

ROYSTON TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND NHC ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA FORUM PUBLIC MEETING

Held on Thursday 14th March 2024 at 7.30pm in the Heritage Hall, Town Hall, Royston.

PRESENT:

Mayor of Royston and Town Councillor Lisa Adams (Chair)

Royston Town Councillors – Mary Antony, Elizabeth Beardwell, Elizabeth Freeman, Bindi Jani, Stephen Lockett and John Rees

Royston Town Council Officer – Caroline Mills, Town Clerk

North Hertfordshire Councillors – Chris Hinchliffe and Bryony May

Town and District Councillor – Ruth Brown

Hertfordshire County Councillors – Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis

Royston First Bid Company – Paul Brown

Hertfordshire Police – Sergeant Lisa Perks

25 electors of the town.

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Royston Town Councillors – Mike Harrison, Luke Haugh, Rob Inwood, Lynsey Langdon and Emma Squire-Smith

North Hertfordshire Councillor – Matt Barnes

2. MINUTES:

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 9th March 2023 were approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR, COUNCILLOR LISA ADAMS:

Good evening, welcome everyone, it's great to see so many of you.

I appreciate you all attending this evening and I am delighted to be sharing my annual report and presenting both the Mayor's Community Trust Fund Awards and the Community Service Awards to recognise those who have contributed towards the success and growth of our Royston Town.

Being elected as Mayor of Royston has allowed me to become more actively involved in the community, giving me an opportunity to reach out and support local people, businesses, and charities. I have thoroughly enjoyed working alongside my fellow councillors and the team here at the Town Hall.

This has been an unforgettable experience and I have appreciated everyone who has supported me on this journey. With this year being the 50th Anniversary of Royston Town Council, and the first Town Mayor serving back in 1974, it feels like an absolute honour to be here.

My chosen charity this year was the newly established Pathways to Learning, a charity very dear to my heart. Angie and her wonderful volunteers, thank you all for your continued work.

I also have the honour this evening of handing out the Mayor's Community Trust Fund Awards which continues to provide grants to support community projects that benefit the people of Royston.

My engagements have been plentiful. As new Mayor, my first engagement was an evening in Barley for the Town Twinning Association Reception for the citizens from La Loupe. What a

lovely evening. They enjoyed visiting Royston, and I am excited to be visiting La Loupe later this month. Town Twinning also celebrate 50 years of twinning this year and I look forward to joining the festivities in April.

In June I attended the Armed Forces Day Flag Raising Ceremony which was an awesome experience at County Hall in Hertford and met many dignitaries. I was kindly invited to the Mayor of Buntingford's Civic Reception, and then later in the year the Mayor of Bishop Stortford's Civic Service.

In July, Royston First invited me to help celebrate our local independent businesses in Royston. I represented Royston Town at the Beating Retreat Ceremony at Bassingbourn Barracks in July. It was a musical spectacular and I enjoyed meeting with officers and soldiers.

August saw me at the annual Kite Festival that took place on the Heath and many locals enjoyed a beautiful day of sunshine, enjoying the stalls and kites flying high. People came from afar to visit Royston on this special day.

Another successful annual event was the Make Lunch Family Day at Royston Leisure Centre, with fun activities and money raised towards meals for our local families in the holidays. I will continue to support this charity.

I was welcomed at the Royston Allotments open day, where I got to meet the many keen gardeners of Royston, and even bought some produce.

In September, I was lucky enough to visit Großalmerode in Germany along with the Town Twinning Association. Our hosts made us feel very welcome and showed us their town and culture. We attended museums, toured the beautiful town on motorbikes, enjoyed Oktoberfest, and met the Mayor and lots of locals.

There was so much talent on display and plenty of things to do during the Royston Arts Festival weekend and as always it was a very enjoyable event for the town.

Royston Town Football Club celebrated 25 years of women's football. What an achievement, especially with the youth team growing every year.

In October we welcomed our new Reverend, and his family, to St John the Baptist Church in Royston. I wish him many years of happiness in our community. I also enjoyed a very memorable afternoon celebrating 100 years of the Women's Institute at the Town Hall, sharing their experiences of empowering women to make a difference in the local community.

November was Remembrance Sunday and I was honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of Royston Town Council.

From local schools to the library, so many local businesses, Royston Radio, and Home Start, I have been to 96 official engagements so far. We would be here all night if I listed every event, but I have felt privileged to attend all of them.

As 2023 came to an end, I would like to take this moment to thank everyone, especially Tracy my secretary, and Caroline, The Town Clerk for all the support I received with the Mayor's Charity Christmas Fayre. It was a great success, raising just under £900.00 for my nominated charities. Along with the annual Christmas Market, it brought many people into town that day.

There are many more great days to look forward to this year, especially with the May Fayre on Monday 6th May. All events are advertised in The Listing, the Royston Crow and on the notice boards around Royston.

I give special thanks to our local firefighters, police officers and community nurses who continue to keep our community safe. I also want to thank my family and friends who continue to support me, and I will continue to play an active role in the community as a councillor once my term as Mayor is over.

As your Mayor, I was lucky enough to be born here, at Royston hospital, and have so many fond memories of our town and the surrounding villages, like Sandon where my grandparents lived. I will keep working alongside my fellow councillors to ensure that Royston is the best place it can possibly be for our community to live, work and enjoy life. I wish you all a great evening.

