

**Present:** Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs J Bland  
Councillor Mrs P G Buckett  
Councillor Miss L Hillier  
Councillor Miss L Pye  
Councillor S Smith  
The Mayor, Councillor Mrs J Wood (ex-officio)  
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor C I Pye (ex-officio)

**In attendance:** Mr M Kennedy – Town Clerk  
Ms N Taylor – Committee Administrator / Minute Taker

**Also Present:** 1 Member of the Press  
7 Members of the Public  
Mr D Buckle – Chief Executive, SODC  
Mr O O'Dell – Town Centre Co-ordinator, SODC  
Councillor Mrs G Dodds

**129. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor I Reissmann.

**130. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Declarations of interest were received from Councillors Miss L and C Pye, Item 139, Henley Arts Trail – Personal – Member of the family.

**131. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

Mr K Arlett, Elizabeth Road questioned a) “if democracy had entered into the decision on the electoral arrangements as he did not feel that Mr Buckle should be making the decision as to where the count is held”; b) “if the cut in funding from SODC for the Information Centre funded the salary for Mr O’Dell and what had Mr O’Dell achieved since last February for his £20k salary”; and c) “if the PCSO’s in Henley were able to issue tickets for litter fines as well as parking fines”.

Mrs P Phillips, St Mark’s Road questioned a) “who was the ‘we’ who part funded 6 PCSO’s “and was informed that it was South Oxfordshire District Council; and b) “if the decision on the electoral arrangements was part of a consultation by South Oxfordshire District Council, or had just been made by the council”. Mrs Phillips suggested that it was hard enough to get the public to vote, and if the count was not held in the Town Hall it could make the whole process even more remote and less people would make the effort to vote.

Mr M Akehurst, Two Tree Hill questioned “why at a time when it is difficult to get people interested in the election was it decided to take the vote to Thame and not Oxford or Henley”.

**132. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Town and Community Committee held on 1 March 2011 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

**133. ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS IN HENLEY**

The Chairman welcomed Mr David Buckle, the Chief Executive for SODC to the meeting to respond to Members’ concerns expressed at Full Council on 29 March 2011.

Mr Buckle informed the meeting that the count had not been held at Henley Town Hall since 2003, with the last election count taking place at Crowmarsh. Mr Buckle advised that he was the appointed Returning Officer and as such was responsible for making the decision to hold a central count at Thame and not individual counts at all the Town / Parish Councils.

In 2001, legislation was made that people could have a postal vote, but to be eligible you had to be practically bed ridden. The law changed in 2006 which made it simpler for anyone to apply for a postal vote. This made it a lot easier for everyone to vote (now 70% postal and 30% personal voters) but has made it almost impossible with current technology to hold local counts. This is due to the fact that as postal votes have to be verified with computerised information held on signatures and dates of births, and this information is held at the District Council Offices, the postal ballots that are returned to the polling stations on the day of the election would have to be returned to Crowmarsh to be verified and then returned to the Town Council for the local count. This would have the effect of making the count and the result slower. This year’s Referendum on the Alternative Voting System would add to the complexity of the count and strengthened the decision for the count to be conducted centrally.

In response to the question of “why Thame”, Mr Buckle advised that the sports hall at the leisure centre in Thame was the biggest venue available in the district.

It was not in Mr Buckle’s opinion essential to have the result available on the same night; he was happy for the counts to be carried out the next day, with all the results of the Town, Parish and District elections being published on the District Council’s website, or to people who have registered their details on a phone text service.

In response to a question on the timings of the count, Mr Buckle advised that the count would start at 8am on the day after the election. The first task involved the verification of the ballot boxes. The first count will be for District, followed by Town and Parishes at 12 noon. At 4pm some of the counting staff will break away and begin the Referendum count whilst the rest of the staff will continue counting the Town and Parish votes. Mr Buckle said that he would liaise with the Town Clerk and confirm the approximate start time for the Henley Town Council count. It is expected that all the counts would be completed by 6pm on 6 May 2011.

A Councillor suggested that the reason Mr Buckle had not considered it important to hold the count on election night at the Town Hall was because he had never stood for election and would not understand how important it was for the people of the town to find out who had been elected.

