

Sandy Town Council

Minutes of the Extra Ordinary meeting of Sandy Town Council held in the Council Chamber at 10 Cambridge Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire on Friday 31st May 2024 at 6.00pm

Present: Cllrs N Aldis, S Baker, B Blackley, A Effiong, J Hewitt, A Lock, R Lock, C Osborne, M Pettitt, M Scott, P Sharman, S Sutton and N Thompson.

Absent: Cllr R Lacey

In attendance: Mrs. N Sewell (Clerk) and CBC Ward Cllrs S Bell, S Ford, R Pashby and 37 Members of the Public

	Action
<p>1 Apologies for Absence (29-2024/2025) No apologies had been received</p>	
<p>2 Declaration of Interest and requests for dispensations (30-2024/2025)</p> <p>i) <i>Disclosable Pecuniary Interests</i> - None</p> <p>ii) <i>Non-Pecuniary Interests:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Aldis declared an interest in Item 5i as the Chair of the Sandy Historical Research Group, who were seeking to have a museum housed on the site of Sandye Place and also as someone who lives opposite Allison House.• Cllr Pettitt declared an interest in Item 5i as a resident of Swansholme Gardens• Cllr R Lock declared an interest as a Member of the Sandy Historical Research Group• Cllr A Lock declared an interest as a Member of the Sandy Historical Research Group• Cllr Baker declared an interest as she works at Central Bedfordshire Council in the safeguarding team. <p>iii) <i>Dispensations</i> – None</p>	
<p>3 Public Participation Session (31-2024/2025) 37 members of the public were present, 11 of whom asked to speak. The Mayor explained that each person wishing to speak would get 3 minutes and requested those present keep their representations civil.</p> <p>All present had attended to speak on the paper <i>Sandye Place Academy and Allison House Residential Home, Sandy</i> which was to be considered at the next meeting of the Executive Committee of Central Bedfordshire Council on the following Tuesday (4th June 2024).</p>	

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There was a lot of agreement across the room as each of the speakers said their piece. They spoke passionately about Sandye Place the general consensus was that the site should be preserved for community use, with a particular emphasis on protecting the site's green space and listed buildings including the Mansion House, Hangar (formerly the School Hall) and Dovecote. Speakers expressed their beliefs that the history of the site and past use by the different groups such as hosting the Sandy Garden & Craft Show, and the town's Jubilee and Coronation Celebration events, which were important factors that had been ignored in the Paper.

The Paper had not made any mention of the Sandy Garden & Craft Show (formerly Sandy Show), a leading event for the town, which had been hosted at Sandye Place since 1869 right up until 2019 when the site was closed to the public. The show had been accommodated in later years at the Conservative Club but the facilities did not afford the space that the event, which attracts visitors from far and wide, required. The historical importance of the site to the town and its' residents could not be ignored.

Speakers talked of a sense of betrayal by CBC who they stated were intent on selling off the land for development and people were bitterly disappointed that the town's best asset would be disposed of to cover CBC's investments in the town such as the extensions to Sandy Secondary School and the Jenkins Pavilion.

Concerns were raised about the siting of a replacement for Allison House in the grounds. While most people were in favour of a care home being built there, it was unclear from the CBC proposal whether that would in fact be an enhanced facility or simply a replacement that would not offer what the town needed. It was felt by some that a care home on the site would need to be in addition to the current facility at Allison House, not simply a replacement for it.

Concerns were also raised about access to and egress from the site, which could only logically be accommodated by Park Road. All were in agreement that access was not suitable if the site were to be used for residential development and even with possible access and egress via Swansholme Gardens or Kings Road was deemed deeply impractical. If development were to go ahead traffic to the site would cause jams in the centre of town creating havoc on the high street. The impact of this extra vehicular traffic had not been considered in the paper.

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In addition to these access issues, the CBC Paper did not touch on any requirement that must surely come with any residential development such as GP services, which it was well known were already under considerable strain in the town.

