

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, GREENACRE CENTRE ON WEDNESDAY 5th JULY 2023 AT 7.00PM

Committee Members present:

S Buck - Chairman, L Anderson, T Bhasin, Mrs M Cooper, S Dhaliwal, S Hayes, Mrs J Hyde, D Matthews, B Saunders, J Smith, J Talbot, H Wightwick (CBC Councillor).

Also present:

Ms Caroline Jenkins – Acting Clerk, Mrs K Woodfine, Central Beds Council Ward Member.

120/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

121/23 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none. Members were reminded that if at any time during the meeting they feel they have an interest in an item being discussed, they should declare it at that point.

122/23 MAYORS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CIVIC ATTENDANCE

These were noted by members.

123/23 PUBLIC SECTION

None present.

124/23 CLERKS REPORT, CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED & MATTERS ARISING FOR INFORMATION

The Acting Clerk drew councillors attention to the information received from Central Bedfordshire Council regarding Schools for the Future SFF.

125/23 COUNCIL MINUTES

Members were asked to note and sign as a correct record, the minutes of the Council meeting held on Wednesday 7th June 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on Wednesday 7th June 2023 be taken as read and confirmed and signed as a correct record.

126/23 CO-OPTION OF COUNCILLOR

The members of the Council were addressed by Mr Nigel Venneear, to state why he should be co-opted as a councillor to Stotfold Town Council.

RESOLVED that Councillor Nigel Venneear be co-opted to Stotfold Town Council.

127/23 STOTFOLD FAYRE

Members had invited Mr Seb Evans to speak to them about holding a future new Fayre in Stotfold. Sadly, Mr Evans did not arrive during the duration of the meeting. Councillors expressed their disappointment but stated that the Towns community and volunteers were very much invested in the Stotfold Mill Events each year. It was

agreed that until Mr Evans could explain fully how this event would be run, staffed and managed, members were very unlikely to grant use of the green spaces in Stotfold.

128/23 REPORTS

a) Final Central Beds Council Ward Member Report

Councillor Kathryn Woodfine:

- CB/23/01673/SECM: Planning application land south of Arlesey Road. request has been made for an amendment, paying less 106 money and changing final delivery plans. Affordable care home has been reinstated, decision to be finalised next week.
- CB/23/01561/OUT: planning application – resident has already complained about this.

It was noted that the schools for the future program has sadly been paused for the Stotfold and Shefford areas. Stotfold and Shefford areas are the worst affected.

The finance is not there for this project. It was felt that correct budgeting has not been carried out for 4 years.

Blame was put on the previous Central Bedfordshire Council administration for failing to budget correctly and Covid for the slowing of house building, so not as many places school places were forecast. Schools at the time were asked ideally what they wanted from the project, not what they needed, so some were given more than the minimum need. it was reported there would be a full investigation into this over the summer, with an update in the Autumn.

Members expressed their huge disappointment for Stotfold. Councillor Woodfine agreed but it was felt to raise the problems now, rather than wait until the beginning of the school holidays later in July to publicise the problem.

It was raised that house building didn't stop during Covid, just slowed. Covid also produced a "baby boom" and it was pointed out that in 3-4 years' time, there would be great need to primary school places.

Members were particularly concerned regarding a recent letter regarding the pausing of the scheme that implied no agreement or discussion had been had during any committee or Full Council meeting. This was deemed as a large project for Central Bedfordshire Council, and it seems there is no democratic decision.

It was stated that the Director of children's services and the Lead on buildings schools for the future made this decision, following constitutional advice. Due to the fact this is a pause and not a stop for this project, it was announced without going to Full Council meeting.

Members disagreed with this statement and stated this was a travesty for this town. In 2022, the Town Council was visited by Victor Wan, who explained the position Stotfold is in. Houghton Regis and Biggleswade have property boom going on, but so does Stotfold and we now have school places diminishing

significantly. A proposal was made, which has now been paused. Members asked if building of more homes would be paused in Stotfold? Councillor Woodfine stated that there was not much building going on at present, and one of the reasons for the pause is the changing financial situation, the budget available and the raise in the cost of lending. This is not an ideal time to borrow money. Interest rates are sky high at present. Rather than saddle residents with debt, it was stated to take a 6 month "breathing period".

It was felt that rather than saddling the next generation with debt, this will leave them with a struggle in provision for education.

It was noted that the Arlesey Cross development will include a new school. Members stated that there were in fact plenty of houses being built in the north of Stotfold, but not at the rate forecast in 2019. All current planning permissions for housing were noted to be underway, so it was stated that the families with children would be moving in soon, with no new provision for school spaces.

Members stated there was a flaw with the plan in general, when development is being allowed to continue and pausing the provision for school places will cause even more problems.

It was pointed out that no-one was happy about the current situation, but Councillor Woodfine stated that generally it was felt better to pause in this situation than to charge ahead in uncertainty.

