

**Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting for the Parish of Sandy,
Bedfordshire, held on Monday 12 May 2014 at Sandy Upper School
commencing at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr Mrs S Sutton (Town Mayor as Chairman of the Meeting)
together with 72 members of the public.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Town Cllrs M Pettitt, C Osborne, M Scott, B Smith and S Walsh, and from Central Bedfordshire Cllr N Sheppard.

The Mayor welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance.

2. Minutes of the 2013 Annual Town Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Monday 29 April 2013, which had been circulated to those in attendance prior to the meeting being opened, were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Town Mayor's Award for services to the community

The Mayor reported that many nominations had been received for all three categories including previous winners. She thanked nominees for their continued work in the community and explained that this year she would be recognising the work of those who have not received awards or recognition of any kind – "our unsung heroes". A set of residents who quietly and diligently support the community because for them "it's the right thing to do", which she had seen first hand during her time as Mayor.

The Mayor's Young Person's Award was awarded to Mr Stephen King of Sandy in recognition of his work as a youth leader at Sandy's Viking Cub Pack.

The nomination for the Citizens award came from members of one of our longest established groups in Sandy. The group was the Townswomen's Guild and the winner was Mrs Elizabeth Wheatley.

The newest award was for a Community Group. There were numerous volunteer led groups in Sandy and Beeston and it was felt it was time that they were also on the list to receive a Mayor's award

The winning Group had only been running for a relatively short time but their impact had been wide reaching. They provided a community service two days a week serving low cost and nutritious meals in a warm and friendly environment. The service was available to anyone who walked through the door all year round. The Winner was The Drop In Cafe – based at St Swithun's Church.

The Mayor thanked all those who had made nominations and thanked all nominees for their contribution to the community.

5. Reports from Elected Representatives:

i) Town Council – Cllr Mrs S Sutton

The Council's annual report had been printed and made available to all those attending the meeting. The Mayor highlighted a number of aspects of the report which presented an overview of all the Town Council's work during the year 2013/14.

In particular she drew attention to the adoption of a new strategic plan for the Council which included objectives and plans for the future. The installation of a permanent hearing loop and microphone system, including a change in the layout of the council chamber had made it easier for the public to see and hear the discussions.

It was with regret that the Allotments in Stratford Road were closed in November and the Council was continuing to work with CBC on a replacement site. However, this did mean that work could press ahead with the plans for the extension to the cemetery site.

For the second year the Council had provided the Christmas illuminations and organised with the Friends of the Christmas Lights the largest event in the town which over 3,000 people attended.

STC's grant budget was distributed by the Community First panel, which also had additional funding from Central Government. By pooling the resources over £11,500 was given to 22 applicants. However, 2014/15 would be the last year that government funding would be available as it was the end of the four year scheme.

ii) Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) – Cllr N Aldis

Cllrs Aldis, Maudlin and Sheppard had provided a written report which was made available to those attending the meeting and which presented an overview of Central Bedfordshire Council's work during the year 2013/14. Cllr Aldis noted that Cllr Maudlin had just been re-elected as Chairman of Central Bedfordshire Council. Cllr Maudlin pointed out that all three CBC councillors were happy to be contacted regarding anything mentioned in their reports or any other concerns.

A member of the public asked about BUPA withdrawing from managing Allison House and what this would mean. Cllr Aldis explained that Central Bedfordshire Council was taking it over and it should be a seamless transition as they were keeping the existing staff in place.

6. Reports from other bodies:

i) Bedfordshire Police

Sgt Gary Kidd had provided a written report which was made available to those attending the meeting.

The last year has been a testing time for Bedfordshire police as there had been cutbacks. Biggleswade police station had closed with officers having to move to Kempston. Officers have still been patrolling in Sandy but they have had to come from Kempston. However, they were now being moved back to Biggleswade.

Overall crime had gone down. Last year there were 54 cases of burglary whereas this year there were 22. Motor vehicle crimes had gone down to 64 from 84 the previous year.

The Sandy Neighbourhood Team held a burglary awareness week in December 2013 and delivered 1700 crime prevention packs. They also gave out 98 packs at an awareness session at Tesco.

Speeding was still an issue in Sandy. Eight people from Sandy would be attending training to form a community speed watch group the following weekend. These members of the community would monitor speeding in areas and act as a deterrent to speeding motorists. Each time a motorist is caught speeding they will get a letter which usually acts as a deterrent. However, if they continue to speed the information gained from previous offences will be used to target that particular motorist. Sgt Kidd

reiterated that if anyone would like to join the group they should get in touch.

Sgt Kidd was asked about the increase in violence against the person. He explained that the figures included actual bodily harm (ABH), common assaults and public order offences. Most of the cases were domestic related and this was the highest category across the country not just in Sandy.

Sgt Kidd was also asked how many burglars had been caught. He replied that a fair few had been caught and sent to prison but not as many as he would like.

ii) Bedfordshire Police Traffic Management Department

Gordon Pearsall introduced himself and explained his background as one of the first accident investigators in the area.

