

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting for the Parish of Sandy, Bedfordshire, held on Monday 22nd April 2024 at Sandy Secondary School commencing at 7.00pm.

Present : Cllr J Hewitt (Town Mayor as Chairman of the meeting) together with Cllr Paul Sharman (Deputy Mayor), Mrs N Sewell (Town Clerk), together with 8 Town Councillors, 2 Council Administrators, 1 Central Bedfordshire Councillor, Ward Cllr Bell, and 14 members of the public.

The Mayor thanked the Executive Principal of Sandy Secondary School for allowing the Council to hold its Annual Town Meeting on the school premises.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Osborne, Sutton & Thompson.

2. Minutes of the 2023 Annual Town Meeting

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 25th April 2023, which had been circulated to those in attendance prior to the meeting were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

It was noted there were no matters arising.

4. Reports from Elected Representatives

i. Town Council – Cllr Joanna Hewitt

I was honoured and surprised when I was appointed Mayor in May 2023 and to be given the opportunity to speak on behalf of and represent all the Councillors of Sandy Town Council.

The Council works as a Team. There are the Councillors, several of who are here tonight including Cllr Paul Sharman (Deputy Mayor); Nicola Sewell (Town Clerk) whose job it is to guide and advise the councillors to the proper manner in accordance to the rules and regulations, without Paul and Nicola I could not do my job.

There is a Deputy Clerk, Admin Team Leader, and new to the Town Council a Community Engagement Officer and Civic Officer, both in the short time they have been here have made an impact on the team and what we achieve. We also have a Grounds Team Leader and several team members.

The Grounds Team are incredibly important to the town, they have been busy undertaking many tasks including, salting the local roads

and Market Square over the winter; maintenance of the open spaces and play parks in the town including, Bedford Road, Sunderland Road Park and Skate Park, Fallowfield Park, Beeston Park; maintenance of the Cemetery, Pinnacle, The Riddy to name but a few; litter picking around the Town, as well as the planting in town and then having to redo it when it all gets pulled up !!!

It has been incredibly important in the past year to build relations and partnerships with others in the community, including the Ward Councillors, the Policing teams both local and the wider circle; library, schools, community groups and churches.

There is a lot we do that's unseen, and we want to reach out and build even stronger relationships in the community going forward.

The last year has seen many community events organised for the Town and to recap some of them;

The Coronation Event – The Big Lunch at Sandye Place grounds, this was a massive community event bringing together approx. 3,000 people for an afternoon of fun.

The 2nd Skate Jam, the aim of Youth Engagement in an effort to discourage and prevent antisocial behaviour, supported by Crime Beat Bedford and Gale Trust Fund.

We have held 2 successful markets in both Spring and Autumn.

Remembrance Sunday always brings the community together and this year a unique first for us with the parade being led by Chester the Horse and his owner Sam; we also partnered for the first time with Milestone Infrastructure who assisted with the road closures and traffic management along the route, and we could not have done it without them. Of course, Remembrance Sunday is never complete without the support of the Royal British Legion, schools, churches and the very important wreath layers.

Christmas Lights switch on for the first time in a long time was held and run by the council. A fantastic turnout on a damp day showing immense support for the Town. I would like to thank Britannia Pharmacy for their fund-raising table which provided the Christmas Tree; Tesco for the many gift bags provided for the Grotto; everyone who provided prizes for the raffle including Gunns Bakery, Co-op, Tesco & Franklins. Finally, I also thank the many market traders and performers, including the schools, choirs and Quintessential Brass, I can honestly say we were very pleased with the end result.

Other projects going on to enhance what's available in the Town include;

Jenkins Pavilion extension, a development undertaken with Central Bedfordshire Council to extend and provide more leisure facilities in the town.

Upgrade of the CCTV Surveillance is now live, and we can work with the police to improve our town centre and open spaces, being able to share details efficiently and quickly to bring swift resolutions to situations occurring.

EV charging project in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council and BP Pulse will be arriving shortly in the Town Centre Car Park providing both rapid and long charge options.

Cemetery extension project is moving forward now the archaeological dig is completed. Work is being done to compile a design and technical study which will then allow for it to go to the tender stage.

Sandy Town Council is still working with Central Bedfordshire Council and BRCC to identify parcels of land suitable for allotment provision.

When we have further answers and timelines to these projects we will reach out and announce them.

