

# ROYSTON TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND NHDC ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

Held in the Heritage Hall, Town Hall, Royston on Thursday 21st March 2019 at 7.30pm

## **Present:**

Mayor of Royston and Town Councillor Iain Leggett (Chairman)

Royston Town Councillors:

Ruth Brown, Ian Coll, John Davison, Mike Harrison, Mark Hughes, Robert Inwood, Tom Perry, Marguerite Phillips, F John Smith, Philip Smith, Emma Squire-Smith, Carol Stanier, Vera Swallow.

RTC Officers:

Caroline Mills - Town Clerk, Eileen Byfield - Assistant Town Clerk & Rachel Bartholomew - Administration Assistant.

North Hertfordshire District Councillors Bill Davidson, Sarah Dingley, Jean Green & Tony Hunter.

Hertfordshire County Councillors Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis

Royston First Bid Company – Geraint Burnell.

Approximately 40 electors of the town.

The chairman advised that the meeting would be recorded.

## **1. APOLOGIES:**

Apologies were received from:

Police Sergeant Jonathan Vine

Town Councillor Amy Bourke-Waite

North Hertfordshire District Councillors Gerald Morris and Linda Needham

## **2. MINUTES:**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018 were signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

## **3. ANNUAL STATEMENT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR, COUNCILLOR IAIN LEGGETT**

Welcome Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Councillors, the Town Clerk & staff and our guest speakers.

Over the last year, it has been an honour to serve this town as Mayor and see the real Royston. Royston is a great town to live in. The motto for the town is 'from good things to better.'

So, what have I seen and what have I learnt so far in my year as Mayor.

Well, the community at large is the driving force that makes a town good. With its almost unlimited resources, its generous heart and sacrificial giving of time, I consider this to be the most powerful thing that we have.

We have heroes, hard-working, dedicated to their craft or club. Many of whom are volunteers and their dedication should be applauded. What's encouraging is that these are growing further, so thank you all.

I've attended openings, given out awards and met people from all different walks of life. So what are my highlights?

An evening with the Royston and District Motorcycle club. The Remembrance Day Service with the special display by the Royal British Legion. Visiting the local Care homes at Christmas and New Year. My Fund raising event in which my band played at the Bull Inn. This was a great success.

Behind all this though we have had challenges and needed to find some answers and implement changes. Firstly, we need to keep praying for our Parish Church as they start the long process of restoration.

The Community Toilet Scheme has expanded and The Banyers House has now been added to the scheme. We thank them and the existing scheme members the Jolly Postie and the Coach and Horses for continuing to support their community.

The Royston Cave is now under a new management structure and preparations are well under way for this season's opening on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

New housing developments are being built in the town.

The Royston Tapestry is now finished and will go on exhibition to the public, here in the Town Hall, from July 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, between the hours of 10am to 6pm every day. Please come along and view this special exhibit.

The most exciting thing for the town? Well, we have just seen the opening of the gateway site with Aldi & M&S opening their doors. Which opened and cut the tape.

Tonight I have an opportunity to thank and present some money to worthwhile groups who help and support this town and also give some awards to some wonderful people who over the years have helped, giving their time and effort for the sake of the town and its residents.

Finally I would like to say again, thank you to all who make this town a great place to live in.

#### **4. PRESENTATION OF THE MAYOR'S COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS AND COMMUNITY TRUST FUND AWARDS:**

**Community Trust Fund Grants:** These awards help local organisations with funding for particular projects within the town.

<b>ORGANISATION</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF GRANT</b>	<b>AMOUNT AWARDED</b>
Home Start	To assist with the cost of an outing to Paradise Wildlife Park	£250
Priory Quilters	To assist with hiring Market Hill Rooms for an exhibition of quilts and textile art as part of Royston Arts Festival	£229.50
Royston Speak Out Club	To assist with the cost of a summer outing	£300
Royston Arts Society	To assist with the cost of hiring the Heritage Hall for the annual autumn art exhibition which forms part of the Royston Arts Festival	£240
Royston Historical Pageant	To assist with the staging of Royston Historical Pageant	£1,000
Royston Bowling club	To assist with the purchase of a dethatching machine	£250
Rotary Club of Royston	To assist with the cost of providing tables for the schools Technology Tournament	£250
Royston Photographic Society	To assist with the cost of hiring the Town Hall for the Royston Arts Festival Exhibition	£187

The Town Mayor, Councillor Iain Leggett, then presented Community Service Awards to:

Lindsay Davidson – In recognition of her services to the Royston community over many years as a Town Councillor, volunteer and active member of many committees.

Susan Thornton-Bjork – In recognition of her work as Town Clerk to Royston Town Council from 2006 to 2017.

Ben and Beth Chapman – for their work in fund raising for many local charities.

Royston and District Community Transport – In recognition of 25 years serving the Royston community.

