

Sandy Town Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Community Services and Environment Committee of Sandy Town Council held virtually via Zoom on Monday 24th August 2020 commencing at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs N Aldis, P Blaine, A Gibson, A M Hill, T Knagg, C Osborne, M Scott, S Sutton (Chair)

Absent: N Thompson

In Attendance: Cllr M Pettitt and one member of the public.

Action

- 1 **Apologies for absence (17-2020/21)**
No apologies had been received. Admin
- 2 **Declarations of Interest (18-2020/21)**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 **Minutes of Previous Meeting (19-2020/21)**
RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Community Services and Environment Committee held on Monday 13th July 2020 as a correct record of proceedings. Admin
- 4 **Public Participation Session (20-2020/21)**
There was one member of the public present and the Chairman agreed they may raise their questions during agenda item 5.

The Clerk informed Members he had received three questions from a member of the public.

The first question was in reference to the former Days Inn site – *'Current works ongoing at the former Days Inn, seem to be in progress despite there being no obvious public consultation and information from Biggleswade Deputy Mayor detailing that no works would be carried out prior to full public consultation. The only information received about future use have been via social media and the council seemingly trying to push this change through in a secretive way with CBC. I would ask the council, where the current expenditure can be found and to conduct due diligence with local residents..'*

The Clerk commented that the former Days Inn site is the property and responsibility of CBC and that the Town Council has not had any involvement in decisions on its proposed future use or works at the site. The Council is anticipating that it will receive a planning

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application for the site on which it will comment as with all planning applications. The Town Council had received information on the proposed future use of the site and as a FAQ, this was public information which had been published by Central Beds Council and the Town Council had displayed on its website and social media in October 2019. The Council had received assurance from CBC officers that there was no intended change of use from what was outlined in October 2019.

The matter was discussed further under Agenda Item 5.

Questions were also received about the need for speed restriction measures on Bedford Road and regular flooding at the A1 end of Bedford Road. Neither item was on the meeting agenda and both were areas of responsibility for other authorities. The Clerk would raise the resident's concerns with the relevant authorities and ask for comment. Speeding in the town has been recognised as a problem and CBC Ward members are currently addressing this with the Highways Authority. In addition, the Town Council is looking to purchase a SID sign which could be used on Bedford Road.

5 Central Bedfordshire Council – Transitional Housing (21-2020/21)

Members received a presentation from Central Bedfordshire Council Officer Charlotte Gurney on homelessness and the use of transitional housing in Central Bedfordshire. The presentation was extremely informative on the issues and challenges of homelessness in Central Bedfordshire. The following main points were noted;

- Following the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act there has been a greater focus on targeting solutions to rough sleeping. There have been increases in rough sleeping and resulting deaths across the country, including in Central Bedfordshire.
- The Act had 5 key points;
 1. Placed a duty on authorities to provide improved advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness
 2. Extended the period of time that somebody may be 'threatened with homelessness'
 3. Created new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority, need or intentionality

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4. Introduced assessments and personalised housing plans which set out actions for the customer and local authority
 5. Encouraged public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a duty to refer
- CBC released its own Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2019.
 - There is now a lot of housing demand and CBC have set a target to find more temporary accommodation in the north of the county to provide more housing options and solutions for this area.
 - There are 1,785 families on the register seeking accommodation. This includes 163 families from Sandy. The number of people applying for housing has increased dramatically, with 2000 applications currently awaiting verification.
 - Due to the number of applications and the lack of available housing options, families can be on the register for some time awaiting a permanent housing solution. This is based on how regularly a suitable property may become available. The average stay in temporary accommodation is 25 weeks.
 - The number of people needing housing assistance has increased and there is potential it may go up further following the end of the eviction ban which the government brought in to support people through COVID19.
 - As well as dealing with housing applications, the Council engages with rough sleepers, including two within Sandy.
 - The lack of accommodation options in the Sandy and Biggleswade area has meant that people with connections to the area seeking housing often have to be displaced to the south of the county, sometimes isolating them from support networks. Increasing temporary housing in the north of the county, such as the former Days Inn site gives more options and avoids displacing local individuals and local families.