Attendees were skeptical as to whether CBC would honour any findings that came from Sandy Town Council's own consultation on the matter and the findings of the Neighbourhood Plan's consultation over recent years. Questions were raised as to who had allowed the Mansion House to fall into a £800,000 maintenance backlog as stated in the Paper, now requiring a projected £2m spend to refurbish it.

It was pointed out that the Girl Guides, including Brownies, Guides and Rainbows, met regularly at the Youth Centre on the site, which was also not acknowledged in the paper. Unfortunately, due to costs the Guides found themselves priced out of most schools and community halls for hire in Sandy and so losing this facility created a real threat to the group and it was recognised that the Youth Centre was the best place for the group to meet.

In general, the siting of a new care home on the site was received positively but concerns were raised by the paper's suggestion that the care home would also be host to the Youth Centre, cafes and other facilities, which seem impractical given the differing needs of each group using these services.

Some residents were in favour of selling or swapping land in other parts of Sandy to enable development for the housing needs outlined in the Paper, while protecting some or all of the site. Suggestions included selling off Sunderland Road recreation ground and Bedford Road recreation ground and moving all the leisure facilities to Sandye Place.

Biodiversity and sustainability concerns were raised, especially as the area is known to be a habitat for water voles. If construction were to take place on the site the worry was that these natural habitats would be destroyed. A question was asked if the Paper had taken note of the Ivel Biodiversity Action Plan?

Some criticism was levelled at both Central Bedfordshire Council and Sandy Town Council with one resident accusing Councillors of having been aware of these plans for years. The Mayor was able to confirm that Members of Sandy Town Council had been told

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categorically by CBC that they had 'no plans' for the site. It was only at a meeting of the Sandye Place Working group that had been held on the Tues prior to this meeting, that any members of STC had been in sight of plans and why an EOM of Sandy Town Council had been called.

The same resident stated that the Graves family had put the site in Trust when Mrs. Fanny Graves passed away in 1947, and as such everyone in Sandy had a vested interest in the site. He added that he was appalled by the lack of people in attendance at the meeting. This sentiment was supported by another attendee who said the people of Sandy had not been defending themselves and now was the time for people to stop sitting on their behind but to get up and take action. He urged the people of Sandy to take a stand and ensure their voices were heard. It was vital he added that the people of Sandy turned up at the CBC Executive meeting on 4th June *en masse* and not take the matter lying down.

There was general criticism of the paper and its "sloppy construction" with one member of the public stating that everything in the document was a brush off. Particular criticism of the lack of detail regarding the site's use by the community over the years, which was deemed disingenuous, and other inaccuracies made the paper 'laughable'.

One attendee reported that they had asked to look at the Deeds for the land but had been told by County Hall these had been removed by CBC and were not available for view.

Attendees expressed their anger at what they saw as a complete lack of regard by CBC for real investment in the area and that the town was once again being treated as a poor cousin to its larger neighbours Biggleswade and Bedford.

The Mayor thanked Members of the public for their attendance and participation in the meeting, adding it was important that each and every one of them did something themselves. While Sandy Town Council could, and would, speak on behalf of residents it was so important that they all spoke up individually also. She asked who had applied to speak at the CBC Executive meeting as Sandy's Ward Councillors had encouraged and one member of the public stated they had applied and would be speaking. In addition, the Mayor and Cllr Aldis had also applied and would be speaking at the meeting on behalf of Sandy and Blunham respectively.

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4 Minutes of previous Town Council Meetings (32-2024/2025)

Members received the minutes of the meeting of Sandy Town Council held on Monday 20th May 2024 and approved them as a correct record of proceedings.

5 Sandye Place and Allison House Update (33-2024/2025)

- i) Members received a paper being considered by the Central Bedfordshire Council's Executive Committee on 4th June regarding a proposal for the future use of land at Sandye Place and reprovision of care facilities at Allison House. The paper asks that the Executive agree to take the proposal to a 12-week consultation starting on 24th June and ending 17th September 2024 and envisages a decision date in February 2025.

