

FRIENDS OF HIGH TOWN
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10TH 2015

1. Attendees: David Landau, Chairman
 Maureen Allen, Secretary
 Lyn Bliss
 Russell Cartwright
 Chris Grabham
 Kim Grieg
 Aysegul Gurbuz, Local Councillor
 Jan Horner
 Sayf-Ali Khan, Beds Police
 Ryad Kohodabocus
 Andrew Malcolm, Local Councillor
 Luke Middleton
 Fiona Morton
 Saida Moujahid
 Lisa Wright

2. Apologies: Simon Barrow, Peter Brooks, Annie Bygrave, Wendi Childs, Kath Gerrard, Jean Godden, Martin Godden, Philip Horner, Joan Samuel Csaba Sipeki, Dan Warwick

3) Minutes of the last meeting

There were three corrections to the previous minutes. It had not been made clear that the funding obtained by Lyn Bliss for the Newsletter had only been sufficient for the two Newsletters which had been written and delivered to the residents of High Town in the current year. There was a mistake in the name of one of the attendees at the meeting. The final decision on the plans for the Railway Tavern had not been reached by the Council at the time of the last meeting.

4. Matters Arising

a) High Town Community Sports and Arts Centre

David Landau gave the background to a meeting which had been attended by DL, LB, Andy Malcolm and Aysegul Gurbuz where they had discussed more local community involvement with the Centre. Dave Wright and Mary Shennick had attended the meeting on the Centre's behalf. Following on from that meeting contact had been made with DL and LB by Phil Collins, a consultant who had been employed by the council. LB said that since that first meeting, which she felt had been productive, she had not received any contact from the Centre. It had later been learned from Mr Collins that Dave Wright was only at the Centre for 4 hours a week, and the High Town Centre was one of DW's many responsibilities. Because of this situation PC had suggested that voluntary groups might like to organise events for the Centre to host. Fiona Morton asked about the costs which might be involved. LB said that the Centre would not charge for use, but would have to charge those attending.

A charge of £2 per head had been suggested. (Voluntary groups would not be allowed use of the café area, which because of hygiene regulations, etc. has to be staffed by the Centre). This arrangement would mean that the Centre would stand to make either the profit, or the loss, on any event which was held there. It was felt it might encourage more people to attend events at the Centre, such as a keep fit class, if a crèche could be provided, so that mothers and carers could more easily join in. PC had thought that this was an excellent suggestion. DL said that better signage was needed on the highway to show where the Centre was. Luke Middleton raised the matter of reports from the Centre on what community work they were doing. DL said it was his understanding that there should be an annual report by the Centre. LB said that she was going to email Helen Barnett on this question. As PC was compiling a report on the council's leisure centres and how to encourage better use of them, DL said it would be good to notify everybody of PC's email address so that suggestions on improvements to the Centre could be sent direct to him. People could give views on how the Centre could become more involved with the local community and made more profitable, currently the Centre was not making any money. DL said that FoHT had not been aware, when the use of the Centre and its involvement in the local community had been raised, that the council had asked a consultant to look into the matter of its leisure centres in general.

b) Newsletter

DL said that he had written to Mark Barrett, of JNB Publishing, to enquire whether the company would be able to help with funding for the next FoHT Newsletter. DL was waiting for Mr Barrett's response.

c) Railway Tavern

DL said that the application by the owner, Mr Shah, to build a one-bedroom flat adjacent to the main site of the Railway Tavern had been refused by the council. DL had still not received a response to his letter to Mr Shah where he had asked what the plans were for the site as a whole.

d) Luton Railway Station Lift

Both DL and LB had not received a response from Thameslink and Network Rail on the long-term plans for the station. DL had contacted the local MP, Gavin Shaker, to see if he had received a reply to his letter on this matter. GS had received a reply, which DL read to the meeting. The letter explained why the lift had been out of service for a long period, due to the lift needing a part from Italy, which the company said they had obtained as quickly as possible. GS felt that the response had not been satisfactory as it had not addressed the wider issues and he was waiting to hear from them again. FM said that if the lift were to break down again, that would be the time to push the issue further.

5. Burglarly Reduction Scheme

The Burglarly Reduction Scheme meeting had been attended by Kim Grieg, Lisa Wright and LB. LW said that it was hoped to get the Neighbourhood Watch Schemes underway. She also mentioned problems with the large planters which the council had installed in some streets around High Town. These were currently being used as urinals and LW had approached the council to look at removing the shrubbery in these in an attempt to stop this.