Mr Buckle was asked if the money spent on the security to guard the ballot boxes overnight could not be spent on staff to count the votes locally. Mr Buckle advised that if the votes were counted locally, the Referendum votes would have to be removed from the boxes, taken to District and guarded, so this cost would still have to be met. The payment of staff to count overnight at all the local elections would be considerably more than the cost of paying for security over night and then for the count to be carried out centrally the next day.

In response to a question on whether an elector could refuse to accept a ballot paper for the Referendum, Mr Buckle believed this to be correct and suggested that they would be handed a ballot paper but could choose to spoil their vote instead. Mr Buckle agreed to check this with his office and confirm the position.

It was noted that if people had replied to the Yes Campaign and had requested a postal vote for the Referendum this did not automatically entitle them to a postal vote for the local elections. The District Council are trying to contact all those who have registered for a postal vote for the Referendum to advise them that they also need to apply for a postal vote for the local elections as well.

In response to Mr Buckle's comments about the verification of postal votes centrally, a Member suggested that it was possible to gain remote access to the Central Software to check the voters' details for postal votes. Mr Buckle acknowledged that this was possible but that each station would then need to have a scanner with links to Crowmarsh and reliable Broad Band.

A Councillor stated that the Referendum was unique for this year, and questioned what the difference in cost was between holding the counts locally and at Crowmarsh as in 2007. Mr Buckle advised that he did not have this information to hand, but that cost was not the main concern.

Mr Buckle advised that he would be happy to look again at the next elections in 4 years time, when hopefully there will have been some advances to technology which may enable the votes to be counted locally once again.

The Chairman informed Mr Buckle that in her opinion things could have been handled better and that, as Returning officer, he should have consulted the Town Council and the public with his plans which would have enabled the Town Council and the Public to get on board. It was requested that a consultation take place before the next elections in 4 years time.

The Chairman thanked Mr Buckle for attending the meeting.

Mr Buckle left the meeting at 8.05pm

#### **134. HENLEY ACTION PLAN UPDATE MEETING**

i) Members received and considered the notes of the Action Plan Update Meeting held on Tuesday 15 March 2011. It was **RESOLVED**

that the report be received and noted.

ii) Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk on the Henley Partnership's Action Plan for 2011/12. The Town Clerk explained that the Action Plan comprised the "wish list" of project submitted by the Partnership's Commercial/Retail,

Arts and Tourism and Leisure Groups. Schemes for submission to South Oxfordshire District Council were separated into revenue and capital bids and showed the level of support to be funded by the Town Council from its provision in 2011/12 for Town Improvements/ Action Plan budget of £3,600. It was **RESOLVED** that

the joint action plan for 2011/12 prepared by the Henley Partnership and the Town Council be received , approved and adopted and presented to South Oxfordshire District Council for consideration and approval.

iii) The Chairman informed Members of the outcome of the Henley Partnership's AGM. The status quo would prevail for the time being while the Partnership considers its new strategy for the next year. Mr Hobbs would remain as Chairman for the time being. The Partnership is quite vibrant at this time and a set of accounts are available in the Town Clerk's office. It was **RESOLVED** that

the report be noted.

**135. HENLEY MARKET TOWN CO-ORDINATOR**

Members received a verbal update from Mr Oliver O'Dell, the Market Town Co-ordinator, on the context of his role and his achievements over the past year.

Mr O'Dell informed Members that the salary for his position was £20k pro rata for 18 hours a week (Monday and Tuesday) and not £20k per year.

Mr O'Dell advised that his main tasks over the past year have included capacity building and delivery of a few specific projects within the SODC's Action Plan. There had been a lot more learning involved than had been anticipated with the Henley post.

The posts in Thame and Wallingford had primarily been working on schemes funded by SEDA's small rural town projects; the Henley post needed to obtain funding from elsewhere in addition to the funding from the Action Plan projects supported by South Oxfordshire District Council.

Mr O'Dell explained some of the difficulties he had encountered including corporate activities, such as training, meetings with line manager etc. that eat into the time allocated for this post, delivering projects when only a small budget has been allocated from the Action Plan where it has not been possible to find match funding and spending time out and about in the town does not leave much time for desk work, such as producing leaflets.

