

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

Held on Thursday 10th March 2022 at 7.30pm in the Heritage Hall, Town Hall, Royston.

PRESENT:

Mayor of Royston and Town Councillor Mark Hughes (Chairman)
Royston Town Councillors - Elizabeth Beardwell, Ruth Brown, Brian Bylett, John Davison, Mike Harrison, Iain Leggett, Thomas Perry, Marguerite Phillips, Phil Smith
Royston Town Council Officer - Caroline Mills, Town Clerk
North Hertfordshire District Councillors - Sarah Dingley, Jean Green, Tony Hunter, Gerald Morris
Hertfordshire County Councillors - Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis
Royston First Bid Company – David Smyth
Hertfordshire Police – Sergeant Jon Vine
30 electors of the town.

The Chairman advised that the meeting would be recorded and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Royston Town Councillors - Rob Inwood, Emma Squire-Smith and Carol Stanier
North Hertfordshire District Councillor - Adam Compton

2. MINUTES:

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 11th March 2021 were approved and signed by the mayor as a correct record.

3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR, COUNCILLOR MARK HUGHES:

Good evening, ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Councillors, the Town Clerk, staff and our guest speakers.

Before I move to the formal part of the meeting, I must note the passing of Councillor F John Smith – He was a dedicated Councillor for Royston for over sixty years, serving twice as Mayor and also as leader of the North Herts District Council.

His knowledge of Royston and its history was exceptional, and he had been active in many community organisations and local charities.

This year we also lost former Councillors Bill Davidson and John Meadows.

I ask you to join me in a moment of reflection.

I have lived and worked in the Town for over 35 years, I see our town at close hand, I walk to my office in the High Street each day, I return home in the evening, at the weekends, I might venture a little further afield, and from a vantage point on the Therfield Heath, I see our town, its homes, its industry, its recreation, its communications; the railways, roads and pathways leading home. Royston is a great town to live in. The motto for the town is ‘from good things to better.’

I was first elected as Royston’s Mayor in 1990. The pre digital world was a very different place, Royston was around half its present size in terms of population, and its boundaries were much smaller and with on-going development shows no sign of abating. Sadly, many of the people who made up our community 30 years ago have moved on or are no longer with us. This certainly gives a feel for our own mortality. We are custodians of our town for such a short time, and I think that we all aspire to leave the town better, stronger and well placed for the future.

Only in recent months have we started to see a return to civic life following the most challenging public health crisis in a century.

I think it appropriate I use this public meeting to place on record our town's sincere thanks to the health workers and all those who volunteered with the delivery of the vaccination programme.

As well as the formality of chairing five meetings of the Council I have represented the town at 27 official events.

I was able to lay wreaths for Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday and reflect at Holocaust Memorial Day.

I held a Civic Service, and my thanks go to Father Phillip and the Roman Catholic Church for facilitating this.

We were also able to host a civic reception to recognise and pay tribute to some of the many people who make a major contribution to the local community.

I have met with many local businesses and local organisations both formally and informally.

With the support of local businesses and Royston First Bid, we had a very successful well attended, switching on of the Christmas Lights. It was great to see the return of some Christmas spirit in the Town.

The Community Toilet Scheme has continued, the future of the cinema has been secured and we are about to complete the work to allow the Museum to move to independent charitable status.

We continue to maintain and preserve many of Royston's historic landmarks and amenities, as well as improving our properties such as the refurbishment of the Town Hall kitchen.

We have seen the introduction of the Council's first environmental policy.

We have overseen the Installation of covered bike racks and a bus shelter on Icknield Walk.

We can look forward to the reopening of our parish church following completion of the extensive restoration after the devastating fire of 2018.

Established popular events will return soon, starting with the May fayre this year. We can also anticipate this year other events such as the Kite Festival, the Arts Festival, also the many clubs, groups and societies now taking place every week run by good-hearted volunteers.

My Mayoral Charities this year are After Umbrage, St John Ambulance, and The Mayor's Community Trust Fund. This evening we will be making some well-deserved cash awards to good causes that help to make life better. I also say a big thank you to all the people that give their time and energy to achieve this.

I will shortly also be honouring some members of our great community with awards for their services to our town.

I wish to place on record my thanks to my fellow Councillors and the Town Clerk and her staff.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for taking the time to come along tonight.

4. PRESENTATION OF MAYOR’S COMMUNITY SERVICE AND COMMUNITY TRUST FUND AWARDS:

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

| ORGANISATION | PURPOSE OF GRANT | Amount Awarded |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Home Start Royston & South Cambs. | To hold a Summer Party for 20 local vulnerable families | £250.00 |
| Royston Arts Society | Towards the cost of hiring Royston Town Hall for the Arts Festival Weekend | £285.00 |
| King James Academy Royston | Development of a designated wellbeing centre to support pupils. | £250.00 |
| Royston Speak Out Club | For a trip to Anglesey Abbey for a Summer Day Out | £300.00 |
| Therfield Regulation Trust | To help towards cost of renovating the Queen Victoria Memorial on Baldock Street | £500.00 |
| Royston Photographic Society | Towards the cost of hiring Royston Town Hall for the Arts Festival Weekend | £275.00 |

The Town Mayor, Councillor Mark Hughes, then presented Community Service Awards to:

Sharon Redrup – in recognition of her commitment to her role as the Manager of Royston Old Barn Day Centre for the benefit of the clients and local groups that have access to this invaluable service.

Victoria Green – In recognition of her voluntary work at Royston Rugby Club for the benefit of the players and their families.

Councillor F John Smith – In recognition of his extraordinary public service to the town of Royston for more than half a century.

Amy Murphy – In recognition of her services in organising the Remembrance Sunday Parades and Remembrance Day ceremonies on behalf of Royston Town Council.

Royston Repair Café – In recognition of their help to local residents in repairing items that are broken or faulty and would otherwise end up in landfill.