The Mayor addressed the meeting to explain to the non-Member attendees that the Neighborhood Plan (NHP) had for some time been working on what the future of Sandye Place would look like, adding that the NHP related to the town as a whole, not just Sandye Place. She added that the NHP Steering Group had undertaken a series of consultations with residents, including having stands at the Carnival, Jubilee Celebrations and Coronation Celebrations, from which feedback gathered had helped inform the NHP Masterplan, which STC would be consulting on in the near future.

Before the rest of the meetings commenced business, the Mayor invited the Ward Councillors to speak. First up was Cllr Bell who told the meeting that she and her other Ward Councillors had received a high volume of letters. She explained that it would not be allowed, or practically possible, to read each of those letters, and as such it had been agreed she would collate the information in the letters to present to the Executive. She added that both her and Cllr Pashby would be present at the meeting and that she would be handing a copy of every deposition to every member of the Executive Committee at the meeting.

Cllr Ford thanked everyone for attending the meeting, he stated he agreed with all the sentiments aired and that the last thing he wanted was the site divested and turned into housing. He added that he had spoken to the leader of the Council and he had confirmed that as long as there was no repetition he would allow more than the usual three speakers to contribute to the meeting.

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Cllr Ford added that he had received some emails where residents had stated they did not want a care home on the site, but there had been confusion as these generally related to people incorrectly believing a care home would take up the whole site. He criticised the plan for being poorly written adding that CBC knew where they wanted to put the care home so it should have been included on the plan being discussed. He queried why there was no document showing what could happen to the site and said that as such the Paper was too thin to take to consultation. He urged everyone to attend the meeting and assured them that all Ward Councillors and Sandy Town Council were behind residents on the issue.

Cllr Pashby stated he agreed with his fellow elected members, who had promised to protect the site and keep it as an open space for residents. He added the site should be an area that attracted people to Sandy as well as an area for residents to enjoy.

The Mayor addressed attendees by reading out an email that the Clerk had sent to Cllr Watkins of CBC, following the Sandye Place Working Group meeting that they had both attended alongside Sandy's Ward Councillors and a Member of the NHP Steering Group in the previous week, when the paper had been first shared with all parties.

Dear Cllr Watkins,

Firstly, thank you for arranging for the sharing of the executive paper with us. I must point out that the information was only released to us at 08:58 on day of the meeting, with Cllr Hewitt, only able to view it 20 minutes before the meeting due to other commitments.

We understand we are unable to suggest pertinent changes to this document at this stage. However, we hope we would be able to put forward these comments/points to the Executive for consideration?

- 1. Fundamentally there are two issues for consultation:
 - 1. Replacement care home*
 - 2. The future of the Sandye Place site.**

As we have continually said clear, unambiguous, communication in relation to this issue is paramount, therefore two separate consultations would seem necessary.

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Following an initial review of the document we would make the following observations:

- i. The document frequently refers to other expenditure in Sandy. Simply, these are the expansion of Sandy Secondary School and the development of the STC Jenkins Pavilion. Both facilities planned to provide, not only for Sandy, but also surrounding areas.*
- ii. Point 4 is not accurate*
- iii. Point 5 confirms the public green space has already been reduced with the transfer of land to St Swithuns School.*
- iv. Point 9a discusses the existing Allison House site and states it would become a surplus property, do we assume this in addition, will be sold for housing providing capital income?*
- v. Point 9b talks about the need for additional facilities requested by the community in previous consultations, i.e., Youth Centre, Community Space/Hub, Café facilities, green space with recreational amenities. However, the text seems to state that the Youth Centre, Community Space/Hub, and Café facilities will all be included within the Care Home not as separate facilities across the site as shown within the Neighbourhood Plan. .*
- vi. Point 9c we know from previous discussions the Town Council would be wholly against the market disposal of any part of the site as this would no doubt lead to over development of the site. At this stage, of course, we have seen no definitive plan with regard to the area for sale. In our discussions it was indicated that there is a high need for further Social Housing in Sandy. We would question this.*
- vii. Point 10 We would reiterate again that the plan for selling part of the Sandye Place site is not defined.*
- viii. Point 11 Whilst we agree with the community benefit, this relies on the cooperation of any future developer, this would be unacceptable.*
- ix. Point 12 Reliance on the planning process to ensure the retention of green space for the people of Sandy is unacceptable.*
- x. Point 14 does not make it clear that the only reason the site has remained largely vacant is due to the decision by CBC to keep the site closed. We would simply add that the Carnival has been held on site 3 times (including this year), as well as for both the Jubilee and Coronation celebration events, with*