## **5. REPORT FROM GERAINT BURNELL, ROYSTON FIRST BID COMPANY LTD:**

Operation Artemis continues to provide after-hours policing. Of over 300 BIDs in the UK we are believed to be the only one utilising uniformed police patrols. All four children's trails once again delivered record numbers of participants. Royston Focus was delivered to 15,000 households listing all the consumer businesses in Royston and featuring 10 businesses new to the town on the front cover. The Town Website continues to be improved and updated (the promised new section on parks and open spaces was delivered during the year). Both the eateries and retail short films have been updated to reflect changes within the town.

After our success with Christmas window painting in 2017, this year we circulated an offer to decorate the windows of the first 15 shops that applied. This allocation was filled within 48 hours and we ended up with two further sessions and a total of nearly 30 windows painted. This is to be repeated in 2019.

The Christmas lights display was delivered in partnership with the Town Council and NHDC (who do the Christmas tree). I think it's fair to say that we all encountered problems with HCC's regulations for festive lighting. We were also informed a few weeks ago that even more stringent regulations due to come in 2020 would apply from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 (Royston First have budgeted for wholesale changes in 2020/21), therefore affecting this year's lights. I'm already embroiled in multiple discussions about this year's Christmas decorations.

The Royston Picture Palace has undergone operational changes (some of which are ongoing) but that hasn't affected the quality of our offer – as witnessed by the fact that we have achieved 13 sell out performances already this year.

As promised last year, we lobbied the developers of the Royston Gateway to open the link road in advance of the retail units in order to relieve chronic rush hour congestion in leaving the existing industrial estate. We almost achieved the road being built a year early, but in the event we had to settle for the road preceding the retailers by 4 months or so.

I mentioned last year that the Royston First Bid was due for renewal by referendum by the end of this financial year. This process has been happening for the past few months and I am pleased to announce that the result has been confirmed of the renewal by a ratio of 4:1. The new BID will commence in April and run for 5 years. It includes continuing provision of many of the projects discussed above. The new BID board will be assembled next month and priorities will be set for working on new initiatives designed to benefit Royston.

## **6. REPORTS FROM THE CHAIRMEN OF ROYSTON TOWN COUNCIL COMMITTEES:**

### **Cllr J Davison, Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Finance Committee:**

I'm going to talk about, our staff and some of what they have been up to in the last year, our Councillors and take a look forward to the coming year.

The last year has been a very busy and challenging time for our staff.

What they have achieved is all the more remarkable when you understand that our Town Clerk, Caroline Mills, has been in post for only around 1 year, and in that time Caroline has recruited 2 new office staff, Tracy and Rachel, a new museum manager, Madeline, a new Cave Manager, Nicky, a new caretaker, Steve, and a new markets manager, Rob.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all, and our other staff members Eileen, Amy, Sefton and Daniel, for their commitment and the excellent service they provide for our community and our Councillors.

We have a very strong team.

Looking back over the last year, here are some of the things they have done:

- They organised the well supported May Fayre (preparation for this year's event on 6<sup>th</sup> May is almost complete).
- They managed the refurbishment of the War Memorial in preparation for the centenary memorial service.
- They directed the ongoing maintenance at the Green Walk and Stile Plantations. This year it has cost more than £10,000 to make safe, diseased and damaged trees. It will cost more in future years.
- Answered 3,000 - 4,000 face to face enquiries from the public and a similar number of phone calls, paid over 700 invoices, managed around 1,500 lettings for meeting rooms and halls, 3,375 visitors to the Cave, around 150 Museum events and 8,000 museum visitors.
- Achieved their 3<sup>rd</sup> 100% clean financial audit in a row.

And last, but certainly not least, supported and guided the 15 Town Councillors including the 7 new Councillors you elected last May.

Once again, thank you to all our staff.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all the Councillors. We are all unpaid volunteers, making our time available for community service alongside the demands of work and family commitments. I believe we do make a difference for the residents of Royston and I thank all the Councillors for their commitment and service.

On to Finance matters. We expect to be on budget for this financial year 2018-19. I can't give you the exact figures as many of our contracts are settled at the end of the financial year in a few weeks' time.

Looking forward, this year's budget is the first from your new Town Council. Royston Town Council has always been fiscally prudent and, over the next 3 years, we will continue to manage and use your money with great care.

Our Town Council Tax for a “Band D” property has been around £42 per year since 2015. For next year 2019/20 it will rise from £42.53 to £47.29, an increase of just under £5 per year.

Our Town Council Tax is much lower than for example the small parishes of Ashwell £89.96, Barkway £90.86 and larger towns of Codicote £63.70 and Knebworth £74.71.

We have made this increase in Town Council Tax to be able, amongst other things, to get rid of zero-hours contracts, budget more money for managing the ageing trees in our Plantations and provide a £20k fund to start improvements and introduce new facilities which we believe will benefit the community.

Some projects are already underway. Some we can do ourselves, some will be in the hands of District and County Councillors who we work closely with. Some projects will require different sources of funds.

