

FRIENDS OF HIGH TOWN
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8TH 2015

1. Attendees: David Landau, Chairman
Maureen Allen, Secretary
Chris Grabham
Kim Grieg
Jan Horner
Luke Middleton
Fiona Morton
Simon Tweed
Lisa Wright

2. Apologies: Simon Barrow, Lyn Bliss, Peter Brooks, Annie Bygrave, Russell Cartright, Wendi Childs, Kath Gerrard, Martin Godden, Aysegul Gurbuz, Philip Horner, Ryad Kohodabocus, Andrew Malcolm, Saida Moujahid, Joan Samuel, Csaba Sipeki, Dan Warwick

3) Minutes of the last meeting

David Landau asked that any corrections were sent to Maureen Allen.

4) Matters Arising

a) Hightown Community Sports and Arts Centre

DL gave an update on behalf of Lyn Bliss, who had said that she had been chasing the Centre for an update following the meeting with their representatives in September. So far LB had not received any response.

b) Newsletter

DL said that he had received a positive response to his approach to JNB Publishing to ask if they would sponsor the next FoHT Newsletter. DL was due to have a brief meeting with JNB to discuss what was required for the Newsletter.

c) Railway Tavern

The owner of the Railway Tavern, Mr Shah, had still not responded to the letter written by DL on behalf of FoHT. The planning application to build a one-bedroom flat on the area adjacent to the Railway Tavern had been turned down by the council. DL had also learned that Mr Shah had been ill. Andrew Malcolm was intending to approach council officers to request that they use their full powers, if necessary, so that the site could be tidied up. This would mean that a charge would be put on the property if this were to happen. DL said that as the Railway Tavern was one of the oldest buildings in Luton it was important to preserve the current structure. He added that even the boarding of the windows would stop any further damage. Luke Middleton said that he had noticed that the windows of the building had recently been boarded.

d) Luton Railway Station Lift – letter to Network Rail

A letter had been written by DL to the Chief Executive of Network Rail because of the lack of response to previous letters. A letter had now been received from Mark Tarry, Regional Managing Director. It had been of the usual kind. Responsibility for the lift had been transferred from Luton Council to Network Rail in 2013. The recent lift breakdown had been due to overheating. It was confirmed that should the lift break down again signage would be provided in the short term when necessary. The refurbishment of Luton station would be completed by 2018, and there would be three additional lifts at the station providing access to each platform.

e) High Town Conservation area meeting

DL was still waiting for a proper response from Luton Council's Conservation Officer following the meeting with Historic England.

f) High Town Conservation area – planning applications

i) 54 Duke Street

DL had sent an objection to the plans to the council's Planning Department, but had not received a response.

ii) 45 York Street

Maureen Allen said that, although she was aware that she was outside of the time limit for objections to the proposed change of use for the building, she had still written to the council's Planning Department putting her objections. She had not received a response.

g) Christmas Tree Festival

Joan Samuel had said at the previous meeting that she would be happy to provide decorations for the FoHT tree. Fiona Morton said that she would be contacting her to ask about collecting these. FM and Kim Grieg would be decorating the tree on the following Saturday. Jan Horner was given a cheque in payment for the tree.

5. Luton Tackling the On-the-Street-Sex Trade Meeting – feedback and next meeting

DL not been able to attend the meeting which had been attended by Lyn Bliss, Kim Grieg, Phil Horner and Lisa Wright from FoHT. Lisa Wright said the meeting had been very heated. A new Chief Inspector had been appointed to look at this area of policing and he had attended the meeting. He said he would be looking into how to deal with the current situation and would answer any criticisms at future meetings, once he had properly started in his new role. This had the effect of comments being made that there had been previous police officers in this role who had just moved on, and was no one accountable. The sex trade was very overt in the Paths Estate area and residents complained of leaving their houses in the morning and finding used condoms near to their homes. The clean-up of the area each morning to prevent this had been stopped. The council officers, police and councillors who had attended the meeting had been unaware of this and said that the clean-up of the area each morning would be reinstated. LW added that the figures given by the police for arrests in relation to the sex trade were not fantastic. She said that the kerb crawlers needed to be dealt with more strongly. The police had said that anyone arrested for kerb crawling would be told that they would now have a criminal record. There had been a particularly nasty verbal attack on Andrew Malcolm because of his association with Azalea, an organisation which aims to help prostitutes and give them an alternative to their current life style. LW said that the general frustration at this continuing situation was extremely evident. DL asked if the meetings were

minuted. LW said that she had never received anything after attending past meetings. DL said a record of the meeting should be provided, or at the very least the latest statistics. LW said that the next meeting would not be taking place until April 2016.

