

## MINUTES OF THE STOTFOLD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD IN THE MEMORIAL HALL, HALLWORTH DRIVE, STOTFOLD ON THURSDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2023 COMMENCING AT 7.30PM

---

Councillors present: Meeting chaired by Councillor S Buck (Mayor)

L Anderson	T Bhasin
S Buck	B Collier
Mrs M Cooper	Mr S Hayes
Mrs J Hyde	D Matthews
G Russell	B Saunders (CBC Councillor)
J Talbot	

In attendance: Ms C Jenkins (Acting Town Clerk /Assistant Clerk)  
Councillor Steve Dixon (CBC Councillor)  
45 electors who recorded their names

---

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the 2023 Annual Town meeting. It was noted that the usual rules apply for the Annual Town Meeting and the meeting will be recorded for minute taking purposes only.

### 781. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor H Wightwick.

### 782. TO ADOPT MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 3<sup>rd</sup> MARCH 2022

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 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.

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

The Mayor moved on to his Annual Report for 2022/23. Further question could be answered after this.

### 784. TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S ACTIVITIES DURING 2022/2023

Councillor Buck read out his Annual Report:

Well welcome and thank you for coming out this evening to my first annual meeting as Chairman.

What can I say about the past year?

Wow, it sure has seen some different and challenging times and some historical celebrations.

Firstly, I'd like to thank all the councillors here this evening and those absent, you have all supported us we navigated the past year, and I'd personally like to thank you all.

No one quite knew what the year had in-store for us however, we rose to the occasion.

Taking over from Cllr Alan Cooper meant I had some large shoe's to fill, and I have had to do a lot of learning rather quickly to navigate the challenges we initially faced. We as an organisation worked hard to cover these challenges and looked at how we were structured to minimise risk in the future, while we continued to deliver the day-to-day obligations, we have, I'd like to especially thank Gavin Elliott-Turner for stepping in and assisting us over the past 10 months that he has been here.

The Queens Jubilee came around and we as a community came together to celebrate this moment in history. Igniting the beacon up at the cemetery with so many of us there sure made me proud of the community I represent with my fellow councillors. Visiting some of the street parties around town, it was humbling to see that so many held the late Queen in such high regard.

We then heard of the passing of the Queen, another significant point in history. Having the honour of reading out the proclamation to the town of which a large number attended was an again immensely historic part of our towns history. The reading of the proclamation goes back a long way, as the mechanism to announce new leadership, a new king or queen.

Taking on this role, and with my experience from a much larger council during the day, I wanted to progress us to a more open and communicative council.

Seven principals of a great council,

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

We have increased our social media, begun a journey of discovery with our first residents survey which Cllr Jon Smith will talk about later. This was intended to see where we are, and where we need to get to. Formulating a plan of delivery in line with our strategic plan and aspirations of the town. Hopefully the next one we will see an improvement and this will again hopefully continue.

The war in Ukraine has impacted us in our day to day lives, bringing about a cost-of-living crisis which has affected us all in some way. We as a council brought together local organisations to assist those in need of sanctuary, not only from poverty but from isolation.

The installation of this year's Christmas tree and the Christmas light switch on event was a huge success, plans are underway on this year's festivities more will be revealed by the council in coming months. We would like volunteers from our community to help. Please contact the Town Council offices. A big thank you must go to Jo from the Stotfold News for all her much-appreciated help.

The library move consultation, which many residents fed back on was carried out, and while the controversy of this project was significant, retaining the library in the town benefits so many people for generations to come. The brighter space will see an opportunity for us as a council to engage and communicate to residents who would use the facility and the relocated Box of Cakes café.

In October we started looking at budgets and setting our precept. As an organisation we endeavoured to strip back where we could however, we need to maintain obligations for services we deliver like grass cutting and street lighting while being mindful of the economic situation around us.

While many have seen this as a rise in council tax, this isn't. It is a rise in the small proportion Stotfold Town Council get from the council tax. The precept is the amount that directly influences what we can and can't do in this town. So, the larger this budget the more we can deliver for our residents.