5. ROYSTON FIRST BID COMPANY REPORT:

Just to introduce myself, I am David Smyth and have been involved with the Bid since the start in 2009. Initially I was on the Advisory Council joining the board in December 2012 and then made chairman in September 2019.

As the second full year of our third term as a Business Improvement District draws to a close the nation is gradually relieving itself from the grip of the pandemic but there are still various issues affecting both the national and local businesses. Since I drafted this report we have of course seen the effects of the conflict in Ukraine and I am quite sure that this will also have some detrimental effects to our local and national businesses. We are seeing it every day and it is terrible as far as I am concerned.

On top of the pandemic, new trading arrangements with the rest of Europe have come into force as a consequence of Brexit, complicating the operation of many of our local businesses that import and export abroad.

Despite the national vaccination programme the UK has been badly hit with nearly 164,000 deaths so far, although the economy has picked up during 2021, GDP is still 2% lower than it was in 2019 before the pandemic.

Despite the on-going difficulties many Royston businesses have adapted their services and managed to survive and a number of new businesses have opened in the town during 2021.

The Bid levy money collected, which is around £145,000, has allowed us to continue to offer tangible support to local businesses. We are one of the few Bid companies in the UK that covers the town centre and the industrial area. We have been able to maintain sanitising stations around the town and many other Covid-19 related measures. We have continued to run town trail events to encourage footfall in the town which have been very successful. Some have been online, some have been in-person.

We have continued to offer finance to the Free After Three parking initiative and issue parking scratch cards to enable employees of the Industrial area to come to town centre premises to do their shopping.

As the pandemic reduces we have restarted our support for the Royston Information Centre and the Library opening on a Thursday.

As I will probably say on more than one occasion, we have continued to communicate with all businesses advising them on joint projects with the Council, NHDC and other local organisations. We are currently going through a programme of one-to-one meetings with the bid levy payers so they can understand more about what Royston First Does.

Our Mayor, Mark, has already mentioned the Christmas Lights, it was one of the major events. We supplied funding and administration and the evening was only a success due to the behind-the-scenes collaboration of so many people. We thank the shops for opening, Sgt Jon and his colleagues for assistance given and Reed Choir for supplying the entertainment. There were refreshments available which made the event such a success and a great start to Christmas. In addition to the lights, we again arranged the festive window decorations which everybody enjoys. Moving forward we hope to extend the Christmas lights to include areas such as Fish Hill Square but the paperwork is a nightmare. We are only in March but we are going to start looking to improve on what we've got and have another switch on event at the end of November.

We have kept the businesses informed of Government updates including advice on the funding opportunities that are available through Government funding schemes.

Premises-based Royston businesses have been included in the new Royston pocketbook and businesses are now searchable on the new Royston Town website.

Both a WhatsApp group, exclusively for local businesses, and an Instagram account have been launched to provide updates as well as additional channels dedicated to communications between the businesses that we support.

We have just launched a new page on the website to share job adverts for all premises-based businesses in Royston Town and the industrial area. Businesses will now be able to advertise jobs that have up to 3000 visitors a month. After being to Tesco to see Mandy Jinkerson during the week, we are looking at using that particular opportunity.

Well I think that covers a wide range of subjects and is just a few of the projects that we carry out on a regular basis. In view of the pandemic it has not been necessary for us to fund additional policing for the town but I am currently discussing reinstating the patrols with Sgt Jon Vine. We are also looking at some form of "Youth Club for the youngsters of Royston who have really suffered during the pandemic having probably lost a couple of years of their development to adulthood.

Just to remind everyone that our AGM is to be held on 27 April 2022 at 5.30pm here at the Town Hall.

That's me on behalf on Royston First.

6. REPORT FROM SGT JON VINE FROM HERTS POLICE:

My name is Jon Vine, I'm stationed at Royston. Contrary to popular belief, it is still open and we have 17 staff stationed there. This includes 3 PCs for the safer neighbourhood team and 4 PCSO's. They cover an area spanning from the Essex border at Nuthampstead, out to Radwell services and down as far as Weston on the edge of Stevenage. When I talk about crime figures tonight, they're all in relation to this area which means not just Royston, so they cover 100+ square miles of land, however you'll still be impressed with them.

The 3 PCs, I and 10 uniformed officers cover Royston 24/7 and they are the normal response police officers. Crime-wise we have done alright this year; I'm going to compare the figures between 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 from 1st April to the 8th March. All crime last year totalled 872 offences for the whole area compared to this year it is 897 offences which is a slight increase but this was to be expected because we were in lockdown last year and didn't have the pubs open along with some other issues that would have kept that figure lower, so I'm quite pleased with the minor increase we've had.

I'll run through the crimes that affect the local area the most. We as Police Officers hate burglary dwellings and we're really pleased to say we live in a safe area. Last year we had 6 and this year we had 8. We have had 2 in the town where a couple of vehicles were taken and one where the offenders came up from North London on the train and burgled a house but we haven't had any since January. Two burglaries in a town of this size is phenomenal. I can't take all the credit as people changing their lives and working from home has played a big part in this as we've seen a reduction in those sorts of offences.

We looked at burglaries of businesses which is anything other than a dwelling or a shed such as Farmers' barns, factories and shops. We had 31 last year and we are down to 23 this year.

For motor vehicles, we had 71 last year and are up to 75 this year. Last year at the meeting online, a question was raised about what was being done about the theft/stealing of tools from vans and we did some work with the builders and a few other projects however we're not seeing this anymore. Instead, we're seeing theft of catalytic converters and theft of fuel from vehicles which are expected as fuel prices go up. This hasn't shocked me, but this is an area where we've got some concerns coming and we need to do some work around that.

Violence against a person went from 286 to 327 this year. That covers all sorts of things from assault to malicious communications to public order incidents with the majority being domestic assaults and domestic incidents. Everything gets recorded for domestic incidents which is why those numbers are high and there's work that goes on around that but there's very little that we can do inside people's homes; we normally pick up the pieces of these offences and deal with the offenders.

