



High Wycombe Community Board minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Community Board held on Wednesday 24 July 2024 in Wycombe Arts Centre, Desborough Road, High Wycombe, HP11 2PU, commencing at 6.30 pm and concluding at 7.47 pm.

BC Councillors present

L Clarke OBE (Chairman), M Hussain OBE JP (Vice-Chairman), A Hussain, M Ayub, K Bates, A Baughan, Majid Hussain, S Raja, N Rana, N Thomas and J Wassell

Town/Parish Councils and other organisations present

Others in attendance

F Ewing (Community Board Manager), K Rackstraw (Community Board Manager), M Everitt (Service Director – Business Intelligence & Community Support), M Howe, P Tollitt, J Peasley, A China, C Dodaro, P Cartwright, T Snaith, M Hanif, S Azeez-Harris, S Karageorgi, M King, C Hingston, A Robb, J Fowler (Community Engagement & Dev. Officer), D Hargitai, D Da Silva, H Morley

Agenda Item

1 Chairman's Welcome

Cllr Lesley Clarke welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the meeting at Wycombe Arts Centre.

2 Apologies / Declarations of Interest / Minutes of the last meeting

Apologies: Cllr K Wood, Cllr D Hayday, Cllr O Hayday, Cllr M Knight, Cllr S Guy, L Hurst (Buckinghamshire Council), R Andrews (Grow Together Bucks), J Roberts (SV2G), A Irwin (Oakridge Baptist Church) and S Sturt (Wycombe Food Hub)

Declaration of Interest: None

Minutes of Last Meeting: Previous meeting was held on 3 March 2024 at Hilltop Community Centre in the form of a community workshop with circa 80 members, residents and partners in attendance. Findings from these workshop discussions have been used to inform the priorities for the High Wycombe Community Board this coming year, with project proposals from the Action Groups to be presented at

today's meeting.

3 Updates

Three questions have been noted from the public in advance of the meeting, however they were received outside of the stated deadline. To allow the time to provide a comprehensive response, the response to these were to be provided at a later date. A copy of these questions and responses can be found below.

Public Question 1:

A key objective of High Wycombe's Regeneration Strategy is to 'create a vibrant and characterful town centre which celebrates local culture and heritage, offering a high-quality public domain'. To achieve this Buckinghamshire Council announced 3½ years ago a total investment of £15.4m including £11.8m of Future High Streets funding. This was to rebalance the town centre providing a diversity of activities not available in the Eden in the historic town centre, prioritising nightlife and creating more reasons to come into Wycombe than just to shop.

Buckinghamshire Council have now announced that 'the Eden is the beating heart of Wycombe' and £12.89m of which £11.26m is Future High Streets money will be spent on repurposing the first and second floors of the Tesco building on Denmark Street to accommodate the County Archive and rehouse council services now in the Queen Victoria Road offices so that these buildings can then be sold. The people of Wycombe and the Community Board have not been consulted on this as the regeneration of our town now belongs to remote decision makers. How will the Community Board strive to give our High Street a prosperous and sustainable future now that funds are being spent elsewhere?

Response:

The original Future High Street Fund (FHSF) regeneration programme dates back to the FHSF bidding process undertaken by the legacy Council (Wycombe District Council) in 2019. It required a defined programme of projects and outcomes, which the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) assessed against a Treasury Green Book benefit cost analysis (BCA). By identifying specific targeted vacant shops for 'repurposing' and potential 'gateway' buildings for improvement, a strong BCA was achieved, making Wycombe one of few south east towns to secure the grant. The programme has subsequently evolved, via FHSF's 'Project Adjustment Request' process, as the market picked up some original targets and replacements came into being.

At the time of the bid, WDC did consult with Ward Members, High Wycombe Town Committee (HWTC) and external stakeholders, as doing so was integral to the strength of its case. There have been updates since, including regular reporting to the Council's Regeneration Board, which includes both Members and external stakeholders. The FHSF programme is time limited (as was the bidding process) and as explained above, restricted to the availability of identifiable vacant shops/gateways, with very limited ability to spend on public realm (the Council is doing this separately, via its Capital Programme, in White Hart Street). Public

consultation was not a FHSF requirement. The focus since the grant award in 2021, has been on delivery of the approved programme. The extent of the programme is set out in the attached Annex.