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

The Town Mayor, Councillor Lisa Adams, then presented Community Service Awards to:

Blake Close Christmas Lights Team - In recognition of their work from September to December each year creating a Christmas lights display for their switch on event that raises hundreds of pounds for local charities.

Caroll Young - In recognition of her long standing commitment to the Royston May Fayre where she has organised the Novelty Dog Show for the last 8 years, raising money for local animal charities.

Ray Munden - In recognition of his continuing work for the people of Royston, and in particular the hard work that Ray has provided in organising the Historical Car Show on behalf of the Rotary Club for the May Fayre since 2010.

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

ORGANISATION	PURPOSE OF GRANT	SUM REQUESTED
Royston Arts Society	Towards the cost of hiring the Heritage Hall for the Royston Arts Festival	£310.00
Royston Speak Out Club	Towards the cost of the Royston Speak Out Club’s Summer Outing 2024	£250.00
Priory Quilters	Towards the cost of hiring the Market Hill Rooms for the Royston Arts Festival	£250.00
Home Start Royston, Buntingford & South Cambs	For the Home Start Christmas Party at Royston Methodist Church	£210.50
Royston Photographic Society	Towards the cost of hiring the Hardwicke Hall for the Royston Arts Festival	£275.00

5. ROYSTON FIRST BID COMPANY REPORT:

My name is Paul Brown, I'm the manager of Royston First and I took over in June last year. We had an election in November and got 87% of the popular vote.

Some of you probably won't know what a Business Improvement District is, but they were set up by Tony Blair and there are now 300 across the country. The way it works is you come up with a location of businesses, in this case, we have the town centre and the industrial estate, and all those businesses get a vote, if you get over 50% of the vote and the rateable value, you form a district and all the money from that is reinvested in the town.

Our new term starts on the 1st of April and for me, it's all about continuing what's good for Royston First but also introducing new stuff. Some of you have probably done our Easter trails or our summer trails; they've been very popular with people in the town, so we're going to carry on doing that. The Mayor mentioned Independents Week, which was a huge success and that's something we want to continue again. Something we're always interested in is pushing "shop local", so at Christmas we had a shop local event which was all about trying to remind the residents and local businesses that you should be spending money here rather than spending it on Amazon. I know it's easy and convenient but ultimately spending the money here means it goes back into the local economy.

We did the Christmas Lights Switch-On which was a big success and we want to continue that and do more Christmas lights but in addition, we want to go further. This year, some of you have probably seen in Europe, London and Bath these umbrella displays. They look really colourful and that's something we want to do in Royston this year. It's proving logistically difficult but it's something I'm confident we can do. So that's one part of what we will do this year that's new and the second part is Business Awards and again it's just an opportunity to remind ourselves of all the great businesses we have in town and get some really good publicity around there. That's probably going to happen in September. So that's pretty much the plan for the year, happy to take any questions if you have them, if not, I'm going to go home.

In response to questions about the business awards, Paul Brown answered that they will be an opportunity for the community to vote for businesses that have made a difference in the town. There will be 10 criteria for the awards and the results will be decided by the board of directors and the BID Manager. He explained that only businesses that have an affiliation with Royston will be eligible to receive an award although he detailed that they don't need to have a business premises in Royston to qualify.

The Mayor thanked the BID Manager for his report.

6. REPORT FROM SGT LISA PERKS FROM HERTS POLICE:

Thank you for inviting me today, I'm Sergeant Lisa Perks.

I've been in the North Herts Neighbourhood Team for the last 2 ½ years, but I've been in the police for 27 years, so I've been around the county quite a bit, but I'm really enjoying working here in North Herts.

I'll explain how the neighbourhood team works. There are three teams, I'm one of three, I'm team two, and as you some of you might be aware I've swapped with Ryan Champion, so he's in Letchworth and I'm here in Royston. But we have our own teams and they've stayed in situ so the only small change is that we've swapped around. I do move around to Letchworth and Hitchin, but Royston is what I'm responsible for.

In case somebody mentions it this evening, the station does get used. We've got our Intervention PCs who are uniformed officers that respond to 999 calls, a dedicated double crew car that comes from Hitchin, that's based there, we're there and the neighbourhood team and other departments do use it throughout the week as well. We're on the ground floor and it's quite heavily used, you'd be surprised how much it's used for out of custody interviews.

For the Neighbourhood Team, the way we're structured, we have local priorities every three to six months. We roughly look at about two or three main subjects that we choose to focus on for the next six months and then we normally make a decision in conjunction with what the public would like to see after the Area Forums. At the moment for Royston, we're concentrating on speeding. If members of the public think that we should visit certain streets they can let us know, whether they call us via 101, e-mail us or contact via Echo. Echo is a social media platform where people can go on there, leave messages anonymously, whether it's positive or negative and if somebody thinks there's some speeding work that needs to be done in their area, they can put the street name on there and that's something that we look at each day and we would pick up to try to gauge what the community wants and where they'd like to see us. The youth. We're focusing our attention at the moment, the negative side, on children when they are being naughty, it's just the way it is with the police, that's how we're set up. So we're doing some work around that at the moment.

Obviously, part of the neighbourhood team's work is community engagement. The neighbourhood team looks at long-term problems. They're going to take a bit more than 5 minutes to sort out. We do a lot of community engagements, so if there's any events, no matter how small or big, we like to know about them, we have a calendar on Teams and we like to put all these events in on the calendar and the idea being that the whole team can see what's going on in Royston so we can pop along and say hello.