Members raised a number of questions following the presentation. It was noted that the right to buy scheme does have impact on available housing stock. However, capital receipts received can then be used towards more housing. Approximately 80 properties have

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been purchased on the open market in the last 3 years. CBC are trying to purchase all over Central Bedfordshire.

Rough sleeping only makes up a small part of the reasons people enter temporary accommodation. Other reasons include mental health issues, leaving violent situations or tenancies not being renewed. There are 17 rough sleepers in Central Bedfordshire.

CBC are confident they can satisfy the demands of the former Days Inn site and those houses there. There are two similar schemes in Central Bedfordshire, and this will be managed in the same way. The majority of occupants will be families, 24-hour security will be in place, a mix of ages to help build a community feel, community support officers will visit the site.

The Chairman invited the member of the public to raise his questions. He asked about a statement released by a Biggleswade Councillor which had caused some confusion over the use of the site. Mrs Gurney clarified that the proposed use of the site had not changed since October when its proposed use was published. The social media post had caused some confusion and the headline was a bit misleading. While rough sleepers may be housed in temporary accommodation such as the former Days Inn site, they would not be individuals with issues such as drinking or violence. This site would not be suitable for that.

Every family and individual placed in temporary accommodation goes through a risk assessment to ensure their needs are identified and met. Part of the assessment includes choice of site. Specialist housing is in place for individuals with needs. There will be a reporting mechanism in place for residents to communicate any concerns they may have once the site is in operation. The date of opening is currently unknown, but it will be in 2020.

It was agreed that a visit of the site could be arranged for Councillors once it was completed.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Gurney for attending the meeting and providing some very important information.

Mrs Gurney and the Member of the public left the meeting following this item.

6 Action List (22-2020/21)

Members received the action list and the Clerk informed the committee that the work that had started on the Beeston

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Allotment/Community Orchard land was being undertaken by CBC and was exploratory to support a Full Planning Application coming forward for the 6 affordable homes.

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The action list was noted.

7 **Former Days Inn Conference Centre (23-2020/21)**

Members considered potential uses for the former Days Inn conference centre for submission to Central Bedfordshire Council as part of its consideration on future use. Members had reviewed the town council's Community Plan, but it offered limited suggestions which would be suitable for the site. While some uses could be transferred from the Community Plan which may work at the site, the issue of access is a difficult one to overcome. It is however a good-sized facility with good transport links due to its position on the A1.

Members discussed the matter and the following suggestions were made;

- Use as a training facility.
- Use as a function room as there are limited places for large gatherings within Sandy. It was noted that a social venue may be more difficult without the associated hotel accommodation.
- Training and business facility, potentially with meeting rooms or temporary office space for rent.
- Use by CBC as a base for their own staff to use for meetings or office space.
- It includes green space and could be used as part of a health and wellbeing function. Including parking to support the Green Wheel.

It was agreed that it would be preferable if the site were to remain in the ownership and control of CBC and that it be protected as a community asset.

RESOLVED to write to Central Bedfordshire Council and encourage them to ensure the venue was protected as an asset for Sandy with community use as its priority function. That use as a training centre/space could form a key part of its future use by the authority.

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8 **Recreation Ground Bins (24-2020/21)**

Members received and considered a request to look at updating old concrete bins in the Council recreation grounds. A Member spoke to say that he supported updating the concrete bins, which were no longer appropriate for the level of waste being put into them. Updating the bins would improve the look and dual bins would mean the Council could look at a recycling scheme in the future.

Members spoke in favour of purchasing bins that had advertising panels, which would allow the council to advertise events or increase its corporate identity in recreation grounds. The replacement of all the Council's 33 bins would be a large capital expense which would need to be planned over a number of years.

A Member commented that the Council needs to know the cost of separating and recycling rubbish before committing to dual bins, as the cost was significantly more than simple single bins.

A proposal was made that the existing concrete bins should be replaced with dual bins this year and that the Council's other bins and a recycling scheme should be looked at by the Environmental Plan group.

