

**MINUTES OF THE STOTFOLD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD IN THE MEMORIAL HALL,
STOTFOLD ON WEDNESDAY 4TH MARCH 2009 COMMENCING AT 7.30PM**

Councillors present: B Collier (Chairman)

Mrs S Bundock	Mrs A Clarey
B Saunders	Mrs M Cooper
Mrs D Haslett-Saunders	Mrs C Turner
S Hayes	Mrs J Hyde
M Smith	L Stoter
Mrs L Wilding	

In attendance: Town Clerk and Assistant Clerk - Stotfold Town Council
P.C. Paul Ryan and Sergeant Dave Leighton – Bedfordshire Police
Councillor Mrs Tricia Turner – Central Bedfordshire Shadow Authority
District/County Councillors Saunders and Street
26 electors who recorded their names

Councillor Collier pointed out the fire exits and then welcomed everyone to the 2009 meeting and introduced those on the top table.

616. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Cooper, Mrs Lewin and Mr Glen Rickwood.

617. NOTICE CONVENING THE MEETING

The Clerk then read the notice convening the meeting.

618. MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 5TH MARCH 2008

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 5th March 2008 were circulated to electors prior to the commencement of the meeting.

The minutes were then taken as read prior to them being confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

619. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the previous year's minutes.

620. ANNUAL POLICE REPORT FROM P.C. RYAN

To allow the two representatives of Bedfordshire Police to give their report and then leave to attend to policing matters in Stotfold, it was agreed that this agenda item be moved to this point in the meeting.

P.C. Ryan referred to crime figures for the last year, and pointed out that Stotfold has the lowest burglary rates in the area. The figures for February's criminal damage were mainly due to snow balls being thrown. He advised that with regard to the recent burglary at the Co-op no-one has been arrested at this time. Stotfold currently has quite bad problems with regard to taking and selling of drugs. P.C. Ryan's working priorities have been established from talking to residents, priority slips completed by residents, attending Town Council meetings and Community Safety Group meetings.

Speeding appears to be quite high on the list of concerns, and unfortunately most drivers caught speeding in Stotfold are local people from Stotfold and Arlesey.

A question and answer session then took place.

Andrew Bourne

Queried the clear-up rates following a crime being reported and seeing it through close of case. P.C. Ryan will come back to the Council with figures.

Christina Turner

Asked if residents were aware of the Police surgeries that take place at the Simpson Centre. P.C. Ryan advised that his surgeries were on a Wednesday morning between 8.30am – 12.30pm and stated that he cannot always be there due to emergencies that may arise. P.C. Ryan also advised that he was in the process of setting up a more permanent office within the Simpson Centre which will enable him to hold more surgeries including during some evenings.

Malcolm Smith

Asked what P.C. Ryan meant by enforced no parking zones outside Etonbury School, and was advised that there is an enforceable zone outside the school, which means that if there is a parking issue the Police can deal with the matter.

Valerie Balderstone

Advised P.C. Ryan that there is a large amount of drug paraphernalia within the Stotfold Cemetery car park and wanted to know if any extra patrols were being carried out in this area. P.C. Ryan informed her that a person had recently been sent to prison for drug offences and that this will make a significant impact on the drug use in Stotfold as a large amount of drugs and money had been seized on this occasion. P.C. Ryan confirmed that there hasn't been much drug paraphernalia at the Cemetery on recent checks and is happy that this arrest has made had an impact.

P.C. Ryan and Sergeant Leighton were thanked for attending and then they left the meeting.

621. TO READ STOTFOLD POOR CHARITIES ACCOUNT

A copy of the report was circulated to Electors. Mr Richard Baines advised those present that next financial year the Eleemosynary Charity will be the only poor charity within Stotfold. There is money available for residents who fall within certain criteria, and they are trying to change the rules of the charity to allow the money to be spread around more people in a wider criterion.