We have a long list of ideas which includes bicycle racks on the Market Place, establishing and promoting safe walking/jogging trails, a new bandstand/amphitheatre for Priory Memorial Gardens, securing the future of the Picture Palace, a disabled parking bay in the High Street, the A505 pedestrian/cycle crossing and many more.

Your views are important to us and we will be consulting you on what should take priority.

I am also very pleased to let you know that in the last few weeks NHDC has negotiated and agreed £200k for “additional local facilities for Royston” as part of the 106 provisions from the housing development that will be built North of Baldock Road. Half the money should be available towards the end of 2020 with the rest to follow some years in the future.

I think Royston is a great place to live. We can make small improvements ourselves and work with the District and County Councils to secure the bigger projects to benefit all our residents.

#### **Report from Cllr Marguerite Phillips, Chairman, Planning Committee**

The Town Council is consulted on all applications for development in Royston. Our role is to review and make comment on these, either by raising no objection to the application, objecting to it completely, or requesting improvements where necessary. Town Council consultation is an important part of the planning process and we make recommendations, using our local knowledge and experience. Of course the major consideration for the Planning Committee is to look at the impact that each development will have on the surrounding neighbourhood.

If we object to an application we do have to give valid reasons for doing so, these are known as ‘material considerations’, however local opinion is very important to us.

Our comments as a planning consultee are taken into account when the actual decisions are made by the District Council. Most planning decisions are made by planning officers under

delegated powers but some are taken before the District Council's Planning Control Committee for a decision by District Councillors.

During this council year, the Planning Committee has so far considered over 120 planning applications, some of these being major developments and the vast majority of which we have supported and given our feedback.

The committee has raised objections to some applications where, for instance, it was considered to be an overdevelopment of the site and detrimental to the area, local residents or to traffic safety.

These included:

- A large expansion of Blckett-Ord Court as it was an overdevelopment and lacked adequate parking. This application was subsequently withdrawn.
- Four proposed town houses near the busy junction on Green Drift as it was considered to be an overdevelopment. This was refused by NHDC and has now been resubmitted for only 3 houses with reduced roof heights and other improvements.
- The proposed housing development south of Lower Gower Road, which the committee considered to be an overdevelopment by way of the excessive height of the houses, increased traffic that would be generated in an already congested area and the new houses not being in keeping with the neighbourhood. We await a decision from NHDC on this application.
- Members raised a strong objection to the application by Gladman Developments Ltd for a new development of 107 houses. These were to be built on land opposite Heath Farm and we were grateful for the subsequent refusal by the District Planning Control Committee. This showed considerable common sense, thought for the local environment and protection of the natural setting of Royston.
- We have objected to the proposal for a Churchill Retirement Home in Mill Road. The committee realise that this type of development is becoming more popular and is normally something that would be welcomed but, in our opinion, Mill Road is not suitable for such a large scale building and subsequent traffic generation. We also took into consideration the ongoing development in Lumen Road and the impact from that.
- The committee have welcomed the progress being made to the development of the land between York Way and the A505 and are now seeing the results of our input to this application.
- Members have also continued to consult with the developers of the Newmarket Road site where work is now underway. We, very recently, received a presentation from developers about a proposal for a new care home on Phase 3 and were able to ask them questions and also give them valuable insight on local care needs. This application was put to the committee in March but an objection was raised as Members thought that the size and scale of the property needs to be reconsidered. The development in the proposed format would have a damaging effect on the views up the hill. The loss of the affordable housing from the development would also need to be addressed and it was considered that there were not enough car parking spaces

for staff and visitors. Members were supportive of the concept of the need for a care home, but felt that more work was required.

- We were disappointed at the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council to allow the submitted plans for redevelopment of the Horse and Groom site on the A505. Our objection had been concern over the potential number of vehicles going in and out of the three retail units onto such a busy and fast section of the dual carriageway.

The Committee has also commented on the modifications to the draft Local Plan and welcome that this is nearing completion.

The Planning Committee will continue to thoroughly consider all the planning applications that are put to us and to do our very best to represent the views of the people of Royston. We do encourage local residents to attend the Town Council planning committee meetings and to let us know their views in the public participation sessions.

I would like to thank the Town Clerk and her staff for their support to the Planning Committee and myself, their knowledge and expertise is invaluable. I would also like to thank my fellow members of the Planning Committee for their diligence and valuable contributions to our meetings.

#### **Report from Cllr Mike Harrison, Chairman, General Purposes and Highways Committee**

As in previous years, we have discussed many different subjects over the last 12 months. We get regular updates from County councillors on what they are doing, and what is happening at county level. For this I must thank both Cllr Fiona Hill and Cllr Steve Jarvis who both give a lot of their time for our benefit. In addition I must also thank Cllr Tony Hunter the chairman of North Hertfordshire District Council Area Committee, who, like our County councillors keeps us in the picture of what is going on locally at district level, and further afield in the district. Thank you to all three councillors, your input is appreciated and most helpful to us. Last year we were invited to give our view on flood management in the county. A sub-committee was set up of Town, District and County councillors, and together with the Town Clerk we worked our way through the document and submitted our views and suggestions. This was yet another case of councillors from the three levels of local government working together for the benefit of Royston and its residents.