The Denmark Street Project (Tesco 're-purposing') will retain Tesco as a retailer in the town centre. It uses approx. £2.6m of FHSF monies, as part of its total £12.2m cost, on top of which Tesco will be investing in a new store. This will create a new active frontage on Denmark Street. The Council is converting their surplus upper floors (which have challenging windowless deep floorplates) – using them to relocate the County Archives and Council offices (improving the building's ageing appearance with new first and second floor windows). These uses will be a 'people draw', with a new Search Room and better public access (given proximity to the Bus Station). This fits well into the FHSF objective of broadening the mix of town centre uses away from retail.

The future of the Council's under-utilised Queen Victoria Road (QVR) buildings has yet to be determined – but whatever goes there (be it another occupier or redevelopment), will bring new activity to QVR (as will the ex-Liberal Club (High Wycombe Social Club) FHSF project opposite, which provides a new gallery/store for the town's Chair Collection.

ANNEX

High Wycombe's Future High Street Fund programme.

High Wycombe has received c£15m Future High Streets funding (£11m Towns Fund/£3m Council match). This has focused on:

1. Purchasing and re-purposing long vacant shops
2. Brightening key spaces/illumination
3. Downsizing the town's over-supplied retail floorspace and
4. Improving a key 'gateway' building.

1. Vacant Shops

Funding has been used to overcome unlettable conditions and unaffordable rents in the following locations:

- 37 High Street: £600K acquisition/£500K refurbishment - Now 'Tabletop Republic' (venue for avid 'Dungeons & Dragons/Warhammer players) and first floor 'Joiceys Boxing Gym', both attracting young people to the town centre.
- 16 Church Street: £500K acquisition/£400K refurbishment - Now 'Collectables' model shop and model railway display, upper floors due to become Collectables' exhibition space/event venue.
- 22 Queen Square: (£400K acquisition/£70K refurbishment) nearing completion. Independent business being sought as new tenant.
- 2 Cornmarket: (£175K refurbishment nearing completion). Independent business being sought as new tenant.

2. Brightening Key Spaces/ Illumination

Funding has been used in the following areas with an ambition to deter anti-social

behaviour and adding interest:

- Guildhall undercroft (£50K) now sports midnight sky ceiling with starry night lighting.
- Little Market House (£50K) undercroft will (subject to Listed Building Consent), gain innovative projected images, to animate it.
- Swan Alley (£50K) also to have new decorative lighting/improved frontage for the pub garden.

3. Downsizing Retail

- Ex House of Fraser, Eden - Eden is the town's retail and leisure heart (post Covid footfall has bounced back) and sustaining the centre is key to the town centre's 'people draw'. The building has four floors, each the size of a football pitch.

The Council has co-invested £4m of FHS monies alongside Eden, in a £12m conversion to achieve:

- Relocation of Primark into Eden, as an 'anchor store', stabilising Eden
- Unlocking comprehensive redevelopment of Chiltern Shopping Centre, by releasing their existing Church Street store, for Dandara's proposed 300 unit town centre living scheme, removing redundant retail floorspace (currently a live planning application).
- The conversion also includes two new leisure attractions on the upper floors – electric go-karting and soft play.

Public Question 2:

As part of this boards continued working with community organisations in High Wycombe. It is important the board recognise the work of Wycombe Food Hub, which currently has the largest community fridge in High Wycombe feeding on average 250 people a week. It currently has on average of 500 people using its basket section a week which offers dignity to our community members in need.

Wycombe Food Hub also manages Bobkins Bazaar which is serving a further average of 150 individuals a week with providing a variety of services, free sanitary products to women suffering Period Poverty in High Wycombe, free contraception through its partnership with Brook, cleaning products, washing products and toiletries all below the RRP. Giving dignity again to those needing these but can't afford High Street retailers.