Damage is another one that affects the community, we had 111 offences last year down to 103 this year. Shoplifting down from 52 last year to 32 this year and reports of anti-social behaviour went down from 332 to 300.

Drug offences have gone up from 19 to 33 which on paper looks bad but this is because I've focused on the drug situation and we are targeting more people and getting hands in people's pockets and finding drugs more often. My officers have been doing what I've told them to do which is arrest more people for drug related offences in Royston. We have seen a change in the way the town is in the last few years. There is a small pseudo-gangster problem where kids are emulating the gang culture and more kids are getting involved with the drug game which is why that number is higher and will get higher and I have no shame over this increase.

What we do in the Neighbourhood Team is set priorities with the public, councillors and farming community and we speak to a lot of people on the ground to see what the issues are to set these priorities accordingly. Theft from motor vehicle came up 4 months ago and we did some work on that and the majority of the thefts from motor vehicles wasn't from vans but from cars being opened up that weren't locked. PCSOs have been going around and checking door handles of cars and finding insecure vehicles and making contact with the keepers and reminding them that there is a lot of thievery from cars at the minute.

Speeding comes up every time and with only 17 staff including 3 PCs it's very hard to have a sustained attack on speeding in this town. We have both a police and crime commissioner van and an enforcement van along with speed and crime watch teams and then me and my team but there is only so much we can do with speeding in this town. We're going to have to look at more long-term solutions to this as it can't be down to 3 people to fix. Speeding is everywhere and I think we need to have a look at what we want as a community and engage with the County Council on that.

The 3rd priority changed slightly, it was always anti-social behaviour with the kids but they have socialised in a different way in the last 2 years. They now don't go to the parks anymore, we don't see kids anywhere, we think most of their socialising is done on Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Facetime and as a result we're not seeing the same volume of kids in the town. Anti-social behaviour came up every time and what we've done is look at increasing user provision because I'm passionate about user engagement and over the years talking to our local kids has been massive. We used to have the Youth Club at Burns Road and the Youth Club at King James Academy and the house in the town and PCSOs or PCs on duty would be able to pop in and have a game of pool and chat to the kids which meant that they knew us and we knew them. I'm not saying it was a perfect set up but it gave us an opportunity to get to know them from a young age. However we've lost that, we've lost everything which means we've lost kids

in the park to engage with so we need to do something to get these kids out and get them to a venue where we and other members of the community can engage with them so they can see that they're valued members of this community, because at the moment I don't think they know what they are and we're finding it very difficult.

We had a meeting with a pub landlord the other day and he said the problem that they're getting at the moment isn't 30-40-year-old drunken people, it's 18-year-old boys that are going into pubs and haven't had social grounding from youth clubs. When Andy and Viv ran The House it was almost like a training ground for pubs because they socialised, stood at bars, chatted with their mates and when they were 18 they went into pubs and these kids haven't had that. They've gone from school boys to young men and they don't know how to behave themselves in some of these venues and we need to stop that from happening. These 2 years that we've lost have had an impact and we need to get that time back for some of these kids that are coming up through the system now.

I'm working with Fiona, Steve, David and a gentleman called Peter Heppelthwaite who owns the Limitless Academy in Melbourn Street. He's got both the theatre and theatre school there and we're going to work with the kids, get them in there and teach them things about social media and how to present on YouTube etc. Hopefully, over the course of a 6 month project we'll get them doing something in relation to performances and get them enjoying themselves. We're going to get them at a young age which means not trying 16 year olds, I think their time has gone and we're not going to influence them so we'll start with 13, 14 and 15-year-olds and we'll go from there. That is what we're going to do in relation to the youth and that's the only opportunity we've got at the moment but we are looking at longer term solutions where they could potentially have a place they can call their own in the town like an old-fashioned youth club because I think it's very much needed in a town like this.

One of the projects we've been doing this year is called mini police which I was very sceptical about to start with being the old policeman that I am. It involves us going into the local junior schools and the kids dress up as police officers in their mini uniforms and they learn things like stranger danger, internet safety, being a good citizen and all sorts of things. The PCSO's deliver it and it culminates with them coming to the police station and I had 30 kids round the police station the other day, it was mayhem but it was lovely and it brought a smile to my face and made me realise what we do this job for. It's not just about catching criminals, it's about laying foundation in this community with these kids and every single one of them will remember that and that's what we need to keep remembering.

We restarted Dog Watch last year because during lockdown I think you probably all saw the media reports that there was a lot of fear about dogs being stolen. We didn't have any here but the fear was in the community so we decided to relaunch it. We had it years ago and there's been quite an incredible take up on that so we've now got an opportunity to speak to dog owners on any issues they have.

Other than that, there's so much that we do, there's not enough time to tell you all the stuff that we do behind the scenes that we don't shout about. We do stuff at the Police Station we'd surprise you with and deal with all sorts of people from the community. We go to nursing homes, give out cards and do all sorts of other stuff because we are part of your community and that's because I love your town. It's my 3rd stint here as your sergeant, I keep coming back and I love it. I love working here and I think you've got an incredible community, the councillors and everyone that works here do a fine job and I can't think of a better place to be a policeman.

That's pretty much it from me, we'll do questions at the end but thank you for your support because we couldn't do what we do without your support and I genuinely mean that so thank you.

7. REPORTS FROM THE CHAIRMEN OF ROYSTON TOWN COUNCIL COMMITTEES:

Councillor John Davison, Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Finance Committee:

Over the last weeks, my thoughts, and I expect yours as well, have been dominated by the desperate plight of people of Ukraine and I fear for the outcome.

It's a reminder to me how fortunate we all are living here in Royston and I applaud the work that Jon has talked about. We are very fortunate to live where we do.

I'm going to talk briefly about; what's happened in the last year, council staff, council finances, Councillors and even more briefly next year.

So, last year; as you know, many of Royston's services are the responsibility of District and County. As Town Councillors we work very closely with our District and County colleagues to represent what Royston needs.

