

Present: Mayor, Councillor Mrs P A Phillips (presiding)  
Councillor M S Akehurst  
Councillor J Bland  
Councillor D Clenshaw  
Councillor Miss S Evans  
Councillor S J Gawrysiak  
Councillor Miss K L Gehrman  
Councillor W Hamilton  
Councillor Miss L M Hillier  
Councillor D R Nimmo Smith  
Councillor I Reissmann  
Councillor D M Silvester

In Attendance: Mr M W Kennedy – Town Clerk  
Louise Hastings – Minute taker

Also Present: Mr John Howell MP  
County Councillor P Skolar – OCC  
District Councillor W Hall - SODC  
1 member of the press  
9 members of the public

The Town Clerk explained the fire evacuation procedure.

30. **WELCOME ADDRESS**

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs Pam Phillips welcomed Mr John Howell MP to the meeting.

31. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs E Hodgkin, Mrs J Wood, Ms L Meachin, D Hinke.

32. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

*Members are hereby reminded that, under the provisions of Part 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 (The Code of Conduct), a member with a personal interest in a matter who attends a meeting of the authority at which the matter is considered must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent. A member with a personal interest in a matter also has a prejudicial interest in that matter if the interest is one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the member's judgement of the public interest. A member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room or chamber where a meeting is being held whenever it becomes apparent that the matter is being considered at that meeting, unless he has obtained a dispensation from the standards committee of the responsible authority; and not seek improperly to influence a decision about that matter. You do, however, have the same right as a member of the public to make representations, give evidence and answer questions about the matter during Public Participation and may remain in the room to enable you to exercise that right and then leave immediately. You must not seek to improperly influence a decision on the matter.*

None received.

33. **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS FOR JOHN HOWELL, MP**

The following questions and answers have been numbered in accordance with the numbering of the questions attached to the Special Full Council agenda.

**Councillor Ian Reissmann**

20. You have asked for questions to be submitted in advance. For questions where detailed research is necessary that makes sense. Why is this an absolute rule and will you allow questions on issues which have recently arisen to be raised?

*A: Questions are asked for in advance to have time to group them in their topics and ensure the fullest possible answers.*

**Councillor Miss Lorraine Hillier:**

1. I would just like to know the level of attendance at the Council Surgeries in the District. Also, if there is any general level of concern in the enquiries and what in particular do residents enquire about.

*A: Surgeries are held about every two weeks during parliament (not through the summer recess). It is a huge constituency, between 260 and 270 square miles. Surgeries have been moved from Fridays to Saturdays to allow accessibility to everyone. Each appointment lasts for 15 minutes. Attendance and issues vary. Sending letters, e-mails or telephone calls is easier than travelling. It is important that the list of surgeries is available. I never hold surgeries on my own in case of any difficulties. There is a lack of understanding as to what councils do.*

**Councillor D Nimmo-Smith**

5. **Getting out & about in the constituency:** When Parliament is sitting, you spend most of the week away from your Constituency. What steps do you take to discuss with, and get feedback from, ordinary constituents about local and national issues? Other than those who visit your Surgeries or otherwise contact you directly.

*A: I am in constant contact with constituents who are not shy in coming forward and I also rely on contacts with other elected members in the constituency. I get approximately 10,000 e-mails per year related to constituents' concerns. I try to hold the meetings with individual groups to discuss issues as well as house meetings. At present, I am in the middle of a 'village tour' as there are in excess of 100 villages in my constituency. I also receive copies of parish magazines. I also send a monthly notice to all parish and town councils advising them of what is happening in Parliament.*

**Councillor Mrs J Wood**

2. How will John vote in the "Changes to the NHS" debate? How does he think the Government's plans will actually help us all, will the new proposals have any bearing on whether we get a new hospital at Henley?

*A: I voted for the NHS bill in its amended form. I am happy to produce a copy of the letter by Stephen Phillips QC MP which counters the claims made by a number of organisations I do not believe it will have any bearing on Townlands in view of the timing.*

**Councillor Will Hamilton**

12. We regularly hear the word "slippage" when it comes to the Townlands development, it has taken more than 10 years of councillors time to progress. Given the deficit and the position Labour has left us, where is the capital money coming from?

