monitor the outcome of this change of tactic. There had been a lot of success in helping women to exit the trade, but this had resulted in different women replacing them on the streets.

d) Newsletter

DL said that when LB had managed to secure funding for the newsletter it had been intended to have one in the summer to promote the High Town Festival, and another newsletter in the winter to coincide with the winter festival. It now seemed that there wouldn't be a High Town Festival this winter. It, therefore, would be good to get the second newsletter delivered in time for the Dance Festival which is taking place in October. Luke Middleton was thinking of getting the newsletter printed and ready for delivery in mid-September. DL said that although LB managed to deliver the newsletter with volunteers last time he thought it would be good to use the services of a leaflet delivery company. Kim Greig suggested approaching the local newspaper, The Herald and Post, to see if they could combine delivery with the local paper. DL said that Heather James from Luton Council had employed a leaflet delivery company which were good. He said he would contact HJ for further information. LM said he was hoping to bring a draft of the newsletter to the next FoHT meeting.

5. Grant Applications

a) High Town Bag

DL said that his partner, Konni Deppe, had applied to the Near Neighbour scheme for a grant for reusable bags for local businesses in the area. The award of a grant meant that any funding had to be paid via a local recognised community organisation or group. The organisation which had agreed to accept the funding on KD's behalf had decided to reorganise its bank accounts and this meant that KD had no way of accessing the funding she had been granted. As this needed to be done urgently, KD had asked DL if this funding could be accessed via the FoHT account. DL had not had time to ask for agreement to this at the next FoHT meeting, but had, instead, consulted the FoHT committee to see if there were any objections. Fiona Morton, Luke Middleton and Maureen Allen had all been in agreement as this action would have no impact on the funds of FoHT, and it was just a question of the grant being paid into the FoHT account and then being withdrawn by the Treasurer, FM, and given to KD. Alex Bain-Stewart expressed the view that there should be a second FoHT account for matters of this nature. LB said it might be worth suggesting this to FM. KG said that she felt that having a second account might make more work for FM if a spread sheet had to be created for the FoHT accounts. ABS said that the accounts should be examined each year.

b) Big Draw

Helen Jones, Luton Open Arts, had attended the meeting in relation to a project she and FM were working on. The project was based around illustration and High Town Haiku. A previous project had involved making a quilt, which had been on display at High Hats in High Town and at local museums. The proposed collaboration between Open Arts and Noah was to do specific illustrations of High Town. There would be workshops and people would be invited to write poetry in response to the illustrations. The results of the workshops would be put together to produce a "fanzine" which would be sold in the local area. Some of the benefits would be improved perception of the area, and the development of micro business skills for those involved. Various groups would be involved, such as those with mental health problems. Comic Relief had been approached for funding. HJ said that the group had 60 voluntary match funding hours and the Comic Relief grant would be for £224. ABS asked

how the group would match any funding from Comic Relief, which was a requirement of the grant. HJ explained that the matching of funding was not in monetary terms, but was costed according to the voluntary hours put into the project. HJ asked if the FoHT account would act as the host account for any funding from Comic Relief. It was decided that if FM had no objection to this, then FoHT would agree to act as the host account for funding for the project. This was proposed by ABS and seconded by LM.

LB said that she thought the Treasurer, FM, should present a proper balance sheet for the FoHT bank account at each AGM. A detailed spread sheet should be produced. DL said that, obviously, there needed to be transparency in FoHT financial matters. HJ said that when she made an application to Comic Relief, FoHT would receive copies of all the paperwork involved in that application.

6. Burglary Reduction Scheme

DL said that the next meeting of the Burglary Reduction Scheme sub-committee would be held at High Town Methodist Church Hall, on Tuesday, August 25th, from 6.00 pm-7.00 pm. Natalie Feerick was interested in pursuing setting up a High Town watch scheme. She would like to have a joint meeting of various interested groups such as FoHT, the PCSOs and Luton Borough Council to get together and speak to people on this. She wanted to give this one last push. LB said it might be possible to have a stand with information on this at the Dance Festival. KG said it would be a good idea to mention this scheme in the forthcoming newsletter. Lisa Wright said that there had been three or four people interested in the scheme, but more information was needed. LB was anxious that any information on the scheme should not be in the form of a presentation, as this would detract from the Dance Festival. It was felt that more input was needed from the Asian and East European sections of the local community. DL said that he would contact NF and suggest to her that she might have a stand/stall at the Dance Festival.

