

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting for the Parish of Sandy, Bedfordshire, held on Wednesday 25 April 2023 at Sandy Secondary School commencing at 7.00pm.

Present: Cllr M Pettitt (Town Mayor as Chairman of the meeting) together with 9 Town Councillors, Mrs N Sewell (Town Clerk), Ian Reed (Deputy Town Clerk), 2 Town Council administrators, 2 Central Bedfordshire Councillors (CBC Ward Cllrs Ford and Maudlin) and 51 members of the public.

The Mayor thanked the Principal of Sandy Secondary School for allowing the Council to hold its Annual Town Meeting on the school premises.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from CBC Cllr Stock.

2. Minutes of the 2022 Annual Town Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Monday 18 April 2022, which had been circulated to those in attendance prior to the meeting were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

It was noted there were no matters arising.

4. Reports from Elected Representatives:

i) Town Council – Cllr Martin Pettitt

In presenting the following report I am grateful to colleagues, especially to the Chairs of Policy Finance & Resources, Community Services and Environment, Development and HR committees for their time in preparation of their own reports which will appear in full in the Town Council's Annual Report for 2022/2023 when it is published shortly.

Just to put this meeting into context this has been the final year of the 4 year term of the present Town Council. The new council will meet for the first time on Monday 22 May comprising initially of the 11 candidates who stood for election in the 4 Sandy wards and were returned uncontested leaving 4 seats to fill by co-option which we have already received the go ahead to do from Central Beds Council.

The Council continued to upgrade many of its assets through funding from its capital reserves including replacement of children's play equipment, upgrading of benches and litter bins, provision of new football goalposts and sockets at Sunderland Road and the replacement of one of its trucks by an electric vehicle – being one of the first councils in the region to do so. Further funding on the cemetery extension has also taken place.

Each year the Council continues to ensure Section 106 funds are invested back into Sandy and its community. Section 106 is a planning obligation, a

legal agreement between the planning authority, the developer and other interested parties.

The Council has maintained its community grants budget and during the 2022/23 financial year the Committee approved grants totalling £3,398 to a variety of worthwhile organisations and community groups, all of which carry out valuable and important work within and around Sandy. A list of those bodies who received grants or donations will be found in the Annual Report. In addition, the Council also supported various community events totalling £9,892 including the Platinum Jubilee Event last June.

The Committee has continued to review its policies and procedures to ensure they are effective and up to date. This year the Council adopted the National Association of Town & Parish Councils' Civility and Respect Pledge, updated its Burial Regulations and reviewed six other policies. The Council's policies are available to view on the Town Council website.

The Committee oversaw a number of legal matters, including lease renewals, and reviewed the Council's Risk Register. In addition, we completed and received clean external and internal audits.

The Community Services & Environment Committee has a wide remit to discuss issues related to work which is required to maintain footpaths, pavements, cycle-ways, roads, waterways, horticultural and arboriculture works, street furniture play areas, and play equipment. While it is the case that Sandy Town Council is not financially responsible in these areas it is important that we monitor and seek to encourage those who are responsible to implement and meet the cost of necessary improvements.

At the beginning of the year the committee updated its Action Plan which details aims and objectives. This Plan is available on the website and sets out the progress made towards meeting those objectives.

The new skatepark for Sunderland Road Recreation Ground was completed in 2022 and an opening event attracted a large number of competitors. We are planning an anniversary event in September 2023 to build on that success.

Just one week into the new civic year and it was all hands to the pump in staging Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee celebrations held in the grounds of the former Sandye Place School on 2nd June. A truly phenomenal amount of work and effort went into organising and making this event happen and required support and co-operation from a myriad of organisations and individuals far too many to list here. The official proclamation was read by the Master of Ceremonies and the Sandy Community Choir sang the specially commissioned song "Rise up and

Serve" followed by the lighting of the beacon. I believe it was judged by most if not all of the roughly 3000 who attended to have been a triumph in bringing our community together and a worthy tribute to a monarch who served this country and its people with selflessness, love and dedication for well over 70 years. Little did we know at the time that only 3 months later we would be mourning her death and on 19 September watching and witnessing the State Funeral. Reading the Royal Proclamation of the succession of our new monarch 3 days after Her Majesty's passing was a privilege and honour which I will never forget.