I have worked in East Herts in the past, where there are a lot of issues with fly tipping. I've just carried out an operation in Hitchin this week stopping lorries that had rubble coming off the back of their trucks because they didn't have the proper cargo netting over them. I'm looking to do a similar operation next month here in Royston.

Structure, we've got the Chief Inspector Hannah Treadwell, she's based at Hitchin and is responsible for North Herts. Anybody working as a detective, a uniform, she's responsible for the whole of North Herts. Then underneath her is my inspector, Inspector Lant and he covers predominantly the Neighbourhood Team for all three towns Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock, and of course Royston. And then there's myself. I'm a Sergeant within the Neighbourhood Team and there's two other sergeants as well.

One of our priorities is looking at dangerous and inconsiderate parking around schools and PCSO Braybrook has visited some year four pupils in Ashwell recently and did some work with them on producing posters. Youth engagements, we've done some school assemblies in Weston, Ashwell, Therfield, Tannery Drift, Icknield Walk and the First School of Reed. We do a thing called mini police that the PCSOs do when they go into the primary schools.

Crime prevention wise, we do all sorts of things, from bike marking, coffee mornings, crime prevention at Tesco.

We've done a theft from motor vehicle operation and a day of action for agriculture thefts and rural crime whereby we're working with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, where we're linking with them quite a bit for intelligence.

Events wise, we've always got stuff coming up. This weekend, we've got OP recall which is tackling out of control dogs that are worrying livestock. Not that it's a massive issue in Royston but I'm quite keen to get out to the rural locations and do some work around there.

I've got a few crime figures here. Crime is low in in this area, I must say antisocial behaviour for Royston and Rural where they group all the crime figures together, has gone up a little bit by 4%. So last year there were 371 reports and this year, there's been 384. Burglaries, there's been a slight increase, there were 25 reported burglaries last year and 26 this year. Criminal damage, there were 95 reports last year and 101 this year, and theft from motor vehicles, there were 54 reports last year and 94 this year. That's it. I won't bore you with the other kind of figures, we've got them if you need them.

In response to questions, the Sergeant detailed that speed checks were carried out in accident/speeding hot spots the majority of the time, but they were open to suggestions from the public for other locations. In the future, they would try to use social media to inform the public of where they were carrying out speed checks to make them aware of this. She explained that the rise in burglaries were linked with vehicle thefts where the perpetrators would break into houses purely to find the keys to a vehicle parked outside the house and nothing else. She informed members and electors that the youth initiatives set up by one of her predecessors, Sergeant Jon Vine would continue and she would be in contact with him on this. She also reported that Neighbourhood Watch scheme signs were old and outdated in a lot of cases, and they would use OWL to identify the areas where resident reports were lacking and conduct door knocks and letter drops to combat this.

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

Councillor Elizabeth Beardwell, Chairman of the Planning Committee:

Madam Mayor, Fellow Councillors and Members of the Public, May I present to you the report from the Planning Committee.

I would 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 the members of the Planning Committee for their work over the past year. Thank you for your input as we try to do our best for the town and residents.

The Town Council Planning Committee is only consultative in nature. Our local knowledge is used in our role of giving the view of town residents on the applications received by the council, which are then presented to North Herts Planning Authority. We can also ask for reasonable conditions to be applied to an application.

We also have to be mindful of the Town Council's declaration of a climate and biodiversity emergency when considering applications.

This year we have looked at over 60 applications. This is down slightly from last year and may reflect an increased pressure on available spend.

The majority of applications are for replacement of existing conservatories with built extensions to increase year-round living space, single and two storey house extensions, roof extensions and garage conversions. This of course indicates that rather than moving house residents would rather extend their present property where possible. Moving is expensive and the process is difficult. This of course means that as the value of properties is increased there is less availability for people wanting to purchase smaller and less expensive properties.

We have also seen applications to create living accommodation within the Town Centre. This keeps the Town Centre alive, more vibrant and safer.

We have seen two cases of small plots of land, which are established green spaces on housing estates being purchased and then applications being sort for dwellings on that land. As we become a more built-up environment we need to preserve these green spaces for the wellbeing of the residents. We have therefore objected to these proposals and these objections have been upheld by North Herts Planning Authority.

Planning meetings are held on the first Monday of the month (except Bank Holidays) and members of the public are very welcome to attend.

The committee will always try to do its best to represent the people of Royston.

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

Councillor Rees read out Councillor Harrison's report in his absence:

Good evening, everyone. I must apologise for not being with you this evening.

I must first of all thank our two county councillors, Councillor Fiona Hill and Councillor Steve Jarvis who supply written reports to our committee, so we are aware of what is happening at the County Council, and then attend our meetings and happily answer any questions we may have on their reports. Thank you to them both for their continued support they offer us.

Next, I must thank Councillor Ruth Brown, who also reports in the same way on the happenings at the Royston and District Area Forum of North Herts Council. Councillor Brown is also a member of the GP and Highways committee.

Over the year we have discussed many different matters including Hertfordshire's Rural Estate Strategic Plan, Active and Safer Travel and the Shared Prosperity Fund, which was government money distributed to brighten up town centres. You may have seen that some of the street furniture in town has been repainted as a result, and this work is still ongoing. In addition, we have also suggested parts of the town where electric car charging points should be located, especially in areas where residents do not have their own driveway.

