

Sandy Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Thursday 16 September 2021 at 7pm at Sandy Town Council, 10 Cambridge Road, Sandy

Meeting Minutes

Present: Nigel Aldis, Robert Baker, Richard Barlow, Anne Elliott-Flockhart, Tim Gardiner, Arnold Gilpin, Joanna Hewitt (Deputy in Chair), Chris Patterson, Anne Ramsay.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Amanda Gibson and Ruth Lock.

2. Review and approve the minutes from 19 August 2021

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

3. Events

a) 22 August Event Review

It was noted that the weather on 22 August was not as nice as at the previous event, but that the group seemed to catch different people than from the previous event.

A couple of people expressed interest in the group, one of whom writes environmental policies for neighbourhood plans in other counties. Work commitments prevent him from joining the group but he would be interested in helping with the policies.

It was felt that the stall location was a bit out of the way, people stopped at the end of the stalls and didn't come past the food stalls to see us.

Thirty to forty people completed the online survey after the event.

b) Next Community Event Opportunity, Christmas Lights 28 November

There will be an opportunity to have a stall at the Christmas Lights event on 28 November. This will be an opportunity to show some of the responses from the initial questionnaires.

Richard, Nigel, Chris and Joanna can be available to help on the day. Anne EF will have to check if the council are doing anything this year and whether she will be needed for that. Tim is unable to help due to other commitments.

4. Business Engagement Survey Update

Arnold, Richard and Amanda have been delivering business engagement surveys to businesses in Sandy.

Amanda has delivered to the Town Centre businesses. Arnold has delivered to Sunderland Road businesses and Richard to Sand Lane and other businesses.

Arnold was surprised at the variety of businesses we have on Sunderland Road. There are only a few vacant units. There are a lot of units that started with one small unit and have expanded into the unit next door as their businesses have increased. The area could do with some smaller portacabin sized start up units. All businesses were busy apart from three that were struggling to get staff.

Richard was impressed by how many businesses there were in Sand Lane and on the outskirts of town and by the nature of some of the businesses.

Most of the businesses were not public facing, but it would be good to have a database of businesses from an employment point of view.

It was felt it would be useful to send out a press release calling on all businesses that we haven't managed to contact, namely those based at homes rather than units, to take part in the questionnaire.

Tim reported that so far there have been 19 responses to the business questionnaire, which was more than the group was expecting.

Joanna thanked Richard and Arnold for their work.

5. Social Clubs and Community Groups Engagement Update

Members are continuing to contact groups they are involved in.

Joanna will check with Amanda to see how many groups are left to be contacted.

6. Initial Engagement Survey Analysis

Tim thanked those involved with the initial engagement survey analysis, then shared some of the results.

So far 202 online and 108 written questionnaires have been analysed. There were between 750-950 unique responses to go through.

95% of people who had responded lived in Sandy and 63% worked in Sandy, which seemed quite high.

The top responses in the hate category were:

Lack of/no variety of/empty shops; lack of public facilities; traffic through town; anti-social behaviour; town centre appearance; litter; lack of/ no variety of pubs/bars/restaurants; crime and safety and the A1.

The top responses in the love category were:

Good road and rail access; nice friendly people; good walks and green wheel; access to country; community spirit and events; shops and services; quiet small town market square; RSPB and Greensand ridge; parks and greenspaces; pinnacle and green spaces.

The top responses in the improve category were:

Empty shops put to better use, Fallowfield shops, opening hours; leisure, cultural, infrastructure, GP health services, education, allotments for all; appearance, tidy up, flower beds, trees & litter bins, play equipment, seats near river & Fallowfield; Sandye Place and use of the grounds; places for young people, skatepark, zipwire, youth club; state of roads, pavements, river walks, potholes, disabled access, parking, pedestrian crossings, street lighting; feeling safe, police, traffic, amount, type and speed, removing speed humps; café culture, more places to eat and Market Square including premises around - upgrade, redecorate, pedestrianise.

The top responses in the add to town category were:

More shops/ variety of shops; swimming pool/splash park; restaurants; community facilities / hub; youth facilities; parks/ trees/ green space; something at Sandye Place; market; new bars/pubs and banking facilities.

It was felt that going with the census age categories was the wrong call, as most of the responders are from the widest census age category.

70% of responses are from women and 50% from men.

The integrity of the original responses has been kept intact as each contributing result can be traced back to the original unique response via the analysis.