Councillors from the three councils attend the North Herts Bus Users Group, to listen to their views and report back to their committee. Members of the Town Council also sit on various outside bodies, and report back to this committee, where the activities effect the areas we cover. I myself sit on the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils, and councillors from all over the county advise what they are doing and their problems, much of which concerns rural bus routes. In the past I have reported to this meeting on buses in our town and surrounding areas.

On the subject of buses the old 26 route has been replaced by the A route which not only goes to Cambridge but on to St Ives, and gives a direct link to Addenbrookes Hospital. Also, the 331 service has been replaced by the 18 service, which goes between Royston and

Buntingford and links up with the 331 bus to Hertford which I understand now covers extra villages on route.

Another subject we were asked for our views on was gambling, and we suggested no further gambling licences should be issued in our town. Traffic problems in Melbourn Street have been discussed in view of the hold ups caused by lorries making deliveries especially at peak times, which can result in long tail backs in the town.

The Chief Constable invited us to make a bid for funding towards road safety. A sub-committee was set up with the three councils again involved and I am pleased to advise we have been awarded a grant, Cllr Fiona Hill will give further details in her report.

We have also been advised we can apply to become a 'Sustainable Travel Town'. This is something being run by the County Council, and would involve better footpaths, cycle ways and bus routes. We set up a sub-committee to work on this, and so far have had just the first meeting, and again Town, District and County councillors were involved. We asked the Town Clerk to apply for the pack needed, and will set up more meetings so we can start work on this task. In the meantime North Herts District Council have advised they are setting up a scheme for cycling routes and footpaths. The sub-committee has met with the officers of the district council, and will do so again in due course. The sub-committee will work on these two plans from district and county, in the hope of improving facilities for the people of our town.

We are also keeping a close eye on the Conservators of the Heath, who have suggested that a parking charge be brought in for vehicles parked there. We are worried this may have an effect on parking in the immediate area to the Heath, but at the present time await a decision by the conservators, which is expected soon.

The committee is also trying to obtain more bus shelters with seating at some bus stops. The matter is still being investigated at the present time, and we hope to have more information on this subject soon. School visits have just started again for 2019, and are at the time of this report still on going.

I must thank all the members of this committee for their hard work over the year, and my deputy Cllr Vera Swallow for her help and support. In addition I wish to thank the Town Clerk Miss Caroline Mills for all her help and support, and all her staff in the office. Without the hard work of these ladies we could not operate. So my thanks to each and every one of them. Also thank you again to our County and district friends, please keep up the good work, and thank you for your continued support. Thank you.

## **7. REPORT FROM HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR FIONA HILL.**

Thank you Mr Mayor, Councillors, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to update the meeting on County Council issues. The Council remains in the situation of financial challenges but has managed to balance the budget with no significant effect on front line services. The council tax increase has been set at 2.99% with Adult Care and Children's Services remaining huge priorities for the council and again is where the highest expenditure occurs.

Education is one of the key responsibilities of the County Council and the relationship between the local schools, the County Council and the councillors remains strong. I am

delighted, in the recent Ofsted inspection, that Meridian School was judged to be a 'Good School' with positive feedback in all categories. The school visits have taken place again this year with attendance from Town, District and County councillors. Schools in Royston and the villages have participated in the Technology Tournament, Youth Makes Music and Youth Speaks, all of which are arranged by the Rotary Club. They have also participated in many sports events and remain among the best in the county.

The Hertfordshire Adults and Family Learning Service is going from strength to strength.

Healthcare in Royston remains a key issue and together with Sir Oliver Heald and Councillor Tony Hunter I am continuing to work with Royston Community Health, the County Council and the NHS for a facility on the Royston Hospital site, in London Road, which fits exactly with the Government agenda of Integrated Health and Social Care. Public Health continues to be a huge priority for Government and the County Council, and the preventative work to reduce smoking, alcohol and obesity is still high on the agenda to reduce the pressure on acute hospitals, which continues to increase. Mental health issues are now widely recognised and the problems, at an early stage, are being addressed in the schools via the County Council and working with the partners in the schools. I have also been involved with the Carers and Learning Disability Partnership Boards to highlight widespread issues and have been promoting the awareness of Sepsis and Dementia, which can both have devastating consequences.