Another matter we have discussed is making a safer entry into the market area from Market Hill. The matter is in the hands of the County Council at present to find a way forward. We are also looking at putting a public cycle repair stand with a pump in the market area, next to the bicycle shelter.

The committee has also looked at a Travel Hub at Royston Station, but it is felt a better plan would be to have extra bus stops close to the station for passengers and not slow the bus services down by going into the station area, and then having to turn round.

Two days ago, there was a bus meeting in the Town Hall. I did submit a suggestion for an extra route to cover Hedera Gardens, Ivy Farm and the Meridian Gate estates. I was not at the meeting in person but submitted my suggestions a few weeks ago.

We continue to work on a plan to make our town a Sustainable Travel Town, and the bus meeting and the new routes are part of this ongoing process, as are the safer entry to the market area, and extra bus stops at the station. This matter is ongoing as we try to improve walking, cycling and bus facilities for Royston. In this respect, I must thank Councillor John Rees for all his assistance on the Sustainable Travel Town project, and everyone involved at both the County and District Councils.

I would also like to thank my Deputy, Councillor Lynsey Langdon and all members of the General Purposes and Highways committee for their help, hard work and support over the year.

I will close by thanking the Deputy Town Clerk, Keri for officiating at our meetings and for her help and support also during the year. I would also like to thank the Town Clerk Caroline, and the staff in the office Rachel, Tracy and Robbie for all of their hard work. Thank you to them all.

8. REPORT FROM COUNCILLOR REES, CHAIR OF THE COMMUNICATIONS WORKING PARTY:

Towards the end of last year, the Town Council commissioned Breakthrough Communications, an external agency, to carry out a residents' survey to ascertain their views on a range of issues including their perception of the Town Council.

Breakthrough Communications were chosen as they are partnered with the National Association of Local Councils and work with hundreds of parish and town councils across the country to help with community engagement, communications and public consultations. Their team have a number of ex-councillors and officers who understand how local government works and therefore how to properly carry out a consultation on behalf of a local authority.

It has been 11 years since the last public consultation in Royston, so it was long overdue. The survey went live on 20th November 2023 and concluded on 12th January 2024 giving residents a healthy 7 and half week period to respond.

762 participants responded – 500 digitally and 262 by paper.

A paper copy of the survey was distributed to all 7,823 households in Royston via The Listing to be as inclusive as possible. Additional copies were also provided at drop box locations across the town as well as the Town Hall and reception.

The survey was promoted heavily on the council's social media, website, noticeboards, and through councillors encouraging residents to take part.

It was noted before carrying out the survey that residents often conflate the roles of councils, so a front page was created to explain to residents the different roles of the County, District and Town Councils to mitigate the responses that applied to the other two. However, a lot of responses were still received that applied to County and District Councils and the feedback applying to them will be fed back in the future.

The Town Council will be going through all the survey results in detail and will be developing an action plan to best prioritise the Town Council's provision of services going forward.

I would like to thank all those who took part in the survey and can reassure them that their comments will be borne in mind when the action plan is being compiled.

I would also like to say thanks to Robbie in the office at the Town Hall who did a lot of the office work on this and was a great help to me.

9. REPORT FROM HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR FIONA HILL:

Madam Mayor, Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for, again, giving me the opportunity to update you on Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) issues. Since last year's meeting, we have seen the Coronation of King Charles and are still in the middle of the war in Ukraine and now the Israel-Gaza conflict, both having tragic consequences and an impact around the world.

The County Council is facing financial challenges but has managed to deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25 whilst maintaining front line services. There will be an increase of 4.99% in Council Tax, of which 2% is, again, ringfenced for Adult Social Care. We expect to spend around £1.1 billion delivering essential services and this does not include the Dedicated School Grant (DSG). Adult Care and Health and Children's Services remain the highest spend within HCC (excluding DSG).

Schools continue to rise to the challenges including, locally, the storm damage, that I saw for myself, to King James Academy. HCC has been working with the school, Department for Education and insurance professionals to find solutions and I am delighted that all children are now back on site. Over 90% of maintained schools in Hertfordshire have been judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

The joint Town, District and County Council school visits took place and were very positive.

The additional funding, last year, with a further amount this year, that HCC has put into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), has funded many new employees, who are now going through induction and ensured that existing staff receive ongoing training to enable them to resolve delays for families awaiting support. Step2Skills is continuing to reach out to a wide range of residents (19+) and help them gain the qualifications, skills, and confidence to enable them to move into employment.

Integration of Health and Social Care remains a key priority and the ringfenced 2% is invaluable in supporting our residents and reducing the number of people having to access the acute hospitals. This is assisted by the huge amount of prevention work by Public Health. Our ambition and support for a health facility for the benefit of Royston and the surrounding area, worked on for so many years, continues and we are working with the NHS and other stakeholders, to try and bring this to fruition. The links between officers in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire continue to be proactive. Our officers at HCC are in regular discussions with their colleagues across the border and attend Cambridgeshire ICB meetings if there is an item relevant to Hertfordshire where their input is appropriate. I continue to work with our MP to promote, at Government level, greater recognition for Mental Health issues, which has increased in young people, carers' issues and the impact of Dementia. HCC has been actively working on the impacts of domestic abuse/violence and the importance of vaccinations to lessen the impact of diseases which are increasing.

