

FRIENDS OF HIGH TOWN
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, JULY 21ST 2015

1. Attendees: David Landau, Chairman
Maureen Allen, Secretary
Alex Bain-Stewart, JP
Simon Barrow
Lyn Bliss
Annie Bygrave
Kath Gerrard
Chris Grabham
Kim Greig
Jan Horner
Phil Horner
Andrew Malcolm, Local Councillor (High Town)
Luke Middleton
Fiona Morton
Joan Samuel
Dan Warwick
Jeremy Williams
Lisa Wright
Raj Desai

2. Apologies: Peter Brooks, Russell Cartwright, Wendi Childs, Gail Dearing, Martyn Godden, Cllr Ayesegul Gurbuz, Ryad Khodabocus, Saida El Moujahid, Csaba Sipeki

3. Minutes of the last meeting

David Landau said that various members wanted to add corrections to the minutes and gave the secretary's email address so that any requested changes could be sent to her.

4. High Town Festival

David Landau asked for comments on the High Town Festival which had been held on Saturday, July 4th.

Annie Bygrave said that it would be useful to have a bit more say in how the stalls are arranged. Her honey stall had been positioned at St Matthews school and had done OK, but it would have been better to have had more consultation with Heather James. Lyn Bliss said the stalls should be centred down High Town Road. DL said that a commercial element had been included in a section of the road, which had been mainly designated for food outlets. This had been an arrangement with a commercial operator. It had been thought that there would be about a dozen stalls in that section, but as there had been fewer stalls than had been anticipated, which explained the gaps along High Town Road. DL hoped that this situation would be avoided in the

future with perhaps more local catering stalls. It had been commented that the pricing of some of the stalls was a bit high. Joan Samuel said that it wasn't evident that the Festival was taking place until she was actually in High Town Road itself. She had seen notices of the Festival in the local shop windows but it would be good to have a band or something to alert people to the fact that something was going on. She felt that the event had not been sufficiently advertised. JS also felt it would be good to avoid Ramadan when choosing a date for the Festival. DL said that Aysegul Gurbaz, who was herself a Muslim, had been on the committee when selecting the date for the Festival next year. It would fall towards the end of Ramadan, but she did not see this as a problem, and the Festival would be taking place outside of Ramadan in the future. Alex Bain-Stewart also felt there needed to be more indications that the Festival was taking place, e.g. flags in the flag holders and signage outside the railway station to draw more attention to it. FM said there were going to be flags in the flag holders, but these plans were scuppered, because the lead maker was injured in an accident shortly before the Festival.

LB said that there had been comments that the Festival had a good community feel, but she expressed her concern about the animals which had been brought to the Festival for children to pet. They had been put in pens on a tarmac floor on a very hot day. Fiona Morton asked if the local authority Safety Advisory Group had been consulted. DL said that it would be good to find out more details. Lisa Wright said that the high cost of entry to the pen where the animals were kept would have been prohibitive to quite a few families.

Chris Grabham said it felt as if Greenbank had been sectioned off, and it might be an idea to extend the road closure. He had been busking outside the café, which had not been ideal as it had been very open. Perhaps a tent and a small PA could be set up for this next year. There was also another event taking place in the town centre. Was there any chance of combining events in the future? DL said the town centre event had been relatively last minute. He had asked the sign posters people to put up posters up and down the road to get people to go to the school. LB had worked hard to get the newsletter containing information about the Festival delivered to 9,000 plus people, and the programme for the Festival went out to 3,700 households. Festival programmes had also been given to the children at the local primary school. JS said that a person smoking next to her whilst she was watching one of music events meant she had to move. AB-S said that people were allowed by law to smoke at an outside event, and could not be told to stop. DL said a steward, who could be recognized by a high visibility jacket, could always be approached to see if the person who was smoking would stop. Dan Warwick said he thought the Festival looked really good, he wondered if Greenbank and the school needed to be involved. He suggested spreading to other spaces and thought it would be good if the event could reach as far as People's Park. DL said people did not want the event to get too big. He thought the aerial display at the top end of High Town Road had been successful and drawn people's attention to the event. Publicity for the Festival had been only one of Luke Middleton's responsibilities, and this would affect his being able to devote a huge amount of time to this. Kim Greig said that lots of people had asked if there would be a possibility of having a monthly market in High Town. There was discussion about whether there might be a Christmas Festival. If so, it would need to be organised now. JS said she had really appreciated the events in the church. DL said he also appreciated the part the church had taken.