Examples of our collaboration include; Royston has been added to the Sustainable Travel Town programme, we've got commitment to a 40mph speed limit on Baldock Road all the way from McDonalds into the town, and some projects are ongoing such as campaigning for weight limits to ban HGVs along Baldock Rd, Baldock Street and Melbourn Street

Other speakers will go into more detail on some of these.

I'll move onto some of the things the Town Council has responsibility for.

The Market.

The Council owns the market car park and manages the market. It has thrived throughout the epidemic and footfall has continued to increase. If you don't already use it, do give it a try, you can pick over fresh fruit and veg in the quantities you want without any supermarket packaging and buy high quality meat and fresh fish.

Our market manager Rob Mills has done an excellent job, I thank him on behalf of the councillors.

We installed the covered bicycle stand at the top of the car park. That was paid for out of 106 money.

We've also had a request to provide some wider parking spaces for parent and child in the market car park. I think it is a good idea – parking spaces everywhere are very narrow. It will be something the new Councillors can think about after the May elections. The rest of the parking in the town is in the hands of District.

Town Hall and Market Hill Rooms.

Bookings of the halls and rooms are picking up and the Saffron Screen Cinema is back in business at the Town Hall.

Behind you, you can see the refurbished kitchen. This was funded by s106 money.

It has all mod cons - two ovens, microwave and dishwasher. It is more accessible and has fixed the safety issues.

We have had some leaks in the kitchen at Market Hill Rooms. That kitchen will need refurbishment as well.

Allotments.

The Council owns and manages the allotment site at Coombe's Hole. It is around 4 acres and provides 129 allotments. At our last meeting with the Allotment Association in December there were 114 on the waiting list. The wait time is around 4 years.

We have been looking for a second allotment site for many years. We were very grateful when a member of the public identified a potential site. We started investigation with high hopes but unfortunately, the cost of providing water made it non-viable.

We will continue to try to find a suitable site but, as you can imagine, finding another 4 to 5 acres close to town at a sensible price is not easy.

Royston Cave.

The Cave is owned and managed by the Council. It reopened to the public at the end of last year. Nicky Paton is the cave manager. He has done an excellent job in creating a new website, a virtual tour of the cave and increased the demand for visits.

On Tuesday night he presented to a local group and they had all had a go with the virtual reality headset where you can view the cave with pop ups and all the rest. He tells me they all loved it. I'm hoping we have that in the museum later on in the year.

His plans for this season include a programme of new events to celebrate the 280th anniversary of the cave's discovery.

On behalf of the councillors I'd like to thank him for all his work.

Royston Museum.

First a bit of history. The Royston Museum dates back to 1965 when the Royston and District Local History Society was established with the aim of setting up a museum. In 1976 the museum was housed in a small room at the back of the Town hall. It moved to its current location in Lower King Street in 1984. The Council has funded and managed the museum throughout. As you know, the museum has been closed to the public for most of the last 2 years. It has become a little tired, dilapidated and dated and is in need of redevelopment. One of the disadvantages it had as a municipal museum was that it was not eligible to apply for grants from the likes of the National Lottery Heritage Fund. In order for the museum to be eligible to bid for external funding, the Council and the History Society, working together, have set up a charitable Trust to run the museum.

The Council is handing over management of the museum to the Trust in April and will continue to provide the core funding.

The objective is the redevelopment of Royston Museum, enabling it to fulfil its potential to become a centre for the local community, celebrating the heritage of the Town and its people, past and present. The Trust has appointed Nicky Paton as the Museum Manager.

The Trust has also agreed that Nicky will continue with his management of the cave for as long as the Council wants. Today, the Trust recruited a new curator and she will be starting in the next few weeks.

Nicky will be looking for more volunteers to join the team and will be recruiting a small number of paid "Duty Officers" to open the museum on Saturday's so he can have the odd weekend off.

The first couple of years is not going to be easy as funds will be limited. The likes of the Heritage Fund will want to see a couple of years accounts of successful operation before awarding significant grants. That won't prevent the Trust from seeking smaller grants for specific projects. This is the just the right time for rich benefactors to step in and help!

I emphasise that the Council, The Trust and the History Society are fully committed to the success of the museum. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Friends of the Museum and the volunteers who have continued their work whilst the museum has been closed.

Council Staff.

We have a small number of staff and that is reflected in our low rate of Council tax. It has been a difficult year for them. Job vacancies have added to their individual workload and put all of them, and especially the Clerk, under considerable pressure. I am pleased to say that our Clerk has now recruited and filled the vacancies.

On behalf of the councillors I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff for their service to the community and councillors.

Finances.

We don't yet have the final figures for this financial year ending 31 March 2022 as some costs are only going to be available in the next few weeks.

Before Covid, around one third of our expenditure was covered by our income including room hire. Although our income last year was much reduced, a number of factors have made up for that lost income; the salary bill was lower than planned because of staff vacancies, some planned expenditure was avoided and we were given some very welcome government grants distributed by NHDC.

We don't expect to have to call on reserves to balance the books.

In setting our budget for the coming year we made the assumption that our income will continue to recover, and we are pleased it has done in the last few months. The Royston Town Council Tax for a "Band D" property next year will rise by 2.45% from £50.90 to £52.15 per year, an increase of £1.25 per year. Due to our prudent budget, the proposed increase is less than half the current rate of annual inflation.

Councillors.

I do believe that Town Councillors make a difference for Royston and its residents. I'd like to thank all the councillors who have volunteered their time for unpaid public service, especially those with the demands of full-time jobs and young families.

Before I finish. I've been a Councillor for almost 12 years. In the last four years, the workings of the Council has been difficult at times because of the actions of one small group.

My personal view, shared by most Councillors is that; once elected to our Town Council, there is no place for party politics, the office of Town Councillor should never be used as a platform for promoting any political party and destructive partisan politics achieves little except to upset other Councillors and Council Staff.

We are coming to the end of our four year term of office. The May elections include all 15 Royston Town Councillors. Whoever is elected to the new Council, I hope that they all focus on what is right for Royston.