Only ten days after the Platinum Jubilee event, Jackie and I were delighted to play a small part in the Sandy Carnival procession which was equally well supported by the community and also culminated in Sandye Place grounds; clear pointers I would suggest to the critical importance residents attach to the area which is strategically located close to Sandy Town Centre and should serve as a reminder of how crucial it is that this valuable and unique site must so far as possible be preserved and forms a part of future Sandy.

We now look forward to Sunday 7 May when the same venue will host the "Coronation Big Lunch" to mark the coronation of our new monarch, King Charles III. It will be a free event from 12 noon to 5pm to which all residents are invited.

Freed from the constraints of the pandemic the Sandy Horticultural Show returned in early September, staged for the first time in the Conservative Club Hall on the same day as The Historical Research Group held an exhibition nearby in the Sandy Baptist Church Hall; both events further evidence of the firm commitment and enthusiasm of all those associated with the organisations involved and to whom I send congratulations and thanks.

A fortnight later I was excited to be invited to formally declare open our new skatepark while equally relieved not to have been asked to demonstrate my lifelong inability to remain upright while wearing any form of skates, roller or ice! Sincere thanks are due to all those who worked so hard to plan, raise funds for and to make the project a reality.

Also during the year we were delighted that we were able to welcome back and host on our open spaces the Circus, fairground and the Pantaloons Theatre Group.

We held two successful craft markets in the Town Centre which supported over 30 local independent traders. New dates have been agreed for 2023 and potential stallholders can contact the office if they wish to consider a stall. We also supported the Christmas Lights event and submitted a tree

for the St Swithun's Church Christmas tree event.

Due to the extreme weather conditions in December we have agreed with CBC that in the event of a repeat that our Outdoor Staff will seek to ensure that the Market Square pavements are treated appropriately with grit to help clear any ice or snow.

In November, several months later than envisaged we took delivery of the all Electric Etesia Utility Vehicle which I'm sure everyone will by now have seen in use throughout Sandy. It will replace one of the two diesel trucks which will soon be, "retired". We are currently working with CBC Sustainable Transport team to install EV charging points in the Market Square in 2023/24 and hopefully there will be more to come as a part of the Jenkins Pavilion project where hopefully preliminary and Stage One works should begin shortly.

In the same month Jackie, I and the Deputy Mayor were pleased to welcome to Sandy a Syrian refugee family who were being settled here under the government scheme. We met representatives of the agencies involved and with the aid of an interpreter learned much more of the background and plight faced by the family members including the young children. I am pleased they have now settled well in Sandy where they feel safe.

I wrote last year of the frustrations I felt at the lack of real and tangible progress on some fronts. I am pleased to report that works to extend the Jenkins Pavilion, to provide increased parking and to form the sports hub essentially separate from the Secondary School is at long last getting under way with preliminary and Stage One works having begun in the past week.

By contrast however, there has been less progress at the new Cemetery and Depot in Stratford Road. There have been significant delays in the wake of the extensive archaeological works which were necessary and also periods of monitoring following the sinking of boreholes and garnering of samples taken at regular intervals over 12 months which have had to be supplied to among others the Environment Agency.

The specialist cemetery design company (The CDS Group) who have been steering and providing advice have themselves to submit a report for approval and to sign off the planning conditions. CDS are presently co-ordinating and will manage consultee responses so that all pre-commencement conditions can be signed off. Last week members resolved at the full meeting of Town Council to place this among the top priorities for the new Council; to schedule regular meetings with targets and timelines and to engage further with partner agencies to move things forward towards completion as soon as is practically possible.

There have been interminable delays which are being actively addressed and similarly at the Beeston Community Orchard and Allotment site. It is with regret that we have still not obtained from Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC), the land which we have been in discussions with them about since 2016. This small site is to be used for allotments and a community orchard. Draft legal documents have been received but until the affordable homes are constructed we will not have full access to the site.

We have welcomed the new woodlands and a larger community orchard currently being planted in another area of Beeston so subsequently it may be possible to use more of the Green site for allotments instead of orchard. We continue to press CBC to conclude the process on this site and source a larger site in the area to meet the demand for allotments. Sunday 13 November was a bright, crisp and sunny winter morning which drew what seemed a record number to the Annual Remembrance Parade and to the Cenotaph in Bedford Road. I want to thank everyone who attended, notably perhaps the number of young people, many dressed smartly in school or other uniform all proudly paying their respects. As I have commented elsewhere during the past twelve months during visits to the Scout HQ, Girl Guides, attendance at the HM Lord-Lieutenants joint Fire, ATC, and Army Cadet Parade at our Fire Station in June and more recently at The Civic Service, our youth are our future!