Councillor Mrs Cooper pointed out that the Recreation Grounds, Public Lands and Lighting Committee of the Town Council were waiting for the old allotment land at Common Road held by the charity to become available for use as allotments, as there is currently a very large waiting list. The Town Council have previously advised that they will administer the running of the allotments. Mr Baines advised that the tenant is currently clearing the three acre site, and it was felt this would be useful if it was cleared ready for use as allotments. Mr Baines will take this feeling back to their charity committee.

Councillor Mrs Hyde advised those present that the British Trust for Ornithology has asked her if they can put nets up on the Common Road allotment site at dawn one forthcoming Sunday to ring birds. Apparently we have a flock of waxwings in the area and they would like to track their movements.

622. REPORT ON PRECEPT 2009/2010

A copy of the report as appended to these Minutes was copied to Electors, and the floor was open for questions.

Pamela Manfield

Asked what the £5,000 budgeted in the Town Enhancement Committee was for, and was advised that it is a contingency sum. It was originally budgeted for Town Plan costs, but it seems that they have sufficient funds for the purpose.

Malcolm Smith

Explained that he felt that this year's £5,000 budgeted isn't designated for any purpose.

Andrew Bourne

Referred to the name 'Town Enhancement' Committee and queried where the town centre is that could be enhanced, and was advised that it is generally felt to be the Co-op area of the High Street.

Richard Baines

Queried what the £6,000 capital in the Establishment Committee budget was for, and was advised that it would be used to purchase a franking machine, projector and cover any other unforeseen expenditure to do with the office computers.

Arthur Castle

Asked again what the £5,000 in the Town Enhancement Committee budget was for, and the previous advice was repeated in that it was for contingencies within the budget. And after he pushed again for a more definite answer, was advised that it would depend on the work of the Committee during this year, they may need to add to the funds for the Town Plan for example.

623. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A copy of the report, as appended, was copied to electors. The Chairman then thanked Councillor Saunders for his work as the previous Chairman to the Town Council.

Members of the public then asked questions.

Valerie Balderstone

Queried how hard we are chasing to get the work to put in the required mini roundabout near The Chequers on Queen Street, and was advised that we have been chasing and will now need to put pressure on Highways to use the bond they hold, as was done for Grange Drive previously.

Pamela Manfield

Pointed out that she wanted to see the County and District Councils supporting the Town Council as they have a very limited look forward to the new era.

624. GUEST SPEAKERS

MRS ANN CLAREY – STOTFOLD TOWN PLAN STEERING GROUP

Councillor Mrs Clarey gave a report on the progress of the Town Plan Steering Group. A year ago the Town Plan Steering Group launched 'Planning For Real' at the Annual Town Meeting. Individuals and organisations were encouraged to use the colour coded flag system to highlight issues both positive and negative within the Stotfold boundary. The larger than life maps were then used, attached to even larger pieces of polystyrene at Stotfold Mill events and at Stotfold Festival. The

interest that this consultation attracted was amazing and that together with the Likes & Dislikes exercise and the online survey for local businesses helped consolidate the focus areas used in the main questionnaire developed by the Steering Group. This in turn was delivered to around 3500 households during October and November 2008. The delivery and collection service which involved 60 residents resulted in a 41% return. Whilst the group would like to have achieved a higher percentage they have recognised that this number far exceeds any average for this type of exercise and to remember that each questionnaire allowed for up to 5 respondents from each household. The group are delighted by the number of families who have all taken the time to consider areas of importance to them, even to the youngest that have a strong opinion on what they would like to see in Stotfold.

A year ago the group appealed for a member of the public to work alongside the Steering Group as the questions were developed and with a view to heading up all the important data analysis. Larry Stoter took on this role and has produced a series of spreadsheets which will within the next few weeks have taken into consideration every part of every question. Not only has Larry Stoter impressed the Town Plan Steering Group but also the Bedfordshire Rural Communities charity who oversees Parish and Town Plans, they have already requested that Larry give advice to larger Towns who are taking on their own plans.

When all the evidence has been collated the group will be able to set out the full report, giving a clear message as to how the residents would like their Town to function in the short term and up to 2020 and beyond. Once the Town Council has endorsed the plan summary copies will be produced for every household to keep and to watch the progress. The full document will be available for reference and will also be forwarded to Central Bedfordshire, our main service providers, Parish and Town Councils near our boundary and our local MP. We will be one of, if not the first Town Plan published under the new Central Bedfordshire.