Partnership working continues to work well between the Town, District and County councillors. We are working on safety issues such as speeding, congestion and dangerous illegal parking, particularly outside the schools. Safer crossing within Royston and cross border over the A505, including improved pedestrian/cycle links and a weight limit, to prevent heavy traffic through Melbourn Street, Baldock Street and Baldock Road is being worked on. Although a scheme remains on the Highways Locality Budget list there is a strong possibility that, following the investigation on the A507 and views put forward with concerns about the impact on surrounding roads, a weight limit would form part of the wider A507 project. There is also a scheme being designed by County improving safety along the A505 between Royston and Baldock, following serious concerns from residents and councillors. We have also been supporting the Rail Users Group following issues with the new train service timetable and also the North Herts Bus Users Group.

There have been joint working parties with Royston Town Council and the Area Committee, including whether Royston should become a 'Sustainable Travel Town', the local Flood Risk Management Strategy, the bid for Police and Crime Commissioner funding for Speed Indicator Devices and also the Town Centre Working Party. I have installed numerous Speed Indicator Devices in the town. We are investigating the possibility of installing a new Speed Indicator Device in the existing socket in Garden Walk and will be moving the Speed Indicator Device in Barkway Road and turning the two in Kneesworth Street and Newmarket Road. This work is linking in well with Councillor Dingley's 'Drive Safe' initiative which also involves the community. I am also hopeful that safety improvements will be carried out on the Melbourn Street crossing, following the safety audit. The Highways Locality and community Locality Budgets have provided funding for many highways schemes and to various organisations for

the benefit of residents in Royston and the villages including the contribution to 'Free after 3' car parking, which is funded jointly by myself and Councillor Jarvis through our Locality Budgets, the Area Committee and Royston First.

We have also provided funding for the Rotary Club, and many other organisations within the town. The local discretion provided by these funds has proved invaluable and they will be available again in the next financial year. Full details of all areas where highways works have been carried out and organisations which have received funding are available to view on the website. The free salt scheme from the County Council, for use in the community salt bins, has also taken place this year.

Finally I should like to thank councillors and officers from Town, District and County Councils for their support. Thank you also to the Royston Town Councillors and the Town Clerk, Caroline Mills and her team for welcoming me to their meetings and their ongoing support.

Mr Mayor this concludes my report.

## **8. REPORT FROM HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR STEVE JARVIS**

I will try and avoid repeating too much of what Councillor Hill has talked about, but it is important to recognise that the County Council spends about half of its money on providing for vulnerable adults and that is increasing for the very good reason that we are getting better as a nation at allowing people to live longer, but that means in some cases that they need support for very much longer, than was the case in the past. Also, the County Council spends about 25% of its resources on looking after vulnerable children or providing special education for those children who need that, and once again we have got better as a community at identifying those children who can achieve their potential if they are provided with specialised help. But of course that costs more money and those things have an impact, those things that most of us don't see unless we happen to know someone who uses those services, but it has an impact on the resources that the County Council has to spend on the things that we do see, like the roads, libraries and public transport etc., that puts a constraint on what we can achieve. One of the things that I do at the County Council is I sit on a panel called the Highways and Environment Panel which looks at the way that the council deals with highway matters across the county. There are a number of things that have happened there, there is a proposal that will result in the street lights that go off at night staying on longer and actually saving the council some money as well because of the way they work the new l.e.d. street lights. Also looking at the way in which we can get better at repairing the roads. There has been some additional money put in specifically to repairing minor roads because under the previous arrangement there were some minor roads that never got to the top of the list. That has produced some local benefits already, there are some of the local roads on the Twigdens estate that got dealt with like that and Tannery Drift is going to be dealt with under that scheme as well, so we have some local benefits. Last year the government decided that it would give all of the councils that deal with highways extra money over the winter to improve the maintenance of the roads, and Hertfordshire got nearly £8 million pounds which is great, but the problem is that it all had to be spent in the winter, which is not the best time to repair roads, fortunately we didn't have much snow this winter, so they will be able to finish

everything that they planned to, although this has brought some things forward. Tannery Drift was going to be done in the next financial year, but will now be done next Sunday, brought forward by 1 month. It means there will be space to do other things that would not have been done, for instance part of Sun Hill would be included. The position of the holes in the road is improving, not as much as we would like, but we have managed to get some more resources put in that are having some effect.

The other panel that I sit on for the council is the Growth, Infrastructure, Planning and Economy panel, which also deals with public transport. As part of that, one of the things that we did in the autumn is to get Govia Thames Link (who run the trains) to turn up, we do not have any power over them, but we managed to ask them lots of probing questions about the appalling service for part of last year. It's clear that although they are mainly responsible, the department of transport and Network Rail are also partly responsible. The County Council has no power, it can write, it can lobby people, it can represent views, and it did that on that issue. I'm not going to argue that was the only reason that things improved but it is an important role in terms of being able to make it clear that there is a real community concern about something at that sort of level.