Councillor Marguerite Phillips, Deputy Mayor and Chairman of the Planning Committee:

Mr Mayor, fellow councillors and members of the public, may I present to you the report from the Planning Committee.

Firstly, I should like to thank our Town Clerk, Caroline Mills and all the office staff for their invaluable support and hard work.

I would also like to thank all the members of the Planning Committee for their commitment over this past year. Thank you for your valuable input and always trying to do your best for our town and its residents.

The Town Council is a consultee for all planning applications that are submitted to the NHDC Planning Authority. The knowledge of local councillors is an essential part of the planning process and we consider our input to be important for the local community. Over my many years as a town councillor I have found this to be a rewarding and interesting task to do.

We may suggest improvements to proposals or suggest reasonable conditions be applied to planning applications. For example limiting operating hours during construction to limit the impact on neighbours or safety measures to be put in place before occupancy.

We are also in the position to apply for Section 106 monies towards the town's infrastructure. These are obtained from developers in order to make a development proposal acceptable in planning terms, often in mitigation of an impact, or to support provision of infrastructure or affordable housing.

This year we have considered well over 100 applications, consisting of home improvements, residential developments and commercial applications. We had no objection to the majority of these.

However, we did object to a few applications that we considered being out of keeping with the area, unsustainable or unsuitable.

We recently resubmitted our very strong objection to the Outline Application for proposed development off the Barkway Road to the north of Flint Farm. The land is not included in either the existing or emerging Local Plan, which identifies areas of land on which development can take place. This application is for up to 280 homes, which was totally unacceptable and unsustainable for the area. Hundreds of local residents also sent in their very comprehensive and valid objections to this application and the Town Council unreservedly supported them. I do hope that once again the town can fend off this latest opportunistic developer.

We also objected to the plans of the smaller proposed development of ten houses off Barkway road because of the negative impact the layout of the homes would have to the residents of neighbouring properties. This particular plot is allocated for development in the Local Plan but we need to ensure its suitability.

At Monday night's planning meeting we had no objection to the revised plans for the proposed development at 5 Kneesworth Street. We had previously objected to this because we felt that it was an overdevelopment and overshadowed existing properties. However we asked that a shadow report still be carried. The revised application reduces the size from 7 to 5 apartments and is a single storey development. This was a good example of NHDC taking our comments into account.

We also submitted a robust objection to the proposed Recycling Facility on land to the south of the Royston Sewage Works. We understand the need to process waste in a sustainable way but this proposal would be in a totally inappropriate location. Royston residents would be adversely affected by it and we submitted the following reasons for our objection:

- The access is quite inadequate for the amount of proposed HGV traffic onto a busy dual carriageway.

- Unacceptable excess noise from HGVs, and the crushing plant in particular, to neighbouring properties.
- Potential odour, unacceptable working hours, impact on the landscape, dust emissions, mud and debris on the A505 and concern about the processing of hazardous waste.
- We suggested that a more suitable site be found.

Planning meetings are always held on the first Monday of the month (bank holidays being the exception) and we welcome members of the public to attend these meetings. This committee will continue to remain vigilant with all the planning applications and you can be assured that will always do its best to represent the views of local people and raise any valid issues of concern that residents may have.

This concludes my report.

Councillor Mike Harrison, Chairman of the General Purposes & Highways Committee:

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen.

Since my report of last year, when I mentioned we were working towards having our bid to become a sustainable travel town accepted, we have been advised shortly prior to Christmas, our bid has been accepted. Along with Letchworth and Stevenage, Royston is one of the three Hertfordshire towns now working to achieve this status.

Our work on this project is now beginning, and we had our first meeting since being accepted only three days ago, and we will report further to the public on our progress in due course. If and when we become a sustainable travel town, the benefits will include better internal bus routes for the town, better cycleways, and better facilities for walkers. In addition this will lead to a reduction in pollution for the town.

We are also starting to work on trying to establish a Travel Hub at the station. The idea is not to have a big hub there but to try and get buses and trains to tie in so there's a bus that will take you to the station to pick the train up and when you come home on the train there will be a bus waiting to take you on to your home.

We have also discussed the Affinity Water and the subject of drought which was more of a tick in the box exercise.

I was going to make some comments on Luton Airport this evening about flight paths but only this morning I received information that may invalidate this and instead of having the Luton aircraft circling overhead waiting to land we may have the Stansted aircraft going overhead instead, so further enquiries are needed on that before comment is made.

Speeding has been a major issue to many people in our town, we have spoken to the Police Authorities and they have some new vans which they can put out. We have suggested various sites in the town where they may be used but this is of course subject to the Police being able to do this safely.

Discussions on the High Street have also taken place to promote a recovery plan following the lockdowns because of Covid. A new scheme allows for four disabled bays on the high street, and a further four close to the Jolly Postie Public House. In addition there will be loading bays by the Cross at the bottom of the High Street, outside the cycle shop and between Angel Pavement and the Bull Hotel.

The 915 bus service between Royston and Cambridge now calls at the village of Fowlmere which is something we've wanted for a long while. This now gives us a public transport link between Fowlmere and Royston and the buses run between the two on an hourly basis.

Finally I must thank the Town Clerk and the Assistant Town Clerk for all their help and assistance they have given me over the year together with my deputy Cllr Marguerite Phillips for her help and support, and all members of the committee for their support also.

I must also thank County Councillors Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis for all their assistance, and District Councillor Tony Hunter for his assistance also. All three councillors brief us regularly on what is happening in their areas, offer us assistance when required. I must also thank all the officers of town, district and county for all their help with the sustainable travel town, along with Cllr John Davison the leader of the council, and the Royston Bid who are also involved in the project. Lastly a big thank you to all the ladies and the gentlemen who has joined them in the office who are always very pleasant and helpful to me whenever I contact them. Thank you very much.

8. REPORT FROM HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR FIONA HILL:

Thank you Mr. Mayor, Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to update you on Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) issues. I am very aware that COVID continues to have an impact on every individual, to some degree or other. We now have the terrible situation in the Ukraine, so it is positive that we can hold this meeting in person again.