Libraries continue to be busy hubs with slipper swaps (which prevent falls), drop-in sessions for Barclays Bank and the Police (which are very popular), many new clubs and initiatives, in addition to their regular activities.

The work of the Armed Forces Covenant continues to be strong with GPs, District and Borough Councils signed up and the intention for more Town and Parish Councils to participate. The Covenant is invaluable in supporting veterans of the Armed Forces in accessing local services.

The Councils, together with stakeholders such as the Police and Royston First, continue to work in partnership including on projects for young people, Royston becoming a Sustainable Travel Town with Hertslynx being a popular service provided by HCC and improving safety and parking in the town. We persist with work on mitigation measures for speeding, including Speed Indicator Devices, Speed and Volume surveys, Police checks and DriveSafe. We recently resolved an issue with community organisation leases and hopefully in future, when property are discussing the issues with the community organisations there will be liaising with all services to ensure that the services are recognised for what they do and it's not just a commercial organisation with commercial land lease.

The Highways Locality Budget has again ensured that many roads, footpaths and other projects that would not receive attention in the near future have been able to be improved in my division and I continue to lobby Government with regard to more accountability for utility companies and developers where Highways has often had to step in and resolve problems. There have been a substantial number of grant applications through the Community Locality Budget and both schemes have been retained in the Integrated Plan (Budget). There are so many invaluable organisations in the town and villages and the full list of grants allocated are available to view on the County Council website.

I have participated in consultations such as the NHS Let's Talk survey, the proposed Banking Hub, the proposal for a congestion charge in Cambridge (currently dropped), promoting active travel and improvements to buses, the speed limit on Baldock Road, where there is now a 40 mph limit, the proposed weight limit on the A507, safety on the A505, the Waste proposals, car parking, various planning applications and I continue working with Cambridgeshire regarding a safer crossing over the A505, where there has been positive progress this year and joint participation from Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire councillors. It is good news that, following negotiations between the two counties, residents in Royston can use the Royston and Thriplow recycling centres without charge.

I will end by thanking all my councillor colleagues, particularly Councillor Jarvis, working on many issues across our division and our locality budgets, and officers from the Town, District and County Councils, for their support and work throughout the year.

Madam Mayor, this concludes my report.

10. REPORT FROM HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR STEVE JARVIS:

Thanks very much. One of the challenges in giving this report is not to say exactly the same things as Fiona has just told you.

As she explained, of the little over a billion pounds the County Council spends every year, it spends half of that on adult care and a quarter of that on services for vulnerable children and there have been some real challenges in some of those areas, particularly around the increasing number of children who have special educational needs and the ability both of the Council and of the education system as a whole to meet those. That presents some real challenges. There is some extra money being put in, but there are some pretty fundamental issues about the dramatically increased numbers of children requiring additional help and the ability to provide that, not just to identify what they need, which has been the first problem, but actually to meet those needs.

Despite that, that's not what most people think of when they think of the Council, or what most people contact the council about, it's potholes that people come to the County Council about. With some extra money, there was some significant progress I think being made, at least in some areas, but the enormous amount of wet weather that we've had this winter, I think it's probably undone quite a lot of that progress. When I talked to the engineers who are responsible, they explain with some justification that it's very difficult for them to fill a hole if it's underwater at the time and we must have some sympathy with that situation but clearly there are some major issues that that still need to be addressed around the way in which the repair of roads is managed and in particular the increasing amount of rain that we seem to get poses some real challenges for the infrastructure that's supposed to take it away. Just one of a few reminders of the impact our changing climate has on our everyday lives. And the impact on KJAR's roof I think is something that also reminds us all that we need to be serious in terms of trying to both deal with the impacts of the climate and do what we can to reduce them.

In terms of more local matters, there are a number of things that have arisen that many of you will have commented on or complained about in some cases, one of my challenges throughout the year has been to try and get some progress in the half-done road works in Baldock Road where the contractors working for the developers half-built a junction and then disappeared and eventually came back and did a bit more and then disappeared again. And then they came back and installed a 40 mile per hour speed limit except they only put half the signs up and I'm currently trying to work with the County Council's Highway Officers to get them to come back and finish the job. The problem with these things is that this is work being done by a contractor who's employed by the house builder, not work that's being done by the

council so when they clear off after leaving the job half-done, the council has to try and get them to come back and finish it. And it's not as if it's their contractor, so they can't say if you don't come back we won't pay you, because the people who are employing them are the house builders who are really only interested in building the houses and spending as little on road works as they can. So that's been a real challenge and it continues, but we will eventually get all the traffic islands built properly, the streetlights installed and the 40 mile per hour speed limit signs put up. It's just that what was supposed to be finished in the middle of last year and now it looks like it may not be finished until the middle of this year.

Further down that road, there were lots of complaints last year when all the vegetation was removed and I spent some time talking to the people who were responsible for that and established that the problem was that they'd carried out no maintenance for about 20 years. If you didn't maintain your garden for 20 years, it would turn into a jungle and the only thing you could do to do anything about that would be to cut most of it down, and that's essentially the situation they got into there. They didn't do any regular maintenance and it got to the point where it was just a jungle and they had to do a lot of work to cut a lot of things down and now they have replanted that section, and they tell me that they're going to maintain it regularly. So, what we will have, will actually be better from an environmental point of view from what was there before, but they didn't explain to anyone that they didn't do that, they talked about highway safety and most of it isn't about highway safety, most of it is about actually improving the environment along there although it does have some highway safety benefits in that now you can see both carriageways, it might reduce the number of people who drive the wrong way down the wrong carriageway on the A505.