The feeling of the Steering Group is that they are anxious to produce a plan that is representational of the people of Stotfold and our consultations, whilst taking time, has been thoroughly carried out. As a group they have been invited to take part in the Green Infrastructure Plan for Stotfold which is evidence that they are already receiving recognition.

Councillor Mrs Clarey gave thanks to the group who are currently spending many hours entering data onto spreadsheets and in the same way the main body of the Steering Group have to be commended for the tireless way in which they have worked. Not only do the group hold regular formally minuted meetings on the progress of the plan but as the questionnaire was developed members split into focus groups and spent time involving the local medical professionals, the police, and environmental groups, etc. Christine Webster has kept residents informed through her newspaper columns and Claire Chouffot had allowed Councillor Mrs Clarey a space every month in the Stotfold News Magazine to keep people up to date with the progress. Thanks were given to the Town Clerk and her staff for the support they have given and the Town Plan has also to be attributable to the residents who have supplied us with so much information.

The Town Plan Steering Group are aiming for production of the plan later this year.

COUNCILLOR MRS TRICIA TURNER – LEADER OF CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE SHADOW AUTHORITY

Councillor Mrs Turner advised that at the previous round of local government reorganisation in 1995 they looked at reorganising Bedfordshire and as a result Luton was taken out of Bedfordshire County and become a Unitary Authority.

A Unitary Authority is where services are delivered from one body/Council. On 6th March 2008 Government agreed to two new Unitary Authorities for Bedfordshire. Bedford's existing boundaries will form the boundary for Bedford Borough Unitary Council, and South and Mid Beds will become Central Bedfordshire, the total population of which will be around 250,000. Bedfordshire County Council also submitted their own unitary bid, but was unsuccessful and unhappy with the outcome and so challenged the Government's decision.

Central Bedfordshire Authority will provide local services for local communities to achieve better access to services and better value for money. For example, there will be one Chief Executive and not three! Government has recognised that they have given Central Bedfordshire virtually no time in which to changeover, and Bedford Borough will in effect be continuing their services and taking on some of the County Council's services in addition. 40% of the County Council's work will go to Bedford Borough and 60% will move to Central Bedfordshire.

The current Councils will remain in place until 1st April, alongside the Shadow Boards who are making the decisions which will affect the new Councils.

All 124 current Mid Beds and South Beds Councillors and County Councillors for this area will continue as such until the elections on 4th June, which will coincide with the European elections.

The change is seen as a transition period rather than a transformation period. The scale of work to move services from three authorities to one authority is a mammoth task. Once Central Bedfordshire Authority comes into effect, these services must be transferred smoothly without any slips.

Central Bedfordshire Authority will retain the current Chief Executive from Mid Beds District Council, and will gain five new Directors from other Councils and the wider world.

The new Authority will be starting with a big overdraft which has to be paid back after five years from the legacies from the three authorities. Unfortunately this won't add up to the overdraft amount so will have a deficit.

With regard to staff, they obviously need the staff in place to do the work to transfer the services. Staff will be transferred from one body to another and their jobs have been protected if there is an equivalent post in the new Authority. If more than one person was available for a position they would select one individual for the job and the others can either be re-deployed or re-trained. Redundancy is the final solution. They have got rid of 200 posts, which will make good savings. There will therefore only be around 40 to 50 redundancies.

The new Authority will be working with Bedford Borough and will share management of services to make savings, such as County music services, archives, waste disposal, school transportation and archaeology.

Their funds will come from Council Tax collected and a Government grant of £49million. There will be a gross budget required of £500million, and net budget of £165million.

The Central Bedfordshire Authority bid said that they were looking to 0% increase on Council Tax, however they don't want to make cuts to services they provide. They have less income from investments and are looking at where to make savings without cutting services.