He explained that when a speeding complaint was received the area was monitored for a 7 day period with a speed data box, put in place to collect speeding information. In the case of high levels of non-compliance complaints remain live until something in the area changes, e.g traffic calming measures, such as those in St Neots Road.

There were two locations in Sandy on the speed maintenance list, Bedford Road and Sunderland Road. The next steps were to put up signs, including vehicle activated signs, along with wheelie bin stickers to act as a deterrent. Then the police would target the area on a rolling programme.

Mr Pearsall was asked about speeding on the A1. He stated that the cameras were owned by the Highway Agency. The cameras were wet based film and the Highways Agency need to replace them with digital cameras, which were expensive. Mr Pearsall's solution to this would be to have average speed enforcement cameras at the start and finish of the speed limit, but ultimately it was the Highways Agency's responsibility and decision.

iii) Local Area Transport Plan

Ben King, Principal Transport Planner from Central Bedfordshire Council spoke about the Local Area Transport Plan.

The Local Area Transport plan was used to help produce the strategic plan for investment in the local transport network.

There were 11 Local Area Transport plans for Bedfordshire, Sandy being covered by the Biggleswade & Sandy Transport Plan. This was drawn up a few years ago after extensive consultation. It included a long list of ideas to be prioritised over 4 years. The Biggleswade & Sandy Transport Plan was in its 4th year.

The plan had delivered public transport, freight & cycle improvements in the area. Including 20mph zones outside schools, waiting restrictions on Girtford Bridge and improvements to footpaths damaged by HGV's.

Mr King explained that future funding was reduced due to Government cut backs of 40%. This means CBC was trying to do more with less money. Therefore the Council would continue with an evidence based approach to work.

One of the projects for the future was the East – West Rail link, which would provide a link between Oxford to Ipswich and Norwich via Cambridge, in order to improve connectivity and stimulate economic growth. The western section would be in place by 2019. The Central section would be in place by 2014. There was no route identified for the eastern section as yet but one of the options was through Sandy.

Mr King was asked if he thought it was weird that two sections were already planned before a route for the final section was identified. Mr King noted that Sandy Town Council and the most recent Sandy town plan supported the link. It was not unusual for sections to be put in place to make some impact before link routes were finalised.

A resident asked about cars parking on St Neots Road as people were in danger of being knocked off their bikes and that the bus shelters were filthy. Mr King noted that the cycle lane in St Neots road was a discretionary route. In the future housing developments would be encouraged to supply generous parking to stop cars parking on the street. One benefit of cars parking on the street is that cars were forced to travel slowly.

A member of the public stated that St Neots Road was not wide enough for a mandatory cycle path. Mr King explained that the introduction of

traffic calming and the future implementation of weight restrictions on lorries would create conditions for safe cycling.

Another member of the public asked if the Government were cutting their funding what was the total that CBC would contribute. Mr King said CBC could bid for additional capital funding for schemes that are important, for example, the Station Interchange at Biggleswade Station. But as with any bid they need to demonstrate value for money.

Mr King was questioned on his statement about a lack of growth in Sandy, the questioner said Sandy was gridlocked in the mornings which showed there was growth. He explained that in comparison to Biggleswade, Sandy is growing at a much slower rate and is hampered by its geography by having the railway line to one side and the A1 to the other.

Mr King was asked if that meant that nothing will improve in Sandy. Mr King responded that that was not the case. Any serious incidents would still spark an investigation.

Mr King was asked how would the council be able to respond to the knock on effects that the Black Cat Improvements would have on Sandy. Mr King explained that the Black Cat was a Highways Agency issue, they have a route based strategy for improvements, which rank improvements in a national context. The reality was that this was not a high priority for the Highways Agency. CBC can lobby the HA but they have to have proof of what they are asking for.

A member of the public voiced a lack of confidence in CBC. Mr King responded that CBC was doing its best but was hampered by the current lack of funds. He then suggested any other questions were forwarded to him at CBC.

iv) Public Transport

Paul Dodge, the public transport manager from CBC spoke about Bus Route 73.

Mr Dodge explained that bus services were provided by private companies and they decided where to provide their services. CBC assessed the needs for services and tried to find bus companies to provide necessary services.

Recently it was felt that a bus service to Tesco was needed, Stagecoach proposed to include Fallowfield in this service. Unfortunately bus stops were erected prematurely by Stagecoach in the wrong places, they had since been removed.

Since then the route had been assessed and Stagecoach had deemed the current turn around in Engayne Avenue to be unsafe. They had prepared several options which were now subject to public consultation.

Consultation papers were available at the meeting. The consultation deadline was Friday 23 May 2014. Once the consultation was closed the results would be reviewed and a way forward determined.

A member of the public asked if the routes proposed had been surveyed as if they had been the survey would have shown that on one of the routes there were bollards blocking the way and on several of the routes there were problems with cars double parking, making it hard for a bus to get through. Mr Dodge explained that if that option was pursued the bollards would come out and be replaced with either raising bollards or a chicane for buses only. Extra spaces for cars might be considered to ease the parking situation.

