

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE STOTFOLD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 22ND APRIL 2021 COMMENCING AT 7.00PM

Councillors present: Meeting chaired by Councillor A Cooper (Mayor)

S Buck	B Collier
Mrs A Clarey	Mr S Dhaliwal
Mrs M Cooper	Mrs J Hyde
Mr S Hayes	H Pickering
D Matthews	G Russell
C Phelps	
J Talbot	

In attendance: Mrs K Elliott-Turner (Town Clerk) Ms C Jenkins (Assistant Clerk)
39 electors who recorded their names

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the 2021 Annual Town meeting, the first held virtually. It was noted that the usual rules apply to the virtual meeting as at the normal Annual Town Meeting and the meeting will be recorded for minute taking purposes only.

759. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Central Bedfordshire Councillors S Dixon and B Saunders.

760. TO ADOPT MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 5TH MARCH 2020

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 5th March 2020 were circulated to electors prior to the commencement of the meeting.

The minutes were taken as read prior to them being confirmed and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Members of the public were reminded to use the raised hands symbol if they wish to ask a question and to unmute themselves when wishing to speak.

761. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING – FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

The Mayor suggested to move on to his Annual Report for 2020/21. Further question could be answered after this.

762. TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S ACTIVITIES DURING 2020/2021

Councillor Cooper read out his Annual Report:

It has probably been some of the most difficult times both the Town Council and majority of residents have experienced for many, many years. The Coronavirus pandemic has imposed hardships and restrictions on the whole country, some of a deeply personal nature, such that it will be many years before we again return to what we, until recently, regarded as “normal” if indeed that is possible.

Due to the 'lock down' periods and ever varying Government imposed restrictions and guidelines we have not been able to offer services from the Greenacre Centre offices nor to have open the various public buildings under our supervision around the town. Both councillors and staff have had to learn to carry on as best they could and largely to use electronic and 'virtual' communication for meetings and other functions. My thanks as ever go to all councillors, our staff and our contractors for their brave support during these trying times.

It has been heartening to see the support that has been forthcoming to those living alone, advanced in age or with other restrictions to their abilities who would not manage easily during the period without the generous input from local groups, businesses and individuals coming forward. Congratulations and many thanks to all those 'good neighbours' who have been so active.

The Town Council, along with many from around the town were saddened to hear of the death of Mrs Sheila Bundock on 5th January 2021. A shining example to us all of a good and caring member of the community who, during her 50 years in Stotfold, had involved herself deeply in many local organisations, in addition to being a member of the Town Council for around half that period until her very end.

Many planned events and activities have not been possible this past year including - Commonwealth Day on 8 March, VE Day on 8-10 May, Keep Stotfold Clean days 16 May & 12 Sep, Remembrance Sunday in November plus numerous Civic events around our area.

The memorial services for the loss of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, also had to be very subdued although I was privileged to be invited by HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis, to attend the Service of Thanksgiving at The Church of St Paul, Bedford on 16 April and represent Stotfold.

Planning for Stotfold's Future

A 'Corporate Strategy', now incorporating a 'Financial Strategy', has been prepared to identify the Councils vision for the town and, its aims, objectives and priorities for the medium to long term future. This will continue to take guidance from the original 'Town Plan' and also action plans from the individual council committees. The Town Strategy Committee oversee this plan to keep it up to date with identified modifications required and also taking feedback from the Town Plan Implementation Group.

A 'Neighbourhood Plan' is in the early stages of being formulated, hindered by restrictions of the Coronavirus pandemic, and is to involve members of the public alongside some Town Councillors on the Steering Group to look to future local benefits this may bring to our residents through more direct influence in the planning process.

Cemetery Developments

It was reported that we needed to plan for the long-term future of the cemetery and in particular the newer Garden of Rest towards the telecommunications mast at the top of the cemetery. Despite Council producing two drawings of modifications to be carried out it has proven exceptionally difficult to find contractors willing to take on the work. Meanwhile, we have also considered an additional area for cremation

interments to be prepared towards the centre top of the Beacon Area to grow closer to the recommended 50-year forward provision recommended. We have finally managed to accept a quote for construction of the additional area for cremation, with quotes for the required modifications to the existing Garden of Rest are being considered shortly. We hope that both works will be completed in the very near future.