Wycombe Food Hub offers support services in partnership with the DWP, Probation Service, Talkback, One Recovery Bucks, Fedcap to name but a few along with others still in their infant stages currently provide a One Stop Hub for the community as we identify it is often very hard for individuals to ask for help, many have already bonded with us by getting their food from us and have started to use our support services because they medically physically or mentally can't get to more than one providers venue. It's all under one roof with us.

We formally ask the Community Board to acknowledge the work of Wycombe Food Hub by allowing us to present to the board on 13th November 2024 the next

published date for the board to meet, if the date is moved then the board held on the new date.

Please confirm tonight that this will happen and if not why with a strategic reason why to the people of High Wycombe.

Response:

The Community Board works with many organisations across the area so is unable to provide general recognition to individual organisations generally or at its meetings. Only funded projects or programmes in partnership with the Council are invited to present at the main Board meetings.

As explained previously in the letter to the Food Hub from Sarah Ashmead dated 24 April, the way forward is to engage with the Board's meeting structure and priorities process. Where organisations have the outline of a project which aims to deliver the priorities of the Board, this would firstly be discussed with the Community Board Manager who would check it met the required criteria, if it did a further discussion would then take place with the Chairman. After that, an organisation would be invited to present to the relevant action group/task and finish group who would consider if they wanted to take the project forward.

If you have a project which you think will deliver the priorities, then please contact one of the Community Board Managers.

Question 3:

In light of the growing anticipation and viability of establishing a town council in High Wycombe. I believe it is crucial that Wycombe Community Board acknowledge and explore how the HWCB and HWTC can collaborate with the High Wycombe Town Council Steering Group (HWTCSG) on the many issues that High Wycombe faces.

Over the years, the Wycombe Community Board has played a significant role in fostering community engagement and addressing local concerns. Your dedication to promoting community well-being and potentially partnership with the newly formed Wycombe Assembly is commendable. However, the High Wycombe Community Board have not reached out to the High Wycombe Town Council Steering Group which has been in existence since 2019.

In 2019, the High Wycombe Town Council Steering Group initiated the Community Governance Review, setting the stage for a potential town council. I am curious to know why the High Wycombe Community Board has not reached out to collaborate with the High Wycombe Town Council Steering Group.

By partnering with the steering group, it would demonstrate the Wycombe Community Board's commitment to community empowerment. Therefore, I kindly request the High Wycombe Community Board to acknowledge the potential of collaborating with the High Wycombe Town Council Steering Group. I also would like to ask the Community Board about how they envision working together with the

steering group to ensure effective governance for our community?

I believe that by embracing this opportunity for collaboration, we can collectively work towards a stronger and more vibrant High Wycombe allowing for greater local decision-making and representation. Your agreement to formalise links between HWCB and HWTC and the High Wycombe Town Council Steering Group is sought.

Response:

As you say, the HWTC Steering Group has a particular view about the issue of whether there should be a town council or not for High Wycombe, which is perfectly legitimate. The 2019 review was conducted by Wycombe District Council so we cannot comment on what took place during the existence of a legacy council. Buckinghamshire Council was formed in April 2020. By that time the Community Governance Review originating in 2019 was in abeyance, partly because of the reorganisation of local government in Buckinghamshire and partly due to the consequent commissioning of an Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire Council during which time Community Governance issues are necessarily suspended. It would not therefore have been appropriate to have engaged with the HWTC Steering Group on that subject in that intervening time.

Similarly, once Buckinghamshire Council formally commenced a new Community Governance Review in January 2024, it would clearly not have been appropriate to engage with one side or any other about the issues raised in the Review. Rather, it was appropriate for all parties wishing to take part to use the public consultation period to submit views. It is also worth pointing out that the Community Governance Review of High Wycombe is led by this Council's Standards & General Purposes Committee not the Community Board.

On your wider point of engaging with the HWTC Steering Group "towards a stronger and more vibrant High Wycombe allowing for greater local decision-making and representation", we assume this means engagement about the needs of High Wycombe generally not just about local government structures. If that is the case, then the outcome of the current Community Governance Review – whatever that outcome is – may well pave the way for further and deeper local discussion with all those interested in the wellbeing of High Wycombe. I'm sure the Community Board will play a key role in fostering such discussion whether that leads to 'formalising' arrangements or sharing views generally. Everyone is welcome to join the Community Board, attend Community Board meetings and engage with the Board's meeting structure and priorities process.

