

Notes¹ on a Public Meeting held on 9th October 2008 to discuss Proposals for the Celebration of the 800th Anniversary of Godmanchester's 1212 Charter

Location: Queen Elizabeth School

Time: 1930 hrs

The Town Council had asked Councillor Mrs Ann Looker to chair this public meeting. The Town Mayor and six other Town Councillors were also present.

Dates

There should be a single major event, not precluding other events throughout the year, because it might be difficult to crowd everything into one day/weekend/week. Two major national/international events were taking place in 2012 – Queen's Diamond Jubilee and Olympics. Based on the Golden Jubilee, early June, i.e. around the date of The Queen's coronation, seemed the likely focus of the first of these, whilst the Olympics would be in late July, so the usual date of Godmanchester Gala Day (first Saturday in July, [i.e. 7th July 2012](#)) would be suitable. 2012 is also the 30th anniversary of Godmanchester Town Council².

The anniversary is 20th May, but again Gala Day being later in the year on average would have a warmer evening.

Level

The lowest level of celebration suggested was a Medieval theme to Gala Day, but there was clearly an appetite for a little more (see below).

Capital Project

The possibility of a capital project to mark the anniversary year (which would possibly provide a focus for a royal visit) was discussed. The following (which vary greatly in size) were discussed:

- A town sign, i.e. a traditional village sign at the centre of the town (not at the entrance), possibly illustrating something from the town's history. Opinion was divided on this. There could be a competition for its design.
- A structure incorporating some form of green technology.
- The restored Chinese Bridge (a necessity in any case) which would normally be funded by the County Council.
- A development of The Causeway (as already discussed elsewhere) partly or wholly funded by the Environment Agency to complement the flood defences.

¹ [Taken by Charles Looker](#)

² Prior to that it had been Godmanchester Borough Council (to 1961), then Huntingdon and Godmanchester Borough Council (to 1974), then Huntingdon and Godmanchester Town Council (to 1982).

The meeting was reminded that the Environment Agency would be holding an exhibition on the proposed flood defences on 31 October.

- Improvements to a community building.
- A self-funding coffee shop to provide somewhere for people in the town to meet informally. The needs of tourists for such a facility should also be taken into consideration.
- A set of plaques throughout the town with historical information – people don't know where historical sites (especially Roman) were and there is insufficient information on the Queen Elizabeth School itself.
- [Apart from the seal which is used as a logo, Godmanchester does not have an official coat of arms \(heraldic achievement\). There would be some cost to having this designed by the College of Arms.](#)

It was said that a capital project told future generations that we thought the anniversary important enough to celebrate.

Events

[There was support for a Royal visit \(not necessarily HM The Queen\), but it was recognised that there needed to be some focus to the visit.](#)

In addition to gala day, a son-et-lumière based on the church was proposed. It was noted that Alconbury were doing a son-et-lumière on 17/18/19 October and some people might want to observe this.

Medieval games could be organised during gala week.

Re-enactment groups would be hired for the main event.³

The possibility of having themes from several periods in history throughout the 800 years, as opposed to only a medieval theme, was discussed.

The meeting was reminded of the street party that was held on The Causeway for the Silver Jubilee celebrations and the subsequent formation of the Community Association

If tapestries etc. were made to commemorate the anniversary, there could be an exhibition to display these. The Friends of the QE School would be developing an exhibition for the anniversary.

A literary competition for stories, articles and poems about Godmanchester could be held.

A number of events could be held throughout the year (rather than just Gala Day/Week).

³ Estimates provided subsequently suggest that £15,000 at today's prices would be a minimum cost "to make any real impact in terms of spectacle and visitor enjoyment".

It is important that we record whatever we do for the Records Office.

Ken Sneath announced that he had started to write a book on the history of Godmanchester to be published in the anniversary year.

Education

The educational possibilities would not be overlooked and the chairman had visited both of the primary school heads who were keen to take advantage of the anniversary in this way. It could not only inspire an interest in history, but provide an impetus for developing other skills such as music/drama/cookery/art/design.

Funding

Huntingdon had received a large grant⁴ from the Lottery Fund for their 2005 celebrations.

The possibility of a grant from the Cambridgeshire Communities Fund was noted.

It might be possible to launch an appeal in the town for funds.

A communication had been received from the town of Turnhout in Belgium who were also celebrating their 800th anniversary in 2012 and were interested in a joint celebration with us and Enns, Austria (also celebrating an 800th anniversary)-) [and applying to the EU for funding for the project.](#) The meeting thought this was a good idea.

Governance

It was thought that the model used for previous events such as Picnic-in-the-Park, where funds were provided by the Town Council, but the organisation was carried out by the Community Association which has both charitable status and access to voluntary help, would be appropriate. The Chairman and Treasurer of the Community Association were both present at the meeting.

⁴ Subsequent information is that it was £35,000, with a further £15,000 from Huntingdon Town Council and £5,000 from local sponsorship.