

FRIENDS OF HIGH TOWN
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 11TH APRIL 2017

1. Attendees: Fiona Morton, Treasurer (Acting as Chairman)
Maureen Allen, Secretary
David Alexander
Lyn Bliss
Russell Cartwright
Matthew Catlin
Kim Greig
Chris Grabham
Bernie Holford, (Pastor, Seventh Day Adventist Church)
Andrew Malcolm, Local Councillor
Vicki Salkin
Pete Savage
Jeremy Williams
John Wright

2. Apologies: Philippa Collier, Ryad Khodabocus, David Landau, Luke Middleton, Maarwish Mirza, Saida el Moujahid, Csaba Sipeki.

3. Minutes of the last meeting
FoHT Newsletter – it had been recorded that the “Your Say Your Way” funding had financed one newsletter, when it had provided funding for the first two newsletters. The third newsletter had been funded by JNB Publishing.

4. Matters Arising
 - a) High Town Community Worker
Fiona Morton said that discussions had been going ahead for a replacement for Luke Middleton. It had, additionally, been discovered that some money was remaining from the previous budget to finance LM in the role of Community Worker for a further three months. LM had agreed to continue in the role until June.

 - b) Luton Town Football Club development
FM reported on behalf of David Landau that he was currently trying to get further information in regard to the Club’s plans in the light of LBC’s decision that the Club would not be allowed to build a stadium at Junction 10 of the M1. This would seem to indicate that the Club’s plans for the Power Court site might be going ahead.

 - c) High Town Methodist Church – path lighting
The work on the path had restarted on that day. However, the council had said that they wanted to cut down some trees which are nearby. DL had written to the local councillors, Andy Malcolm and Maarwish Mirza, to ask if they could provide more information about this.

d) Conservation Area:

i) satellite dishes

Russell Cartwright confirmed that he had sent a revised list of the buildings in the conservation area which had satellite dishes, where permission had not been sought from LBC to erect these. He said that, as the list had only recently been sent, he was awaiting the council's response.

ii) 94-96 High Town Road – change of shop front application

The premises is a primary shopfront in the High Town Road conservation area, and the recent retrospective application had not been advertised, so that anyone who might object would not necessarily be aware and, therefore, would be unable to express their viewpoint. DL was actively chasing a response from LBC to his formal complaint, made on behalf of FoHT, that LBC should have advertised the fact that the application had been made. The council was in breach of its own complaint procedure guidelines, as they had not responded to the complaint during the time frame set by them, and they were being slow in providing a response. DL, on behalf of FoHT, had also requested to see the current application.

iii) 80 High Town Road – change from commercial to residential

The application had been for the conversion of the ground floor shop space, the former TV and video repair shop which had been demolished in the fatal car crash last year, and the single flat which had been above that, into four self-contained bedsits. FM reported, on behalf of DL, that the council had refused the application on the grounds of the conservation and space issues.

iv) 17 High Town Road

DL had written to LBC concerning the building work currently taking place at the property. Planning permission had been given in 1999, but it was thought that this may have expired and a new application might be needed to be made.

e) Donations to the former TV and video repair shop owner

FM said that she had made out a cheque for £100 for Mr Chohan from the FoHT bank account, and this was awaiting DL's signature.

f) FoHT Newsletter

LM had asked if FoHT would cover the £250 distribution costs of the next FoHT newsletter. Lyn Bliss said that there would be a small increase in FoHT's funds after the AGM, which was to be held in May. RC questioned the amount. LB said that the cost of delivery on the previous occasion had been £40 per thousand newsletters, and the number of newsletters to be delivered averaged at about 4,000. Kim Greig said that one of the reasons for wanting to arrange delivery was that this was needed to be done in the next two weeks, and if volunteers were to be recruited to deliver the newsletter, this time frame would not be met. LB added that another consideration was that volunteers could not obtain entry to blocks of flats, which delivery agents seemed to be able to do. She suggested that, in future, volunteers might deliver to the areas where deliveries would be easy to arrange and to do, and that the areas with a high concentration of flats be given to an agency to make deliveries. She thought that this would cut costs.

g) High Town Community Gardening Day

KG said that Vauxhall and Near Neighbours had both provided funding for the scheme. Ten to twelve people had turned up on the day (April 1st) and they had spent two and a half hours working on, and planting in, the green spaces near to the Noah charity shop. Various people had promised to help to look after the plants during the week. The further funding of the scheme was due to finish at the end of April. Both Philippa Collier and Doris Brittain had said that they would like to continue in their role of looking after and improving the green areas in and around High Town, and KG hoped that further funding could be secured to enable this.

5. High Town Voice

LB explained that, over the course of the past year, several people had been attending meetings with the people in charge at the High Town Sports and Arts Centre, in an effort to encourage them to have more involvement in the local community. She was pleased that representatives from some of the local churches, and the Irish Centre, were now also involved in the meetings. LB had felt that the Centre were taking note and making steps to encourage more community involvement, but recent attempts to generate this had not been successful. The proposed Knit and Knatter group, which had been due to start on April 21st, had not received any interest, even though interest had been expressed by some people in attending. Similarly, the family board games night, to be held in aid of the NSPCC, had not received any interest either, even though the parents of the pupils of St Matthew's school had been notified of the event. LB wondered if these sorts of events should be pursued with the Centre, as the local community did not seem to be responding to these initiatives. KG said that it would be good if the parents at St Matthew's school could be asked what activities they would like to see at the Centre. LB suggested that the High Town Festival in July might provide an opportunity to ask people what they would like the Centre to offer. KG said that a short piece asking for suggestions might be included in the next FoHT newsletter. The deadline for the newsletter had been changed, and it would be now be possible to add a small item in relation to this. FM said that another consideration was getting people involved in the organisation of local events. Chris Grabham said that, once the noticeboards in High Town had been repaired, people would find it easier to access information on local community events.

