

Friends of High Town (FoHT)

Minutes of the Meeting 12th Mar 2013

AGENDA

1. Attendees
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of Last Meeting
4. Prostitution
5. Housing – David Landau (DL)
6. The Railway Tavern - DL
7. Nature Conservation Work
 - (a) People's Park Planting Day (Sat 30th Mar) –report and future plans - Simon Barrow (SB)
 - (b) Guerilla gardening (Rainbow Charity) – Sun 17th Mar – report and future plans - Annie Bygrave (AB)
8. Post Office petition - DL
9. FoHT Press and Marketing
 - (a) FoHT aims
 - (b) Notice boards
10. High Town team update - DL
11. AOB
 - (a) Post Office petition
 - (b) other
12. Next Meeting Date: the AGM

1. Attendees: David Landau, Andy Malcolm, Marie-Louise Lowcock, Simon Barrow, Chris Grabham, Fiona Morton, Joan Samuel, Russell Cartwright, Annie Bygrave, Simon Barrow, Steve Worsley, Anthony Page, Chris Stevens.

2. Apologies: Roxanna Whittaker, Anthea Cowell, Linda Farrell, Judy & Roger Dixon, Sue Lake, Kim Greig, Lisa Wright.

3. Minutes of the last meeting.

Minutes to be approved for Feb, Mar 2013.

4. Prostitution

DL asked AM to address the group re the prostitution issue in the High Town area. He also told the group that he had interviewed Mr Khadam and taken detailed notes of the interview for sharing with the group, however on asking Mr Khadam to approve these notes in advance of the meeting approval was denied. DL hopes that these notes, detailing Mr Khadam's views, will be released shortly.

AM addressed the group about the prostitution in the area.

In brief:

- Councillors are available to all residents of High Town to discuss any local issue.

- Councillors themselves do not have the power to make changes, they can only pass on the information to those that can.
- For example, they can ask for 'paraphernalia' to be picked up from the streets of problem areas during the night so that streets are clean in the morning –there is a cleaning team responsible for this.
- Council officers work closely with the police.
- Meetings with police occur 4 x per annum.
- Strategies for crime prevention discussed at these meetings.

Prostitution – 3 main points:

1. Routes in
 2. Management
 3. Routes out
- Routes in – 50% of prostitution is due to child sexexploitation. Few women make a free choice to become a prostitute – most have very limited choices.
 - Management – it is the police who mainly deal with this. The police have had a variable response over the last 10 years – peaks and troughs of activity.
 - The council work with the police in trying to limit prostitution.
 - Routes out – it is the council who mainly deal with this. The council help women to leave prostitution, commonly by exiting Luton to avoid the relationships and activities that have lead to their situation.
 - Councillors have been pushing the police to put in place a long term strategy and to have a sustained approach rather than attacking vigorously then doing little to carry this on afterwards.

Questions from the floor:

ML: Can the drug centre in Clarendon Rd be moved - it seems to exacerbate the problem?

AM: The Addaction Centre. The vast majority of the people who attend the centre are nothing to do with prostitution.

DL: Do you know if they supply methadone or needles from the centre?

AM: There is a doctor who attends the centre, but I would think that if methadone or needles were required they would not be supplied directly but by prescription.

JS: Re: a letter by Yvonne Dunne printed in the local paper – it encourages local residents to help the police to find the drug dealers in the area in a bid to crack down on the root causes of prostitution – how can we actually do this?

AM: Reporting things that you see to the police is the first step.

ML: You need to get a crime number for each report.

DL: This helps the police collect data on crime and to set future strategies.

AM: Local MP Gavin Shuker is the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade. He is trying to push for changes in the law at a national level.

DL: How confident are you that things are going to change? *(DL then mentioned Operation Vision – poster warnings about kerb crawling being illegal that were put up for a while but discontinued)*

AM: There are police operations ongoing, but they cannot commit long-term. They do not know if they will have the future resources.

JS: I'm a regular user of the Minimart and apparently a vast number of people have signed the petition and other shops are now getting involved. Do you think Gavin Shuker would intervene – perhaps talk to Mr Khadam?

AM: My feeling is that the petition is not as large as is being made out. I did a local door knocking survey, asking residents if they had signed, and all the people I spoke to had not. My feeling is that it will fizzle out.

DL: I have heard it (a petition) has to be in the right format to be effective.

AB: You have to have names and addresses as well as signatures.

The discussion ended at that point.

5. Housing – Report by DL

- Drill Hall earmarked for demolition and building affordable housing but council have not made any firm decisions as yet.
- Derelict land on Old Bedford Rd is not owned by the council. It is currently up for sale.
- 15 Hitchin Rd is owned by a Housing Assoc and council now pushing them to develop the site.
- Plans for affordable housing on a car park in East Village area
- No comment on other issues such as schools, parking, health care provision, infrastructure.
- Council representatives seemed to be unaware of the many plots of empty land in Luton or plots where planning permission has been obtained for building homes (eg the Dye Factory) and could give no comment on the future usage of these.