We have also welcomed new councillor's, Briony Blackley, Archie Effiong and Susannah Baker and thank them for bringing a host of positive contributions, however we do still have 1 seat available for co-option if anyone is wishing to join us and help with the further maintenance and enhancement of the town.

ii. **Central Bedfordshire Ward Councillor – Sue Bell**

Thank you to Councillor Hewitt and Sandy Town Council for the invitation to attend this evening. Unfortunately, my fellow CBC ward councillors, Simon Ford and Rob Pashby, are unable to attend but, even though we are independent, we do work collaboratively and so my report does include their input. We all value working with Sandy Town Council and the good relationships we have with not only our hard-working town councillors but also with the Town Council's hard-working staff.

I am focusing primarily on matters specific to Sandy and Beeston, but have included some authority-wide issues.

Much has happened in the eleven and a half months since Rob and I were elected and Simon re-elected. Between us, we have handled getting on for 200 individual cases as well as involvement in ward and authority-wide issues and initiatives. These cases have included tenancy issues, antisocial behaviour, planning matters, highways issues and flooding. We regularly liaise with Safer Central, Central Bedfordshire's community safety officers, as well as with our local police and PCSOs. The rise in offensive graffiti around the town is of concern to us all, and I can assure you that all parties are working hard to put a stop to this. With respect to flooding, Storm Henk brought challenges. It may not have felt like it at the time, but Sandy and Beeston got off relatively lightly compared to other parts of Central Bedfordshire.

East-West rail is still under consultation, something which is of interest to us all. Various drop-in events are being held where one can find out more about how the process works prior to the launch of the statutory consultation process. The nearest event to us will be held at Roxton Village Hall between 2pm and 7pm on 20th May. Prior to that, a similar event will be held at the Swan Hotel in Bedford on 7th May.

The work at the Black Cat continues to impact. Although still at a very early stage, the proposed Universal Studios theme park is generating a real buzz across the county. I know there are some fears that increased traffic is a concern, but I do not believe that this will impact our ward; traffic from the north and west will use the A421 and from the south the A507.

There is a public consultation on April 30th at the Roundabout Club in relation to the proposed solar farm to the north-east of Sandy.

The waste recycling plant in Beeston was refused planning permission but is currently subject to appeal.

From a green perspective, you should soon see more electric vehicle charging points in the town and it would be marvellous if we could follow Ampthill's example and establish a 'Library of Things'.

It is good to see that work has now started on the houses on Beeston Green. As the adjacent land has proved to be unsuitable for allotments, we are working with the Town Council to find an alternative location and to support getting the allotments up and running as soon as possible.

Housing continues to be an issue nationally. Many younger people find themselves having to move back home because they either

cannot get onto the property ladder or are unable to secure a rental property. Private rental properties are snapped up the moment they hit the market and the cost of living crisis continues to impact. More housebuilding is inevitable, we simply need the homes, particularly affordable and social housing. We are pushing for infrastructure to be in place for all new developments and, to that end, are building additional educational accommodation. Some matters are beyond our control; issues relating to access to GPs, dentists and healthcare services continue to be of concern locally and nationally and CBC continues to push for better services for the whole authority. Should you wish to express your views on primary health care, the Integrated Care Board is holding a listening event in Biggleswade on 9th May.

The increase in council tax was inevitable. In real terms, between 2010 and 2020 government grant funding for local authorities dropped by 40% and being the only authority not to raise council tax last year made a significant impact on this year's budget. Many councils have issued section 114 notices, effectively declaring themselves bankrupt, and many more have said they may need to issue such a notice. We are not in that position, but to continue in good fiscal health we had to take some hard decisions. I know that, for instance, the green waste charge has not been popular; there has been some acceptance from those who realise that we cannot fund everything and still maintain our statutory duties, and that this charge simply brings us in line with our neighbours.

In respect of Highways, it is wonderful to finally see the installation of the crossing on the High Street by St. Swithun's school. Other works have included double yellow lines on Bedford Rd junction with The Avenue and Sunderland Road junction with Berwick Way. The top of Sunderland Road has been resurfaced using a new type of surface which should last much longer than traditional surfaces. Brickhill Road has been resurfaced. St. Swithun's Way and its offshoots are to be resurfaced in the first quarter of this year. Mills Walk, Kings Road and Western Way are also on the plan and there will be some pavement work in Swansholme Gardens. We encourage you all to use Fix My Street to report issues in the first instance.

We continue to work together with CBC officers with regard to the future of the Sandye Place site and will share news when we have some. Only last week at Full Council I asked the Executive Member for Public Assets about the care and maintenance of the Mansion

House and was assured that maintenance is being carried out to ensure the building is not put at risk.