Mr O'Dell added that his role was not that of a Town Centre Manager. He considered that it was difficult to know what could be added to a town that has limited commercial vacancies and already has a number of successful festivals, leaving little calendar space for new initiatives. Work has taken place with South Oxfordshire District Council Tourism who has funded the Partnership website update.

Mr O'Dell confirmed that he supported the aspirations of an independent Partnership. This would require more work to boost the Partnership and make it as successful as it should be. This would require an underlying business / marketing plan, a portfolio of membership benefits and a realistic action plan for the coming year.

The role of Market Town Co-ordinator could be used to drive the Commercial Group of the Partnership forward as it has been without leadership since last October when

the Chair, Barbra Richardson, left Henley. There is a mechanism for consulting businesses on line in place.

Henley in Transition is not a part of the Partnership structure at present, but discussions have taken place on Carbon Consultations, Huntercome Placements and links with other groups.

Mr O'Dell said that he has liaison meeting once a month with the Town Clerk and regularly attends the Town Council's Christmas Committee Meetings.

He summarised the following projects that have been considered/undertaken to date:

District Council Action Plan

Henley Festival Leaflet – to be distributed by the end of April 2011, 13,500 leaflet to homes and 6000 at the library.

Henley Tourism Banner – passed to the Henley Tourism Group

Lamp Column Banners – Discussed at a previous Town & Community meeting in October but the idea was not supported.

Website Management and Maintenance – Social Media Solutions and Henley Partnership.

Commercial Property Vacancy Database – Held at South Oxfordshire District Council.

Hospitality Awards – South Oxfordshire District Council working with tourism marketing team to find requirements.

Christmas – Sold Christmas Trees, Partnership Day with Jack FM.

Independent Business – Meeting with the police to discuss Lantern Parade

Moving Forward – Work closely with Henley Partnership, Action Plan, and Festival of Businesses (October).

In response to a question about branding Mr O'Dell advised that interest in branding has slipped. Barbara Richardson was against branding on the Partnership side, but elements were used at events such as the Christmas Festival when several organisations came together. The website is still available if people are interested.

When asked why SEDA funding was given to the other towns but not Henley, Mr O'Dell advised that although this was before he joined the district council, he understood that SEDA had not received a collective approach from Henley and did not have any projects in the correct area. As regards the Oxfordshire Stronger Communities Fund, Henley had nothing that matched the criteria.

A Councillor asked why Mr O'Dell could list the things he was unable to do over the last year not the things that he had accomplished. Mr O'Dell advised that the balance between the two was tangible; he had thought that the Henley Partnership was strong, but this was not correct. He had spent a great deal of time working with the Partnership to get them viable.

A Councillor was greatly disappointed as it had been thought that the role would involve engaging with businesses to find out what was needed to increase footfall. Questions should be asked to find out why businesses are closing and what help and encouragement they require i.e. shop window displays etc.

A comment was made that the three day market that had taken place last weekend had caused the centre of town to be buzzing but the outskirts to be quiet.

It was also suggested that competition can be good for business but too much competition can be destructive, and legislation should be drawn up to look at what type of businesses, i.e. multinationals are wanting to come into the town.

When questioned what he meant by an Independent Partnership, Mr O'Dell clarified his position and explained that a Partnership that was not chaired by the Public Sector but chaired / run by local business and supported by the Public Sector would be considered to be independent.

A Member asked what value Mr O'Dell had added and responded that there had been insufficient funding to deliver specific projects which meant that he had to bring in funding from other sources. He would be looking to see what can be done next year with match funding from District. He believed the role is more about challenging the Partnership and the way that people think rather than delivering projects. He wanted Members to understand that he had not been set a list of challenges and an explanation of what he was expected to deliver – part of the difficulty of this role is that he does not know what is expected of him.

When asked how long Mr O'Dell thought he would need to be in this position before he made any significant difference to the town, Mr O'Dell accepted that he had not made a significant difference in the first year, but had spent time making fundamental changes that had been required in the Partnership / Action Plan.

A Councillor suggested that it was part of the role of the Town Centre Coordinator to go round and speak to business owners to find out what they need and what he could do for them. Mr O'Dell confirmed that while he could spend time visiting all the businesses there has to be a balance between achieving things and purpose. Last Christmas Mr O'Dell visited businesses whilst trying to sell Christmas Trees and only managed to see between 4/5 businesses in any one day.

