

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

HELD ON MONDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Councillors Liz Jones (Town Mayor), Lisa Bird (Deputy Town Mayor), Peter Hollick (Chairman), Pam Ghent (Vice-Chairman), Greg George, John Gurney, Wendy Bater, Alan Corkhill, Gloria Martin and Gladys Sanders

In Attendance: Paul Hodson (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Becky Wisbey (Head of Community Services), Lisa Stephens (Cultural Services Manager), Michelle Collings (HSHAZ Manager, remotely), Gill Peck (Youth and Community Manager, remotely), Gina Thanky (Events Officer, remotely), Annette Clynes (Town Centre Services Officer, remotely) and Ian Reed (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies: Councillor Cameron Restall

Public: One

132. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 6 June 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

133. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

134. DUNSTABLE TOWN CENTRE SERVICES

The Committee was updated on Town Centre Services including vacancy rates, Middle Row Markets and partnership working.

Middle Row Markets had been entered into the National Association of British Markets (NABMA) Market Achievement of the year competition. A summary of achievements had been sent to NABMA. The markets were still popular with traders with 30 stalls booked on 16 July, the most stalls ever booked for a summer market. New traders were joining each month and Officers were expecting a very busy Christmas.

The repairs completed at Ashton Square Toilets were noted. The Committee noted once again the toilets had been entered into the Loo of the Year competition for 2022.

Town Centre

The Committee noted the vacancy rates. Five new shops had opened recently. Events on the Square were set out in the report. The Committee particularly noted the Dunstable High Street Fun Day and Middle Row markets on 16 July; 35 stalls were booked and this successful day was a result of partnership working with Central Bedfordshire Council. The Ashton Square Day 6 August had been set up to celebrate the past, present and future of the Square. The public feedback on the event was very good. Twilight Markets were set for 9, 10 and 11 December (3 pm to 6 pm Friday and Saturday and 10 am to 3 pm Sunday). The last Market for 2022 was 17 December with Christmas activities. It was further noted the plans for the Twilight Market would include children's carousel, crafts, snowboard

simulator with extra Christmas lights in the area and music.

Partnership Working

Shop Watch continued to meet and it was noted there was a meeting that the Town Centre Services Officer would attend on 6 September.

A new scheme was noted: 'Random Act of Kindness' which promoted Dunstable as a town of giving and kindness. The Town Council was also preparing a leaflet guiding businesses in the town as to what was and was not allowed in the conservation area. The Community Window in West Street had a 62 inch digital display screen which would carry details of community events.

Christmas Lights

The safety improvements to the hole for installation of the Christmas tree had been completed. New Christmas decorations were on order for the High Street and West Street which would be part of this year's display. It was noted festoons in Grove Gardens would replace the old decorations for this Christmas. Currently, it had not been possible to secure sponsorship of the Christmas tree. The Mayor of Dunstable advised the officers of possible opportunities to secure sponsorship.

It was agreed to thank the Town Centre Manager and her colleagues for her efforts and to request all Town Councillors to attend the events and markets organised by the Town Council.

135. OLDER PEOPLE'S SERVICES

The Good Companions Club had twenty four members. The Creasey Park Community Football Centre Lunch Club currently had thirty members. There was currently a waiting list with nine people waiting to join. The Committee received a report on the activities of the two groups.

Good Companions' Club

In June, the group received visits from Bedfordshire Fire Service and Central Bedfordshire Council Safer Communities team. Both visits offered valuable support and advice, which was well received by the groups. Following the visits 10 people requested Safe & Well visits which are in the process of being carried out. Members also received a visit from the Health and Fitness Manager from the Leisure Centre to talk about the free sessions they hold for older people to help prevent falls and promote wellness. The Good Companions Club annual summer outing took place in July. This trip was supported by four regular volunteers. This day out was appreciated by everyone. In August, the group were visited by a representative from the East Anglian Air Ambulance Service.

Creasey Park Community Football Centre Lunch Club

Since the last report, members had enjoyed several visits and activities including celebrations for the Platinum Jubilee, a sightseeing day trip to London followed by lunch in a restaurant, a summer party with a buffet lunch and entertainment as well as quizzes and music bingo led by one of the members. Visits included Dunstable Leisure Centre, where a member of Bedfordshire Police attended about scam awareness.

136. GROVE CORNER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Grove Corner

Grove Corner had received 779 visits from young people between 2 May and 17 August

2022. Pokémon was still popular, and numbers continued to increase.

Youth Engagement

A summer party was held on 23 July. A total of 47 young people attended and enjoyed karaoke, mocktails, sweets and pizza. On 29 July Prehistoric Experiences attended and the young people learned how to make their own string, facial reconstruction, and cave art and learned about caving times. A Lego workshop was held on Friday 5 August. Officers had delivered informal discussions and activities during the drop-in session on Monday evenings. A karaoke and disco event was held on 1 April 2022.

School Engagement

Officers facilitated a litter pick in Downside. Officers were liaising with Queensbury Academy to help set up 'Wellbeing Warriors at the school in the autumn term. The project would be known as 'Taking charge of your wellbeing' and would run in the autumn term.