Parking around our schools at pinch times continues to be a problem; our parking enforcement team do make as many visits as possible but obviously cannot be everywhere at once and there are a lot of schools in Central Bedfordshire. We reach out to parents and carers dropping and collecting pupils to be considerate of residents and other road users and to put the safety of those children first by parking away from the immediate proximity of our schools.

Pollution caused by the volume and speed of traffic on the A1 continues to be an issue. Pollution levels dropped considerably when the speed restriction of 40 mph and average speed cameras supported enforcement during the installation of the new safety barriers and we are pushing for ASCs and speed reduction to be made permanent.

Thanks to Rob's efforts, Speed watch is now up and running in Sandy, with a small group of stalwarts. We are always looking to recruit, so if you can spare 2 hours a month, please do contact one of us and we will happily take you through what is involved.

Between us, using our Ward Councillor grants, we have been able to help various community groups including 'Let's Get Going', Sandy Youth Club, Sandy Tigers and Sandy Football clubs, Handley Court Social Club and Sandy Historical Research Group. We look forward to receiving applications from community groups in this current financial year.

And finally, whilst Facebook is a wonderful publicity tool, I would urge you all, should you have an issue you think is either CBC related or is something one of us could help you with, I would ask that you make direct contact. I, for one, do not religiously read every post on every community group to which I belong; there simply are not enough hours in the day! Contact details for all three of us are on Central Bedfordshire Council's website.

5. Presentation of Town Mayor's Awards for Services to the Community

It is a great honour to recognise some of the outstanding contributions made by individuals in Sandy to their Community. This year, as we mark the 80th Anniversary of D Day, we also present with the Certificates a special D Day badge.

a) Community Group Award

5th Sandy Brownies was awarded the Community Group Award as they provide a large number of girls with the opportunity to learn new skills and join in with a wide range of activities that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to do. These include working towards badges, enjoying days out and overnight or weekend camps, all which provide new challenges for them. The girls are supported to do their best at whatever age and stage of development they are at, which in turn prepares them to join Guides and then many of them Young Leaders themselves.

b) Community Young Person

Eleanor Endersby was awarded the Young Person award as she has been an active and committed member of the Sandy Community for many of her young years. Her mature and compassionate character, with a wise and reliable demeanour shining through in her words and actions.

Through Sandy Secondary School she has had a key role in helping run a tea morning for local elderly residents.

Eleanor was previously a long standing member of Girls Brigade and matured through the years with them, taking responsibility in encouraging and nurturing the younger newcomers to the group.

She is a coach for children's football as well as a player for a women's football team in Sandy.

c) Community Citizens Award

Mr Reynolds was awarded the Citizens Award as his services to the community span many years. He has been an active member of the Sandy Community, including time spent as a referee and coach for Sandy Albion Football club and as an active member of Sandy Town Bowling Club. Mr Reynolds was the very first chairman of the Village Hall.

This year Mr Reynolds decided he wanted to give something back to the community and installed a defibrillator at his home address in Middleham Close, Sandy. It is now available to the public 24 hours a day when needed and directed by the Ambulance Service.

Barbara Dunn was awarded a Highly Commended Citizen Award as she has provided an enormous amount of help to the library, voluntarily, 2 days a week, preparing craft activities for the local children to enjoy. Barbara will often be found cutting out many of the shaped activities that are used throughout the year for whichever seasonal activity is coming next. Barbara has done this

for many years and always with such quiet efficiency, and a smile on her face. A labour of love which is reciprocated by the enjoyment she sees on the faces of the children as they get stuck into the crafts.

Max O'Keefe was also awarded a Highly Commended Citizen Award, as a long-time resident of Sandy he runs a fitness business. Through this he and his clients take the opportunity to raise money for charities close to them. In November 2023 they raised £8,200 for pancreatic cancer, an illness that struck someone close to him. Max runs 4 bootcamps a year and the winner each season gets £250 to put towards a charity of their choice, local charities such as Moggerhanger Hospice have previously benefited. Along with this Max also runs other opportunities for fundraising such as Race Nights etc.

c) Sandy Secondary School – Mrs Karen Hayward, Executive Principal.

Mrs Hayward gave an introduction of the school and history of where the school was in 2013 when she was brought in to rectify the Special Measures the school was in. She reported it as a turbulent time, with 4 senior leadership teams in 18 months the school was struggling, the pupil count of 500 was falling as many sought a "better" education elsewhere. She added however, that after a tough start and many changes the school had received an improved "Good" status in 2014 marking the start of an incredible journey for the school, taking it from strength to strength. In financial trouble and also aesthetically challenging - the use of suppressive colours had been used throughout the school building - there was so much to do to continue to improve it. She added that new policies were introduced, student outcomes were put at the front of everyone's plans, and that the commitment and loyalty to improving the school was evident from everyone.