Mr O'Dell was encouraged to prepare a set of key questions, photocopy them and hand these out to businesses; the responses could then be collected and analysed to establish how trade is going and what is happening.

The Chairman thanked Mr O'Dell for attending the Meeting.

Mr O'Dell left the meeting at 9pm.

**136. PROGRESS**

Members received and considered a report on progress. It was **RESOLVED**

that the report be received and noted.

Arising from the foregoing, Members were ask to consider the appointment of a Councillor to attend and represent the Council at the Licensing Panel meeting on 18 April to consider the review of the Diamonds and Pearls licence. It was **RESOLVED** that

Councillor Barry Wood be appointed to attend the Licensing Panel Meeting at South Oxfordshire District Council on behalf of Henley Town Council and gives evidence into the review of the premises licence for Diamonds and Pearls and that Councillor Miss L Hillier shall also attend in support.

**137. BUDGET**

Members received the budget report to February 2011. It was **RESOLVED**

that the report be received and noted with satisfaction.

**138. DESIGNATED PUBLIC PLACE ORDER (DPPO)**

Members received and considered a request from South Oxfordshire District Council to grant permission for the Police to issue an alcohol related anti-social behaviour Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) in Henley. It was **RESOLVED**

that the Town Council supports the issue of an alcohol related anti-social behaviour Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) in Henley.

**139. HENLEY ART & CRAFTS GUILD**

Members received and considered a request from the Henley Art and Crafts Guild to place a banner on the Fairmile. It was **RESOLVED**

that the Town Council approves the request from the Henley Art and Crafts Guild to place a banner on the Fairmile to promote the trail from Sunday 22 May until Monday 30 May as in previous years, but does not grant permission for the display of any Agent's board beneath the banner to recognise sponsorship of the festival, rather the sponsorship detail be incorporated into the banner itself.

**140. PSCO KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Members received and considered the summary report for quarter three 2010/2011 and made the following comments:

- Dog faeces in Grey's Road
- Police action to issue fixed penalty notices for littering offences
- Chewing Gum

It was **RESOLVED** that

these matters be raised with the Police at the next meeting of the committee when they would be in attendance.

**141. INFORMAL REGATTA MEETING**

i) Members had before them the notes of the informal meeting held on 22 March 2011. It was **RESOLVED** that

the report be noted.

ii) Members received and considered the report of the Town Clerk regarding the provision of a late night bus service from Henley to Reading, Twyford, Maidenhead and High Wycombe. It was noted that Reading Buses required £6,700 to provide this service on the Friday and Saturday nights of the Regatta, Members were informed that the Henley Royal Regatta and Wokingham Borough Council had agreed to underwrite £1000 each. The Clerk explained that a joint application on behalf of the town and district councils and Thames Valley Police would be made to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

Members considered funding up to 50% of the shortfall, £2,350 on the understanding that the CSP would fund the balance. In noting that the guarantors would receive the whole of the fares, estimated at £4,000, the share of the income to be returned to the council would be £1,650, a net cost to the Council of £700. While there is no specific budgetary provision in estimates for this anticipated cost, Members accepted that the cost would be met from the Committee's overall budget from virement or savings elsewhere and if needed from the General Fund balance. It was **RESOLVED** that

the Town Council underwrites £2,350 to guarantee Reading Transport's cost of providing a late night bus service for the 2011 Regatta.

A Member suggested that a time table should be available and tickets sold in advance for this service. It was **RESOLVED** that

the matter be discussed at the next meeting with Reading Buses to discuss the possibility of advanced ticket sales and promotion.

**142. OLYMPIC PLANNING MEETING**

Members had before them the notes of the Olympic Planning Meeting held on 1 March 2011. It was **RESOLVED** that

the report be noted.

**143. WIFI WORKING PARTY**

Members received the notes of the WIFI working party held on 11 March 2011. It was **RESOLVED** that

the report be noted.

**144. THANKS**

The Chairman gave thanks to all Members, Officers and the Town Clerk for their hard work over the past year.

The Deputy Mayor thanked the Chairman for her hard work over the past year.

The meeting ended at 9.20pm.

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Chairman