Community Engagement

Officers met with Dunstable Wombles to support the group to create a safeguarding policy and put procedures in place before they received the equipment from the seed corn grant. Officers were supporting Friends of Dunstable Cemetery. The officers also facilitated a community version of the Good, Bad, Ugly. The Committee discussed Love Parks Week which ran from 11 July to 15 July;

11 July – 29 people attended games and a trail in Grove House Gardens

12 July – 72 people attended an Older People's Wellbeing Day in Priory Gardens

13 July – approximately 25 people attended an obstacle course and boxing taster session at Downside Recreation Ground

14 July – 34 children and 30 adults attended a picnic in the park at Bennett Memorial Recreation Ground

15 July – approximately 120 people attended Gin and Tea event at Priory Gardens

Officers had facilitated the summer activities programme. This included small scale workshops as well as bigger events such as Inflatable Day, Let's get Creative and a Big Top Circus activity. A total of 1,006 people took part in the programme. Officers would be holding a wellbeing walk as part of Bedfordshire Walking Festival on 12 September in partnership with the Wildlife Trust. Refreshments will be provided at Ringcraft Boxing.

Recruitment

Vacancies had been advertised for Community and Youth Casual Sessional Workers.

It was agreed to thank The Youth and Community Manager and her colleagues for organising the summer events. The Committee was particularly impressed with the organisation of Love Parks Week.

137. HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE (HSHAZ)

The Committee considered the latest update report on the High Street Heritage Action Zone.

Latest Updates

- Number 4 High Street South

Since 13 December 2021 there had been four applications from the owners of 4 High Street South in respect of design work, survey work, scaffolding design and works and project management and Principal Designer/Construction Design Management work. Officers were

awaiting confirmation that the owner would support the works.

- Number 7 High Street South

An application for a new shop front was submitted in late March but was not approved until July 2022. Conception Architects were managing the tender process for the building work. The closing date for receipt of tenders was 7 September. However, it was now reported there was a possibility that if the tenders were high it would not be possible for the project to progress

- Number 18 High Street South

Repair works funded through HSHAZ have been completed; other works not funded by HSHAZ were continuing. The owners were hoping to rent the property out once the works were completed.

- Number 21-23 High Street South

Dialogue with the owner has been ongoing. The member decision group has agreed upon a potential grant amount should an application be received. However, to date the owner has not submitted the necessary paperwork.

- Number 2 Church Street

There was no expectation that an application would be pursued.

Priory House (See also Minute)

The Priory House project was likely to commence in mid September 2022 and it was estimated the works would take approximately 40 weeks taking the project to June 2023.

Community Engagement

In summary, the summer programme of engagement has included Priory Rocks, held in Priory House and Priory Church, Festival of Archaeology, HSHAZ Roar into Archaeology on 23 June at the Quadrant Shopping Centre and Ashton Square Day on 6 August.

There had been various other HSHAZ activities at several events and standalone activities since 6 June including: HSHAZ themed crazy golf at the Jubilee Market on 11 June, HSHAZ activities including Digging for Stories trail, the Mulberry Dyer, the Longthorpe Legion, Paul Vitty and the History Knights at Party in the Park on 9 July. Activities included a Memory Workshop with the Dunstable Cultural Consortium at Love Parks Week with a free Older People's Wellbeing Day on 12 July. HSHAZ Activity comprising caricature artist to create historical themed portraits at Love Parks Gin and Tea on 15 July. Cave people from Prehistoric Experiences www.prehistoricexperiences.com/ on 29 July at Grove Corner. Bricks McGee Local Landmarks Lego Workshops on 5 August at Grove Corner comprising a number of timed sessions with up to 30 participants per session. HSHAZ activities at Summer Activities Arts and Crafts on 11 August. The Adventure Out Games new puzzle trail game only ran for a short period of time in later May and earlier July.

It was agreed to thank The HSHAZ Manager for her efforts to deliver the programme.

138. EVENTS

Events Programme 2022 Review

The Committee considered a report on the following events:

- (i) St George's Day
- (ii) Motor Rally
- (iii) Queen's Jubilee Concert
- (iv) Dunstable Live
- (v) Party in the Park
- (vi) Band Concerts - they had been well received and had been hosted by the Town Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and Councillor Greg George.
- (vii) Around the World featuring the Dunstable Festival of Archaeology - went very well with an attendance of 4,000 across the day.
- (viii) Priory Pictures - this rescheduled event on Saturday 20 August achieved an attendance of 1,000 across the day.
- (ix) Priory Proms - the Committee noted this would be held on 10 September.
- (x) Christmas Carols and Torchlight Procession commencing 25 November. The Town Mayor advised she was organising a free Christmas Carol event around the Christmas Tree in Priory Gardens on Sunday 27 November which she hoped Priory House would benefit from refreshment sales.

Event Review Working Group

The Working Group would meet in September to review the above events and a report would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to allow it to determine the programme for 2023. It was agreed to thank The Events Officer, her colleagues and the Town Councils' main contractor for organising and delivering the summer events to such a high standard

139. PRIORY HOUSE INFORMATION REPORT

Operational Issues

The Committee was advised that there had been some staff shortages over the last three months due to sickness and resignations. The issue had been addressed by employing casual staff and existing staff taking on additional hours. Staff were prepared for the refurbishment works commencing on 12 September.