They would spend capital money on tangible projects and revenue on ongoing work. The Government has said that they can't use their capital reserves, but they can use it for any IT delivery

that is necessary – approximately £4.4million – so this has reduced the overdraft. They will be reducing the amount of money set aside for the growth factor.

Originally South Beds and Mid Beds had two different levels of Council Tax, and Mid Beds was 50% lower. To take Mid Beds Tax up to the level of South Beds would be a very fast increase, so they will ensure that the levels equalise after the end of the second year. They have agreed £31 increase over the year on the existing level of Council Tax for South Beds and Mid Beds. Next year they will do something similar again. By the fourth year there will be 0% increase on Council Tax. The Director of Corporate Services feels they will just have sufficient funds to keep going and to include money for the odd emergency.

Their Strategic Plan is now in place and sets their vision for the future. It is available to view on the Central Bedfordshire Authority website.

One of their priorities, as well as supporting an ageing population and raising aspirations of young people, is to establish how residents, community groups and local Councils want to work with Central Bedfordshire Authority. A meeting is being set up for local Councils for this purpose and is scheduled for 29th April 2009.

With regard to offices, Priory House will become the Corporate Centre, they will keep the Dunstable office and will use part of County Hall in the short term for up to five years if necessary. Melbourne House situated opposite County Hall will become the Central Bedfordshire Authority Contact Centre, and in total approximately 2,700 staff will be employed by the Authority – Mid Beds had 270. There will initially be home-working, hot-desks as well as permanent desks, which all needs to be worked out before setting out the offices.

The old Ampthill offices were sold when there was a very buoyant market, if they purchased it again it would be at a lower price, but they would need to know what their exact needs were before looking at buying it.

Councillor Mrs Turner advised that residents shouldn't notice any difference in services on changeover. All contacts should remain the same, but she will make sure that the Town Council has all the correct details it will require.

At their first meeting on 18th June they will elect a new Leader and appoint a new Chief Executive. The new Council will have 66 Councillors and 2,700 staff. They will have inherited a sound financial strategy, and if they adhere to it they will be ok, but there are worries that the Government won't give the finances they promised for next year. The national pay award increase is 2.75% and they have to apply it to staff salaries.

Members of the public then asked questions.

Keith Cooper

Queried why he hasn't received a response from the District Council following a letter he sent them in 2007, and was advised that in order to resolve his issue he would need to speak to the Town Council or the River Ivel Drainage Board. District Councillor Saunders advised that he would take up the concerns of Mr Cooper and try to resolve them.

Malcolm Smith

Referred to a point in the Chairman's report regarding the Community Leisure Centre project being caught up in the change to the new Unitary Authority, and also that there will be an apparent increase

in work load due to the changeover. Councillor Mrs Turner will speak to the Chairman to establish what the concerns are.

With regard to the Community Leisure Centre project, she advised that there is a capital programme from all the authorities put together, and they have to determine the priorities, which will include road improvements, and those projects which have been going on for some time. They are asking the new scrutiny committee to prioritise projects and recommend criteria.

The Chairman advised that he was aware that money has been put into the year after the forthcoming financial year by the Central Bedfordshire Authority for the project. Some may be able to be brought forward into the new financial year. Councillor Mrs Turner advised that she would make sure the project was not caught up as a result of the changeover, but couldn't guarantee where it would go in the list of priorities.

Andrew Bourne

Felt that Bedfordshire was the most unpopular area to live in, and asked what Central Bedfordshire Authority would do to improve the area. Councillor Mrs Turner advised that they wanted to make it somewhere to stop in rather than pass through. Bedfordshire has a lot of wonderful assets, it will shortly have a new Centreparks, and NIRA. They want to raise the stakes in the tourism arena and need to exploit our assets and build on them. Part of the charm of the area is that it is rural. Mr Bourne also queried how they will monitor housing growth, and was advised that they will need mechanisms in the Local Development Plan to keep the greenbelt areas. The Government wants to impose 60,000 houses, 20,000 of which are to be in this area. There are insufficient jobs in our area and people have to commute out, which puts pressure on the road infrastructure.