The County Council continues to work with Government and the NHS, together with many stakeholders and volunteer groups, to ensure that every individual has the support needed, particularly with the increased impact on mental health due to the pandemic. Thanks to the staff and volunteers, of so many organisations, we have tried to ensure everyone has received the assistance needed. The vaccination programme continues to be an outstanding success and we should be grateful to all those individuals who have worked to achieve this.

The County Council continues to face financial challenges but has, again, managed to balance the budget with minimal impact on front line services and an increase of 3.99% in Council Tax, 2% of which is ring-fenced for Adult Care. This equates to £1.13 per week for a Band D property. We expect to spend £2 billion next year (£1 billion for Schools and Education, £400m on Adult Care and Health, £200m on Children's Services and £125m on Environment and Infrastructure), plus numerous other services.

Education has had to change to rise to the challenges presented by the pandemic. Following two years of assessed grades, this year will see a return to exams, with changes so that pupils are supported. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to hold the School Visits and events such as Youth Makes Music, Youth Speaks and the Technology Tournament, but schools are starting to return to normal. Hertfordshire Adults and Family Learning Service has now been rebranded as Step2Skills and is continuing to reach out to a wide range of residents and help them gain the qualifications, skills, and confidence to enable them to move into employment. Libraries have also reopened and are providing many of the services that existed prior to 2020. The home service has been vital and includes a chat service, for those who are unable to access libraries in person.

Integration of Health and Social Care remains a key priority and we welcome the additional funding to support the care of our residents. The County Council has also provided additional funding to support the wonderful care staff who work so hard to care for so many people.

Integrated Health and Social Care and prevention through Public Health, is vital to reduce pressure on the acute hospitals. I have continued to promote greater recognition for Mental Health issues, particularly in young people, more awareness of Carers' issues, Dementia, Domestic Abuse and Sepsis, all of which have a devastating impact on people's lives.

Town, District and County Councils, together with stakeholders such as the Police and Royston First, continue to work in partnership for the residents of Royston and the villages. Examples of this are the progress on becoming a Sustainable Travel Town, social distancing measures in the town centre, which enabled safe opening for retailers and other businesses during the pandemic and projects to benefit young people. We have been working together on speeding and parking issues, such as educating drivers through mitigation measures including speed indicator devices, the DriveSafe Scheme, led by Councillors Sarah Dingley and Jean Green and speed and volume surveys, together with Police checks and the Free After 3 parking initiative. We have, jointly, commented, objected, and participated in various consultations, such as the Baldock Road speed consultation, which has resulted in a proposed reduction of speed to 40 mph. Joint working also continues on making the A505 safer, for vehicles and pedestrians, including improvements to the road and a proposed safer crossing over the A505. The HCC initiative of HertsLynx is also proving to be very popular.

The Highways Locality Budget has enabled many roads and footpaths in Royston and the villages, which would not currently meet the criteria for general funding, to be improved and has also provided funds for additional speed indicator devices to be installed and parking restrictions to be implemented where there are safety issues.

I have received a huge number of grant applications through the Community Locality Budget, and we were, again, provided with an additional fund, this year. It has been difficult to allocate, as there are so many invaluable organisations in the town and villages and I hope the amounts provided have helped to make a difference.

I will end by thanking all my Councillor colleagues and officers from the Town, District and County Councils, for their support and the Royston Town and District Councillors and Town Clerk, Caroline Mills and her team of staff, for welcoming me to their meetings and for their help during the year.

Mr Mayor, this concludes my report.

9. REPORT FROM HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR STEVE JARVIS:

One of the effects of being this far down the agenda is that most of the things I was going to talk about have already been said so I'm not going to go through them all again you'll be pleased to hear.

As Fiona has outlined, the County Council's biggest undertakings certainly in terms of spending in the area is providing care for vulnerable adults and children. Many people see the holes in the road but much more of what the council does is providing care for those vulnerable people and clearly those people have in many cases become even more vulnerable in the situations we've encountered over the last couple of years. The County Council has faced some challenges in dealing with that but has been provided with some additional money because it is clear those impacts are going to continue. There are going to be increased numbers of elderly people and vulnerable adults that need care on a long term basis and providing care gets more expensive partly because the council has ensured that the people who deliver that care are paid more and that's important for two reasons. The first being that

if we don't offer enough then it will be impossible to recruit enough workers to do the job and secondly, because it's the right thing to do to reward those who do that job. So that's a challenge and something that's going to continue and similarly caring for vulnerable children, whose numbers have increased as a result of the pandemic for reasons that I'm sure we can all imagine.

The Council did set some money aside to support communities. Interesting that in some places, money was not required because people were doing such a great job in the community and working together to do things. There will be many enduring effects of the pandemic but it may not just be the number of white vans we have deliver things to our houses, it may be that some of those community cohesion things will continue and people will work together in ways they didn't in the past. Some of the outcomes will not necessarily be bad in the long term.

One of the things I've been working on for a long time is trying to get the County Council to do some things about the A505. As part of my area, I don't represent just Royston but all of the villages down the A505. Over the last year we've seen one improvement at the Litlington junction which was marginally the most dangerous junction if you looked at the statistics. It's certainly an improvement but there's still work required to be done at the other junctions and I'm having an ongoing battle with them about whether they should try and reduce the speed limit in some of the junctions and at the moment they're saying we can't do that because the traffic is going too fast. It doesn't seem to me they understand the importance of the role in speed limits but we've made some progress and there is a lot more to be made there.

The sustainable travel town has been mentioned and I'm really pleased that Royston has been selected. I think the County Council's original idea was that sustainable travel towns were all going to be big towns. They thought that they were going to Watford and St Albans and places of those sizes and didn't think it would be something that a town the size of Royston would be able to do so I'm glad we've proved them wrong on that. There's a lot of work to be done but I think it's something that could deliver some real benefit to the town and I think it's been good to work together with the Town Council and District Council to try and move that forward. We've only made the first few steps but hopefully we're heading in a direction that can provide some real benefits.