To return to the precept increase, it equates to £1.34 per week on a band D property which is relatively small compared to some other services we as a nation have had to endure.

We fully appreciate that when spoken of a 39% increase, we also need to see it in the real cost value to our residents, which is why we mentioned it as £1.34 per week or £69 per year.

We are looking into the funds we have and how we can use them more efficiently to allow us to deliver projects in the town, further benefits like rejuvenation of some of our older facilities like here in the Memorial Hall and Hitchin Rd changing rooms for instance.

This year's Civic service was a huge success with the integration of the Hitchin, Bedford and Milton Keynes Rock Choir along with the salvation Army band brought us a modern a more memorable service this year. Some photos have been playing so you can enjoy what this was all about.

Dawn Hollyoak our bake-off star baked us a cake which really did emphasize community and it was enjoyed by many those in attendance reflecting on what community was and is all about. Last year's Remembrance Sunday was amazing to see such a large turnout of all the local groups and residents.

We have embarked as I mentioned on this process of discovery, and I hope that those elected in May continue with this pathway. Looking into the finances, staff reviews and expansion of our team, while this does add to our costs, we actually have more control and flexibility pushing us to a more sustainable, efficient and friendly council. Unfortunately, timing hasn't been great but while we take on board everyone's concerns the timing has just been unfortunate. We really are proud of the staff we have and will continue to support them as we as a council evolve through this process.

Entering the pre-election phase and despite no certainty of if any of us will be here in the very near future, I would like to think that we have this past year delivered some change. Change to some may not be welcomed, however, we as a town have changed and so we as a council need to evolve to meet these new times and challenges.

With Arlesey Road Muga, Suto Ball wall and gym equipment being completed and the Riverside Muga regeneration also taking place this year.

If I can take something from this past year, I guess I could sum it up with the seven values I mentioned earlier.

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership.

If we are seen visibly then our community can have all these values and hopefully as a community, we can grow.

Thank you everyone, councillors, staff and residents for this past year.

I would also like to thank especially Brian Collier, who has devoted so many years to the council not only at town council level but at Mid Beds council back in the day. His information on planning will be missed, however Brian and Isabelle can now continue in their retirement, without having Brian to come to Wednesday night meetings.

#### **785. REPORT ON TOWN COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES DURING 2021/2022 AND THE TOWN COUNCIL PRECEPT FOR 2022/2023**

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor explained the report for the Town Council's financial activities during 2022/2023, 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 Mayor then explained the Precept calculation for 2022/2023.

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.

#### **786. 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.

It is quite remarkable, that one can find evidence of approximately 20 Charities that have existed in Stotfold and it is even more remarkable when you consider that Stotfold has never had one very wealthy patron, rather the money and land has been left by a number ordinary people going back over hundreds of years. I have read that Stotfold had more charities than any other place in Bedfordshire.

Over the years these separate Charities have been amalgamated and consolidated until we now have six. Each serve different functions and all are registered with the Charity Commissioners. The six are 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, the Roe's Charity for the Parish Clerk and the latest to be sorted out is the H.O. Roe Charity. Income for these is derived from invested money, land and houses.

The Eleemosynary Charity administers the Common Road Allotments and makes grants to organisations and individuals around Stotfold and Fairfield. In 2022 grants were awarded for equipment at Larkfield Surgery, equipment for Pix Brook Academy, Stotfold Bowls Club, Pippin Pre-School and Stotfold's Youth Club. Money was also put into the Roe's Education Charity where approximately £4,000 was made available to individuals to help with further education.

The William Field Charity helps to pay for the upkeep St. Mary's Church.

The Roe's Almshouses provides five dwellings down Mill Lane.

The H.O. Roe Charity looks after the Roecroft Centre and adjacent house and at present is trying to find enough money for much needed refurbishment work. The sum needed may well be in the region of £200,000 to provide disabled access and much needed up-grading work to the toilets and kitchen. Plans have been drawn up and we are now looking at grant funding.