LB said that a chainsaw had been stolen from her garden and she had contacted Cash Convertors to see if the item had been sold to them. It had, and because of the system at the shop where people's details were taken before anything was bought, they were able to track down the person who had sold the item to the shop. Kim Grieg said that LB's action was a

good initiative and it would be useful to have an email address publicised in High Town to which people could send information on stolen items. This information could then be sent to the retail outlets which might be offered the goods. KG felt that this action would act as a deterrent. Funding for this was going to be considered.

DL said that the forthcoming Christmas Tree Festival might provide an opportunity for the police to talk about burglarly prevention and the use of items such as Smartwater. LW said she would contact the local police with that suggestion. Jan Horner was going to look at how this could be organised at the church. This was to be co-ordinated by LW/JH.

6. High Town Conservation Meeting

DL had a meeting with David Grech of Historic England (formerly English Heritage). The council's temporary conservation officer, Dr Valery Scott, had also been present. They had walked around the area to assess how Historic England could help. DL felt that DG was sympathetic to the aims of preserving the historic parts of High Town and had given some useful hints and advice. The local council would need to be involved in the funding and a project manager would also be needed. There were two aspects to the Historic England grant scheme. One provided a high level of funding which was more difficult to obtain and took more time to access, and the second level allowed less funding, but was easier to access. DG said the second level of funding had been applied for and used to good effect in Peterborough. This level of the scheme would enable enough funding for the shopfronts in High Town to be refurbished, thus making the area more attractive to investors and retailers. DL had spoken to Mark Franklin, who owns properties in High Town, who had benefitted from similar funding and he was in favour of the application. VS said she would be discussing the matter with the Head of Planning. She would be looking at any planning applications for High Town and making sure they met the regulations regarding conservation, and was also looking at providing planners. JH asked how the church might be helped by the grant. DL explained that any grants would be confined to the frontage of buildings. DL said that he was waiting to hear from VS about a further meeting. She had a list of all the points which had been raised, but as there was to be a new Head of Planning this would delay any further meeting.

7. High Town Conservation Area – planning applications.

a) 54 Duke Street

Russell Cartwright said a planning application had been applied for to erect 10 flats at a height of three storeys at 54 Duke Street. The application was for one and two bedroom flats. The site was adjacent to the former Green Man pub. The application had been made by the person who also owns No. 52 Duke Street. An objection had been put to the council on this application as there were concerns about the waste management of the proposed building, they were proposing to use large bins for the flats, which, if not managed properly, would contribute further to the problem of waste in the area and encourage rats. It was noted that 54 Duke Street was not part of the conservation area. DL said he was going to object as he felt the proposed building was not sympathetic to the area. He had no objection to the number of properties, but objected to the design of the proposed building, which would be out of place in the High Town.

b) 45 York Street

The owner of the Freeholder pub at 45 York Street had submitted a proposal to the council to turn the former pub into a B & B with 10 rooms. The plans included building an extension to the back of the building and putting in new skylights. All three previous applications to

extend the building had been refused. DL was concerned that the back of the building was not in the conservation area. It was too late to put any objections to the council, but DL felt that this application would be one to watch.

8. Christmas Tree Festival

The size of the tree funded by FoHT was put to the vote and it was decided to have the 6ft tree. The festival would run from 13th December until 20th December, and an entry fee of £5 for grown ups and £3 for children would be charged for the Children's Piano concert on December 13th. FM asked whether the local groups paying for the trees would be allowed to raise money for their own group. JH would be looking into this. Those groups paying for a tree would have a card close to the tree saying who the group was, and what they did.

9. AOB

Chris Grabham said the recent sale of old photographs, these were duplicates, etc., at Wardown Park Museum had raised £475 for the Museum.

10. Notices and Information Exchange

Luton Tackling the On-Street Sex Trade

The next meeting of the group was to be held on Monday, 23rd October, at 6,15 pm. The venue would be High Town Methodist Church Hall.

Climate Change Meeting

Annie Bygrave had asked DL to inform FoHT that a meeting to discuss climate change was to be held at the University of Bedfordshire on Thursday, November 12th. KG said that she would be interested in learning more about the event.

Tina Edwards said that St Matthews School would be organising a pantomime which would be taking place on Saturday, December 12th. The event would be also be open to those who lived in High Town, but who did not have children who attended the school. There would be a small charge for tickets. The official closing date for applications for tickets was November 28th.

Konni Deppe had managed to get the agreement of another shop, the High Town Supermarket, to sell the reusable High Town Bags.

11. Date of next FoHT Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, December 8th at 7.00 p.m. in High Town Methodist Church Hall.