

Royston Town Talk – Wednesday 17th March 2021

In attendance:

Cllr Tony Hunter (NHDC)
Cllr Ruth Brown (NHDC / Royston Town Council)
Cllr Carol Stanier (NHDC / Royston Town Council)
Cllr Jean Green (NHDC)
Cllr Gerald Morris (NHDC)
Cllr John Davison (Royston Town Council)
Cllr Michael Harrison (Royston Town Council)
Cllr Marguerite Phillips (Royston Town Council)
Cllr Steve Jarvis (HCC/NHDC)
Cllr Fiona Hill (HCC)
Ash Hawkins (NHDC Officer)

MOA – Member of Audience

Tony Hunter chaired the Town Talk and opened the informal meeting at 615pm. Tony welcomed the members of the public and asked for any questions.

There were seven members of the Public in attendance at the meeting, some with questions and others in attendance purely to observe.

MOA – Following on from the Royston Town Council AGM where Sergeant Jon Vine commented about the lack of opportunity to engage with youngster, what is being done to engage with youngsters in Royston?

Cllr Fiona Hill said that all interested parties in the town were looking at venues and options for engaging with young people but also stressed that Youth Connexions had been engaging with young people throughout the Pandemic and before at Coombes Community Centre.

MOA – It is not only the youth of Royston that need to be engaged but also those in the surrounding villages and to spend S106 monies allocated for Community Facilities on a bandstand needed a rethink.

Cllr Tony Hunter said that there was a lot of sport related things to do within the town and highlighted that there had recently been improvements made at the skate park on Newmarket Road which used S106 monies. Tony also stated that he appreciated that not all young people were into sport and that all organisations involved needed to ensure that whatever is put in place must be what is wanted by the Youth of Royston.

Cllr John Davison responded to the question raised about the bandstand. John stated that the bandstand would not cost £100k and that costings for it had not yet been finalised but stated that the £100k mentioned was simply the amount of funding that would be made available from the developer's S106 Community Facilities contribution once the first home

on the development was occupied. John also confirmed that the actual developer contribution would be £200k for Community Facilities and that the final £100k would be released once 75% of the development was occupied.

John also said that the Town Council would consult with residents about the bandstand and whether or not it was wanted but did advise the MOA that S106 can only be used on Capital projects.

Cllr Ruth Brown who is the Deputy Leader for Community Engagement at NHDC said that S106 monies had been utilised at the Skate Park and also for bike rack and bus shelter schemes around the town but that for large projects such as the bandstand the public would be consulted.

MOA who was new to the town asked why supermarkets in Royston didn't have recycling sites like in other parts of the country?

Cllr Tony Hunter said that Tescos did have some but that these had been removed possibly for commercial reasons but also as a result of the Covid Pandemic. Tony stated that Royston had a Recycling Centre on York Way and that 57% of waste was successfully recycled in North Herts.

Cllr Carol Stanier who is the Deputy Leader for Waste said that large families in North Herts could apply for a larger bin if necessary and that additional waste would be collected if it was in suitable containers but not in bags.

MOA said she was concerned about the proposed new development off the Barkway Road.

Cllr Tony Hunter said the procedure for any proposed development was first to Town Council and then to NHDC for consideration.

Cllr Ruth Brown, Chair of Planning said she could not comment on the Application but that it had been submitted to the Council and could be viewed on the NHDC Website. Ruth also stated that a pre-application letter had been sent to around 300 homes. The application can be viewed on the NHDC Planning Portal under Flint Hall Farm and that people can add comments. Ruth added that objections must be based on material planning reasons such as traffic and not objections such as reducing the value of your home.

Cllr Marguerite Phillips, Chair of Royston Town Council Planning confirmed that the application had been discussed at Town Council and concerns were raised but that the planning decision would be made by North Herts District Council.

MOA said she was disappointed with the low attendance from the public at the Town Talk and asked what could be done to improve it?

Cllr Tony Hunter said that the Community Engagement Officer does a great deal to promote the Town Talks both on social media, through the Parish Councils and also by putting posters up around the town and in shops. Tony said that Royston had only been hosting Town Talks for a year or so and that the process takes time to grow. Hitchin have been running Town Talk sessions for many years and they are very popular.

MOA stated that she had seen comments on the facebook messages about Town Talk but maybe people don't like saying things face to face.

Cllr Tony Hunter stated that the take up for the online Town Talks was low but the mechanism was put in place to allow for community engagement during the Pandemic. Tony advised the MOA that the Council does hold Councillor Surgeries in the town which are popular and that hopefully people will use them again when it is safe again to hold public meetings.

Cllr John Davison said that the last time the Royston Town Council carried out a Public Consultation exercise was back in 2011 and was about whether to have a local cemetery and whether to keep the Public Toilets by the Cross open. They received 712 responses to a paper survey. John stated that technology had moved on since then and that they would be looking at finding the best ways to consult with residents regarding S106 spending for projects such as the bandstand.

MOA advised John not to carry out the consultation like the recent Police Survey in which respondents could make multiple replies.

Cllr Steve Jarvis said that a mix of online and face to face should be used for consultation as no single method would suit all. Steve also stated that in the 12 months before the Pandemic 600 people had attended meeting whilst in the 9 months of the Pandemic 3000 people had viewed meetings online.

With reference to the Police Survey, Cllr Tony Hunter said that with the Local Plan consultation, it was possible to filter out multiple entries and assumed the Police Survey could also do this.

MOA introduced herself to the meeting and said she was the person behind the group and petition opposing the planned development off the Barkway Road. She was seeking advice from the Councillors about how to approach this.

Cllr Tony Hunter said that a lot of the Councillors in attendance sit on the planning committee so would not be able to comment but stressed to the MOA that all objections would be looked in to by Planning Policy Network.

The MOA said that the group had concerns about increased traffic flow, pollution and concerns for the local wildlife and that her objections would be based on Planning law only.

Cllr Marguerite Phillips suggested that the MOA might get some helpful advice from the Campaign to Protect Rural England

Cllr Fiona Hill informed the group that she is liaising with the MOA and stressed the need for the action group to be objecting on Planning reasons and not elements such as loss of value to their home, rights to view, dislike for the development etc

Cllr Ruth Brown added that planning issues such as traffic / access / archaeological site would be reasons for objections. Ruth also added the site was not in the Local Plan.

Cllr Fiona Hill also stated that it was not in the existing Local Plan or in the emerging Local Plan.