

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting for the Parish of Sandy, Bedfordshire, held on Monday 27 April 2015 at Sandy Upper School commencing at 7.30pm

Present: Cllr W Jackson (Town Mayor as Chairman of the meeting) together with 43 members of the public.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Town Cllrs J Ali, M Pettitt, M Scott, and from Central Bedfordshire Cllr N Sheppard.

The Mayor welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance.

2. Minutes of the 2014 Annual Town Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Monday 12 May 2014, 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

The North end of the Pavements on St Neots Road

Marie Stainton who had raised this question at last year's meeting reported that the pavements north of West Road are still in a poor condition. Cllr Aldis explained that the Council conducted a street review and made a list in order of precedence. Then a rolling programme was instigated. St Neots Road was considered but deemed not to be a high priority in comparison to other areas in Sandy.

Marie Stainton pointed out that the area near the bus stop had deteriorated quite considerably since then.

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

The Mayor reported that a number of nominations had been received making it hard to choose deserving candidates.

The Mayor's Community Group award was presented to Steve Harral from Seetec which is a work experience group that undertakes community duties in Sandy. They have been working on clearing overgrown paths and verges and everyone agrees that they have been doing a fantastic job of making Sandy look more attractive to visitors and residents alike.

The Mayors Citizens award was presented to Mary Baker, Welfare Officer and Social Secretary of the Sandy Branch of the Royal British Legion. Mary devotes many hours to the welfare of not only the members but also to their families.

The Youth Award was presented to Amy Cook of Sandy Upper School for outstanding academic achievement and attendance despite having both parents with severe illnesses and all the attendant difficulties this brings.

5. Reports from Elected Representatives:

i) Town Council – Cllr Will Jackson

The Mayor gave an overview of the Town Council's work during the year 2014/15.

Regarding the successful Christmas Lights switch on event held at the end of November, many organisations had stalls at this event to raise funds and there was a very good selection of stage entertainment from around the area. The weather was good and approx 3000 people supported the event again. What a wealth of talent we have around the town. Sandy Town Council is committed to continue supporting this very successful event and providing the Christmas lights for the benefit of the local community and we look forward to next year. If your organisation is interested in helping organise this event please contact the council offices, we would be very glad to hear from you.

The Mayor reported that we have had some coming and going of councillors. Taking on this roll is a very big commitment in time and energy and is done on a voluntary basis. Local Councillors receive no reward for this office.

For the second year Sandy Town Council received no mitigation funding from Central Beds Council which would have been almost £50,000 this year, but despite this we have managed to keep our precept rise to only 2.53% which has meant on a band D property a rise of £3.05 per year or 6p per week.

Our new cemetery extension has now reached the planning application stage so work on that should start later in the year. We have accepted the quotes for the relaying and resurfacing of the path in our existing cemetery. The reorganising of our office is now well under way and our new Information point will open soon. Soil testing on the probable new

allotment site is completed and we await the report so let's hope it is ok and we can start work soon.

The Mayor was delighted that two defibrillators had been purchased for the town. One will be sited at the library and one hopefully at Fallowfield. The Mayor thanked CBC and the Fire Service who have provided the largest part of the funding. His grateful thanks also went to all those who have contributed to the Mayors Charity Fund this past year. Funds raised have also gone towards the defibrillators and to helping two Scouts from Sandy who are going to the world Scout Jamboree in Japan in June.

He then thanked all the organisations for the warm welcome he and his wife had received when they have visited them and thanked them for all their kind invitations and hospitality. They have enjoyed meeting so many people on their visits.

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 2014/15. 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 why the mitigation funding was not passed on to town councils. Cllr Maudlin explained that last year CBC did pass on the mitigation funding but made the decision not to do the same this year. By not passing on this money they were able to keep their Council Tax at the same level and therefore received extra money from the Government. If they had passed on the mitigation funding they would have had to raise the Council Tax by more than the amount that Sandy Town Council had increased theirs by. This decision was not taken lightly and was heavily debated at CBC.

Another member of the public pointed out that Beds Borough Council managed not to raise their Council Tax by managing it in a different way.

6. Reports from other bodies:

Bedfordshire Police

PCSO Ann Jeeves had provided a written report which was made available to those attending the meeting.

She explained that her main duties included patrolling in Sandy, paperwork relating to incidents in Sandy and reporting to the local council.

She reported that there had been a number of criminal damage cases over the Christmas period and that she had been working with youths, youth clubs, housing associations etc to decrease the number of cases in this area.

The Police held a community event on 22 October 2015 called Operation Vision on the Fallowfield Estate and High Street, Sandy. It was a daylong event involving Police Community Officers, the Police Crime Commission, Bedfordshire Police NHW/Smartwater worker and Sandy Speedwatch Team and Central Bedfordshire Council's Good Neighbours Initiative. They visited 211 homes and businesses as well as engaging with the public who came along to the hub.

PCSO Jeeves also explained that after a burglary or car break in, the police door knock the area making people aware and giving advice on safety.

A new initiative that has been instigated is that the PCSO's are given a day off from doing paperwork and are not on call to incidents so they can visit their area and engage with the community, for example by meeting with elderly groups, visiting parks and helping with Speedwatch.

The Speedwatch group has had a very successful year patrolling certain roads in Sandy. The Traffic Management team have used the information gleaned to help make Sandy roads safer.

A member of the public asked about the Neighbourhood Watch team. PCSO Jeeves explained that the PCSO responsible for Neighbourhood Watch Teams had been to a meeting in Sandy and is helping to get this group up and running.

Another member of the public asked if the Police Commissioners Referendum would have an effect in Sandy. PCSO Jeeves explained that if the police service gets more money then there will be more money to employ 100 new officers. Out of those 100 officers some would be allocated to Sandy.