These Charities are all run by volunteers.

These accounts you have tonight are for the Eleemosynary Charity. When it was set up it was recommended that they should be presented at the Annual Town Meeting because this Charity is for and accountable to the people of Stotfold. You will see that in the income section we received over £21,000 in income from our investments and we made grants totalling nearly £16,000. Our investments went down in 2022 but are still over £700,000.

Over the years we have distributed in excess of £120,000.

We shifted some of our money into more tightly controlled ethical funds. We do not believe this has caused 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.

Grants are distributed half yearly and forms can be obtained from the Town Council Offices, forms for the Education Charity are also there. If you know of any voluntary organisation or person who could benefit from these charities, please make them aware. The main criteria is that they are within Stotfold or in the case of the Eleemosynary Charity, Stotfold and Fairfield.

## **776. 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, due to the large area that they now cover.

#### **777. RESIDENTS SURVEY – REPORT ON FINDINGS**

Councillor Jon Smith gave the following report:-

This is the first residents survey that has been carried out, something that the Town Council now aims to carry out annually, to be transparent and engage with our residents. We had a total of 165 responses, which was a good benchmark to start and improve on. The Town Council aims to listen and take on board your issues to look at.

The recent Area 5 priority setting meeting was attended by myself and Councillor John Talbot. Police were asked to prioritise for the next quarter Anti Social behaviour, which includes drug use and dealing. Priority was also given to Speeding traffic in the town. The Town Council has its own Speedwatch programme, so if you would like more information on how to be involved, please contact the Town Council offices. We will be working together more with the other towns and villages in Area 5 towards the priority setting meetings. Thank you to all who took part in the survey.

#### **778. REPORT FROM A CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCILLOR ON MATTERS PERTAINING TO STOTFOLD**

Central Beds Councillor Steve Dixon gave the following report:

In the last 12 months since the pandemic and now during the cost of living crisis, the resilience of the public has been noticed. A great thank you is extended to Gordon Hamilton and all the volunteers from The Need Project, who are a credit to the voluntary sector, and Stotfold. Stotfold is proud and supports the Need Project, who also provide to families in need over farther parts of Central Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire.

It is business as usual at Central Bedfordshire, after the Pandemic and during the cost of living crisis. 70% of funding from Central Bedfordshire Council goes into Adult and Childrens Care. It is noted that schools are now evolving. The old Roecroft school field is now most certainly to be part of the Academy of Central Bedfordshire, as part of their 125 year lease. This means that no development will be on this site, which will be left to be maintained by the Academy.

It was very disappointing to lose the appeal against the decision to refuse and grant planning permission off Arlesey Road. At one point it was thought we had grounds for judicial review of the decision, but unfortunately that was not the case, and permission went through. The new levelling up bill will hopefully provide comfort and protection from unwanted development.

The problems in the NHS have a huge impact on local residents. There have been concerns about the Larksfield Surgery and talks on how this is evolving back to a more manageable level. The local MP, Mr Richard Fuller is concerned about this. There has been reliable information that 3 new doctors are to be appointed to the surgery.

It was great to see Stotfold take up the offer of the new EV charging points. The full infrastructure is not quite there yet, it still has a way to go.

Great to see new Bike stand at the parade of shops.

Looking forward to the Library move to the Greenacre Centre in 2024.

Completion of the new roundabout at The Green is very soon, but weather driven.

New white lining has been completed. Potholes have been mended around the town. The numbers have gone from +40 to -13. Residents do not realise that most of the work on a pot hole goes on further below the surface level. Central Bedfordshire council have doubled their machines to fix the potholes and it was noted to record any new holes on the "Fix my Street " App.

Central Bedfordshire Councillors also stated they have £25,000 available in grants, Councillor Steve Dixon stated that both he and Councillor Brian Saunders have a personal grant allowance of £2000 each.