I also hope we can do something to improve the position for young people along the lines that Jon Vine was talking about earlier, there are some things that the council can do to support people. In some cases that might be Jon and his people, in others that may be volunteers. The council can't do everything but it can provide facilities in some cases and I hope we can move towards doing that.

I'd just like to finish by thanking you for the contribution you all make to the town and also to my colleagues. We have a very effective working relationship, and from what I hear from my colleagues in other parts of the county, that doesn't necessarily happen everywhere. I think we all get on well and try to get things done for the town. No doubt we'll get questions about things we haven't done and things we should've done but I'd like to thank my colleagues for the positive contribution they've made to try and get things done for the town that we all represent.

10. REPORT FROM ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, DISTRICT COUNCILLOR TONY HUNTER:

I'll try to be reasonably brief and talk about things that haven't already been mentioned tonight.

Obviously we're living in difficult times, I don't think the pain from the pandemic has totally gone away, we're still living with it and of course our televisions and news are full of a conflict in Ukraine which is absolutely awful to see. The council has made a statement, they're committed to providing assistance and are working with partners to try and finalise a way forward. It's very difficult for a council that doesn't own property but they can work with other parties to find a way that they can help in some way, shape or form.

The budget meeting is being held at North Herts and the council tax increase is 2.08%. In real terms that's a £5 increase on the "Band D" property and of course the council administration at present are trying to find another £1.5 million in savings which is difficult to do without affecting the frontline services. We are still very fortunate that within that budget we still have capital investment projects such as the 2023-24 extension for Royston Leisure Centre and the 2022-23 renovation and updating of the skate park in Newmarket Road which is quite an old facility and needs updating.

Parking review continues, it was delayed due to the pandemic but hopefully is ongoing and consultations are going out.

Again, the local plan is something I might one day be able to say has been finalised by the inspector but it continues and we still await and are hopeful that this will be the final year but then we've got to start a new one because we're so far behind.

The council have also done something quite different this year in working with partners, they've had wellbeing sessions in the town which started in January, they included family cookery, crafts, wellbeing talks and adult wellbeing activities. There's also been a shop local campaign, you'll see councillors walking round with bags on surgery day actually promoting it.

The Royston and District Area Committee have been able to support a number of projects locally, giving grants and money to:

- Free After 3 Parking Initiative
- Royston Town Youth Football Club
- Royston Community Centre – stackable chairs
- Homestart
- Barley Town House – roof maintenance
- High Street Planters – better, brighter ones

One thing that's happened just recently is that next May, there will be a new polling station for anyone who votes in Heath Ward which will be located at the Royston Museum and that affects anybody in DBA Heath as it was felt that the portacabin at the Golf Club didn't work that well.

Our community engagement officer continues to work and assist a number of organisations locally and has been able to get £50,000 out of the capital facilities project which went to the Trinity House Church for refurbishment. Under Section 106 monies, Royston Rockets received £12,000 for their BMX track resurfacing project and Therfield park area was also helped.

To try and get some money back in, North Herts have launched a community lottery for good causes and that money will go to the grant pot which will hopefully provide us with more grants in the future.

I'd like to thank my colleagues, the Town Council, County Council, the Town Clerk and her team for all their help in the past and hopefully in the future so thank you kindly.

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.

Q. A member of the public asked:

We've had a small problem recently with the Green Walk plantations, our neighbour recently had a tree fall on his property and it caused quite a lot of damage so we're wondering about the reports. First of all, how often are the trees checked over by the tree surgeon? And secondly, could we read the reports when they come out?

A: Caroline Mills, Town Clerk:

The trees are inspected on a monthly basis and any anomalies are reported to us, however today we have commissioned a full arboriculturist report and with the council's consent this report can be made public. The report will cover both of the plantations and this has been done because of the recent extreme weather and we want to be sure that there are no other trees in either plantation that could be at risk at the moment. I believe it will take place in a couple of weeks' time.

Q: A member of the public asked:

We had the tree fall on our house, can I ask whether this will be carried out by an independent arboriculturist or is it the tree surgeon company that currently carries out the work?

A: Caroline Mills, Town Clerk:

This is somebody completely independent, they are a qualified arboriculturist and once we make the reports public you can see exactly who has carried it out. It is somebody with approximately 20 years' experience in the industry, they work with a number of town councils, the NHS and schools and are based in Newmarket so they're further removed from the area.

Q: A member of the public asked:

We have an hourly bus service to Cambridge but very limited access to Baldock, Letchworth, and Hitchin so I'm wondering if this is going to be changing.

A: Councillor Harrison:

We do have an hourly service to Cambridge but it's very limited to Letchworth because it's simply not used that much. There was talk prior to Covid of the 91 service being amalgamated with the 17 service that goes to the Mordens and the idea was that the bus would follow the route of the 17 service but after going to the Mordens it would go to Ashwell, Baldock and Letchworth. I'm not sure what has happened to that because it was all put back because of Covid and we are still waiting to find out whether it will go ahead or not.

Q: With the laundrette in Royston being closed, we're looking for an alternative laundrette to go to and if you catch the bus to Letchworth you have to get the bus back before you've completed washing your clothes because there's no later bus you can catch to come back. I have to take my mum to Letchworth to use the laundrette and it would be a lot easier if she could just get on the bus.

A: County Councillor, Steve Jarvis:

Joining the two buses didn't work because of the way the bus industry operates. The company who run the bus service in Cambridgeshire decided to run it as a commercial service and the county council are only allowed to fill in the gaps between the commercial services. Cambridgeshire is thinking about the way it runs all its buses so that idea is probably off the table. What is currently on the table is the HertsLynx on demand bus which you can take from Royston to other towns and villages. You can book to travel on the HertsLynx bus through either a phone number, the website or the app. The reason it works like this is because the number of people who travel by bus to these areas is quite small so the solution is that the bus only goes where people want to go which avoids spending a lot of money on empty buses. You can book up to a month in advance and it's a way that's much more likely to provide for people who are wanting to get around where there are not a lot of people travelling. Most people book it by apps on their phone and I accept there are members of the community who cannot book it this way but there are a substantial proportion that can. Your mother may be eligible to use dial-a-ride if she meets the requirements to travel, however there are a lot of potential users and not a lot of vehicles for this service.