A resident asked if a solved crime meant a successful prosecution. PCSO Jeeves explained that it did, which is why the numbers seem low. She then explained that this is not because the Police are not on the case but because it takes a long time to bring a case to prosecution. The resident then went on to ask if the spike in domestic burglary over Christmas was down to one group of people. PCSO Jeeves replied that generally when there is a spike it is down to one group.

6. Reports from other bodies

There were no reports from other bodies.

7. Resolutions and Questions

No resolutions had been received before the meeting.

The Mayor opened up the meeting for questions.

i) A resident asked if someone could explain the work at Sandcaste Wood. Cllr Aldis explained that the work by the Mill Pond is to re-inforce the wall there as the bank may collapse otherwise. There has been some concern about the drop from the path to the meadow so a new fence is being put in place to make it safe. They are also going to resurface the path to address the adverse camber. There has been public consultations about this area in the past which highlighted the difficulties of using the path due to stinging nettles and dense vegetation. CBC have removed the rotten fencing and are cutting the vegetation back to increase access to this path. There is still work to be done.

ii) A member of the public asked about the situation regarding the Town Clerk. Cllr Sutton as chair of the HR Committee explained that Sandy Town Council, along with other parish councils across the country have been put in a difficult situation. On one hand the government want openness for the public but on the other hand Town Councils are employers and are responsible for the health and welfare of their employees. The two are not compatible. Sandy Town Council are facing questions that legally they are not allowed to answer. The government are debating the situation but in the meantime Sandy Town Council cannot comment on the situation with the Town Clerk until the situation is resolved.

iii) There were a number of questions asked about the No 73 bus route. Cllr Aldis explained the situation. Central Bedfordshire Council in

conjunction with Stagecoach who run the service have withdrawn the service that goes along Engayne Avenue due to safety concerns over reversing near the Upper School and Quince Court. Cllr Aldis explained that a lot of things have changed since the bus service was instigated 20 years ago there is now the very real risk of the bus company being sued if there is an accident therefore the bus service have to reduce their risks. The service will end on May 25 2015. They have looked at a number of alternative options including creating a turning circle but none of them have been feasible which is not ideal. CBC are now providing a new bus service, No 83, which will connect Engayne Avenue to the No 73 bus route allowing residents to be able to travel on to Biggleswade and Bedford. The No 83 will run between 9am and 3pm which is when the majority of residents are looking to use the service.

One member of the public raised concerns over the validity of a public consultation in a case where a decision has been made on point of law. In which case the public consultation was a waste of money.

Another member of the public asked why the buses couldn't turn round at the Upper School. This is a possibility which is being looked at.

iv) A resident of Sandy questioned the Mayor of Sandy's comment that was in the Beds on Sunday stating that he thought the lack of interest in residents joining Sandy Town Council was because he thought they would rather join Central Bedfordshire Council as they give an allowance. The Mayor explained that his words had been taken out of context. What he had actually said was that he thought people weren't standing for Sandy Town Council as it is a voluntary role. The Mayor then went on to say that he hopes people will stand for co-option to fill the empty seats that are remaining.

v) A member of the public asked the Council it's view on the draft proposals to changes at the River Ivel. Cllr Osborne replied that Sandy Town Council had considered the draft proposals and had made their position clear, which is that they are opposed to the proposals.

vi) A resident expressed their concerns regarding Sandy Tourist Information Centre and asked the following questions.

a) Why was the building work for the new combined office not completed before the existing TIC office was closed? When she asked at the meeting

in April she was told the work would take two months. So effectively the Council has closed the TIC. The existing office is still there, standing empty. It could and should have been retained until the new office was ready for occupation.

b) Why has the service provided by the TIC been curtailed, without any public consultation? For example, the opening hours have been reduced to three days from six. The latter are still listed on the Council website! Also, why are theatre tickets and train tickets no longer available for purchase from the TIC?

She understands that only local information is now available. Local people know about the local area and its facilities. She has used the TIC to gather information about places throughout the UK. None of these changes were made known to the public and there was no consultation. The Mayor responded that he would reply in full to her questions in due course.

Another member of the public asked what the TIC office would be used for now. The Mayor replied that the groundstaff will use it as an office. It was then asked how much it will cost. Cllr Osborne responded as head of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee. Cllr Osborne explained that at the meeting when the budget was set the subject was discussed at length. Sandy Town Council has received no mitigation funding this year from Central Bedfordshire Council which means budgets are very tight. The Council have looked at all aspects of their work. It had two offices working within yards of each other and it had a depot building that was becoming dilapidated. The amalgamation of the TIC and the office has meant the TIC office can be used for the groundstaff which has kept the cost of the work within budget. Cllr Osborne then went on to praise the staff for their hard work during a very difficult time for the council. He then asked residents of Sandy to support the Town Council as the Councillors work voluntarily and do it with the best intentions for Sandy.

vii) A member of the public asked if the high costs of running the public car park were to do with the domestic rates, and had the Town Council tried to do anything to get this mitigated.

The Mayor explained that the high rates were due to holding a market in the car park one day a week. Therefore it had been decided to move the market to the market square to try and lower the rates. The Council did

not want to charge for the car park as it wishes to encourage people to come into town and use the shops.

viii) A resident reminded the Council that the skatepark had been removed because it was dangerous and that they would like the skatepark put right. £3000 had been raised towards renting equipment for the school holidays. He would like the Council to consider the matter at their first meeting of the new Council in May. The Mayor asked that he write a letter to the Council regarding the renting of equipment.

There being no other questions the Mayor closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.