A Member sought clarification on the proposal as to whether it was being proposed that the subject be explored or that bins actually be purchased in the current financial year. It was clarified that the proposal was to replace concrete bins now and look at the remaining bins in the future.

It was Proposed, Seconded and **RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council replace the 12 concrete bins with 80L dual waste bins during the current financial year, with the Environmental Plan group looking further into recycling waste and the long term replacement of the Council's remaining 21 bins.

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Clerk /
Environ
mental
Plan
Group

9 **Recreation Grounds (25-2020/21)**

Members considered a draft document on potential improvements to recreation grounds, how this could be developed and what improvements the committee would want to explore. Members commented that it was a good document and had the potential to be developed into a positive working record for the Council which could clearly demonstrate to the public what action had been taken to improve our recreation spaces. The purpose was to be less reactive in taking action to improvements.

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It was commented that there was more space for nectar plants in Bedford Road recreation ground, but these should be kept away from play areas. A Member commented that Bedford Road was an underused resource and there was more scope for planting, trees, and benches.

It was also commented that there needs to be thought on how the large space at Fallowfield can be best utilised given its shared use between children and dog walkers.

A separate signage audit is required of all parks which can be fed into this document and a proper plan on how any additional planting will be maintained is essential if improvements are to be successful.

The views of the outdoor team will be fed into the report and Members can send their ideas through to the Clerk. Site audit forms are available for any Member who wishes to review a recreation ground.

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RESOLVED to accept the draft document and that the office continue to develop the plan for further review and approval by the committee.

10 **Community Asset Fund (26-2020/21)**

Members considered the possibility of making an application for match funding from the CBC community asset fund. It was noted that 50% match funding was required and that any project should be achievable with the remaining funding in place. This meant that larger scale projects such as a skate park would be difficult. Another Council in Central Bedfordshire had been granted funds towards outdoor gym equipment in a previous funding round. The Council has recently received grant funding for the installation of outdoor gym equipment at Sunderland Road recreation ground and had indicated that it eventually wanted to see further gym equipment installed at other sites in the town. A successful application to the Community Asset Fund for gym equipment could allow the council to install an outdoor gym at Fallowfield.

RESOLVED to make an application to the Central Bedfordshire Council Community Asset Fund for funding towards the provision and installation of outdoor gym equipment.

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11 Greensands Country (27-2020/21)

Members received and considered a report from Cllr Hill on the recent Greensands Zoom meeting. It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

Members discussed the need to assign specific councillors to represent the Council at Greensand Country workshops and it was agreed this would be sensible. **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that the Council appoint two representatives to attend Greensand Country meetings and report back to council.

Full
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12 Events Working Group (28-2020/21)

Members received notes from a meeting of the Events Working Group. It was noted that the Scheme of Delegations were to be clarified as to decisions and recommendations the committee should be making. Future notes from the Working Group will be clearer in showing its recommendations.

The Clerk informed Members that he, Cllr Aldis and Cllr Hill had met with the organiser of the outdoor plays to discuss their request to use Beeston Green. The request was as a result of no longer being able to use the RSPB, which they had done for a number of years. The Events group wished to support the event and Cllr Hill and the Clerk will work with the organiser.

The fair is due to attend Sunderland Road in September, but the Clerk needs further information from the organiser on what will be present and how it will be run.

13 Councillor Surgeries (29-2020/21)

i) Members received a verbal report from Cllrs Aldis and Gibson on a Councillor surgery held on 22nd August 2020. Ten people attended the surgery and a positive response was received to Members' presence at the community stand. There were a number of issues raised and Cllr Aldis will send the Clerk a report to circulate to Members. Grass cutting was a major concern and Cllrs Aldis and Gibson have a number of matters they are going to pursue.

Improved publicity is needed ahead of any future surgeries.

ii) Members considered holding further Councillor surgeries and it was agreed these should be held on a four-week basis, with surgeries in September and October. Members willing to attend surgeries are to contact the office with their available dates.

Admin /
Cllrs

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14 Chairman's Items (30-2020/21)

There were no Chairman's items.

16 Date of next meeting (31-2020/21)

The date of the next Committee meeting is 5th October 2020.