6. High Town Team Meeting

There had been a discussion at the meeting about the Arts Council money that is available for the town centre and High Town. This discussion had been needed because various people were involved. The money had been made available because Luton does not do well in comparison to other areas. KG said that there were five phases. The money was intended to help develop skills and to maintain an art base in Luton. Art installations were also part of the scheme. FM said that groups applying for funding did not have to be local, but any events would have to be based in Luton. Hannah Lofthouse, who represented a group in Colchester, had been in touch in relation to the funding. LW mentioned work being done by the Royal Opera House in the Houghton Regis area. Participants had been able to get involved in building theatre sets and it had provided an excellent opportunity for them. This was something worth looking into.

There was a new website for High Hats. FM said work had been done to develop the site to make it a shop window which would show people what was on offer. It would be possible to place orders online and collect them from the shop, or to post orders. The web address was Lutonhats.com. It had been hoped to have the website up and running by Christmas, but there had been various hitches.

DL said there was also a new website to encourage people to move their business to High Town. This had been designed by Ben Hodgson of ATP Media. The website address was HighTownRoad.com. High Town was described as a place of “opportunity, quality and creativity”. The close proximity to London was clearly shown, along with the excellent transport links. The very low rates for new businesses was also highlighted. A footfall of at least 5,000 people each day between High Town and Luton Town Centre was also given as an incentive. The site shows how many new homes have been built in the area, and the expected increase in the number of local jobs. LM was drawing attention to the site on Twitter. Simon Tweed said he thought there should be a large screen in the Arndale drawing attention to the site. MA said that a large screen for advertisements was situated near to the escalators, just behind Muffin Break. ST said that there should also be a stand in the shopping centre drawing attention to the website and what High Town could offer. KG said that stalls were available to voluntary groups for free.

7. High Town Festival Meeting

DL said there had been two meetings to discuss the Festival for 2016. The date for the Festival would be Saturday, July 2nd, and it would feature some really good music events.

Tina Edwards from St Matthew’s School was hoping to get 100 children involved in the opening procession to start the event off with a really festive feeling.

The Turkish Weekend School were intending to come and do some traditional dancing.

It was intended that events around Welbeck Square would work better.

The local BBC were being approached to give publicity to the event and get more local people involved.

The road closures would be more extensive than for 2015 and would include York Street, which would be linked into the activities taking place in High Town.

Stalls for crafts, etc. would be available to hire for the day at a cost of £5.00.

Jack Mcleod, who had provided stalls selling food and the animal petting section at this year's Festival, would be asked to be involved.

Jan Horner said that the facilities usually offered by the church may be curtailed as building work will be underway at the church at that time.

It was also intended to get local businesses in High Town involved.

There had been a sub-committee meeting on communications. The meeting had discussed possible sponsors. DL read out a list of businesses which might be approached.

8. Hartley Road Residents' Meeting

DL said a new church had moved into the road and they were keen for their members to get involved in the local community. They had already had clean-up days in the area. The church had also applied for planning permission for work to their church. DL had spoken to Zana J Ellis about plans for the future. There were issues about responsible parking and concerns about security near to Crescent Road. The church would be interested in getting involved with the Festival. If anyone from FoHT wanted to go along to the church they would be welcome.

9. AOB

Marjorie's

DL said it was hoped that Marjorie's café would reopen during the day in a couple of weeks' time. Marjorie's had recently been open in the evenings for people to do their gaming.

Scandinavian Café

It was noted that the café currently had signs in the windows saying it was available to let.

Déjà vu

DL said that some building work appeared to be in progress on the currently unused building.

Chris Grabham said he had been looking further into the request to find out the opening date of People's Park. CG said several dates had been discovered relating to different aspects of the origins of the park, and the park had been transferred to the council in 1894. CG thought the park might have been available to local people in the spring/summer of 1868.

Simon Barrow had asked about new work to give people their own green space, or links, in High Town. DL said that this was happening on the corner of North Street and Havelock Road. LW said she would see if she could get the plans on the work on the estate.

10. Notices and Information Exchange

FM said that an A5 booklet, produced in connection with Open Arts, would be available for sale in High Hats in the following week. This would contain illustrations of High Town taken from photographs, and also Haiku poems about the area.

11. Date of next FoHT Meeting

The next meeting would be held at the usual venue of the High Town Methodist Church Hall, at 7.00 p.m., on Tuesday, January 12th.