Fiona talked about the bridge, which we're all hoping will fairly soon be built over the A505 for a cycle route to Melbourn and onto Cambridge. There is of course another bridge over the A505 that's never been used since the bypass was built and we are, I hope, getting to a point where that will become part of a footpath as an alternative to having to cross the bypass near the gateway, which is not a very nice thing to do. The Hertfordshire side of it is pretty much sorted, but the Cambridgeshire side is taking a little longer to resolve.

So, there are many local issues of that sort in addition to the much broader county wide issues, but I think I've probably covered the significant ones so at that point, I'll stop.

Thank you very much.

11. REPORT FROM ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA FORUM CHAIRMAN, DISTRICT COUNCILLOR RUTH BROWN:

Thank you, Madam Mayor.

So, I have become the chair of the Royston Area Forum just this last year and you may remember that it used to be called the District Committee. So, this committee is made-up of the six district councillors in Royston and the one that represents the villages, Barley, Barkway, Nuthampstead, Reed, Therfield and Kelshall. It used to be a formal committee that made decisions but for this year we decided to pilot a different format and we renamed it the Royston District Area Forum and the purpose of that was to make it less formal, more interactive and get the public discussion going.

So, we've had four meetings this year and we've grouped them around themes. We've covered planning, parking, we had a group from Let's Talk Royston about the health survey that came from the integrated care services, talked about recycling and waste, the Citizens Advice North Herts have been to talk about cost of living, and we've had presentations on transport from HertsLynx and Royston and District Community Transport. Last time we had

the police talking about community safety and we also talked about green space. So, we've covered quite a lot of things, so the idea is that each year, there are four meetings a year. Each time we take a theme and the public can come and they can hear a presentation and then they can ask questions and we've had some lively discussions. We've had some quite good turnouts from the public and I think personally it's worked a lot better than the more formal meeting.

Part of the formal part of the meeting was to award grants, we do get a small budget and we used to be able to decide on grants but now we're an advisory body. We make recommendations to a cabinet member who takes the final decision but essentially, we've maintained that link with the community where community organisations can apply for grants, they can come to the committee, they can speak to the committee and then we decide whether we think it's a good idea or not. And so this year, we've awarded nearly £7,000 in grants to Creative Royston for their weather machine at the Arts Festival, to Traksa for the car park resurfacing and rainwater harvesting up at Therfield, to Homestart for family support, to Resolve, that's a drug and alcohol addiction service to help support people and to Reed Cricket Club. Next year we have put an additional £5,000 into the budget and that is in part compensation for the fact that the County Councillor Locality Budgets are going to be cut in half next year. Another bit of funding that has been available has been this Community Investment fund that the District Council put in place of £100,000 which really came from the fact that the government last year suddenly told us that we could raise the tax a bit more than we thought. That extra amount of money we decided to put into a Community Investment Fund for capacity building in the voluntary sector. There were awards of £5,000 to £20,000 and it was three times oversubscribed, but there were eight organisations who were awarded money and three of them were in Royston.

I just wanted to say a few more things about what the District Council has been up to. If you're a leisure centre member, you've probably already had some emails to tell you that the contract is changing. There's a new contract and the leisure centre will be run by Everyone Active as of the 1st of April but there should be continuity in terms of memberships and hopefully you won't notice any difference in the service and it will be better if anything. There is going to be money made available for a gym extension and there is possibility of a learner pool as well which I'm very excited about as a swimmer because there is always a problem with the temperature of the pool. And the other very exciting news about our leisure centre is that we recently learned that we have been awarded £7.7 million from the public sector decarbonisation scheme and we've got 3 million to match fund that and that's going to put in air source heat pumps and solar panels on all our leisure centres which is a fantastic win because it's good for the climate and it's going to save on CO₂ emissions.

Royston Skate Park, we did a consultation last June and there are some plans now to refurbish it and to expand it and we'll be starting works very soon on that.

It is the 50th anniversary of the District Council. For the 50th anniversary, there are various events being run for the district and the town is doing some as well. And if you as a local organisation, want to get involved with any of that, please do contact the relevant people in the town or in North Herts.

So finally, I just want to mention the budget because none of this can happen without money. So we approved a revenue budget of just under £20 million this year. We approved a Council Tax rise of 2.99%. So your Council Tax here is made up of Royston Town Council precept which went up 3.68%, District Council which is going to go up 2.99%, you've heard about the County, 4.99% and the Police and Crime Commissioner which is 6% or 8%. The North Herts Council tax

rise is equivalent to £7.50 a year in addition for a band D property and in order to fund that, we did have to take £1.7 million out of our reserves and that's meant we have not had to cut any front-line services and in fact we've put £25,000 extra into area grants, £5,000 of which will come to Royston and we've put an additional £10,000 to expand our bee corridors which have been happening in Letchworth and across the other towns. So, Royston will get bee corridors.

I think that's all, our next Royston Area Forum meeting will be on the 5th of June so it'll be after the elections. And you're all welcome, we have been doing most of them in person here at the Town Hall. Please do spread the word, please do come, you get the chance to enter in the discussion, ask the questions you want to ask and I think that's really helpful for us to get engaged with the public.