Mrs Hayward told the meeting she had come here for a challenge and in the Summer of 2015 became principal of the school. She reported that it was a lonely term as those who had come with her to turn the special measures around had left to seek other opportunities, however she moved forward and continued with changing routines and embracing the future of the Education provision. She continued that the whole town started to collaborate to ensure that when the children joined as Year 9s (as it was then) they were not playing academic catch up and a Sandy Cluster was formed determined to buck this trend. The cluster was keen to lead

the change from a 3-tier to 2-tier system to ensure the provision was the best it could be, and with Bedford Borough converting to 2-tier at the same time this was eventually the way forward, unfortunately Sandye Place became the casualty here which was never what anyone wanted to happen.

The first year as a Secondary School cohort, she added, the school expected to take in 50 children at year 7, however due to a school in Bedford closing the school also opened to a year 8 cohort, again expecting another 50 children. They actually took in 350 which was staggering. The building, built in the 70s, had a capacity of 900 and it was clear that the school was going to need to extend and improve on what it had to keep growing and serving the community the best it could. the school currently has a roll of 1,200 children. Working with Central Bedfordshire Council, she reported they have 2 new buildings which are due to open this September and it is the school's aspiration to provide for non-main stream academic needs, under pinned by a belief that "empowering students to shine" and every student matters, an ethos that the committed team work to fulfil every single day.

Mrs Hayward then played a video showing the school's positive culture and hearing from students about how they view the school.

What is the future of the school. Once the works have finished it will provide the community with a new teaching block and a new SEND block. Within this will provide an additional 28 classrooms, 5 IT suites and 2 Food Spec Rooms. This is a huge investment for the future and a very exciting proposition.

The SEND provision will be for students who cannot cope in a mainstream environment. It provides an academic timetable wrapped around their interests, for example the football academy. It supports the student to change their behaviour by focusing them on interests whilst learning, the social interaction and changes seen in this environment is immense.

Sandy Secondary School are great believers in Education Opens Doors and are here for the young in the community. The majority of the young people are exceptional, polite, keen and respectful. Supported by excellent staff who aim to open opportunities for all the young people.

Towards the end of the Summer the leisure facilities currently provided by Everyone Active will move out to occupy the new addition to The Jenkins Pavilion, this will allow Sandy Secondary School to refurbish these areas and repurpose some of them, however they are committed to serving the community and remaining a community school, with the leisure areas (Sports Hall etc) being available for Community use still.

d) Neighbourhood Plan – Joanna Hewitt

The Neighbourhood Plan is a steering group made up of Sandy Town Council and residents, it aims to bring the views and ideas of residents to shape the Town Plan and move ideas forward. The group knows that everyone is keen to know what will become of Sandye Place and is working with Central Bedfordshire Council to make the views of the residents heard. Currently the group is at the 1st Review stage of the plan, once this stage is completed the document will be published and open for Public Consultation. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NHP) is hoping this will be in the coming months. There will be lots of media coverage for the consultation and the NHP will be in many places to allow everyone to have a look and have their view heard. All of these will then be considered, changes made and finally it will go to a referendum and then adoption.

e) Incredible Edible – BRCC

Cliff Andrews, Deputy Chief Executive & Head of Supporting Communities at the Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity (BRCC), explained a little bit about the organisation. He told those present it has been active for over 70 years, in Sandy BRCC coordinates with the Good Neighbour Scheme and Sandy Helping Hands. More recently a Social Prescriber organisation, which sees a wellbeing champion in the community to help meet non-medical and mental health issues.

Sandy Green Wheel was designed in conjunction with Central Bedfordshire Council and Sandy Town Council, and BRCC continue to chair the development group, this year developing a major link between Beeston & Sandy.

BRCC also run weekly "You Can Do It" sessions in Sandy Town Council Chamber which helps people access Health & Wellbeing activities online and to improve their IT skills.

Having has long term relationships with Sandy Town Council, spanning over 25 years BRCC has helped with staffing and managing The Riddy and Pinnacle leisure areas.

Emma Lacy, from BRCC introduced a new scheme "Incredible Edible" to create community gardens across Bedfordshire. The initiative takes community space and supports people to grow food for all in a public space. This provides access to food for all and encourages local interaction resulting in locally grown produce for everyone.