Pamela Manfield

Queried what the present situation is with regard to the gypsy and traveller site consultation, and was advised that nothing has been agreed yet. The Council is deferring looking at the current suggested site as the Government has changed the goalposts. She confirmed that Stotfold residents have put forward a host of good planning reasons why the suggested site should not be in Stotfold.

Valerie Balderstone

Asked if there was a definite provision for a replacement Hallworth House, and was advised that a new site has been suggested however it has restrained access and it is unrealistic to put 50 units on the site. The key priority is to provide a care home within the town.

Larry Stoter

Queried the substantial increases in District/County/Unitary Councillor allowances, and was advised that an independent board has looked into all areas of work by Councillors, and assured those present that they will have to work hard for their money.

Glen Rickwood

Queried what the land area for Mid Beds is, and was advised that the historic County of Bedfordshire remains, and that the area previously designated Mid Beds and South Beds will be known as the Central Bedfordshire Unitary Authority area.

625. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE FLOOR

Glen Rickwood

A letter from Mr Rickwood was read to the meeting requesting that the Town Council consider promoting and organising a 'Spring-clean for Stotfold' litter-picking event in and around the town in

the near future. Mr Rickwood stated in his letter that such an event would be more effective and well attended if it were driven by the Town Council, especially if its members were willing to participate. The Chairman responded with details of the 'Big Tidy Up' event that is currently being organised by the Campaign to protect rural England. This idea was discussed at a recent Recreation Grounds Public Lands and Lighting Committee meeting and it was suggested that local groups be made aware of the information available as they may wish to organise a litter pick around the Town. The Chairman announced that to date two local groups have expressed an interest in taking part in this event and have been provided with the information packs received from the CPRE which included rubbish bags, stickers, tabards, badges, gloves and posters etc to help promote their event. The Chairman informed those present that if any one else wished to take part in this campaign then they are to contact the Town Council Office who are able to provide them with the appropriate packs and support.

Pat Clarey

Informed the Chairman of the large amounts of rubbish that is currently littering the Hallworth House site. Aragon Housing will be asked to clear the site.

Mick Haskell

Advised those present that Biggleswade and the immediate surrounding area has a population of approximately 11,000 and Stotfold will shortly be coming very close to that number. Biggleswade has hotels, supermarkets, senior schools, a railway and a town centre; Stotfold's facilities are very limited as most of the old facilities have now gone. He asked if there was an opportunity to revisit the planning of the Land South of Stotfold to look at making more of a town centre area.

The Chairman advised that there could be changes for the Land South of Stotfold development that will include different retail type outlets. Discussions are underway with current retailers and developers to get something better. No plans have been forthcoming, and so the Town Council has not yet been consulted on plans. District Council Forward Planning Officer Trevor Saunders and the Local Development Framework team have been looking at the land to the west of Stotfold for possibly more retail outlets, bigger than those at present in the town, and there is talk of a replacement for Etonbury and possibly a special school provision. These ideas have only been muted for the moment, and Trevor Saunders is starting to do a study on the long term planning for that area.

District/County Councillor Street advised that the slow down in the development of the Land South of Stotfold means that the developers won't rush into the building and they can therefore look at changes to the town centre area – to perhaps include a new civic centre.

Valerie Balderstone

Queried whether there was any personal data on the computers which were recently stolen from the Council offices, and was advised that data is stored off site. CCTV and alarm systems have now been installed and are monitored.

Christina Turner

Felt that a 'Be Proud of Stotfold' type event should be held – tidy gardens, litter picks around the town, and get the children involved in some sort of week long event. Glen Rickwood agreed but felt that it would be more effective if the Town Council organised an event and that attendance would be much higher. This will go back to the Town Council to discuss further.

Alan Cooper

Explained that new people to the area think that Stotfold is a dormitory town, and felt that it was the lack of facilities that is to blame. We were let down in terms of Section 106 agreement money from new developments in the town. Stotfold is making a statement through the Town Plan to let Central Bedfordshire Authority know what we want and would therefore ask them to take it into account when considering the future of Stotfold.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked all present for attending the meeting and closed the meeting at 9.53pm

CHAIRMAN

DATED