Our Events Working Group, the Sandy Branch of the Royal British Legion and St Swithun's Church combined to stage the event and we are grateful also for those volunteers who set up the sound system at the war memorial and assisted with road closures.

We continue our tree planting programme and support for Rewild East Project. Specimen trees were donated by the Sandy Branch of the RBL and the Women's Institute which were planted in Faynes Corner. Sandy Round Table organised a tree planting session at The Limes in Beeston which will be named the Queen Elizabeth Wood in honour of the late Queen.

In response to speeding issues highlighted by members of the public and backed up with speed monitoring surveys a new SID sign was installed by CBC in Sunderland Road. This was financed by CBC. We hope that this reduces the speeding on this road.

Work has been undertaken by the Ivel Drainage Board to clear the waterways in and around Beeston and The Riddy by removing overgrown vegetation. These improvements will continue in 2023/24.

The Town Council supported and encouraged litter picking areas of the

town as part of the Great British Spring Clean and has litter pickers and waste bags that can be used by any groups or individuals wishing to "litter pick" in their own areas.

We have continued to provide Support for Sandy Green Wheel with the need for further improvements on the walking route being constantly reviewed.

Towards the end of 2022 members considered and indeed welcomed a proposal for the creation of a significant new woodland to the west side of the town which initially included land to be leased to Sandy Town Council for provision of community allotments. While the planting of several thousand saplings did take place during February and March with more to come in the coming autumn the allotments were disappointingly withdrawn from the scheme due to reasons entirely beyond the control or influence of Sandy Town Council.

It would be amiss of me to not thank again all three of our CBC Ward members for the input and support which they have continued to provide throughout the year. Their willingness to engage with members and town council staff has been valuable and greatly appreciated.

It is pleasing to report that the new pedestrian crossing in the High Street should be installed during the next couple of months following the decision at CBC Traffic Management meeting held on 28 March.

By contrast however and despite the regular meetings that have taken place in the past year and notwithstanding all the arguments that have been put forward a solution to solving the conundrum that is the stretch of the A1 from Biggleswade south to The Black Cat seems no closer. Previous talk of "quick fixes" seems to have evaporated and while stories abound of changes at Biggleswade North and major investment happens (again) at The Black Cat there seems no solace so far as we in Sandy are concerned. So much it seems for dreams of, 'The Queens Highway'.

On a Saturday afternoon in February I was delighted to organise and host a gathering of around 25 Ukrainian visitors and including some young children who are presently living with host families in Sandy, a number of them since the early days of the war which has ravaged their country since March 2022. About 50 including hosts attended what was a poignant but in some ways a very uplifting occasion held in the Conservative Club Hall and which served as an opportunity for everyone there to get to know one another better and cement friendships which should undoubtedly serve to provide mutual support in these difficult times. I thank other members for attending this event, especially Cllr Lacey and his wife also in their capacity as hosts now for more than year.

I must thank Cllr. Hewitt for her support and wise counsel, the work she has done and continues to do with the help of others to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan which we hope will be complete later this year. The now familiar Neighbourhood Plan stall was present at yesterday's Spring Market and will be again at the Coronation Event at Sandye Place on 7 May and elsewhere throughout Spring and beyond. Also, the other chairs of the standing committees; thank you for your diligence and hard work.

As we near the end of the four year term of this Council it would be most amiss of me not to pay tribute to Cllr Peter Blaine who decided, not for the first time to **not** seek re-election. With a break along the way Peter has been a member of successive Town Councils for a very considerable period as well as serving on Bedfordshire CC and Mid Beds DC prior to the reorganisation of local government when he became a member at the newly created Central Beds Council. Peter is of course the present Chair of Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils. Thank you Peter for all your work and service to our community. The same goes for all remaining members whether or not you are among the cohort who will be returning to form the new council in May.