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:

Can we hear some more about the banking hub? We're going to lose the services of Lloyds Bank in June and potentially the banking hub will be setup in September, but do we know where it's going to be?

A. County Councillor Hill:

No, in fact I was talking to the Clerk about this yesterday because other people have been asking as well. We were all in the same briefing when we were told the intention was that Royston had been chosen for a banking hub and not everywhere has got them so it would be brilliant. They asked for some ideas from us of places we could think of so we suggested some. Some they said might not be big enough, some might be too big, so they were going to look at it. My understanding was if they couldn't find a permanent premises for June or not long after June, there would be a temporary building set up. So, we are trying to get some information because it's getting quite near June.

A. Town Clerk:

They're called Cash Access UK and they do have a website that you can look at and it details some of the banking hubs that are already in existence and the ones where the property search is underway.

Q. A member of the public asked:

Can we assume that our cinema is finally gone?

A. Councillor Brown:

No, not if I have anything to do with it, the cinema is not gone. The Cinema Working Party is a small group made up of town councillors, plus the BID manager, and we've got somebody who used to be the programme manager when the cinema was first set up and then someone who represents the volunteers. So the working party has been meeting very regularly. So we're not there yet but what I would say is that the working party are absolutely unanimous that we need to find a way to reopen the cinema. Personally, I use the cinema a lot or have used the cinema a lot so I love it, I think it's great. So yeah, we're absolutely committed to reopening it, but so far, we are working on the solution, there are lots of legal and financial barriers that

we're working our way through. But if I have anything to do with it, it won't be closed forever. I think that's all I can say.

Q. A member of the public asked:

I was just going to ask about access for disabled around the town, and I can't remember which meeting I was at, but were we not talking about putting dropped kerbs in where they're missing and is anything happening?

A. County Councillor Jarvis:

There are some that have been put in but there are many more needed I suspect.

Q. Member of the public:

I've also come across another problem. I took a client out in a wheelchair and then I came across 2 bollards right across the footpath, and no dropped kerb. Who do I need to say this to, please can you remove these bollards? If you go down Rock Road to the very sharp left bend it's diagonally on the right, there's a path that leads into 2 concrete bollards.

A. County Councillor Jarvis:

The great problem with all these arrangements is that people put them in places to prevent people from cycling and there is no arrangement that prevents cycling that doesn't also prevent wheelchairs, in fact, quite the reverse. I think what we need to do is establish who's responsible for that path. It may well be that it's Settle, the housing association.

Q. Member of the public:

There are no "no cycling" signs on any of our pavements apart from the cut through between the school and the football pitch and we still get motorbikes down there. I would love to see signs that say "no cycling" here, unless it's part of the shared path thing for your new accessibility scheme for cyclists.

A. Councillor Brown:

The problem is that there isn't a safe cycling route along Melbourn Road.

A. County Councillor Jarvis:

One of the complications is that legally, the status of some of these paths is different. For example, there is a path from King Street down through to Princes Mews which is a detached footpath and consequently, you are allowed to cycle on it, although the residents have put up signs saying you can't, it needs a traffic regulation order to make it illegal to cycle on it. If it's a footpath instead of a detached footway, then you're not allowed to cycle on it but you couldn't tell which was which just by looking. And one of the problems I've discovered elsewhere is that the County Council has no records of which bits are shared paths. They have to go over to the sites, which is not very sensible. The plan is that there will be a shared route all the way along Melbourn Road eventually.

Q. A member of the public asked:

What is the council doing to encourage senior citizens to walk to town?

A. Councillor Brown:

It's the local cycling and walking infrastructure plan which was widely consulted on last year. It came to the Town Council, it came to the Royston Area Forum and it was online, people could

comment on it, it was an interactive map. We did try and publicise it as much as possible and there are a lot of comments on it actually. It's been widely consulted and it's now been adopted by the county at their Highways Panel, that was last September. But there's actually no funding for any of it so the idea is we've got these things we would desire in terms of cycle and walking paths, but there's no funding to do them yet. But when it comes to new developments, the plan is to make footpaths and cycleways as direct as possible to encourage people to go by walking or mobility scooter or cycle rather than getting in a car.

Q. Member of the public:

In order to encourage people who can't walk long distances, you need to put something there, not necessarily a bench, it could be a wooden stool. Just a couple on the hills where you can stop for 2-3 minutes and carry on, you will have more people walking into town which is good for parking and local businesses.

A. County Councillor Hill:

We have been asked for quite a lot and we've put in quite a few suggestions. I had some comments that people were struggling to go across the whole park in one go, and could they have some seats periodically there so that's been done. We've got some down near Twigdens, and more elsewhere. We can look at that sort of thing.

Q. A member of the public asked:

I have two questions. I was wondering what the plan was with Lower King Street and Kneesworth Street? I was surprised at the lack of pedestrian access to the railway station and the town centre, especially if you have a wheelchair. On Kneesworth Street the pavement isn't very wide. The second question, I work for Scope, the disability charity and the campaigns team is currently doing a nationwide campaign on playgrounds and their accessibility. They are doing a map where they are putting all playgrounds and how accessible they are on. Is it possible to put the campaigns team in contact with the Council so that the playgrounds in Royston can get added to the map as well as the recommendations for making them more accessible?