*A: With Townlands and slippage it is important to ask whether as a result of the slippage we will end up with something better. I have meetings with the PCT and the old model of just a hospital is not going to happen for financial reasons. A mix of hospital and care home is needed.*

13. Is there likely to any impediment given the changes to Planning, any impediment from the Localism Bill or NHS bill. Will there be any impediment from the Treasury?

14. Will the changes to NHS bill make any difference to what happens here locally?

*A: I can not speak on behalf of the Treasury but I don't believe any of these changes will be an impediment. The Localism Bill would not affect it adversely, it should help it to move forward.*

**Councillor David Nimmo-Smith**

3. **Localism:** You are PPS to the Minster for Decentralisation and Localism, in which role you have helped introduce the Localism Bill. In practice, how will Localism be different to what local Councillors have been doing for as long as I have been a Member of Henley Town Council? What more statutory duties will Town and Parish Councils be able to carry out?

*A: I would push services down to the lowest appropriate level. It is not about single devolution of only Whitehall giving power. It is about double devolution and power being given to neighbourhoods.. Issues that relate to local authorities including local organisation, should be able to do things for themselves. The community has a right to challenge.*

**Mayor, Councillor Mrs Pamela Phillips**

16. The car parks and toilets in Henley are managed by SODC, but I believe that Henley Town Council would do a better job. How will the Localism Bill help Henley achieve this?

*A: Under the Localism Bill which is hoped to be law later this year, town and parish councils are expected to be amongst those who are able to bid to take on services currently being run by other councils where they feel they can do them better, cleverer and cheaper. Such bids cannot simply be brushed aside. Assets of community value e.g. pubs, can be nominated so that if they are going to be sold or demolished the community has a chance to put in a bid to buy them.*

17. What other advantages could the Localism Bill bring to Henley?

*A: A community right to build. You can come forward with small schemes for development. A right to produce a neighbourhood development plan. The local Council and the residents could shape the development. There is no set format.*

**Councillor D Nimmo-Smith**

4. **Planning:** You are credited as the architect of the Coalition Government's reforms to the planning system, having been the principal author of the Conservative Green Paper "Open Source Planning". Can you reassure us that the proposed legislation is not intending to ride roughshod all over planning law and allow unfettered development? Or becomes a charter of rights for nimbys.

*A: The neighbourhood planning process should help. You should be able to use the Localism Bill. There are three aims (1) To bring back democratic and local control. (2) To make sure that the plan put together is sustainable and (3) Make things much simpler. Planning applications will continue to be judged against the local plan (including the Neighbourhood Plan). Plans should be based on transparent evidence and include a balance between the areas environmental, social and economic requirements.*

**Councillor Ian Reissmann**

19. What is your view in the proposed healthcare village at Highlands farm? What will you do to address concerns about any possible effect on the Townlands development? To a degree this mirrors Townlands. If there is a concern will you support it?

*A: I believe this sort of issue should be a local issue and that you should not need the MP to come in to try to sort it out. That is after all what Localism is all about. A key issue will be whether the market for this Care Home is different from that envisaged on the Townlands site.*

21. Many people in Henley feel that the planning system is remote from Henley and that is shown by the number of applications allowed by SODC when these are strongly objected to by Henley residents and the Town Council. The Localism bill is removing many restrictions allowing District Councils much greater powers. For Henley this would render local planning objections even harder to make, when true localism would give greater powers to Henley. Do you agree with these concerns?

*A: Planning applications will continue to be judged against the Local Plan and Neighbourhood plans. By making the plan-making process more robust, the system will get easier to use. I hope this will mean fewer appeals. If a plan from the town is in conflict with a surrounding village you would need to resolve the problem through the Duty to Cooperate in the Localism Bill.*

**Cllr Martin Akehurst**

23. The government's Core Strategy will put 400 houses in three already identified Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in Henley. Would our MP like to comment please?

*A: Issues like this need to be resolved through the Neighbourhood Planning process. Neighbourhood Plans after all will need to be approved by local referendum..*

**Councillor D Nimmo-Smith**

6. Housing: What is the role for Town and Parish Councils in the provision of new Community Driven Housing?

*A: Under the Localism Bill, local neighbourhoods will be able to bring forward small schemes to meet local requirements themselves.*

**Councillor David Silvester**

7. Two aspects of the Big Society. Firstly, what evidence do you see that the Big Society is succeeding in South Oxfordshire?