The benefits of this include food security, fresh nutritious food for all regardless of social status, gardening brings people together, growing local reduces carbon footprint, it is sustainable as well as aesthetically pleasing with colour and vibrance to the area.

BRCC help with providing knowledge, tools and support to anyone involved in the project.

The four sites are : Stratford Road, Station road, High Street (outside St Swithun's Church Rooms) and Bedford Road Recreation Ground.

The first meeting is 10th May 2024 @ 2pm and then weekly, meeting at Sandy Town Council Offices.

f) Update on Village Hall – Joanna Hewitt

Following the departure of the staff and committee at Christmas the Mayor gave a brief overview of the Village Hall and the current situation. The Village Hall and Social Club is closed, however there were periods of opening to allow for the stock that had already been purchased to be used.

The Village Hall is a Community Venue with many different rooms, lending itself to many different uses. It is used by many groups for various meetings and currently the school are using it for mock exams and also booked for the summer exams as they need the space whilst waiting for the new buildings to be completed. This is providing an income for the hall.

The Bowls Club are utilising the back bar and changing rooms for a permanent home to allow them stability and to engage new members in.

The Mayor reported that the front bar is currently under review as to the future use explaining that it is unlikely to remain as a Social Club instead exploring the options of a more community based facility, open to more people.

Any future decisions will be communicated as they happen.

g) Resolutions and Questions

The Mayor then asked for any questions which had been submitted prior to the meeting. The following 2 had been received:

Q: When will speed cameras be enforced on Sunderland Road ? This road has become a racetrack and now having lived just off it for over 2 years the speed of cars and lorries has become increasingly concerning every day. The speedometer has made no difference and only effect's the top of the road closest to the field but does not create any fear for those entering at the closest to Merlin Drive or for anyone actually. I'm tired of hearing the pops of exhausts and screeching tires round the roundabout, before you know it there will be a horrendous accident and only then will people take notice now is the time to take action and introduce cameras and start protecting the public.

A: (Answer provided by CBC Cllr Sue Bell)

Unfortunately, speed cameras cost money and there is a strict criteria for providing cameras. We know speed kills, and that the SID (Speed Indicator Device) that is on Sunderland Road has made a difference, slowing people down. Central Bedfordshire Council is aware of the issues of drag-racing and Cllr Pashby has been liaising with the Police, who are also aware and have plans in place to deal with this. Speed watch has been effective in the town and they also have plans to target this area. Although they cannot prosecute, and the police cannot prosecute on the back of the information Speed watch has, there is a process for speeding drivers captured by them.

1st offence – Police issues a letter to the driver.

2nd offence – Police issues a further letter to the driver.

3rd offence – Police visit the driver, after that the vehicle becomes a target for the police and observations of the vehicles are undertaken.

Unfortunately, the criteria for Sunderland Road has not been met with regards to speed cameras etc and the advice is to ensure all

incidents are logged with the police and ref numbers obtained to build a continual pattern of this behaviour.

Q: My partner has recently had need to use the Putnoe Medical Centre Walk in Centre which is 12 miles away from where we live. It was an amazing service & my husband was treated within 30 minutes. Thankyou. I think that North Bedfordshire needs a local walk-in centre, for people living in Sandy, Biggleswade & surrounding villages.

There are vacant rooms in Sandy Health Centre or perhaps at Biggleswade Hospital.

By providing a walk-in centre for residents in the area of Bedfordshire, it would be beneficial to patients, as they wouldn't be going to A&E or the walk-in centre in Bedford. I am sure this would be cost effective by easing the strain on A&E & GP surgeries.

A: (Answer provided by CBC Cllr Sue Bell)

There is a listening event in Biggleswade on 9th May which Cllr Bell urged residents to attend if possible. Urgent Treatment Centres are provided by NHS, and whilst CBC can try and influence and pressure, ultimately NHS are the stakeholder and have the decision. Generally Urgent Treatment Centres are provided for a population of 100,000 people or more.

There is a shortage of GPs, but also there are extended hours to try and provide more appointments; additional clinics in Sandy Health Centre and Saffron Partnership; Saturday morning clinics for convenience.

Unfortunately a UTC, although wanted by CBC is not on the cards for the area any time soon, but do email your MP, Richard Fuller as he is concerned too.

The Mayor then advised the meeting that the Solar Farm Meeting previously mentioned was at the Roundabout Club on 30th April, between 15:00 – 19:00.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 20:45 and thanked everyone for attending and congratulated the award winners again.