7. Luton Railway Station

DL said he had sent a letter to the Director of Govia Thameslink, Stuart Cheshire, with a copy to Gavin Shuker, concerning the broken lift. He had explained that the station was the main route to the town for most people living in High Town. DL had asked that a second lift be installed at the station going to platform 5. He had also requested signage to let people know if the lift was not working. LB said that she had also written to Gavin Shuker and had put in a complaint to Network Rail. She had received notification that she would receive a reply in 20 days, but had, so far, not had a response. LB had also written to Luton Council asking why the lift had been given to Network Rail. She had received a response from the council to say that the person who would be able to help with her enquiry was currently on holiday and she would receive a reply on that person's return.

8. Bell's Close Trees

DL reported that 3 horse chestnut trees had to be felled in Bell's Close Park because they had canker. LB said that some trees had also been felled in Pope's Meadow. DL said that it was likely that more trees would have to be felled as the disease spread. He said that the Council had no budget to replace the trees because of austerity measures. The Woodland Trust did provide trees, but these were not the large varieties. The horse chestnut trees could not be replaced by replanting them as the disease affects young trees and they would again be affected by the canker. DL felt it would be good for Simon Barrow to investigate this matter further and look into the possibility of getting some large trees. LB said that as not only the High Town area had been affected, trees had also had to be felled in Wardown and

Stockwood Parks, it would be good if SB could see if it were possible to get replacement trees. Maureen Allen said that the large toilet roll companies used as their PR the fact that they were replacing trees in large numbers. Could one of them be approached? DL thought a large DIY store could be approached on this. RC wondered if it would be possible to get schools involved in the project.

SB had let DL know that he was still trying to contact Trevor Tween. DL had heard that TT would be in People's Park on August 12th, and he had let SB know so that, if possible, SB could talk to TT about voluntary work in the park.

9. Bandstand

DL asked if anyone at the meeting had been able to attend the event to discuss the new bandstand for People's Park. LB said that she had been there, and that FoE had also been there.

She had spoken to the architect and the Rotary Club. She had not understood the points they were making and still questioned that Wardown Park was the place to put the new bandstand/stage, which she felt was out of place in a Victorian Park. Lots of people had voiced their objections to the new design. David Gauntlett, of Luton Council Planning Department, had said that the deadline for objections to the proposed new bandstand had passed, but that the council would still welcome comments. Anyone wishing to state their views could send them to his Luton Council email address.

10. Travellers Update

DL said that he had not had a response to his email to Luton Council concerning suggestions on how the Council should be looking at the recent problems with travellers. He had contacted Jayne Maddox from Parks and Stuart Jackson with the FoHT's thoughts on this matter. SJ had indicated that the situation had become worse since the abolition of the post of Travellers Liaison Officer, and there had been concerns because there was no official travellers' site in Luton. The site at Stopsley was privately run and this created more problems than if the council had its own site. Barry Timms from Parks was looking at what the Council could do in terms of providing a council run site. The current situation seemed to be costing the Council more money, rather than effecting a saving.

11. AOB

Joan Samuel had not wanted to raise this point at the last FoHT meeting, which had been a long one, but she wanted to ask if a letter of support could be sent by the FoHT to Mr Tatham who owned the jewellers shop in High Town Road. He had been burgled for a second time, and on this occasion had had jewellery stolen which was valued at £12,000. The meeting agreed DL should send a letter of sympathy and support.

Morrisons

MA said that various people in High Town had heard that the proposed Morrisons store in High Town would not be going ahead. DL said that he had spoken to the PR department for the store and had been told that the design and fitting out of their local stores was being reconsidered. That was the only information that he had been able to gain.

The Freeholder

MA also asked if any more information had been gained on the future use of The Freeholder. DL said that no plans had yet been submitted for the future use of the building.

12. Notices and Information Exchange

Wardown Park and People's Park were to be given a new Green Flag. It was hoped the award would give a bit of publicity to FoHT via the involvement of some its members in supporting the future and upkeep of the Parks.

Fly Tipping

The problem of fly tipping was being looked at by the council. Rachel Hopkins would be one of the councillors involved.

Mussons Path

LB reported that Mussons Path had almost been cleared. A fence had now been put on part of the area, which should stop a lot of waste being dumped there.

LB hoped a tidy up of the area could be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

13. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 8th at 7.00 p.m.