Further new Defibrillator

Last year we were able to announce that one of the life saving devices had been installed at the Kings Baptist Church by The Green. Now, thanks to the generosity of the Eleemosynary Charity of William Field we have a further unit available to the front of the Memorial Hall just off Hitchin Road. The Town Council will remain responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of these in addition to the one at the Greenacres Centre.

Public Art (Greenacre Park)

The carved granite blocks forming part of this installation have recently arrived in the U.K. and we can hope to look forward to the full installation of all components during the coming Summer months for all to enjoy.

Transport Issues

The traffic calming measures for Norton Road are now in place with a speed reducing platform near the entrance to the allotments and a 'speed aware' warning sign on the uphill approach as you enter Stotfold from Norton. This was a matched funding initiative between Stotfold Town Council and Central Bedfordshire Council.

After a 15 year absence there are two reinstated bus stop positions in Norton Road. A further bus shelter has been installed in Hitchin Road and the redundant shelter at The Green opposite The Crown public house has been removed and the area tidied up.

Parks, play areas, play equipment

After many years of delay, final discussions near an end for open areas and play equipment at both the Prince Charles development off Queen Street and around the Greenacres and Trinity Manor developments behind the Co-op. These will become 'adopted' by Stotfold Town Council once remedial work has been completed by the developers (Persimmon Homes & Taylor Wimpey) and financial settlements have been agreed.

Stotfold Football Club have now settled into their new home at the Arlesey Road Park site and we look forward to the next phase of adding facilities within the park for general use by of the public in 'non-football' pursuits. Plans are well advanced for the design of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) plus further play and fitness equipment and landscaping. This project, costing in excess of £200,000, will be financed by Section 106 monies from local developments and is to be overseen by Central Bedfordshire Council on our behalf and to ensure that all legal and safety requirements are met. It is hoped that everything will be in place for permission and start of build to begin sometime from September 2021 and subject to the money due from the developers having been received.

Police matters & Anti-Social Behaviour

The main target of the local police force remains the 'County Lines' drug trafficking and use problem which remains an underlying cause of many other illegal activities, plus more recently the issue of 'cuckooing'. The Town Council, through its representation on the Stotfold Community Safety Plan & Bedfordshire Police and Priority Setting groups, introduce the concerns of Stotfold residents for their attention. We continue to support and finance the activities of the 'Youth Participation Team' to engage with our young people in an attempt to discourage them from becoming involved in anti-social activities.

Environmental Issues

With ever increasing pressure from a growing population and extensive development within the town we have a number of groups helping to preserve and enhance our local environment. The Teasel Group continue their good works around the Mill Meadows and beyond, while the Green Infrastructure and Etonbury Green Wheel schemes plan widely and in conjunction with our neighbours to both protect wildlife and create pleasant walking areas outside of the built-up areas. With assistance from other local authorities, including Central Bedfordshire Council we hope to use grants and assistance available for further tree planting both around the Arlesey Road Park and other areas still to be identified.

763. REPORT ON TOWN COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES DURING 2020/2021 AND THE TOWN COUNCIL PRECEPT FOR 2021/2022

The Town Clerk explained the report for the Town Council's financial activities during 2020/2021, including information regarding the Stotfold Christmas Lights, current use of the Simpson Centre, Investments and the General Power of Competence that the Town Council now holds. Additional information on grants awarded, free or discounted facilities hire and Councillor mileage claims were also included. The Town Clerk then explained the Precept calculation for 2021/2022.

A copy of the report appended to these minutes (appendix A) was provided on screen to those present. There were no questions from those present.

764. REPORT ON THE ELEEMOSYNARY CHARITY OF WILLIAM FIELD

As Chairman of the Trustees of the Eleemosynary Charity of William Field, Councillor Mrs Hyde gave the following report.

You should be able to see the Accounts of the Eleemosynary Charity of William Field.

These accounts are presented to you tonight because this Charity is for and accountable to the people of Stotfold. We have been fortunate, that in the past people such as William Field, Octavius Roe and Jane Brooks left money and land for the benefit of the residents of Stotfold. Originally these were administered by the Vicar and Church Wardens, but with the establishment of Parish Councils some of the responsibilities were then shared by the Town Council and therefore they are answerable to the electors of Stotfold which is why these Accounts are presented to you tonight, as representatives of your community.

The trustees of this Charity are 2 appointees from the Town Council, the Vicar and the two Church Wardens. The Town Council appoints their two Trustees who then serve a 4 year term. The Vicar and Church Wardens serve for as long as they hold that office.

You will see the Trustees listed on the Accounts sheet.

The Eleemosynary Charity is made up of a number of smaller Charities, which over the last 20 years or so have been amalgamated. This process has now finished and Stotfold is left with the main charities being the Eleemosynary Charity, the Roe's Education Charity (largely funded with money from the Eleemosynary), the Roe's Alms Houses, the Ecclesiastical Charity of William Field and the Roe's Charity for the Parish Clerk. Income for these is derived from invested money and land.

At present the Eleemosynary Charity is made up of 8 acres of land down Common Road. 3 acres have been returned to allotment land. The other 5 acres is currently being farmed for us. We are grateful for the work that Annette at the Town Council does on our behalf to administer the allotments for us. We are currently experiencing problems with vandalism, theft and trespass. To mitigate this, we have invested in gates and locks and are currently looking at putting more fencing and gates around the allotments. Unfortunately, we feel we must now put this work in hand, the cost is fairly considerable, and we will be dipping in to our reserve accounts.

We also own a parcel of land near Buntingford.

Our main source of income is derived from the sale of the old Brook Street Allotments where the new houses now stand, stretching back some way along the Brook. £390,000 was invested with CCLA an investment company that specialises in investing for Charities and Churches. That capital sum has now grown to £683,901 from which we are currently receiving approximately £19,000 a year to distribute to good causes in Stotfold and Fairfield.

This year much of that income will go on the fencing.

Over the years we have distributed in excess of £97,000.

Last year grants included the Need Project, the work of Stotfold Library and money to help young people fund education costs and trips, Pix Brook Academy, Scouts, Good Neighbour Group, Library and repairs to St. Mary's Church Hall and purchase of defibrillator at the Memorial hall.

Grants are made half yearly with the deadline for applications being the end of June and the end of December. Application forms are available from the Town Council Offices. If you know of any individual or organisation which might benefit from some funding for a project or a need then please encourage them to apply.

We are currently looking at our investments with a view to shifting our money into more tightly controlled ethical funds. We do not believe that this should cause us any diminution in our income or capital growth but gives us the chance to use our money to drive forward environmental, social and ethical changes in the businesses that we are invested in.

765. ANNUAL POLICE REPORT FROM BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE ON MATTERS PERTAINING TO STOTFOLD

Bedfordshire Police apologised that they unfortunately are unable to attend any council meetings or the Annual Town Meeting, or to provide any reports due to the

large area they now cover. They were not able to hold any community engagement events due to the inability of people to gather together during the pandemic. Future dates have not been set due to the current uncertainty.

The Mayor asked that a letter to express our disappointment is sent.

766. REPORT FROM A CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCILLOR ON MATTERS PERTAINING TO STOTFOLD

Central Beds Councillor B Saunders gave the following report:

Sadly, no Central Bedfordshire Councillors were present to give the usual report. It was noted that they may have been delayed on Central Bedfordshire Council business, and should they join the meeting at a later time, the report will be read.

767. GUEST SPEAKERS:

Councillor Steve Buck, Chairman of the Stotfold Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, on the process of forming a neighbourhood Plan for Stotfold.

Good evening everyone, I am Councillor Steve Buck, Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group which comprises three other councillors, Humphrey Pickering, Brian Collier and John Talbot.

Explaining the importance of the Neighbourhood Plan for us as a community cannot be emphasised enough, which is why the Town Council have agreed to invest time and funds to this cause.

We have a short video which should help explain what the Neighbourhood Plan is all about.

If you are interested in joining the group, please email the clerk to express an interest.

We are looking for people who can communicate with all age groups and also all types of resident from local businesses to social groups.

We see a benefit in making this plan and hope you get involved whether directly or in consultation when the time comes.

We have a packed agenda so I will ask that you take the time to watch the video and should you have any questions, please contact us after the meeting.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to speaking with you in the future.

A member of the public asked what would be the timescale for the Neighbourhood Plan? The timescale is anything between 3-7 years. The Town Council are keen to get started on this document and have already received an offer of assistance from Liz Anderson.

768. PRESENTATION OF THE CITIZENS AWARDS BY THE MAYOR

Nominations are invited for these awards each year to recognise the outstanding contributions the individual has given to the community of Stotfold, often on a voluntary basis and outside of their everyday occupation. Candidates may be put forward by, friends, colleagues or others who know of them and their involvements. Since the first

presentations some 10 years ago there have been only 30 successful nominations so those awarded should feel truly appreciated.

The Mayor presented each successful recipient in turn with their Citizen Award, congratulating them on behalf of the Town Council and their community.

Mrs Jan Gale

The first of tonight's awards goes to a Lady who, along with husband Les and four-legged companion 'sixpence' only came to Stotfold around seven years ago. Taking on one of our local 'ale houses' originating from around 1833 they faced the reputation it was suffering of having become a slightly run down 'old man's pub' that needed to move on into the 21st Century.

She was determined to succeed in this enterprise and to become a bigger part of local society as a whole so over those few years has organised and supported many events to do that. She, along with her team, and often involving her 'regulars' have carried out sponsoring events for local individuals and deserving causes including items such as marathon dart throwing, Christmas dinners for the Good Neighbours Group of participants, quiz evenings, numerous raffle prizes, collection jars and much else.

The pub itself has also become a more friendly venue for people of all ages who can go to enjoy a chat with friends over a drink or two or extend that to include a pleasant and reasonably priced meal from an extensive menu.

As the Coronavirus took its grip on the Country normal service was obviously not possible but she has supported many residents who were in 'lock down' isolation or simply feeling lonely with restrictions on their movements being imposed. She has made great efforts to provide a safe collection system or to make deliveries of groceries and meals to many people in the community which has been widely appreciated. She has also set up mornings and activities for mothers and tots –

Please join with me in showing our appreciation to Mrs Jan Gale of The Stag public house.

Roger Watson

The person nominated to receive our second award of this evening is both a member of the local 'Teasel Group' as well as a volunteer at the Stotfold Water Mill where he additionally runs the Archive Group.

He coordinates, with the minimum amount of fuss, the activities of the Teasel Group at both Stotfold Mill Nature Reserve and at other green spaces around Stotfold such as Centenary Wood and the Community Orchard behind Etonbury School. He puts a huge amount of his time and effort into making sure these facilities are in the best possible condition for members of the public to enjoy.

His cheerful nature and enthusiasm have helped significantly raise the number of volunteers for Teasel over the last few years. Being extremely unassuming he is popular with all those he works and deals with and handles all responsibilities with a light touch.

During the pandemic period he has gone to great lengths to ensure that any work groups have operated in a Covid-safe way which has reassured members, many in the more 'senior' age category, of their well-being.

At all times, and even more so during the Coronavirus pandemic period, the 'green lungs' these open spaces create for our residents are recognised as important for both our physical and mental wellbeing and also as an introduction to nature for younger members of society. Although not a Stotfold resident it was felt that this person's great input towards the welfare of our town made him worthy of an 'honorary' award from the town.

Ladies and gentlemen, your appreciation please for Mr Roger Watson

Snowy the Cat

The third and final of this evening's nominations was slightly different from those normally considered in that the services rendered were done silently and with no praise being expected or asked for this Stotfold resident.

Those of us who have visited the Cooperative store during the periods of lock down will have been aware of the changes from normal such as hand and trolley cleansing facilities plus requirement to wear face masks and keep apart within the store.

The general mood during changes of Government instructions and restrictions became one of slight despair and grumpiness with many residents.

Something was needed to brighten up the mood and, as if arriving from nowhere, a little ray of happiness appeared at the store entrance. This was in the form of a four-legged big white ball of fluff who insisted on escorting people through the doors, only asking for the occasional stroke or belly rub from young or old alike.

Despite being regularly carried outside by staff he would guarantee to be back inside through the automatic doors much more quickly than they could manage and be ready to accompany another customer inside. Many a gloomy face of bored youngster was cheered up by his presence. This feline presence was greatly appreciated such that it was considered worthy of an honorary award for services to the town and its residents.

Ladies and gentlemen, your appreciation please for Snowy the Cat

769. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE FLOOR

- A resident asked does the Town Council feel it has a key role to play in co-ordinating activities with issues such as anti social behaviour, drug dealing, flytipping, keeping Stotfold tidy, and residents safety. If so, what has it achieved in the last year and what actions are planned for the next 12 months.

While the Town Council is unable to co-ordinate many of the activities described, we can take an important role in liaising with the authorities that can take action or have the legal authority to tackle the problems. For example, anti-social behaviour and drug problems are a matter for the police, as is keeping residents safe.

Flytipping is a matter for Central Bedfordshire Council, who not only clear away flytipping but now can prosecute for this act.

Our handyman carries out regular litter picks of the park areas under our control, including emptying bins. We have for a number of years invited residents to join the keep Stotfold tidy events. Turnout for this has traditionally been good. Unfortunately, during the Covid19 period, these events usually in May and September have not been possible. Residents were encouraged to complete their own litter pick of their chosen area.

During the year the town council acts on these on behalf of our residents by having representatives on the Bedfordshire Police priority setting group, partly funding of the Youth participation group. We have representatives on the Stotfold Community safety group, and on the Bedfordshire association of Town and Parish councils. We have representation on the Town Plan implementation group, which oversees progress on the original town plan, taken with consultation with residents and neighbourhood plan steering group. We also have in place a corporate and financial strategy to plan future objectives for the town, the Etonbury Green Wheel, the green infrastructure plan, and representatives on Scouts, Guides, Bowls Club, Football club and other organisations, as well as the Eleemosynary Charity trustees.

We hope that this presence gives a reasonable feedback to the Town Council on activities and concerns in the town. For residents concerns, our reception is open daily, sadly not so during lockdown, but we are contactable by telephone, email, post, Town Council surgeries or Town Council meetings. Council activities are advertised on our website, via facebook, on the noticeboards in the town and with our regular pages in Stotfold News magazine. Agendas and minutes of all committee meetings are posted on our website and noticeboards for public information.

Neighbourhood watch or Speedwatch could be addressed again, as in the past they have failed to remain active, as actions were not carried through by volunteers. Lack of communication is relevant to public expectations and what actually happens.

- Another resident asked if the Town Council would consider in the future a new road safety system in Mill Lane, Malthouse Lane and Wrayfields by extending the 20mph speed limit to the A1 junction and introduce weight restrictions for certain vehicles. Residents taking exercise are regularly faced with speeding vehicles. Trucks and vans are increasingly using these narrow lanes and together with the threat they pose to residents, the grass verges and edges continue to be eroded. Now that Saunders vehicles recovery yard is being relocated to Wrayfields, this problem is only going to worsen.

A few years ago Central Bedfordshire Council asked for suggestions for quiet lane designations, and the Town Council suggested these three roads were included in that description, as quiet lanes. The Town Council also asked for weight restrictions from the A1, but neither of these were acted on by Central Bedfordshire Council.

It is suggested that this is raised again with Central Bedfordshire Council.

Verges are damaged largely by lorries going to and from development sites in the town. Central Bedfordshire Council should be asked to inspect the damage to that area of road.

A request for a narrow humpback bridge ahead sign, nearer to the A1, which may help dissuade traffic going down this route. It was noted that these roads could have been busier in the last few weeks as Rook Tree Lane has been closed, due to Anglian Water works.

A 20mph speed limit could be difficult to adopt, particularly as the 30mph speed limit was extended, but there are problems with getting people to comply with this.

Councillors noted that a large lorry on its way to the Roker park development got stuck under the tree on the corner of Malthouse Lane and the Green. Roker park development should be clear as to the correct route for lorries to take to avoid using Wrayfields. It was discussed whether this could be included in part of the new Neighbourhood plan, if it cannot be classed as a quiet lane.

- A resident noted that the new ashes interment area at the cemetery now looked very barren and whilst there is planting there, it would be lovely to have some spring flowers in that area.

Work is to begin soon on the new Garden of Rest to replace the wooden sleepers with brick walls. Once this is complete, it should be possible to include some planting. This item will be raised at the next Cemetery committee meeting.

It was noted that the area behind the chapel has been left to cultivate bluebells and primroses and the area has been carefully maintained to enable this. It was noted that more could be done to introduce wildflowers in the cemetery.

Central Bedfordshire Councillors Steve Dixon and Brian Saunders both confirmed they had been held up with business at Central Bedfordshire Council and send their apologies for the meeting. Their report for this evening will be put on the town council website for information.

There being no further questions the Mayor thanked all present for attending the meeting and closed the meeting at 8.08pm

CHAIRMAN

DATED