

FRIENDS OF HIGH TOWN
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, APRIL 12TH 2016

1. Attendees: David Landau, FoHT Chairman
 Maureen Allen, FoHT Secretary
 Luke Middleton, FoHT Media & Marketing Officer
 Lyn Bliss
 Russell Cartwright
 Kim Greig
 Jan Horner
 Ryad Khodabocus
 Andrew Malcolm, Local Councillor
 Thakor Moraji, Luton Foodbank
 Saida el Moujahid
 Csaba Sipeki

2. Apologies: Chris Grabham, Fiona Morton (FoHT Treasurer)

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Lyn Bliss pointed out that the Anti-Burglary Reduction Group meeting was to be on April 28th, and not on April 25th as shown in the minutes.

4. Aysegul Gurbuz

Andy Malcolm said that following reports in the media about comments made, in the past, on Twitter by Aysegul Gurbuz, and because of the nature of the comments, AG had resigned as a local councillor. AM read a statement from AG regarding the “ill-judged” and “offensive” remarks which had appeared on her Twitter account, which she said others had had access to. She apologised for the remarks and said she had resigned as an elected representative from Luton Borough Council. David Landau said that he had communicated with AG in the relation to the comments. AG had also offered her resignation from FoHT, which DL accepted. AM said that there would be a local election to elect a new councillor for High Town. He did not, at that time, know when the election might be held.

5. High Town Masterplan

AM said that he was trying to get the Council to implement the High Town Masterplan, and recent press reports had been slightly misleading. There would be further consultation on the plan with those responsible for services such as highways, and housing, etc., but consultation would also be open to the public. This would be launched on the following Friday, alongside the investment framework. It had been agreed that there would be a delivery group, and AM said he was part of that group. There had been delays as the person with responsibility for the plan had been ill. The finalised plans were those which had been previously presented and these had not changed, it was just a consultation on those plans. AM thought the next Delivery Group meeting on the Masterplan would be in the next couple of weeks or so. In

regard to investment in the plan, AM said he thought there would be private investment in some of the sites. The council was working towards being in a position to build houses. A housing association was already building houses at the bottom of Hitchin Road.

6. Luton Foodbank

Thakor Moraji gave a presentation on the work of Luton Foodbank, and how it was gaining in importance to the community because of the implementation of government changes to benefits. The changes meant that those receiving help would suffer a decrease in their benefits. He also said that the unemployment rate in Luton was above the national average. Luton Foodbank, which had been established in 2013, was now based in High Town, having previously been in the former LBC depot at Kingsway. The aim was to ensure that no one would go hungry. Distribution centres had been established in several wards where there was evidence of deprivation. These included High Town, Farley Hill, Park Town, and Marsh Farm. Amongst the organisations which helped Foodbank were churches, temples and mosques. Most of those who worked for Foodbank were volunteers. A strict check was kept on how much food was available to those in need, and there were four categories for help, dependent on how many children were in the family. Those with more than three children received additional items. Food given to families was meant to last for three days, but, with careful planning, the food could last for five days. Those in need were referred to Luton Foodbank by the Citizens Advice Bureau, Luton Borough Council, and crisis centres. Families and individuals are given vouchers to take to the Foodbank, and only five vouchers per year are available to those seeking help. 60% to 70% of those using the Foodbank only ever used the service once. Those needing to use the service more often were assessed to see if any help could be given with the situation necessitating this use. Dietary considerations were taken into account and food was provided for those who were vegetarian, or vouchers (of a specific monetary value) were given to those who needed halal meat. Regular collections of food donated by the public were held at supermarkets such as Tesco, Sainsbury and ASDA. Those aged between 36-55 accounted for 40% of those needing help from the Foodbank, with 30% in the age range 26-35. 22% of these are single people and 42% families. During Ramadan it was expected that extra funding for Foodbank would be raised. TM gave leaflets out to the meeting showing what type of food was needed for Foodbank, and information on volunteering to help. He said Foodbank hoped to have a stall at the High Town Festival which was taking place at the beginning of July. DL said information could also be obtained by looking at the Foodbank website. Training would be given to anyone who wished to volunteer.

7. Matters Arising

a) Luton Railway Station

Maureen Allen asked AM about future plans for the railway station, especially in regard to the Masterplan for High Town. She had read in the press that the local MPs, Kelvin Hopkins and Gavin Shuker, had put a case to the government for funding for expansion of the front of the station and for the station's very much needed update and repair. This had been turned down. AM confirmed that this was the case and that the funding had, instead, been awarded to St Albans station, which everyone agreed was in a far better state of repair than Luton. It was planned to do a general tidy up of Luton station and to replace the broken windows, but the update would now most probably be going ahead in stages, rather than all at once.

b) High Town Community Sports and Arts Centre

DL confirmed that the meeting to discuss more community involvement with the Centre went ahead on March 17th. LB, DL, AG, AM, Luke Middleton, Dave Magill, Tina Edwards, and Heather James had attended the meeting, which was described as successful. DM was going to speak to Greenbank Music Village about the use of their notice board which is on the corner of High Town Road, outside St Matthew's school. This would mean that the Centre could use the notice board for their information, and it could also be used by other community groups and St Matthew's school.