The Community Governance Review is currently scheduled to end by the end of this calendar year.

A question was asked; Are the number of children within the fostering network higher or lower than in previous years?

Response:

There has been an increase in children coming into care this year, with an increase among the under 12s age group.

4 Partner Updates

- High Wycombe Assembly
- Wycombe Environment Centre – Refresh The Marketplace
- Wycombe Community Church

A presentation was given by partners on the above projects and initiatives that have been supported by High Wycombe Community Board.

5 Update on Community Board Projects

Community Board Manager Fay Ewing provided an update on the Community Board:

- Partnership Projects and Funding

A special thanks was given to Heather Morley and the team of volunteers of the newly launched High Wycombe Life Magazine. The High Wycombe Community Board has provided £15k of contributory funding to support the publication over a 1-year period, with 3 editions per year. This project aims to combat the negative reputation of the town and 'shout' about the positives that in turn aim to improve and drive the local economy. The first edition was published in June and reached 35,000 households. Content highlights Community Board activities as well as local news and events. The next edition will be published in November. If organisations would like to be involved, please contact Heather at hello@hwlife.co.uk

The Community Board also recently supported Talkback's Festival of Fun and Sport, a learning disability games event at Wycombe Leisure Centre which was held on 8th July, Movers and Shakers club at The Vibe Church, the Woodland Trail at St. Francis Church with volunteer sessions starting in October.

This financial year the Community Board have provided funding to support the Royal British Legion Beacon Lighting event at Tom Burt's Hill, Wycombe Swan's Summer Youth Project and Wycombe Celebrates (see update below).

One of the Community Board's flagship projects this year is Wycombe Celebrates delivered in partnership with the High Wycombe Community, Buckinghamshire Council Culture Team, Whizz Fizz and Partners and the Rothschild Foundation. This event aims to develop pride of place by bringing together food, environment, heritage and culture. In addition to the centre event on Sunday 8th September, in the lead up there will also be fringe events. Volunteers are needed for this event, please email hwcb@buckinghamshie.gov.uk

- Activities and Events

The Community Board hosted a Dementia Awareness Event in the Eden Centre on 15th May, this was well attended by partner stall holders and received great footfall. The Thai Chi sessions were especially popular.

Proud of Bucks nominations for 2024 awards are now open and will close on Sunday 11th August. Categories include; The Good Neighbour Award, The Young Champion Award and The Outstanding Group Award. Shortlisting to be completed in September with an award ceremony for High Wycombe to be held in November. Details and invitations to follow.

- **Opportunity Bucks**

Matt Everitt provided an update on the Council's Opportunity Bucks programme which is now in its second year of delivery. The MEAM team, (Make Every Adult Matter) have been working predominantly in High Wycombe supporting vulnerable residents on a one-to-one basis.

There is also a focus on skills development.

6 High Wycombe Community Board Priorities for 2024/25

(Minutes from priorities workshop from March 2024 can be found [HERE](#))

- From the workshop findings, Action Groups Chairs presented 2 potential projects that address their priority theme. The chair confirmed and agreed for the following projects to progress through task and finish groups.
 - **Recovery and Regeneration:** Town centre pilot to increase accessibility. Focus on visitors with health conditions who require easy access to toilets. Encourage visitors to High Wycombe and reduce social isolation. Support local businesses by making High Wycombe more accessible, increasing footfall and dwell time.
 - **Health and Wellbeing:** Did You Know? (or similar) Greater public awareness of existing health and well-being, Early Years Services and Domestic Violence Awareness, support services.
 - **Environment:** A combined education and awareness programme, for schools and the public, which would also build in key community projects where they are missing to allow people to put their learning into action, and that is delivered in a way that builds a more cohesive community.

7 Meeting Summary and Close

Cllr Lesley Clarke thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

8 Date of the Next Meeting

13th November 2024 – Proud of Bucks event.

March 2025 (date to be confirmed).