5. Your Say Your Way – Newsletter and Dance Festival

LB said that she hoped to get more volunteers to deliver the newsletter in the future. There were still some of the newsletters available. FM would be taking a supply of these to High Hats. DL said that he had managed to get quite a few local people interested in Friends of High Town by talking to them at the Festival. A lot of them had received the newsletter and had found it useful. The details for the dance festival were in hand.

6. Burglary Reduction Scheme

The scheme was run by the council in collaboration with the police authority and was designed to advise on how to prevent burglaries. Areas in High Town which were thought to be at a higher risk were particularly being targeted. Heather James, who had been running the scheme, would be changing her role within the council department, but she was determined that the scheme should continue. It was agreed that as a number of FoHT members attend the scheme, it would be appropriate for FoHT to ‘adopt’ it as a sub-group and it would provide feedback to general FoHT meetings. The next meeting to be held on this matter would be on August 25th. DL said he would ask Maureen Allen to circulate a note to FoHT members to remind them of the date.

7. People’s Park Environmental Works

Simon Barrow reported that some of the work in the particularly wooded area had already been done, but the remaining work which needed to be done by the local council appeared to have dropped off the agenda. There were, however, lots of jobs that could be done by volunteers. SB would be asking Trevor Tween, the council’s ecologist, for advice on how this help could be best applied. It might be possible to organize volunteers for a Saturday or Sunday for an activity such as planting new hedgerows or improvement work. LW said that the charity Groundwork had a ‘Green Team’ of young people in Luton. The team helped with improving the environment and green spaces and the work described by SB sounded like a project they could help with. It was left that LW and SB would consult on this matter.

8. Bandstand – Wardown Park

DL said that the Rotary Club had been wanting to have a replacement for the bandstand. DL said he had met socially, on one occasion, one of the architects from the London practice which had been chosen to submit plans, and asked the meeting if they had any objections to his chairing the discussion on the new bandstand. No one raised any objection. He said he had done some research on this and had found out that the Chair of the Rotary Club’s committee, was Alan Corkhill. If anyone wanted to look at the plans they could search on www.Rotarybandstand.org. There you could find a contact number and an email address, which Alan Corkhill would reply to. The closing date for Standard Consultations was July 28th, with a deadline of August 3rd for Neighbour Consultations. Alan Corkhill and the architects would be at a stand and available to discuss the proposed bandstand/community stage at the official opening of the Wardown Park Suspension Bridge on July 30th, between 1.00 p.m and 5.00 p.m. It was also possible to view the plans on the Luton Council website ref: 15/00804/Ful. LB said that she felt that proper consultation had not been had on the design, which she felt was out of place in Wardown Park, especially in relation to the fact that the Victorian suspension bridge had undergone recent work to preserve the structure. AB-S, who said he lived near to Wardown Park, said he had not been aware of the plans for the bandstand. DW said that he felt the idea of a stage was more

appropriate to modern times and music. Victorian bandstands had been constructed to suit the music of the time, and modern music needed an open stage. AB-S asked Andrew Malcolm if he was going to oppose the plans. He said he would not be doing so as the discussions at the meeting did not indicate that the majority view was against the new design. CG said that the design for the bandstand had been published in the local press last year. He thought it was possible for old and new architecture to co-exist. DL said that if anyone felt strongly about the new design they should approach the Rotary Club and the Council, and go along to Wardown Park on July 30th.