Changes in the structure of any organisation inevitably brings with it challenges to be faced and overcome, while remaining mindful of the need to maintain a good and efficient service to our residents, business people and organisations which together comprise our community and to provide the services they have a right to expect while ensuring value for their money.

There have been notable changes in the Administration Team with our Town Clerk, Mrs Nicola Sewell who joined us in March 2022 now supported by a Deputy Clerk, Ian Reed who joined us in December. We have since welcomed, Laura Dove and most recently Danielle Castle to complete the Team.

Our Outdoor Team is currently to establishment. Wayne Harvey joined us in June followed by Solomon Paris a month later joining Chris Dainton and Team Leader, Richard Gilbert.

It's been a busy, demanding, even a challenging 12 months for everyone but I wish to thank Nicola, our Town Clerk for her professional help, support and advice which has been hugely appreciated. Each and every employee of the Council should be thanked for the work they do and which contributes to maintaining and improving the town in which we choose to live and it's environs.

A check through my diaries reveals that during the past year Jackie and I have attended around 80 engagements of one type or another here in Sandy, across Central Beds, wider Bedfordshire and beyond. We have

been privileged to have met some interesting and inspirational people along the way and would not have missed it for the world.

Fund raising for charity in the post pandemic period has I must admit not been my number one priority. I was mindful of the significant amount of time it takes to organise events and have felt on balance my own and the time of others would in the short term be more profitably employed on furthering the work and needs of the whole council and the community. It has however been possible to raise some money and in addition to the £700 given to The Eve Appeal last June I have recently been able to donate £1250 to The Prostate Project.

As I conclude this report the nominations for the upcoming local elections have been published. It is hugely disappointing in my view that in the Town & Parish category only 11 candidates put their names forward for 15 seats in the 4 Sandy wards meaning that all 11 are returned, uncontested but leaving 4 vacancies. A great shame and a missed opportunity for more members of our community to have put themselves forward to try to help to make a contribution towards the ongoing and necessary work which it remains the responsibility of the incoming Town Council to deliver over the next 4 years.

ii) Reports from Central Bedfordshire Ward Councillors

The Chairman reported that in accordance with the Pre-election Guidance (Purdah) for the 2023 council elections issued by CBC, the current CBC Councillors had worked to produce a joint report. It would not be presented at the meeting but Electors could access copies and they were encouraged to raise matters of interest and concern with the sitting members outside of this meeting.

5. Presentation of Town Mayor's Awards for Services to the Community

a) Citizen's Award

William Stewart was awarded the Citizens Award recognising his 3 tireless years of volunteering at Sandy Secondary School while studying to be a sports teacher at Bedford University. Adding to his original nomination the Principal Head of Sandy Secondary School, Karen Hayward had written, "William is an asset to the school and to his local community. I have had the pleasure to see him grow and become the young man he is today. I have no hesitation in endorsing this nomination".

b) Community Group Award

Sandy Good Neighbours were announced as winners. They are a group of community volunteers who provide a whole host of "good neighbour"

services to members of the community who need and greatly benefit from support in their everyday lives. The Award was received on behalf of the Sandy Good Neighbours by their Chairman and Secretary Mr Stephen Ralph.

c) Young Persons Award

This was awarded to Keown Seldon, Fire Cadet Watch Manager with Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and a member of Sandy Fire Cadets. Keown had shown great commitment to Sandy Fire Cadets from the day he began and fully deserved his recent promotion to Watch Manager. Keown represented Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service as a Lord Lieutenants' Cadet supporting HM former Lord Lieutenant Helen Nellis at numerous events across the County. At the memorial service for Officer Chris Page held at Sandy Fire Station in 2022 Keown took on the role of reading the citation in front of Chris's family, fellow cadets, Principal Senior Officers, local dignitaries and others. More recently Keown attended the Town Mayor's Civic Service where he read one of the lessons and has become a fine ambassador for the Fire Cadets maintaining at all times a mature and professional attitude. In recent years Keown has also volunteered at Wood Green Animal shelter shop in pursuance of his Duke of Edinburgh Award. Currently Keown is considering a longer term connection with the Fire Service by becoming an On Call Firefighter in Sandy helping to protect the community in which he lives.