*A: The big society is not just about more volunteers. Volunteers do a great job. It is about freeing them up to help make strong communities. This is not always about money. For example, one of the biggest problems volunteers have faced is insurance on cars when they are volunteering. The Association of British Insurers has now agreed that volunteers should not be treated as a business.*

8. Second, are funds available to ensure its success in a town as outwardly prosperous as Henley-on-Thames?

*A: There is Big Society Funding from Central Government for activities. The Big Society capital was launched at the end of July. There is a list of potential sources of funding. It is not about the affluence of the area.*

**County Councillor Peter Skolar**

15. Except for those suffering from deficit denial, it is agreed that reduction of the deficit is not only good but necessary. When, in some time in the future, the financial position of the country improves, is there any chance that the bad old ways of excessive spending by Local Authorities will come back and that even more money will be taken from the poor old Council Tax Payer. How will this be avoided?

*A: We cannot put all this effort into changing the deficit only to let it all happen again. Structural changes are important. Local Government accounts for 25% expenditure of Central Government. It is right it should take its share of the cuts. But ring fencing has been taken away from most grants to allow councils to focus on local priorities. A sustainable basis for future community budgets. Funding is done in a different way – shift to council having more control.*

**Councillor Miss Kellie Gehrmann**

9. You will be aware (due to the media coverage) of the investigation into a new skate park by some of the users and associates of the current facility in Henley. The current facility is at Makins and the idea is to create a concrete bowl which will be much safer, quieter and easier to maintain. Baring in mind that the project group are trying to raise the funds for this themselves, do you support the investigation in to a new park and it's current location? Also have you seen any other parks like this in the constituency and what is your opinion of them and how they work?

*A: I looked at the situation at the skate park in Thame. The Police report read no noise complaints, the little bit of graffiti was not offensive. Litter was the only issue. There were two serious Police activities and that related to the youth shelter – which the youngsters were against having. They have a regular police patrol. The overall feeling is that it is a very much loved asset causing no harm or offence to anyone.*

10. Last year you were photographed in the Henley Standard at the Henley branch of the YMCA helping out in the garden there. They had been doing a garden project at the time and over £3000 was raised. I wondered what has been done since last year and what are the plans for next year? Will you have any future involvement in the project?

*A: I am always happy to go back to the YMCA. I do have a huge constituency covering between 260/270 miles. I do need to be invited.*

11. Businesses seem to come and go in the town, which I find strange because of the vibrancy of Henley and the amount of tourism we attract. Our market town co-ordinator recently resigned and it is felt that he did not really do anything in the first place. Do you believe in these town co-ordinators and do you think that having a new one would help the businesses in Henley or simply be a waste of money?

*A: There has been positive experience and enthusiasm from the businesses. I do not know the set up but turn around of businesses happens everywhere not just Henley. Do not give up on ideas. Give good direction of what it is you want to achieve.*

**Mayor, Councillor Mrs Pamela Phillips**

18. On 30th July 2011, prior to the recent riots, the Guardian warned "that we should expect a summer of gang and knife crime in UK cities as the impact of cuts to Youth Services takes hold". OCC has withdrawn its annual grant of £25K from Henley Youth Club, and made the staff redundant. What do you see as the consequences of this to the youth of Henley?

*A: In relation to the issue over land, I helped arrange meetings for the Youth Club Trustees. I had a meeting with Liz and Gill; taking computers out was not a very friendly way of behaving. There are opportunities for project funding and you should be looking for company and community funding. The riots and the youth club did not have an impact on each other. A percentage of the rioters were over 35 years old. Young people got blamed and it was not completely true. Youngsters contribute to the town. It is not acceptable that Henley is not included for funding from OCC. We must make sure that support is there from the core and project funding.*

*Henley Town Council needs to complete a source book of where funds are.*

**Cllr Liz Hodgkin - From local resident: David Dickie**

22. What help can he give Henley Residents on the closing of open spaces on the Berkshire side of the river. Both HRR (by Leander) and Copas are closing off pathways that have been used for over 50 years. The new Copas fencing is particularly dangerous in places during the regattas. However the trend is for pathways to be closed even if they are well used.

*A: There is very little I can do in practice as this is a County matter and outside my constituency. The Localism Bill will support open spaces. This will give a new ability for communities to nominate open spaces for protection.*

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs Pam Phillips thanked Mr John Howell MP for attending and answering Councillors questions.

The meeting ended at 9:20pm.

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Mayor