Mr Dodge was asked why there was an option to go through Fallowfield and why no option to go round the outside of the Fallowfield Estate. He advised Stagecoach had said they would not go round the outside of the estate as a bus can get round the estate itself.

v) Rights of Way

Drew Gwillam the Rights of Way Officer at CBC spoke about the Countryside Access Service.

The Countryside Access Service was responsible for footpaths, bridleways and byeways. The seasonal vegetation clearance was the biggest expense. Footpaths were cleared twice a year. Though landowners were responsible for maintaining hedges or fences bordering a right of way.

Sandy was an important area with regards to rights of way as Sandy was now a Walkers are Welcome town, it also had the Greensand Ridge and Kingfisher Way running through it. So it was important to keep the paths clear. Mr Gwillam urged regular walkers to take his card so they could let him know if there were any problems in the local area.

Mr Gwillam then spoke about the Sandy Green Wheel. The Sandy Green Wheel Masterplan was now under consultation with the deadline being 23 June 2014.

The Mayor thanked all the contributors to the evening.

7. Resolutions and Questions

Questions that had been submitted previously were answered. It was noted that Mr Gurney wished to withdraw his question but as the questions and answers were prepared in advance there was no time to do this in time for the meeting.

1 Accuracy of Town Council Minutes

Question submitted by John Gurney

In minute numbered 5 of the minutes of the meeting of Sandy Town Council held on 21 October 2013, in a reference to me the Mayor is quoted "The Mayor reminded Cllr Lynch that a decision had been made by the whole council as a result of an agenda item first raised on 29 July 2013 that the staff should not communicate with this individual". As there can be found no agenda item or minute of that meeting on 29 July that mentions this matter, this statement cannot be accurate.

Would the Town Mayor now agree that either she gave an incorrect reply to the question asked on this matter or would she agree that she signed minutes are (sic) being an accurate record of the meeting of 29 July that were in fact inaccurate in that they failed to record a decision made by Council?

Furthermore having researched all minutes of Council both before and after 29 July no record of Council having made such a decision can be found. Is it not a requirement in local government law that all resolutions of Council are contained within minutes of the meeting concerned?

In conclusion, I now ask that this minute be deleted and an apology be given for this inaccuracy, in public at the Annual Town meeting? I also ask that I'm given the right of reply to any statement made by the Mayor or Town Clerk on this matter.

Response from Sandy Town Council

The questions Mr Gurney raises have already been answered by the Town Council in previous correspondence with him and others. The Town

Council is satisfied that its meetings have been correctly minuted and all resolutions properly recorded. The minutes are and have been in the public domain. The minutes of a Town Council meeting once approved can only be altered by the council itself and no member has asked for any amendments to be made.

2 The North end of the Pavements on St Neots Road

Question submitted by Peter and Marie Stainton, members of the SG19 Group

The pavements north of West Road, are not at all safe. The holes, the workmen's work, for gas, electricity water and drains etc, across the pavements are humps or ditches. Also, when crossing side roads, of which there are EIGHT out of a total of twelve, we have to avoid puddles in the gutters, blocked drains and rough holes. Crossing East Road is particularly difficult and unsafe. The South end of the pavements were repaired some time ago but the North end was not, and it has deteriorated more since then! When will it be repaired to the appropriate safety standards?

Response from Central Bedfordshire Council

A response from Central Bedfordshire Council has been requested but was not available at the time of writing. Any further response will be published on our website.

Response from Sandy Town Council

Sandy Town Council shares concerns about the state of the pavements in West and East Road and has drawn the attention of the Highways Authority to the problems through various channels of communication.

3 Town Council Cheques

Question submitted by Ken Lynch

It has been noted that Sandy Town Council have out-sourced the task of writing cheques, could I please be told (a) what is the cost to Sandy council taxpayers for this and (b) why is it thought necessary to incur these additional costs at a time of such financial pressure on council expenditure?

Response from Sandy Town Council

With effect from 1 March 2014 Sandy Town Council appointed Accounting Solutions DCK Beavers Ltd as contract accountants at a cost of £6,193.25

for the year. The scope of the work provided under this contract is far greater than the production of cheques (as Mr Lynch should be aware since he was provided with all relevant documentation during his time as a councillor) and includes accounts preparation work which was previously being undertaken by other providers. The decision to outsource this work was made because at a time of financial pressure on council expenditure it is essential to have effective financial controls in place. The council recognised that the number of regular financial transactions it was undertaking had increased significantly during the preceding 5 years but in the current economic climate it did not wish to increase its permanent staff establishment to deal with the resulting additional work.

4 SG19 Road Safety Action Group

Question submitted by SG19 Road Safety Action Group

Does the Town Council agree to support the efforts of the SG19 Road Safety Group to investigate, prioritise and seek solutions for road safety issues in the SG19 area including the provision of a named contact with it?

Response from Sandy Town Council

This question was received on 29 April 2014 and so there has been no suitable opportunity for the question to be put to a meeting of the Town Council and for a resolved position to be agreed upon.

Meanwhile the Town Council will continue to communicate with SG19 Road Safety Action Group and to respond to their concerns as it does with other community interest groups.

Resolutions

No resolutions have been submitted in advance for discussion and voting.