6. Presentation of Freedom of the Town

The Mayor then made a special award to Mr Paul Barrows. He read from the citation, *"The Mayor and Members of the Council in sincere appreciation of the distinguished public service rendered by Paul Barrows to the Town of Sandy over a period of thirty eight years. His untiring commitment to the role of Retained Firefighter and wider achievements perfectly typify his ceaseless dedication and spirit and mark him out as a worthy recipient of this award. The people of this community hereby admit Mr Paul Barrows to be an Honorary Freeman of the Town of Sandy which is the highest mantle of esteem and honour that the Council can bestow"*.

In adding to these words Cllr Pettitt said that Paul had volunteered throughout the pandemic as Mass Vaccination Centre Manager while continuing his retained duties for Sandy. Paul's dedication combined with his leadership qualities in providing unstinting support for community events including Sandy Carnival, Band Contests, Christmas Lights, Remembrance Parades and many others have marked Paul out as the most worthy of recipients for this special award and the Town Council was delighted to have this opportunity of expressing its sincere appreciation in this way.

Paul received his Scroll and Insignia and then spoke to thank not only the Council for the award but especially his wife and children for all their

support and encouragement over very many years acknowledging the sacrifices that had been made by them and also to his colleagues and senior officers who were present to witness the presentation.

7. Resolutions and Questions

The Mayor then asked for any questions which had been submitted prior to the meeting. The following had been received:

Q: From Mr Ravi Mal. As a Sandy resident for around 13 years, I have started seeing a deterioration in the services available. At my GP practice (Sandy Health centre Northcroft), everyone is required to call up at 8am to get a doctor's appointment. Currently, the practice has been having telephone issues which disconnects your phone call when over 50 people are trying to access the service at the same time. If you're able to get through, within an hour, the doctor's appointments are pretty much all taken. I have raised a complaint with the GP practice and they have blamed BT for the telephone service. This issue has been going on for (what we have experienced) about 2-3 months. Making a doctor's appointment is now a horrible experience that deters people from making appointments which can be a serious health risk. This idea of a first come first served race for doctors appointment is immoral.

I have also been using the dental practice in the market square for probably 15-20 years. Recently, when I went for a check up, I was told that they can no longer provide me my next 6 month check up as the system was changing. They would contact me when there would be availability. Finally, my wife has been off work for 6 years taking care of our 2 children and is planning on going back to work. We tried to get our 3 year old son into our daughter's school (St Swithuns') for the nursery service and we should be eligible for 30 hours free childcare by the provider. However, we were only offered 15 hours as there's too much demand. We have been told we will need to wait until September to try and get allocated more space. Busy Bees nursery in Sandy, close to where we live said the waiting list was up to January. Robert Peel School didn't even return my calls or emails. So why has my council tax been going up each year, yet we can't get any services anymore? How is my wife supposed to work without the adequate childcare availability?

Why is everyone required to call the GP practice on the day at 8am and struggle to get a face to face appointment when required?

I do not want to hear that this is a problem everywhere and so we should accept this as the norm. This isn't right.

I'm not an expert but surely, if we're building more houses in Sandy and neighbouring towns like Biggleswade, then we should get allocated extra money for our services too. Make more GP & Dental practises and open up more nurseries & schools?

A:The Mayor advised that the issues raised were not the responsibility of the Town Council. However, he confirmed he would raise the issues raised at the Annual Council Meeting on 22 May 2023

Q: From Mr Anthony Bell. Can the Town Council provide crime statistics that are interpreted to make them more understandable for the residents of Sandy?

A: The Mayor advised he would raise the matter with the Police and Crime Commissioner and he supported efforts for the statistics to be more easily understood

Q: From Sarah Gibson. An elector was looking to set up a mental health facility in Sandy. She and her colleagues were looking to set up a facility to assist and support the current demands on the NHS. She had come across a number of empty buildings in Sandy and was wondering whether Cllrs were aware of any space that may be able to be used or access to funding to run such a service. She wanted to offer discounted/low-cost therapeutic services particularly to people struggling on benefits or with cost of living problems.

A: The Mayor said in response that he would be looking to the three Central Bedfordshire Ward Councillors elected in May to take these matters forward and raise them with Central Bedfordshire Council. He also commented that the Town Council was likely to support such an initiative. The details of the question would be sent to the newly elected councillors and a reply would be sent to the questioner in due course.

The Mayor then closed the meeting at 20.06 and thanked everyone present for attending.