There is a new "Active Luton" website which gives information about the High Town Community Centre. The Community Centre would be having a coffee morning and local community groups would be invited along to show what they can offer to local residents. This would also give people the chance to see what the Centre itself had to offer. This event would be taking place either at the end of April, or in early May. If the coffee morning could be arranged to coincide with the half-term break it would give the children from St Matthew's school, along with their parents, the chance to attend. Any action points from the meeting for AG would now be followed up by AM. The Centre would be having a new children's area in the café, and steps would be taken so that there would be a potential play area for children. There had also been the suggestion of a Friday evening "drop-in" for teenagers, which AM would now have the responsibility of looking into. A suggestion was made that the centre has a Users' Group, to feedback on issues such as opening hours. DL said that the meeting had been positive and most of the people around the table had been "go-ahead".

c) Newsletter

DL said that a couple of changes had been made to the previous draft and LM had a couple of copies of the revised Newsletter to pass around the meeting. DL and LM wanted people to read it and make any suggestions and comments before it went to the printers. DL had asked Jeremy Williams to re-write the "Your Say Your Way" item. Kim Grieg said that funding was now available from the "Near Neighbours" scheme, and it might be worth including that in the Newsletter. LB asked when it was thought the printed copies of the Newsletter might be available. DL said he hoped it would be printed by the end of the following week. It was intended to have a print run of 4,000 copies. LB expressed her concern about co-ordinating the delivery of the Newsletter. DL said that it was possible to have a lot of the copies delivered for a relatively small amount of money. HJ had recommended a company to him.

d) Conservation Area

The new Vita supermarket at 70 High Town Road had undertaken the refurbishment of the store without getting the appropriate permissions. The windows had been ripped out and work had continued to replace them, despite LBC telling them to stop. DL had spoken to the council's conservation specialist, who did not think that the windows that had been replaced were original anyway. DL would send LBC photos of the changes to the windows and the telephone number of the owner of the store. The owner had told DL that they would be applying "retrospectively" for permission to do the work.

Cllr Rachel Hopkins had informed DL via Twitter that Historic England now had special funding for areas such as High Town. DL said that he intended to pursue this.

Planning applications

i) The Freeholder, 45 York Street – A decision on the change of use for this building was still pending.

ii) Painters Arms, 79 High Town Road - The application was to convert the existing single flat above the Painters Arms into three flats, building an extension on the back of the building. The first application for listed building consent had been granted and a second application for planning permission was still under consideration by the council.

iii) The shutters at 23 High Town Road were being looked at.

e) High Town Festival

DL said that there had been a meeting that morning, mainly to discuss logistics. LM said that he thought that there would be twenty acts, appearing on three stages. Jan Horner expressed her concern about additional car parking. DL said that he had not considered that aspect. The Luton Business Improvement District (BID) was going to have a week of events at the time of the High Town Festival, and Saturday might be their busiest day. DL did not think that people attended the Festival all at once, and the fact that most of those attending were local would mean extra parking might not be needed.

f) Clean-up Day

LM had a meeting with Gavin O'Brien, of "Made in Luton". He had said that they hoped to have another clean-up day in the summer months. LM said this was needed for High Town, and GO'B said he would continue to raise this matter in the meetings.

g) Allotment

KG said that this had been left in the hands of the Revd. Malcolm Pritchard, of St Matthew's church. He had responded positively to the approach by KG about an allotment in the grounds surrounding the church, but had certain stipulations regarding finance, safety and security, and he wanted a working group. KG said there needed to be a meeting to look at the issues which were of concern to Revd. Pritchard. She also needed to know how many people would be interested in joining the group. Ryad Khodabocus knew of a group who might be interested in joining the working group. A member of the church's congregation was also interested in an allotment at the church and DL said he would put him in touch with KG.

h) Nuisance motorbikes

DL said that it had been agreed to monitor the situation before writing to the police to thank them for the action they had taken on this problem so far. The situation still seemed to have calmed down in the High Town area.

i) Parking Permits and one-way system

DL said that he had not heard anything on this.

j) Tree replacement

Simon Barrow had sent an email to the council enquiring about plans for future tree planting and tree numbers, but DL said SB had not received a reply. SB intended to keep on trying to find out this information.

k) FoHT website

DL said that there would be an introductory post. There would be a soft launch and it was nearly there. The website would explain why it is there and encourage new people to come to FoHT meetings. He had informed Leeroy Jenkins, of Next Up Local, of the new site and had thanked him for his work on the previous website and in the other ways that he had supported FoHT. He had added that FoHT would continue to work with him in the future. He had also enquired what LJ wanted to do with the old website.

8. High Town Community Worker post

LM said that his first year in the Community Worker post had come to an end, but financing had been received to enable him to continue in this role for a further six months.

9. AOB

RK said about the on-going problems with teenagers near to his home. It was suggested he try to attend the next Anti-Burglarly Group meeting where situations like this were discussed. LB said that she had been informed that certain paths in the area were to be blocked, and this might help with that issue. Russell Cartwright said residents were going to be consulted on the closure of paths on the Paths Estate.

KG had mentioned at the last meeting about her visit to a Street Association in Birmingham, which was part of a national initiative to help streets become more friendly and integrated. She had hoped to invite someone along to talk to FoHT about this. DL said that as the next FoHT meeting was going to be the Annual General Meeting, which would have a full agenda, perhaps KG could invite someone to the meeting following the AGM.

10. Notices and Information Exchange

LM said that Hope Church would be holding a “Quiz and Chips” evening on Friday, April 29th, at 7.30 p.m. All would be welcome.

LB said that Andrea Needham, who had written a book about her experiences leading up to and following on from being involved in the disabling of a British Aerospace warplane, which had been due to bomb East Timor in 1996, would be giving a talk at the Petit Café in High Town Road, on Tuesday, May 17th.

13. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting, which will be a combined AGM and general meeting, will be held on Tuesday, May 10th, at 7.00 p.m. at High Town Methodist Church.