Central Bedfordshire Council have all out Elections in May 2023. Councillor Brian Saunders has decided to stand down as a Central Bedfordshire Councillor. The ward is one of the largest in Central Bedfordshire, covering Langford, Astwick, Fairfield and Stotfold. Councillor Steve Dixon has been so pleased to work with him over the years as a colleague and mentor.

**Question from the public regarding Traffic increase:-**

The A507 traffic is getting busier. It is noted while there is no Neighbourhood Plan, most of the development of the roads have been by appeal and not willingly granted. 40% of the Stotfold community are commuting, predominantly south. It was thought during lockdown that the A507 area would be deserted, but this was not the case with many local residents working remotely. Mitigation is in place, as with the Black cat roundabout, the junction management consists of a through road and flyover.

Central Beds Council encourage sustainability in their scheme "Active in Travel" promoting Car Sharing. It was noted that during the school holidays there is a 20% reduction in traffic volume. It is now deemed to easy to just use the car for transport. It will hopefully be down to the next generation to change this.

**Question from the public regarding electric scooters, are these legal or illegal to use on Highways:-**

Councillor Steve Dixon stated that he had recently spoken to the Chief Constable of Bedfordshire Police. Technically they are illegal other than being ridden on private land. Again the infrastructure for these is not properly in place, so while the trials for scooters have been allowed, they are still deemed illegal on the highway. Whilst they do aid the push to less car traffic, without the correct infrastructure in place, they are a danger to use.

**779. GUEST SPEAKERS:**

The Mayor introduced this years guest speakers, Chris Hobbs and Catherine Chris from the Revlvel Association to talk about the River Ivel which runs through Stotfold, and the worrying concerns about low water levels on the chalk streams.

To main aim is to revive the flow in the upper River Ivel  
This used to be 6metres, deep and very active in days gone by  
Now there is virtually No flow.

Stotfold is deemed very lucky. There are 225 chalk streams in the world. 4 of these flow through Stotfold. The River Ivel rises in Baldock, the Pix Brook rises in Letchworth. There is also the River His and the Cat Ditch which flows into the Ivel.

These rivers are rare and precious, with very pure, high-quality water. It is therefore not surprising that the water companies take a lot of water from these rivers. This leads to insufficient water in the aquifer to percolate to the surface and provide headwater for the chalk stream. In the upper reaches of the streams it is shallow, whilst downstream there is more water and flow in the river. This is mainly due to recycled sewage water joining the river from the nearby treatment works. Letchworth Sewage Works adds 10 million litres a day to the River Ivel.

At this point, the RevIvel Association played a short film to those attending.

The next aim is to implement the findings of the report and let the river flow. With wider resources and desk and feasibility studies carried out by consultants, together with knowledge from the John Lawson report, it is hoped that the water levels will flow correctly.

Having great support from the Community, Council and Councillors, local businesses plus membership greatly helps, hoping that there is no threat to a secure future for the Chalk Streams.

Thank you for your co-operation and support.

#### **780. 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.

#### **Kayleigh and Eva Clark**

Kayleigh and Eva are both members of 4th Stotfold Brownies, and during November they decided to try and help keep their town clean, whilst raising funds for charity, and so undertook litter picking across the town. They managed to collect a significant amount of litter, and whilst promoting girl guiding, they did a great job in raising £203 for Children in Need.

It is great to see our younger residents stepping forward to help improve their town, and raising funds for a good cause, and it is for this reason that they were recognised with the Citizens Award.

#### **Bob Werrett**

Over the last couple of decades, Bob has orchestrated and lead the Silver Birch Avenue Christmas Lights switch on event. He has managed to encourage his fellow Silver Birch Avenue residents to put up Christmas Lights outside their houses, and



to synchronise their switch on for the event itself. Residents also put on refreshments, with money raised at the event going to charity.