6. High Town Improvement Action Group

At the last meeting Emma Colclough, LBC, who had been involved with the Group by attending meetings and taking action on the various problems raised, had said that she had been told by her Manager that it would no longer be possible for her to attend the meetings. The Group had been disappointed on hearing this information, as they had valued EC's help, but they had discussed the ways in which the Group could inform the council of any problems occurring in the local area, and get help dealing with the current on-going issues. It had been agreed that the Group would meet prior to the surgeries of the local councillors, Andy Malcolm and Maawish Mirza, to discuss any issues which needed to be raised, and then would raise them at the councillors' surgeries, which are held on the first Thursday of each month. LB said that she and a neighbour had attended AM's recent surgery to discuss the litter problem in Frederick Street. Her neighbour had also suggested that, when sweeping the streets, Luton should ask residents to remove their cars on the day that the street was to be swept to give clear access. It had also been suggested that residents might keep the pavement outside their houses clean and litter free. LB said that her neighbour was hoping to gauge local opinion on these suggestions via a survey. Dependent on this, they would consider organising a petition.

LB said that the suggested date of June 10th for a further clean-up day in the High Town area would need to be changed, as it clashed with the events being held at Wardown Park. The date would be changed to June 17th.

7) High Town Festival Meeting

AM said that the proposed meeting had been postponed, but things were progressing well. He added that if anyone knew of any businesses in the area who were able to help financially, it would be good if they could get in touch with him.

8) Wardown House – reopening

CG said that those who had recently visited the museum had said very positive things. He said the museum wanted to make a visit to it a more up-to-date experience, and now had displays on what was going on in the local community, including information on FoHT and the High Town Festival. He wanted to support the museum in collecting as much information as possible on what was going on in local community groups in Luton. There were magazines in every room at the museum which contain a series of articles on the museum and what was happening in the local area at the various stages in its history. There was also now a tea room at the museum, so that visitors could enjoy relaxing with tea and cake after a visit.

9) AOB

LB raised the question of the benches in People’s Park? which had been dismantled. Were they to be replaced? AM said that he would contact LBC’s parks department to see if he could find out any information on this.

Bernie Holt, who was from the Seventh Day Adventist church, in North Street, said that the church wanted to make a positive contribution to the local neighbourhood. He referred to the sale of “The English Rose” pub, and said that the church were considering purchasing the building themselves, rather than see it taken over by developers and turned into flats. He wanted to know if the local community might want to use the facilities if it were to become a centre for the local community. It was added that so many pubs in the local area were disappearing. CG said that “The English Rose” was considered by the conservation department at LBC to be of architectural interest, although it wasn’t a protected building. FM suggested that BH’s question be put on the agenda for consideration at the next FoHT meeting in May.

FM said that the cookery book “Around the Pound”, which she had been working on with Helen Jones, would be going to the printers on the following day. The book would be launched at Luton library on May 2nd, and there would be an exhibition space on the book at the library. FM thought the exhibition would be for one week, but she would confirm this. The book had been produced for Luton Food Bank in order to provide ideas on healthy low cost meals. The print run would be of 200 books, 100 of which would go to the organisations who work with and at food banks. The remaining 100 would be on sale for £3.00 each. KG asked about the book being available online, and FM said that the possibility of online availability was being looked at. KG said this would prove useful for her work with organisations who had connections to and with food banks, as she would be able to forward information on the book to them. FM said that recipes from the book could be photocopied and included with any relative items in the boxes of food which were being given to those in need of them.

10) Notices and Information Exchange

a) Housing developments:

i) The Old English Rose – as had already been discussed at the meeting, the building was for sale.

ii) 146 Midland Road – (The Railway Tavern) - Two applications had been made to make the ground floor offices into a nine bedroom HMO, or to make these into three flats. Concern was expressed at the size of the proposed rooms/flats, and it was asked if DL would look into the plans further to discuss if FoHT should make an objection to the application.

iii) Hatton Place – 114-134 Midland Road – An application had been made to convert the former club into 12 flats. It was thought that it would be good to use the site, but, again, DL was asked if he would look at the proposed development.

iv) 142-144 Midland Road – Work was due to start on the site to create a block of flats which would be 8 stories high, and comprise of 40 flats. LB expressed her concern at the proposed size of the individual flats, and asked if DL could look at the plans.

b) Wenlock Street car crash – It had been confirmed that there had been no fatalities as a result of the crash. It had been thought that the driver of the car had suffered a heart attack or stroke whilst driving, and this had resulted in the car going out of control.

c) Luton Borough Council - It had been said that the council were organising an event to celebrate the town's volunteers. No one had any information on this, and AM said that he had not received any information on the event.

11. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday, May 9th, at 7.00 p.m., at the Methodist Church Hall. This would include the Annual General Meeting, and those attending would need to pay the £2 annual membership fee. LM would not be standing for re-election as Media and Marketing Officer, and Maureen Allen would be standing down from her role as Secretary. They had both been in their roles for two years. DL would stand for re-election as Chairman, and FM would stand for re-election as Treasurer. LB said that she hoped that an email would be sent to encourage people to apply for the posts of those who were standing down.