A. Councillor Brown:

In terms of that pavement on Kneesworth Street, I mean I walk up and down there a lot, it is so unsafe. You've got, particularly when it's raining, cars coming rushing past and you have to step off the pavement because someone's coming towards you, it's really not safe. In the LCWIP, the original proposal was to make that a modal filter so that you'd only be able to go on cycles and walking one way but there was so much objection to that, we decided that it needed more work and I think the county councillors looked at the other side of Kneesworth Street.

A. County Councillor Jarvis:

There was a plan. There's a particular problem with Lower King Street in terms of what you do but Kneesworth Street, you could lay the foot way wider by restricting the width of the roadway, making just one lane. We got to a point where there was a design to do that and this is probably five years ago. The reason it never happened is because there is apparently a gas main under it and to re-lay the gas main will cost a quarter of a million or something like that. So at the moment the County Council has put it in the too hard. But, you know, I was sitting in a traffic jam there only last night thinking why do we need two lanes here? One would be perfectly adequate.

A. County Councillor Hill:

There were complaints over the trial done for one lane because of the businesses at night, and also the dropping off. So there's a lot of things that couldn't be overcome easily, including what Steve said, so that was the problem, there was no real agreement. On the other issue, the problem with doing what Ruth has suggested was the idea of the modal shift was then all the traffic would have been going around Tannery Drift and we had a problem with the bus at one time going along Tannery Drift and children coming out of the school and so we lobbied then to get the bus back away from Tannery Drift, which is what happened. But they would only do it if we could guarantee that they could get up Kneesworth Street and that was when the trial was carried out because they couldn't always get up Kneesworth street, because of all the cars. So it was one of those never ending circles that didn't really get resolved. It's there in the list to do something, but it's what can be done so that businesses aren't affected, and safety is put first.

Q. Member of the public:

I'm conscious of all the development we're doing but we don't seem to be expanding amenities in town, my particular concern is doctors. There are multi-month waits for doctors' appointments, particularly for those that work and can't be in the town during the day.

A. Councillor Brown:

I suppose the first thing to say is that any developer, like Hedera Gardens, provides money for health. So, if you go to the Section 106 legal agreement, there is money allocated for health. That doesn't necessarily mean a new health centre, it could be additional capacity at existing health centres, but whether that is actually being used to increase capacity is another matter. I don't know about that.

A. County Councillor Hill:

There's an interesting thing about the NHS, at one time, unless the development was more than a certain number of properties, the NHS didn't respond back to planning, and they pushed and pushed and therefore some of the section 106 that they could have had, they didn't get. I think that's got better now and there is funding in there.

A. County Councillor Jarvis:

In some places, they're quite clear that the model that would have existed maybe 40 years ago where they built a new housing estate, they also built a separate surgery is not the way that things are going to work anymore because GPs do so many more things and need to be in larger units. I think that the way in which the issue is likely to be resolved is not a separate health centre but having a health centre in the town that's big enough for the town, the size it is. There's a meeting between councillors and the Integrated Care Board later this month, and one of the things they're going to talk about is how they can provide more capacity.

A. Councillor Brown:

Just to add, Granta having taken over the health centre and now having the Market Hill site as well, they would much rather have a large health centre on one site and they have got money, but it's all about finding a suitable site. It's not going to happen quickly but we've got a meeting with the ICB which is progress and we've got Granta who want something to happen and have got some money set aside. I think there is a possibility of a primary healthcare hub with a diagnostic centre and all that kind of thing.

A. County Councillor Hill:

They did the survey and they promised that when they had the results of the survey, they would engage and they're doing what they promised to do. This has been going on about 10 years, 20 years actually, and we went up to see the Health Minister at the time.

Q. Member of the public:

The second question I have is, the new scheme where we have to prove who we are in order to recycle, I take objection to that because I'm not quite sure why we're monitored as to what we're throwing away, and I wonder what the justification for that is?

A. County Councillor Hill:

Nothing to do with monitoring, it was because of the Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire argument about where you lived, but you can now use both with a permit, they're not actually monitoring. That's just to make sure you are from Royston or Cambridgeshire, and you can use the Cambridgeshire one if you get a free permit as well.

Q. Member of the public:

I'll move on and go to my third if that's alright? I think we're heading to a rise in e-scooters and I think we somehow need to understand how we control that in town to avoid unpleasant instances happening because they do and will continue to happen and we need to get a grip of that before it gets bad.

A. County Councillor Jarvis:

Well, the government needs to, I mean it keeps just extending the trials and it needs to decide how it's going to deal with the issue beyond the trials. And I assume that one day it will and there will have to be some regulations about what you can do with these e-scooters and what you can't but they're not going to be on a town-by-town basis, I would suggest they're going to be on a national basis and the current position of just saying you must not have them is becoming increasingly untenable because more and more people are getting them anyway. And that isn't likely to result in a satisfactory position so there needs to be a national decision about where e-scooters are allowed and what you're allowed to do with them and what the rules are surrounding the use of them.

A. County Councillor Hill:

I know that the police have difficulty with this as well because of mobility scooters, there have been some accidents with mobility scooters knocking people over and it's how you differentiate between the two and there was an accident on the crossing with a scooter actually so they're very aware of it, but it's how it's handled.

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

The meeting closed at 9:37pm.