### **Linda Preston & Sue Dunne**

Linda Preston and her sister Sue Dunne, two Stotfold residents, meet-up every day at 6am and collect litter from across Stotfold. They started litter picking just before the first lockdown and have continued it tirelessly every day since, the only exception is when it is hammering down with rain!

During the course of my town council work emptying bins and litter picking our recreation grounds, I often come across these ladies, who are friendly and extremely hard working, and I would like to see their community spirit recognised through the council's award.

## **781. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE FLOOR**

- **How to reduce the increase in traffic, air pollution and carbon in house building.** Stotfold Town Council are working on a Neighbourhood plan to have a developed plan in place for the future. This will benefit the town by addressing both air pollution and traffic management.

The Local plan has been published by Central Bedfordshire Council and covers issues with air quality. There are only 2 areas in central Bedfordshire that have cause for concern, the roundabout at Sandy and Ampthill. Air quality is also looked at in the Central Bedfordshire design guide with a view to being net zero by 2030 and carbon neutral between 2030 – 2040.

It was noted that St Marys School had recently become one of 8 schools in the country to become a carbon neutral school. It is currently at the evolution stage and has had ground source heating installed under the school field to keep the school insulated and energy efficient by taking heat from the ground through bore holes.

- **Traffic on the A507**  
Increased traffic is causing concerns on the A507. It has been noted the increased build up of traffic, particularly around the Norton Road 5 spur roundabout. It was also noted that traffic is diverted through the town if there is ever a need to close the A507.

Traffic volumes are monitored predominately by the Highways Agency and Central Bedfordshire Council, although Stotfold Town Council can input into this. Recently the Town Council has implemented traffic watch to monitor traffic to 20mph in the town. The Town Council has 15 volunteer members, all who are keen to aid for a safer community for the 13,000 residents of Stotfold. To do this, the Council needs help.

Residents commented that infrastructure in the town was not enough for the increased housing. This was in general agreement and Stotfold Town Council would continue to press Central Bedfordshire Council and Central Government on this matter.

It was also noted that the land parcels on the Greenacre estate that were originally earmarked as employment land were still vacant. It was also thought that if a company based in Stotfold could look to employ residents, this would avoid many peoples commute.

- **Increase in Precept**

Residents noted the 39% increase in the precept this year. This was then equated to £1.34 per week on a Band D property, roughly the cost of a small bottle of water. Costs for everything are on the increase. The Town Council itself has obligations to meet and increases in costs for streetlighting and grounds maintenance has seen the need for the increase.

It was noted that the Town Council would be evolving over the next few years, with the possibility of hiring more staff to bring the grounds maintenance service, in house.

It was also noted by residents that there was no police presence at the Annual Town Meeting.

- **River Ivel**

With a view to the presentation tonight from revivel, a resident asked how the watermill worked if there was insufficient water flow. It was noted that a sluice gate is opened a day before each mill run. This is then left to recharge for the next time.

It was asked how Affinity Water can dump sewage into the river Ivel, near the nature reserve. It was thought that the sewage comes from the Baldock Services. Representatives from revivel stated they were monitoring this as the Environment Agency has had funding cut and are short of people.

A resident asked for some microphones to be purchased for the Annual Town Meeting next year.

- **Library re-location**

A resident asked what decision had been made over the vacant building, after the Library moves to the Greenacre Centre in 2024. Councillors stated that no decision had been made, or will be made until the building is vacant.

Further to the local elections, a very special thank you was extended to Councillors Steve Dixon and Brian Saunders for all their service to the town as Central Bedfordshire Councillors.

- **Neighbourhood Plan**

The Town Council is keen to work on a new Neighbourhood Plan but would need volunteers from the community to help.

The last town plan was published in 2009 and took 3 years of work to complete. The newer Neighbourhood plan would need to be taken into consideration by developers and adhered to, as it is classed as a legal document. The document would also look at growth, where employment would be needed and what types, and how to develop this.

There being no further questions the Mayor thanked all present for attending the meeting and closed the meeting at 8.58pm

**CHAIRMAN**

**DATED**