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associated costs being met by Sandy Town Council and the Carnival.

Obviously, there are lots more points to raise through the whole document, and no doubt you would argue that all these points would be covered during the consultation process.

I am sure you will understand from the depth of feeling expressed at yesterday's meeting, we were entirely shocked to be presented with this document at the 11th hour when we have been assured, even during our last Teams meeting held on 30th January 2024 that there were no plans in place. This is now already included on the forward plan for Executive in February 2025! Once this document is published it will of course be in the public domain and will leave Sandy Town Council with no choice but to comment accordingly.

She reiterated to attendees that the Town Council was working hard on residents' behalf to do what it could for the town and preserving the site.

She then shared a copy of the NHP Masterplan and the aspirations that the plan had envisaged for the site including:

- Care home facilities
- Youth Centre
- Community Hub
- Riverside frontage with a board walk and facilities for paddle boarding etc
- Café facilities
- Amphitheatre
- Arts Centre
- Community garden.

The Mayor then invited Members of Sandy Town Council to speak in turn to express their thoughts on the Paper. Members generally expressed their disappointment with CBC, who they had been asking for months about plans for the site, only to be told, even up until January 2024, that there were no plans to speak of.

Members also queried the lack of any evidence to back up claims in the paper, and asked where were the results of the consultation undertaken by CBC and where were the statistics behind the claims for the need for housing etc mooted in the paper? Members were particularly aggrieved by the idea that the Sandye Place site would need to be sold in order to fund other CBC investment in the town. As one Member pointed out the

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Council were never told that they would be given one thing only to be expected to pay for it later down the line.

Members' concerns regarding access and egress to the site mirrored those expressed previously in the meeting by members of the public and it was felt that these, along with other restrictions including protected views and listed building actually would make the site less attractive to developers, however it was acknowledged that the Town Council would fight tooth and nail to keep the site for the community use to enable events like the Sandy Garden & Craft Show and Carnival to continue to be hosted there.

Members recognised Sandye Place as being the town's biggest asset and wanted to preserve the memories and history of the site as well as ensure its use for future generations.

Members called for the Leader of CBC to attend an STC meeting to share more details about the proposed plans for the site and urged residents to turn up in force at the CBC Executive meeting on 4th June to ensure that the message of how important the site's future was to the community. Attendees were warned not to leave all the fight to the Town Council, but make sure they got involved themselves.

One member also urged the Town Council to partner with the RSPB and Wildlife Trust to ensure that they added their weight to the conversation.

RESOLVED that the Mayor communicate Sandy Town Council's stance on CBC executive's paper and the future of the Sandye Place site, stating the following:

- STC does not believe the Paper is fit for purpose, it lacks detail and is missing important information which present an incorrect overview of the site and its history.
- STC wholly objects to the sale of the Sandy Place site for development.
- STC has grave concerns regarding safe and practical access and egress to the site, should it be developed for residential use.
- STC urges CBC Executive and CBC Officers to delay any consultation on the Paper until it has further engaged with STC and Sandy residents to create a revised document for consultation.

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- Sandy Town Council Statement on Sandye Place and Allison House.

7 Chairman's Items (35-2024/2025)

The Mayor informed attendees that STC and the NHP would both have a stand at the Sandy Carnival on 15th June and would be gathering opinion from visitors at the event on this matter. She thanked everyone for attending.

8 Date of Next Meeting: 24th June 2024

The meeting closed at 19.55