The other area that we deal with is areas like the future planning of Hertfordshire's transport. The Council has adopted a 'local transport plan' which sets out a series of objectives as to how, if we are going to deal with the growing numbers of people in Hertfordshire, we need to get more people to make more journeys on foot and by bus and by bike. If we can make some impact in terms of people making journeys that they can that way, then that will help with not only the current congestion but also the issues to come with more and more people living in the county. Later in the year there is a document coming out called the North Central Hertfordshire Growth and Transport plan which will set out some more detailed ideas as to things that might be done across this part of the county. It covers North Herts and Stevenage. There will be proposals as to what might be done and I hope this will include the work on cycle ways that we have already heard something about, and provides a kind of a framework in which the 'Sustainable Travel Town' mechanism will fit.

In terms of moving on to local issues, Councillor Hill has mentioned the highways locality budget, and I also have some money which I can direct where highway money gets spent. I try to spend as much as that as possible on doing new things and I try and get the people who have the maintenance budgets to fill the holes because we can then spend the money on things like the speed indicator signs and repairing some of the footways which otherwise never gets on the list. There is also the locality budget that provides grants to local organisations, the only organisations that get given grants are the ones who ask for them, so it is important to ask. It is interesting the things that go on in the town, the things where a relatively small amount of money can help someone start something new, get something going, get something done and I am always pleased to hear from people to see if we can provide some help with that.

I just wanted to finish by saying, there has been a couple of people who have mentioned the visits to schools. I think one of the really good things that the Town Council does is to organise for us to go along – a County Councillor, a District Councillor and a Town Councillor – to as

many of the schools that will have us, which I think is most of them most years. To meet the children to tell them about what we do, to listen to their views about what we do and their views about the town. Some of these meetings can be very entertaining, and some of them ask some pretty difficult questions on occasions. But one of the impressive things is just how many of the children in the schools really enjoy living here, they have good ideas how it could be made better but they think Royston is a great place, and it is really good to hear that the young people in the town feel like that. That is all that I need to say. Thank you.

## **9. REPORT FROM ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, DISTRICT COUNCILLOR TONY HUNTER**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Good evening thank you for having me.

North Herts District Council, now probably not many people are aware that North Herts District Council is a little unique, we have a thing called area committees, there are 10 other districts in Hertfordshire and none of them have that. We not only have our area committees, we also have a community team behind them that actually work with our local communities and it works very well. We also have a grant pot – we have a budget to give money away and we also have a capital grant scheme to aid and assist communities. Currently this year alone under our grants with the local area committee we have given to:

- Singing Kettle group – June 18 - £400 awarded to assist with the purchase of a laptop computer and website software.
- Royston Cricket Club – September 18 - £1,500 awarded to assist with the purchase of cricket sight screens.
- North Herts MS Society – September 18 - £740 awarded to assist with the purchase of a new exercise bike.
- Make Lunch – September 18 - £450 awarded to assist with the cost for First Aid Training of volunteers and staff.
- McSplash Swimming Centre – September 18 £240 awarded to assist with publicity costs for swimming gala
- Royston Bowls Club – November 18 - £1,000 awarded to assist with costs for the purchase of a de-thatching machine.
- Royston Choral Society – November 18 - £750 awarded to assist with venue hire and publicity cost for Annual concert.
- Royston Historical Pageant – November 18 - £500 awarded to assist with publicity and equipment costs for the event which will be held for the first time on 7<sup>th</sup> July.
- Royston University of the Third Age – March 19 - £850 awarded to assist with the purchase of equipment including a camcorder and projector screen.
- Free after 3pm Parking Initiative – April 2019 - £1,500 awarded.

With the community facilities capital projects fund, we managed to support the Coombes association with an application for £50,000. This is not pennies, it is serious money for the good of the community. We have also supported Barkway Village Hall in enhancing their kitchen area and an extension. At the moment we are helping Royston Day Care Centre with an application for £50,000, helping Therfield, Royston and Kelshall Sports Association for

£50,000 and helping Royston Heath Sports Club to improve their facilities, toilet and a spectator area. Also working with the British Legion to aid and assist them to put an application in.

Other capital funding, we have assigned £100,000 of enhancement work to the Coombes Community Centre. Section 106, this is where a developer is made to give a percentage of money to both County and District Councils to aid and assist the community. It can be for education, roads, any number of things. We together have supported another £43,000 for Coombes Community Centre, £15,000 for the Royston BMX track, a new bus shelter for Barkway and a new sports pavilion that we have given £6,000 for new play equipment. These things are important, and I actually sit on the Planning committee at North Herts and there is a lot of housing coming our way in Royston, that money has to be put to good use to make sure we can hold developers to task to give a fair percentage back to the community. I actually sat on the planning committee that rejected the Briary Lane development, and I wish I could be as confident to say that the application will not come back again, because developers are always looking for ways to develop land. I feel personally, they will put in another application at a later date, changed in some way or other, but we will have to take that when it comes along. As always we have to work within planning law, so developers use the current system and put in applications wherever they think they have an opportunity. Currently the local plan, as you are probably aware, has been delayed on the consultation and that actually finishes on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Currently, also in progress, we are working with the police to create a spectator shelter in the Serby Avenue area, we are also working with Herts County Council to enhance the bus shelters in the region, and we are working with the Town Council reference the bicycle racks that were mentioned earlier. We have also allocated, £108,000 of S106 money towards the Town Hall enhancements so there is another pot of money that they can use. We have allocated £128,000 to the all-weather pitch at Royston Heath and also £55,600 for a cycle and pedestrian footway over the A505.