If necessary, any responses that come in now can be added to the analysis.

It was encouraging to see that the love category had more comments than the hate category.

Those that undertook the analysis noted that there were some quite interesting comments, for example, one responded that they liked the quirky nature of the shops in town, and another that they liked the small nature of the town. Sandye Place is very important to residents of the town.

Someone asked if it would be possible to find out how many people want a swimming pool, for example, and was that across the age groups or only important to one age group. Rob replied that it might be possible. If anyone has any questions like this, please let **Rob** know so he can bring the information to the next meeting.

Some of this information may be of interest to community groups or businesses within the town and will be shared with them where relevant.

A member of the group asked if we had a list of landlords in the town, unfortunately this information is hard to come by.

It was noted that the coffee shop at the station was closing due to an unreasonable rent increase and that a building in town was empty because the previous occupiers are still paying the rent. It seems a shame that landlords are thwarting prospective businesses and letting the town down.

7. External Consultants

a) Housing Needs Survey – BRCC & Other Suppliers

The Chair had sent out a discussion document regarding the Housing Needs survey, together with costings from BRCC. Detailing information received from Central Bedfordshire Council on the number of houses built in Sandy since 2011 and the number of

people on the affordable housing list who want to move into Sandy. The numbers seemed quite high, and it was thought perhaps that people pick a number of preferences, it would be more useful to know how many had chosen Sandy as a first preference.

The document also detailed a number of permitted development applications for change of use of buildings in the High Street for one-bedroom flats.

Nigel had found a housing needs survey online that could be used instead of using BRCC. But how would this be distributed.

The discussion document would appear to answer the question of if there is a need for housing in Sandy, but it doesn't answer the question as to where it will go.

Our initial survey didn't include any questions on housing and housing wasn't mentioned at all in any of the responses.

How much housing would we need to take to see improvements in infrastructure?

A member asked if we knew how many houses and the types of houses there are currently in Sandy. Another member responded that they thought this was included in the census data we have in the drop box, though this would be from the previous census and not the one recently undertaken.

It was felt we need to ask some housing questions in the next round of consultation to see if we really need to undertake a housing needs survey. We would at that stage look to compare costings and any grant funding that may be available.

b) Green Infrastructure Plan Update

At the last meeting the group were keen to undertake a green infrastructure plan update. However, it was noted there are extra costs for assessments to designate any of the green spaces within the plan.

The Green Infrastructure plan is out of date and does need refreshing. But do we need to undertake this to show as evidence for the neighbourhood plan.

It was felt we could ask the resident with experience of neighbourhood plans if he knew if the cost quoted by BRCC for this

was reasonable or if it was something we could do ourselves or if we could find another company to undertake it for us.

A member asked if we would need to undertake a strategic environment assessment. Another member responded that she thought that a SEA was more for a developer to undertake not a neighbourhood plan.

It was agreed that we need to update the plan, just that the group were unsure if the costs were reasonable.

Anne R will speak to Amanda about contacting the resident and BRCC to find out more information, including how long the consultations will take.

8. Plan Timeline Update

At the last meeting the timeline was pushed back by three months.

If we need to undertake a housing needs and green infrastructure survey this may push the timeline back further. The housing needs survey and green infrastructure plan are standalone documents, but information from those will feed into the plan.

According to the timeline we should be starting further consultation now, but we are not ready for that yet.

Whilst the group doesn't want the plan to take forever, we are in control of the timeline so shouldn't feel controlled by it. As we go through the process, we discover things that need to be done, or that require more research.

The group felt they would like to have more questions to go out at the Christmas Lights event. **All members** to read the analysis and have questions prepared for the next meeting as there is only 6 weeks between the next meeting and the Christmas Lights event.

Questions need to be more specific, for example, people want more shops, but what type of shop and where would they like to see them. We need to look at the data and pull-out what things we need to know more about. Questions need to address the practicalities of the things people are asking for.

Someone asked how we want to undertake the next round of consultation. As we have already done a questionnaire, it was felt that roadshow style events would be more appropriate now that we are able to undertake them.

9. Communications Strategy Update from Working Group

The **communications working group** have instigated a plan of action which includes sharing of information on social media. They will also share posts from other sources about things that are relevant such as the skatepark and planning.

The **Chair** will do a monthly press release.

10. AOB

There was no other business.

11. Next meeting 21 October 2021 at 7pm at STC