It was noted that Stotfold is one of the worst hit areas, and that members felt that Stotfold was always at the back of the queue for everything. This is not the answer that Ward members wanted to give, but sadly the answer now was not to proceed by accruing debt. Other areas in the area were deemed further forward in the consultation process and therefore could not be paused.

The schools local to Stotfold had their validation process completed last year and were waiting on the outcome. Our ward members were ultimately informed by officers from Central Bedfordshire Council, many of whom now had left due to the high staff turnovers.

Town Councillors again asked the Ward Members to represent Stotfold and fight into the autumn on this topic. Councillor Woodfine stated that she had been meeting with all heads of governors of local schools to push for this, but sadly had not had better news.

Sympathy was given to Ward Members at having to deal with this in the early stages of their new positions as Central Bedfordshire Councillors. It was noted that last year, Central Bedfordshire Council agreed a standstill budget and did not raise the council tax. This was obviously the wrong decision as this, and many other projects are going horribly wrong due to funding. There would be an investigation into the budgets available, but it was noted this was probably not the last piece of bad news for residents.

Town Councillors stated that taking a pause on this topic into the autumn would coincide with the budget setting period. Members were hopeful that honesty

from Central Bedfordshire members would raise the Council tax to plug the hole in the lack of funds.

All councillors agreed there seems to be a fundamental flaw in the process and department. Yearly we have been told by Central Bedfordshire Council that school place numbers are correct. Every year they are proved wrong. What needs to change? Possibly a whole review of the whole educational system in central Bedfordshire. Government may then intervene to put in order. Problems may be in senior management team, or across the board at Central Bedfordshire Council.

Highways Update.

Tansy Avenue/A507 - restrictions for no parking, closing date for consultation is end of this week. Councillors asked that it doesn't take 6 months for this to be actioned.

Greenacre estate adoption – there are still 2 packets of land to be completed on Valerian Way and Tansy Avenue. This will then proceed to Buttercup Road and then onto the estates off Valerian Way.

A snagging list has been started. There will be a meeting on 3rd August 2023 to discuss.

Councillors all noted the problems with the Larkfield surgery locking the gates to their car park until 8am. There is already parking restrictions on the road, but these are not yet enforced.

Applications for the new Community Asset Grant scheme are now open. The closing date for this is 25 July 2023.

Ward Councillors highlighted the Supplementary Planning event to be held on 17 July 2023.

Town Councillors asked that now Central Bedfordshire Council has an independent group in office, would this be time to revisit using the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) rather than S106 money. CIL money comes back into the relevant area to be spent, and the area decides how it should be spent. It was felt that S106 is not fit for purpose. Central Bedfordshire Council to consider.

b) Member and Nominated Representatives on Outside Bodies

- Councillor Liz Anderson reported that the St Marys decarbonisation project has started.
- Councillor John Talbot asked to be reinstated as the representative for the Stotfold Scouts. There is also a 2nd representative required which will be confirmed when the vacant places on the Council are filled.

129/23 ACCOUNTS

- a) Members considered the Expenditure Report for approval for July 2023 and the income received during June 2023 in the Income Report.

RESOLVED that all payments on the Expenditure Report are approved and are to be paid, and the Income Report be noted.

- b) Members considered the monthly committee budget report and bank balances as at end June 2023.

RESOLVED that the monthly committee budget reports and bank balances for month end June 2023 are noted.

130/23 ESTABLISHMENT COMMITTEE – 31ST MAY 2023

Members of the Establishment Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 31st May 2023 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee. The minutes were noted by council.

131/23 PLANNING COMMITTEE – 14TH JUNE 2023

Members of the Planning Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 14th June 2023 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee. The minutes were noted by council.

132/23 RECREATION GROUNDS, PUBLIC LANDS AND LIGHTING COMMITTEE, 14TH JUNE 2023

Members of the recreation Grounds, Public Lands and Lighting Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 14th June 2023 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee. The minutes were noted by council.

133/23 ESTABLISHMENT COMMITTEE, 28TH JUNE 2023

Members of the Establishment Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 28th June 2023 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee. The minutes were noted by council.

134/23 QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS ON ITEMS ARISING FROM THE MEETING

Members noted that the Council are currently advertising for 2 new councillors to fill our vacancies on the Council.

135/23 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Under section 3d of Standing Orders, the Chairman proposed that the press and public are temporarily excluded whilst matters pertaining to confidential issues and staffing matters are discussed and that they be instructed to withdraw from the meeting for the following agenda items. Non-committee members are also required to leave the meeting during the following confidential agenda items.

136/23 STAFFING MATTERS

Members continued to discuss staffing matters with press and public not present.

137/23 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

Pix Brook Bridge – there is debris on the side of the Pix Brook, by the bridge on Brook Street.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.21pm.

MINUTES APPROVED (date):

SIGNED BY CHAIRMAN: