

FRIENDS OF HIGH TOWN
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 14TH JUNE 2016

1. Attendees: David Landau, Chairman
Maureen Allen, Secretary
Fiona Morton, Treasurer
Luke Middleton, Media and Marketing Officer
Philippa Collier
Chris Grabham
Gina Graham
Martin Graham
Kim Grieg
Clare McAnulty
Ezley Whyte
Jeremy Williams
2. Apologies: Lyn Bliss, Jan Horner, Ryad Khodabocus, Andrew Malcolm, Saida el Moujahid, Csaba Sipeki

3. Minutes of the last meeting

4. Street Champions – Talk + Question and Answer

Martin and Gina Graham attended the meeting to tell the members of FoHT of their work in Birmingham for Street Association. The talk had been organised by Kim Greig, who had seen the results of their work.

MG explained that he and GG had started work with Street Association five years ago. The aim of the Association was to bring residents of streets together by organising events such as BBQs, seniors' tea parties, Easter egg hunts, quiz nights, etc. The first event they had organised had been a children's Christmas party. The charity had received funding from two local authorities, one in Birmingham and one in Staffordshire. In order to start an Association a core group of residents was recruited to help with the organisation of events. The areas MG and GG worked in were those with problems of anti-social behaviour. The first course of action was to knock at every door in a street to ask questions such as how many neighbours did people know by name, and what people thought of the area in which they lived. As a result of the formation of the Associations residents had seen a decrease in anti-social behaviour, with more community spirit and the street feeling friendlier. This had been achieved within a relatively short space of time. MG showed some window stickers given to those who participate in the Street Association scheme.

KG said that Near Neighbours funding might be available if anyone wanted to start a Street Association in High Town. She said MG was able to make it clear what the idea of a Street

Association was. Anyone interested might perhaps work with Luke Middleton who, besides his involvement in FoHT, was also a community worker based at Hope Church.

Philippa Collier asked whether the first step in starting an Association was just to knock on doors. MG said it was. Maureen Allen asked if people actually opened their doors and were responsive. MG said that he had always found that people were receptive. Chris Grabham asked if an Association was confined to one street. MG confirmed it was and said that Associations usually worked in an area of 100-150 houses. PC expressed her concern that if an area had drug addicts, etc. their attendance at any events might deter others in the street from attending. MG said that, usually, the people with those sorts of problems did not attend the events. Fiona Morton asked if the Associations survived when the core groups were left to manage things on their own. MG replied that out of the four Associations which had been formed three were still going and it was hoped to restart the fourth one soon. David Landau asked if Street Association had a Christian background. MG replied that, although he and GG were Christians, the Associations had no religious base, they were multi-ethnic. Although some funding was needed to start the Associations, and for any major expenses, most of the resources came from the street itself. Initially a venue was needed for meetings to discuss the setting up of an Association. KG said that Hope Church and the Methodist Church Hall would be ideal if any Associations were to be set-up in the High Town area, and she would contact Hope Church and Philip Horner from the Methodist Church. She had a couple of areas in mind which would benefit from a Street Association. PC said she would be interested in exploring starting an Association in the area where she lived and gave her email address to MG so that they could be in touch. DL said that the initial focus would be on High Town, but it was hoped that other areas in Luton could become involved.

5. Luton Town Football Club development roadshow

DL said that he had gone to the roadshow in Bute Street to see the plans for the proposed new football stadium. A number of those attending were supporters of the club. He said there had been a lot of detail shown on the display boards and in the plans, and the roadshow was a pre-application roadshow. The Club's Chairman, Vice-Chairman and the Manager of the project had all been present. DL had been interested to see what impact the plans might have on High Town. Ezley Whyte said the plans had presented a good picture and would help to develop the town centre. The Club had been looking at two possible sites, one at junction 10A on the M1, and the other at Power Court. Luton FC had bought the land at junction 10A and were planning to develop that. The Power Court development would mean the Club would have to negotiate with British Land, who own Power Court, and Luton Council who also own a small part of the land. The plans were for a stadium with a seating capacity of 17,500, along with shops, restaurants, bars, a hotel, residential apartments and a supermarket. It was also planned to make a feature of the River Lea which runs under the site. Jeremy Williams had looked at the plans online and felt that there was nothing in them that would compete with what was currently in High Town Road. He felt the plans could have a positive effect on the town. JW thought that the railway station would need a lot of work prior to the proposed opening of the new football stadium in 2020. PC was concerned about the impact on those who lived near the town centre on match days. MA said that she had been caught up in violence from visiting fans in the past when she had been a few streets away from the current ground at Kenilworth Road, and she was very concerned that this would affect the residents of High Town because of its closeness to the railway station and Power Court. Concerns were also raised about whether football fans would use the streets in High Town to park their cars. DL said he would speak to Dave Wilkinson from Luton Town FC, to see if he could come along to a FoHT meeting to discuss the plans and any concerns about them.

6. Charles Street housing development pre-application consultation

The development application was from the Hightown Housing Association, which is based in Hemel Hempstead. The land for the project was currently occupied by a pharmaceutical company and a storage unit for Monarch Airlines. The consultation, which had been held at the Hightown Sports and Arts Centre, was aimed at those who lived in close proximity to the proposed site. DL said that he thought the development, which was a combination of houses with a small number of flats, looked like a fairly reasonable one. The original plans had been for 40 properties, but this had been increased to 49. The houses would be built of Luton grey bricks. The rents for the properties would be based on a percentage of the local market rate on completion of the development. There were also options for part-ownership.

7. Luca Restaurant and Café – alcohol license application

Ryad Khodabocus had raised concerns about the application for an alcohol license by the Luca Restaurant, which had been the former Scandinavian Café. RK's concern had been about the long hours covered by the license: Monday-Thursday – 10.00 a.m. until 11.00 p.m., and Friday-Saturday 11.00 a.m. until 1.00 a.m. As other restaurants in High Town had already been given permission to have a license covering those hours, DL felt that there would be no point in objecting to the license on that basis. If the restaurant played loud music late into the evening, or those using the restaurant caused a lot of noise, residents close to the restaurant could object on that basis.

8. Matters arising

a) Allotment

KG said there had been a development regarding the land surrounding St Matthew's church. It was uncertain if this could now be used as an allotment, but KG had not received anything in writing on this from the vicar. Another possibility for the allotment was the land surrounding the nursing home in Wenlock Street. If this were agreed it might enable the residents of the nursing home to get involved.

High Town herb bed

DL said the council would be happy to allow Burr Street car park to be turned into a herb bed, which the council would be involved in planning and maintaining. PC wondered if this could be tied in with the creation of a Street Association. She said not everyone had a garden and it would be good for those who wanted some green space to get involved.

DL to talk to Simon Barrow on this and to consider plans if a Street Association were to be created.

b) Hightown Community Sports and Arts Centre – networking day

DL had gone along on behalf of FoHT, and LM had represented Hope Church. KG had also attended for Near Neighbours. The event, which had been organised in aid of Food Bank, had provided a good opportunity for local groups to talk to each other. The High Town reusable bag, which had been the idea of Konni Deppe, might possibly be used by Food Bank.

c) Newsletter

Copies of the Newsletter had now been delivered to most of the homes in High Town and the surrounding area. FM asked about extra copies in order to complete her delivery to properties in High Town Road. DL said that Lyn Bliss still had some copies.

d) Nuisance motorbikes

DL said that these were still a problem and advised all members of FoHT to report them. He said the new Police Commissioner, Kathryn Holloway, had said that she was making this issue one of her priorities. EW said that he had tried to report some nuisance motorbikes to the police, but he had not received a very good response from the call handler as he was unable to give a full description of the riders as they were travelling at speed.

e) Conservation issues

DL said that the council had given permission for the planning application to build a block of flats in Brunswick Street, on what had been the site of the Green Man. The development comprised of twelve one-bedroom flats, and two two-bedroom flats.

DL had been contacted by the council as the FoHT had put in an application, by a former member, for a Community Right to Bid. DL said that Right was still in place, and the council wanted to know if FoHT still wanted to maintain its Community Right to Bid. This Right gives community groups the right to prepare and bid to buy community buildings and facilities that are important to them,

DL was to check the legal situation on this.

A retrospective planning application had been submitted to the council for an HMO above Brown and Lewis, the curtain shop at 59 High Town Road. The application was to convert the storage rooms back into occupational use.

9. Any Other Business

EW raised the issue of the ice cream van which, during the summer, parked in Havelock Road, near to the children's play area in Pope's Meadow. He said that the van obstructed the road and he wondered if the van could be made to park in a parking area.

DL to ask who might be able to advise on this.

Another issue raised was that the grass in Pope's Meadow was not being cut properly. DL wondered if this was on purpose. JW said that he had seen this in lots of areas and the areas involved looked like they had gone to seed.

Clare McAnulty asked about getting community radio involved in a small business Expo she was organising on June 30th at Venue 360. She had tried to contact Diverse Radio, but had had no luck in doing so. She said a lot of people ran small businesses and the Expo was designed to help them. It was recommended she contact Inspire Radio and Three Counties Radio.

PC asked if anything was being done about a clean-up of the local area. DL said that LM had been working on this and it was hoped to join in the initiative of the town centre group Luton BID.

FM said that Flamingo Arts in High Town Road had various workshops and anyone interested should contact them. They also intended getting involved in the forthcoming High Town Festival and would have a Festival workshop on the day.

13. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting, will be held on Tuesday, July 12th, at 7.00 p.m. at High Town Methodist Church.