Tourist Information Centre and Retail Outlet

Trading was going well. Pet and garden stock was popular with customers. Frenchic paint continued to sell well and was attracting new customers.

The Jacobean Room

There were eleven weddings and one vows renewal booked for the rest of the year. There were already four weddings confirmed and paid for in 2023. The first outdoor wedding had been a success and another two were booked for this year. The Committee was advised of all the bookings for the Jacobean Room which included 64 paid functions.

Events

The Committee noted the events programme with satisfaction.

Priory House Tea Rooms

The tea rooms were trading extremely well; total income including additional income 2022/23 was £51,437.04.

Ground Floor Reconfiguration

Further to the decision of the Finance and General Purposes Committee on June 2022 (minute refers not to support reserve monies to be spent on improvements to the shop area of the house), officers had looked to see how the ground floor could be better utilised with an investment of up to £10,000 as approved by the chair.

Since August new tables, chairs and a 'bean to cup' coffee machine had been in place. These had been used regularly and a secondary spend on gift shop items from those sat at the table and chairs had been noted by staff. This addition to the offer meant Priory House is able to offer a quicker takeaway service. This had already proved very popular, especially on Saturdays and market and event days. In the Tea Rooms there had been additional point of sale opportunities, which had a similar result.

Officers requested further clarification regarding how to reduce the loss of income from the 9-month closure of the Undercroft, how to reduce the overall subsidy for Priory House and how best to use staff at Priory House. The following suggestions from Members had been received which officers continued to investigate:

- Removal of cube display boxes in current shop area, making more use of all shelving and add additional cafe seating.
 - *Officers will investigate with contractor.*
- For duration of works remove the "lounge" furniture and put in Undercroft tearoom tables and chairs to maximise covers.
 - *This is already planned for the beginning of works*
- For duration of works remove in tearoom area near till, the dresser and barrow and maximise space with seating.
 - *Officers have considered this option and still need to resolve where to store the dresser during the works and also where to store its contents (e.g. coffee beans, sugars menus etc).*
- For the duration of the works erect a temporary structure outside Priory House linked to the main building and heated to give some extra tables.
 - *With it being an open public park there would need to be security during the evening to ensure that the structure was safe and secure. The additional cost means that there is no financial benefit to this option.*
- Maximise on marketing opportunities
 - *Officers are already undertaking this including use of social media, website, ToTT, showcase window etc.*
- Offer Priory House 'goods and services' at other DTC sites e.g. Creasey Park Community Football Centre.
 - *Some goods are now being trialled for sale at Creasey Park.*
- Reduce the size of the till area in the shop, providing space for more covers and/or display areas.
 - *This is what was proposed in June as it is believed by officers that this part of the shop could be better configured to ensure that space is used more efficiently.*
- Introduce new lines of stock which are Dunstable branded e.g. confectionary,

biscuits, dog treats.

- *Officers are investigating available products.*
- Extend the alcohol offer e.g. not just one off G&T events with regularly opening to make the use of the building of an evening.
 - *Officers are considering future events and will now also consider staffing and opening options to maximise use of the building when it is currently closed.*
- Lease the space to a third party.
 - *This brings several options e.g., whole building or all the ground floor (both of which would bring significant staffing implications and the grant may prohibit this anyway) or just the shop space (which would have less of a staffing implication). Officers would need further time to scope out the full costs and detail of these options should this be something the committee would like explored. These options could only be facilitated post works due to the unknown operational disruption.*

140. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT APPLICATIONS

The Committee considered a report on two four-year Service Level Agreement applications. The Committee was also advised of the BRCC decision not to sign the revised SLA approved at the last meeting to increase its SLA grant. BRCC had concerns regarding the original details in the SLA. Until the matter was resolved the additional SLA grant would not be released.

RESOLVED: That the application received from SORTED be approved and the Keech Hospice application be not approved at this time.

141. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

South Bedfordshire Dial-a-Ride

Councillor Gloria Martin provided an update on the operation of the service. It was noted that a new General Manager had been appointed.

Dunstable Town Band

Councillor Martin had not been invited to any meetings since the last meeting.

Men in Sheds (MiS)

Councillor John Gurney reported that:

In August, DTC finally received the updated price for refurbishing the Shed (former Grounds Store) in Meadway by the entrance to the allotments. Due to the shortfall between the original pre-pandemic price discussions were held between the DMiS Board of Trustees and the Town Council to discuss how Men in Sheds met the new price. The final totals of how much DMiS can contribute from its own savings and various grants they have been offered by CBC are shown in a report for the Grounds and Environment Committee to be discussed next Monday 12 September.

Over the summer months, DMiS' income had been generated from market stalls, events such as Around the World, Luton Transport festival and Edlesborough fete, plus monthly subscriptions and donations. Expenses included a £120 a month for an outside port-a-loo. The refurbishment would include an internal toilet.

£959 Gross Income

£691 Expenses

£268 Net Income

The meeting closed at 20.45