At district level we have just finalised our budget which is all important. We currently have given over £200,000 to worthy organisations like Age UK, Citizens Advice, setting up a parking forum and £50,000 towards health and well-being, which does everything from teaching tots to ride bikes to dementia clubs. Also, importantly, there will be no increases in car parking charges in Royston which is another part of our budget this year. Plus a £30,000 grant towards replacing trees, which was mentioned earlier. It has been quite a wide ranging budget this time around.

My thanks goes to colleagues who have worked with us, the Town Clerk and her team, Town Councillors, District and County. Thank you.

## **10. OPEN MEETING: QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS TO TOWN, DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCILLORS**

The Mayor informed everyone that it was now an open meeting where electors can ask questions to the Town, District and County Councillors. He asked people to please avoid national issues, to speak clearly, and avoid the same question being asked more than once. We will try to get the best person to answer the questions that are asked.

Q. A member of the public asked:

With regard to the Highways, I consider the performance of their contractors as very poor. There has been a deterioration of the job in the High Street they did a couple of years back, the continuing break-up of the channels, possible trip hazards and the inconvenience to shop keepers. There is also a problem with drainage and flooding in Royston. Work was done up at the A10 at the top of the high street but gullies were only dug out 15 inches which means that the system will block up again prematurely because all the rubbish will go straight down the pipes.

Work will be carried out along Sun Hill over an 18 month period and the diversion route is off the A10 up Sun Hill putting traffic into conflict putting pedestrians at risk. Along Sun Hill and Briary Lane the gullies are solid and have been solid for years. The only people who will suffer with these gullies being blocked are the people in the Town Centre. So could you tell me what will happen with those then?

A. Councillor Fiona Hill:

Regarding the High Street I am aware of the issue with the shops and we did take that up with them and with County as well. I had received complaints and those were dealt with at the time. If you have any others please let us know.

As far as the gullies are concerned, that is still something I am raising with Highways because there have been issues and we are aware of one particular one which is a major issue. There are crossing points so that people do not have to cross the gullies, but gullies are being looked at again. There is one that is constantly a problem every time it rains. So that part of it is in hand.

A. Councillor Steve Jarvis:

In terms of the blocked gullies that never get dealt with at all, there is now a process by which the gullies get dug out, are supposed to be dug out, I complained about some in London Road that had not been dug out for ages. I was not aware that anyone had issued an instruction to only half dig out the gullies, because most of the cost is taken up with getting there and starting the job. I will take that up and check if that really was the instruction given, or if it was some kind of miscommunication. In terms of the Sun Hill diversion, it is clearly a mistake. I find quite a lot are wrong and tell them to put it right. I have not read the Sun Hill one, sometimes it is a lack of local knowledge. One of the things that I am trying to do is to make them be clearer about what the work is for because they make a TTRO for 18 months because that is the most cost effective thing to do, but do not necessarily make it clear, so more communication about what is actually going to happen is needed.

Q. A member of the public asked:

Why have you raised the council tax so much and what are you going to spend the money on? Can the leader of the Town Council please explain what he is going to spend all this money on?

A. Councillor John Davison:

My calculations show that the band D charge has gone up by 11.19%. There are a number of items where the costs have changed this year. They include an increase for the plantations, the legacy project, £20,000 towards improvements in the town, I gave you a short version of the list earlier, I have a much longer list that I can share with you and what we will be doing is we will be investigating each of those ideas to come up with costs to show that it is a feasible project and then consult on what the people of Royston think should be the priorities and then we will go ahead and implement them.

Q. A member of the public asked:

It is related to the last question in a way, I feel the precept could be used for aiding the ecological work on the Heath. I wonder why this has never been done. Why is there no funding from Town Council?

A. Councillor John Davison:

I have to declare an interest because I am a conservator as well as a town councillor. That is a matter for the people of Royston and the council to debate and decide on. There is no reason why it should not be done if that is what the people and the council want. It hasn't been done in the past, but I do remember it being raised a couple of years ago but not considered any further.

Q. A member of the public asked:

May I ask why you gave the History Society £5,000 pounds? And when you did so did any councillor with connections to the History Society declare an interest and not take part in that debate?

A. Councillor John Davison:

We have not given the History Society £5,000, we have in our budgeting, prepared to give the History Society £5,000. Whether or not individual councillors declared an interest, is up to those individual councillors.

Q. A member of the public asked:

My interest is the High Street and the cleanliness of the High Street. Two issues, one is the cleanliness of the High Street and the Cleanliness of the pavements. I still think there is room for improvement. Second issue is pigeons, has RTC a policy on pigeons and the feeding of pigeons?