Questions/comments from the floor

CG: Bedford & Luton Archives & Record Service were looking for new offices and had planned to move into the Drill Hall. Council say there is a problem with asbestos on the site. Would think that problem would be worsened by knocking the building down.

East Village plans briefly mentioned by group members.

CG: www.LutonHeritageForum.org website has lots of links to the relevant documents for the East Village plans – better than council website.

RC: What was the purpose of the meeting on the Paths Estate?

Group discussed Paths Estate in general.

Railway Tavern –DL

After the recent fire in the Railway Tavern, DL contacted a number of relevant parties:

- Luton Council Conservation & Planning Team
- The Building Developers (Alexanders Solicitors)

- Police
- Various Heritage related bodies.

Asked questions about the development of and security of the building, why work has stalled and if the group can be kept updated on progress of police investigation. Also presented worries that building may be demolished or developed inappropriately now that there has been fire damage and called for it's protection due to it's local heritage status.

Brief Results of Enquiries:

- Council – can do very little unless development breaches planning application awarded. Building is not listed.
- Developers – are in contact with contractors to ensure building is made fully secure. Are awaiting approval from council on 'technical changes' before continuing the work.
- Police - investigation ongoing. No identification of arsonist yet. Will keep us informed.
- English Heritage – sent DL a Section 215 document showing council have powers to intervene in issues 'detrimental to the amenity of the local area'
- English Heritage said they may be able to attend an FoHT group meeting in May or June.

DL will send emails to group – *action point*

CG will mention the issue at the next Luton Heritage Forum – *action point*.

DL: Next meeting for that will be 30th April 2013, 2pm-4pm, Committee Room, Town Hall. I have the agenda.

N.B. DL has gained agreement from the police to have a PCSO attend the FoHT meetings more frequently in future.

7. Nature Conservation Work

(a) People's Park

SB briefly told the group about the native hedge planting work in People's Park carried out on Sat 30th Mar.

- Spare whips (single stemmed trees) have been 'heeled in' in SB's garden to keep them alive.
- Suggestions for further planting areas were requested.
- No plans for any future volunteer work in the parks so far.

DL: Contractors are to work on improving the entrances so no volunteers for that are required.

There followed a short discussion by group on suitable areas for planting remaining trees with no final decisions made.

Photos of the planting work will be put up on the FoHT facebook page by AB - *action point*.

(b) Rainbow Charity

AB updated group on Rainbow charity garden planting.

- Planting is now complete.

- Next step is to get chippings to cover weed membrane.
- Chris Brown has given details of who to contact to get these.
- AB will arrange this and ask for volunteers to bag up, transport and spread chippings – *action point*.

Short discussion about high shrubs in Paths Estate possibly leading to antisocial behaviour. Short discussion about other areas in High Town that may need gardening improvements eg Station Rd slope and outside the Mediterranean Cafe.

DL to investigate if council will let us do the Mediterranean Cafe patch without them digging it up again – *action point*.

8. Post Office petition

- DL and KG obtained more signatures on the PO petition but need more.
- Call for volunteers to door knock and go to local businesses.
- Deadline for completion is 1st September 2013.

9. FoHT Press and marketing

(a) FoHT aims

FoHT aims are to go on website – not done yet. SB to do this – *action point*

(b) Noticeboards

DL will approach Travis Perkins for materials to replace rotting noticeboard opp. Station – *action point*.

10. HTT update – DL

- Heritage Lottery Fund email received and will be circulated to group – *action point*
- Grants available from £3000 upwards.
- Next Fund meeting dates will be circulated.
- Luton Culture is to take lease on empty Zoen shop to make the Hat Museum.

11. AOB

(a) CG mentioned the Irish Forum Archive. His liason there is happy to give us a walk and talk tour of the archive during April. Group proposed the date Sat 27th April.

CG to arrange the time – *action point*.

(b) RC raised concerns over number of trees having been cut down for ring road (6 trees so far).

Suggested 2 to 1 replacement of trees by council may no longer be policy.

DL asked if there is a legal requirement to replace at even 1 to 1.

RC will find out if there is a legal requirement to replace trees that are cut down and by what ratio – *action point*.

11. Next Meeting Date - DL

7pm 14th May 2013 – AGM.

- Committee is up for election.
- Subscriptions are due.
- Only paid members have a vote.
- Committee members shall give a summary of what group has done in previous year.
- AB wants to stand down as Secretary.

ACTION POINTS AGREED THIS MEETING

1. CG: will mention the Railway Tavern issue at the next Luton Heritage Forum.
2. AB: photos of the planting work will be put up on the FoHT facebook page.
3. AB: will arrange volunteers to bag up, transport and spread chippings at Rainbow Charity
4. DL will send Railway Tavern emails and replies to group
5. DL: will investigate if council will let us garden the Mediterranean Cafe patch without them digging it up again.
6. DL: will approach Travis Perkins for materials to replace rotting noticeboard opp. Station.
7. CG: to arrange the time for walk and talk tour of Irish Forum Archive.
8. RC: will find out if there is a legal requirement to replace trees that are cut down and by what ratio.
9. Call for volunteers for door knocking to add to PO petition