A: Sarah Dingley, District Councillor:

The laundrette closed because the owner wasn't making any profit from the business and was disheartened when people that weren't using the laundrette would park in the parking spaces allocated for it. There are other good laundry services in town such as Wash Me and Iron Me that come to your house and take your clothes to wash and bring them back dry.

Q: A member of the public asked:

Last year we were promised a bandstand and there is no bandstand. Could the council update me on where the bandstand is?

A: The Mayor, Councillor Hughes:

The town has a bandstand, it is a dilapidated bandstand which was last renovated for the Queen's silver jubilee. It is an eyesore in my opinion and the town does require a new bandstand which the council has been actively pursuing. I would like to invite Councillor Davison to tell us where we are with that because there have been many people involved in it.

A: Councillor Davison:

I talked about looking at a bandstand and having a public consultation. There were other priorities last year, not only for me and the council but also for trades' people who chose not to do the initial estimates that we asked for. It's still on the books and we will get round to looking at it because it will be an excellent project for the town.

A: The Mayor, Councillor Hughes:

For what it's worth I would fully support a new bandstand because I think it would be of benefit to the town and I hope the new council that's elected in May will deliver on that.

Q: I'm disappointed that in a year with £100,000 allocated that we've not even got to planning.

A: The Mayor, Councillor Hughes:

I'm disappointed as well but Councillor Davison has given the reasons. There's no obstruction, the mayor and the leader of the council both support the bandstand and we haven't been able to get the trades to deliver on a complex project in a persistent lockdown.

Q: A member of the public asked:

I've noticed there's been a lot of petty vandalism and spray painting going on and when taking my grandchildren litter picking, there were lots of gas cylinders. I spoke to Robert Inwood and he said I don't want to advertise it, it might encourage youngsters to do it. Surely we could have some more PCSO's and Police presence around the town to try to stop this?

A: Sergeant Jon Vine:

I'll speak to you at the end and get some times and details and we'll get some more people down there.

Q: A member of the public asked:

We're finding big ones on the Green Walk plantation and we're told by my husband's litter picker that he shouldn't touch them so every time a cylinder is there we have to phone or fill in a form with the council and they have to come and pick it up.

A: Sergeant Jon Vine:

I have no idea where that advice comes from and I wouldn't want to contradict that but I would personally happily pick it up because it's just a metal cylinder. If it's dispensed it'll have nothing in it, if it's sealed it's still exactly what is sold on the shelf in a shop.

Q: A member of the public asked:

What is happening regarding the potholes on the A10? Why can't we have a permanent repair like the one that's on Kneesworth Street?

A: Councillor Hill:

A full resurface of that area was planned for last month but they can only do it when the weather is right otherwise it doesn't work. The main problem with the A10 is that it would need a road closure to do it properly. Half of it is in the division which I represent and half is in the division Councillor Jarvis represents. It may be able to be done with just a single lane of the A10 being closed or the resurfacing being carried out overnight but it is a difficult road to close and the management would require a lot of work. It is planned to be done at any time in this financial year.

Q: A member of the public asked:

We were told that the council would look to work with the Conservators of the Heath about a precept contribution to the Heath. Could the council give an update on any meeting that has happened with the Conservators?

A: Councillor Davison:

The Chair of the Conservators and I discussed it and she chose not to take it further forward.

A: The Mayor, Councillor Hughes:

The minutes of that meeting are also there as a record of what happened. Subsequent to that, the leader of the council and the chair of the Conservators discussed it and those two people who reported it to their respective bodies decided not to take any further action.

Q: A member of the public asked:

There was mention about a crossing over the A505. Has anything happening with that?

A: Councillor Hill:

We've been working cross-party and cross-border with parties in Cambridgeshire. Councillor Harrison and I attended a meeting with the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership a month ago and it was confirmed that this was still on their agenda. It's also been confirmed to myself and Councillor Jarvis by our officers in Hertfordshire that it's on the agenda. Hertfordshire have committed to the maintenance of the bridge for its whole life and Cambridgeshire have had a variety of grants in an effort to try and stop congestion in Cambridge which includes the paths to encourage cycling and walking.

Q: Are there any plans for the bridle path at the McDonald's roundabout and the footpath crossing that has no protection on the centre piece of the A505?

A: Councillor Hill:

We're very aware and are looking at the whole of the A505. I personally have concerns about the crossing behind Tesco as a lot of people cross there.

A: Councillor Jarvis:

There's a hope that we will get the bridge with the barrier half way across it opened and that's tied up with some diversion of the footpaths around the Redrow development. The complication is when it lands in Cambridgeshire, there is currently a track and no footpath and creating a footpath where the land owner does not want it would take Cambridgeshire County Council a lot of time and effort with little reward for them. The hope was to get an agreement with the land owner because that would be a lot quicker and a path would be created almost immediately. However, creating a public right of way is an elaborate process where people can object and delay it. The Redrow developer was originally going to promote the diversion but has now decided to pay Network Rail to promote the diversion which I'm a bit concerned about as the progress of the path has not sped up since it became their responsibility.

A: Councillor Mike Harrison:

I attended the Greater Cambridge Joint Assembly meeting in Cambourne and they refer to that stretch as the Melbourn Greenway. They are looking to start work on it in 2025 and have attained the fund to start the designs necessary for it.

Q: A member of the public asked:

On the Council's website, it says that access to the allotments is currently restricted due to Covid-19. Could you explain why?

A: Caroline Mills, Town Clerk:

It was a message that was put up during the pandemic, it will be reviewed and removed when no longer needed.

The Mayor thanked everyone for the time taken to come to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 9:25pm.