A. Geraint Burnell, Town Manager:

We do not actually have a policy for feeding or not feeding but we advise people not to. The big issue is how we deal with them, the policy that we have is to try and move them away from the areas where they cause most offence. Pigeons are protected by the wildlife act, we are not allowed to eradicate them, or damage them in any way. We have to move them around. We have spoken to some individuals who are keen on feeding them and pointed out some of the problems they cause. But, as I say it is largely a policy that Royston First funds pigeon proofing in gutters and around the high street etc. and we move them away from where they make the most mess.

A. Councillor Iain Leggett:

I go into the town at 7am and see the workmen cleaning and spraying the pavements, I have also seen the rice that has been thrown out for the pigeons. All we can do is discourage people from doing that and as a Town Council say 'do not feed the pigeons'.

Q. A member of the public asked:

Are you allowed to fly a raptor around the area?

A. Geraint Burnell, Town Manager:

This is not effective in a town centre location. We are advised that the multiple nooks and crannies will just be hiding places for the pigeons until the raptor has gone.

A. Councillor Tony Hunter:

Thank you for your question. NHDC are responsible for street cleaning. We take street cleansing very seriously and if we spot it we report it and it is monitored on a regular basis, and also I believe Urbaser are coming to the next Town Centre working Party on 20<sup>th</sup> May, so we will bring it to their attention. But there were plans for a bit more comprehensive cleaning as far as the High Street was concerned, one of the things I would like to see is the actual mechanical unit coming to the town more often than it is.

Q. A member of the public asked:

Can the council explain, as the town is growing, what is the strategic plan for the provision of sports facilities, we know it causes quite a lot of concern amongst sports clubs, we do not have enough in Royston, actually how can we create, or is there a plan to create a proper provision for sporting facilities across the town?

A. Councillor Iain Leggett:

Part of the answer to that question is with Schools, and with clubs and with the Heath and the Rugby Club and the Hockey club and we have all of those and we are a growing town, if there is a need, one of the answers will be what can the schools and sporting clubs do to accommodate that.

A. Councillor Tony Hunter:

Again it comes down to the District Council and they have been working on a sport policy, 'pitch and provision' working up a strategy whereby they can work with all the existing facilities and also enhance in some shape or form, and again that could be where S106 money comes in to play again. The document is available on line. There is never going to be enough money to build huge facilities across the district but what they can do is aid and assist the organisations that exist to improve their facilities and that is the main concept of what they are trying to do.

A. Councillor Fiona Hill:

To add, there was a meeting of Sport Royston yesterday which was very well attended and there were some good ideas being discussed there as well.

Q. A member of the public asked:

Listed buildings. In November I drew North Herts District planning people's attention to the fact that there was a very significant redevelopment of one of the listed buildings going on without any notices being displayed. I wrote again in January with the same information, with no response. It wasn't until I made a formal complaint in February that I finally got a response. It would appear that the work was being carried out without permission. I wonder whether with the planning people being quite a long way away, if there was a role for Royston Town Council's planning people to help perhaps police the protection of our listed buildings to stop this happening again.

A. Councillor Tony Hunter:

Obviously with a listed building, if you are doing anything to it you have to get listed building consent as you are probably fully aware. The one you are mentioning, they are in the throes of putting it back to how it should be, following a visit from the planning authority. I will say thank you, but I apologise for them not getting back to you. As it is such a big area, they might not be aware if people are doing things from the inside, they have to have the intelligence to follow it up. Town Council is effectively a consultee on any listed building consent, but the main body is the District Council.

A. Councillor Fiona Hill:

Anyone who knows something is going on can report it to any of the councillors.

Q. A member of the public asked:

Road safety – going back to road safety in terms of Melbourn Street, you mentioned deliveries etc., and that is an issue during the day time. Is there any actual active enforcement going on in the evening time? You drive down Melbourn Street and there are cars everywhere and I never see any enforcement.

A. Councillor Tony Hunter:

Since the police decided that they didn't want to get involved being traffic wardens, it has come down to the District Council and they have an enforcement team, they do not work 24/7 but they do work the area in shifts. I must admit talking with a portfolio holder, they are looking at how they work and whether their contracts could be changed to be a little bit wider. I did note today that there was a car parked in Upper King Street that had 3 tickets on it so I know they are active in the town during the day. We do often have arguments with the police because there are issues of safety and obstruction, quite often we bring it up at police meetings that they can put a ticket on a vehicle and a £60 fine and 3 points has a lot more effect than an enforcement from the District Council. So we will keep lobbying them but as they say it is very low on their priority list, and there are principles that they have to work to and I think the lead time they have to wait so many minutes (5 or 8) before they can actually do anything with the vehicle.

The Mayor thanked everyone for coming and thanked members of the public for your questions. He thanked the committee and councillors for taking part. The Mayor thanked the Town Clerk as well. The meeting closed at 9.35pm