9. High Town Road Conservation Area

Russell Cartwright had contacted LBC Conservation Officer, Gemma Davies, re. possible breaches. These were the responses:

1 High Town Road

Planning permission was recently granted in relation to this unit for a new shop front and security shutter. The approved plans show that the existing full height window display vinyl and advertisement panel will be removed and replaced with a half-height frosted glass window pane. The flashing sign should therefore be removed once the planning permission as approved is implemented so this matter should be addressed imminently. However if the works have not started in the next few weeks, the Conservation Officer says she will speak with the agent and outline the importance of implementing the application to ensure the character and appearance of the conservation area is protected.

25 High Town Road

The Conservation Officer says she was not aware of this shop front replacement and has referred the matter to the Council's Enforcement Team who will investigate accordingly and advise on appropriate action.

44 High Town Road

The Conservation Officer has discussed this matter with the Enforcement Department and they have informed her that as the strip lighting would not be classed as an advertisement nor shop front alteration, there is very little that can be done by way of enforcement. The Conservation Officer has, however, written to the owner/occupier requesting that the lighting strip is removed as it is out of keeping with the character and appearance of the conservation area.

45 York Street

The Conservation Officer has investigated the wooden blocks installed and she is of the view that whilst the blocks are not entirely in keeping with the traditional character of the unit, they do not materially harm the character and appearance of the conservation area and not to such an extent that we would be in a position to take enforcement action. The Conservation Officer has, however, had discussions with the owner in recent weeks and she understands their intention is

to submit a planning application for the property which will involve a change of use to the ground floor. This application will provide an opportunity to address any concerns with the appearance of the unit and so the blocks to the door could be something addressed under this application.

10. Travellers (update)

DL said that following the discussion on the travellers and how to approach this matter with the council he had written to Stuart Jackson and Jayne Maddox outlining the views that the Travellers Liaison Officer post should be reinstated, and the council should look to find transit sites for the travellers. Luton Council should also look at the way other councils, such as Leeds Council, approached this problem.

11. Railway Tavern

AM said that some plans had been drawn up for the building's future use and the council could be approaching the current owners of the building with an offer to buy it. The building would be for residential use upstairs and retail use downstairs. DL said he hoped the retail use would involve a focal point such as a pub. JS said she hoped her suggestion that the retail use be the hat shop and a hat museum, which would demonstrate the history of the area would not be overlooked. Quite a few people who had attended the previous meeting had said what a good suggestion that had been. AB said that the retail use should be looked at carefully to make sure that it would be financially viable.

12. Any Other Business

LB said that the lift near to the railway station had been out of use for a few weeks. As the lift was now the responsibility of the Network Rail company she had written to them to complain about the ongoing situation. It was suggested that an approach be made to the council to put pressure on Network Rail to fix the lift as this was the main route to the town. AM suggested that the local MP, Gavin Shuker, might also be involved in any approaches to the company.

AB-S proposed that DL should pursue this matter and this was seconded by LB.

Scandinavian Café

Following the sad death of the previous owner there had been an interest shown in reopening the café with a new owner. DL said he believed that this matter was still under discussion.

High Town Sports and Community Centre

LB said that she felt there should be more involvement by the local community in the running of the Centre. An annual delivery plan should be provided by the Centre to show activities. LB had provided a letter to ask that FoHT have a representative on the Committee, and that there should be access to the annual report. A proposal that an approach be made to the Centre for a community representative and more community involvement was proposed by AB-S and seconded by AB.

FM said that she had been in touch with the University of Bedfordshire in support of the project she had suggested at the last meeting of an interactive map of the various areas in High Town to show the social history of the area.

Raj Desai brought up the problem of prostitution in the area. He had seen “ladies of the night” standing around in Frederick Street. AM said the five year plan to deal with this problem was underway. He would be looking into how the work on the plan, in general, was going. DL expressed his sympathy for those affected by this. RD said that the people who used the prostitutes should be “named and shamed”. JS said that the ‘Luton on Sunday’ had recently published a piece on the problem of prostitution in the area. DL said that highlighting situations that nature was regarded as a good story by the media

13. Notices and Information Exchange

Closure of 33 Shop

JS said that although there had been an attempt to really make a go of it, the shop would be closing on August 6th. DL said he believed there were plans for something else to take the shop’s place.

14. Date of the next meeting

The next FoHT meeting would be held on Tuesday, August 11th.