

MINUTES OF THE STOTFOLD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD IN THE OAK HALL, GREENACRE CENTRE, STOTFOLD ON THURSDAY 3rd MARCH 2022 COMMENCING AT 7.00PM

Councillors present: Meeting chaired by Councillor A Cooper (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: Mrs K Elliott-Turner (Town Clerk) Ms C Jenkins (Assistant Clerk)
Councillor Steve Dixon (CBC Councillor)
37 electors who recorded their names

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the 2022 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.

770. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Dhailwal.

771. TO ADOPT MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 22nd APRIL 2021

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Thursday 22nd April 2021 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.

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

The Mayor suggested to move on to his Annual Report for 2021/22. Further question could be answered after this.

773. TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S ACTIVITIES DURING 2021/2022 Councillor Cooper read out his Annual Report:

Since my last report, the town and its inhabitants have moved into the second year of restrictions and difficulties caused by the Coronavirus pandemic with its evolving variations. Our deepest sympathy goes to all those suffering losses, both financial and more personal, during this awful period.

On a more positive note, we have seen continued local support from both individual 'good neighbours' and organisations for those living alone, advanced in age or with other restrictions to their abilities and remain very grateful to them all.

The Town Council have been obliged to hold a combination of virtual meetings and also make use of delegated responsibilities to keep the various wheels in motion. The main offices have, along with all other STC buildings, been out of bounds to the public meaning that a large amount of rental income has been lost and, more importantly, those amenities have not been available for use. Our staff have been enabled to work remotely from home until recently but throughout have been contactable by telephone, e-mail or mail to answer queries from the public and have tried to provide as good a service as possible.

RETIREMENT – In December, after almost 50 years’ service to the town, Mrs Margaret Clark took retirement from her post as key holder, caretaker / cleaner of the Memorial Hall. Her dedication and reliability were appreciated by many residents over those years.

The vacancy for a Town Councillor to replace the sadly missed Mrs Sheila Bundock was published and Mrs Talvinder Bhasin, having been duly nominated was welcomed as a Town Councillor at the June meeting.

Cllr. Bundock’s responsibility as Highways Representative has passed to Cllr. Russell.

Her role as Community Governor for Roecroft Lower School has passed to Cllr. Mrs Bhasin.

Cllr. Humphrey Pickering resigned his position in June to leave Stotfold and spend his retirement in the Colwyn Bay area, our best wishes were sent with him.

Mrs Elizabeth Anderson was duly nominated and welcomed as a Town Councillor at the October meeting.

FURTHER TOWN COUNCIL VACANCIES –

Cllr. Colin Phelps resigned his position for personal reasons on 4th November, thus creating a vacancy. We wish him and his family well.

Due to the untimely and unexpected death of Cllr. Mrs Anne Clarey on Christmas Eve a further vacancy was created. Anne was a valued member of the team for many years and a stalwart supporter of several local causes who will be sadly missed by all who knew her.

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW would be interested in joining the Town Council to have influence and give good local representation helping our community to thrive, then please contact our offices for more information or an application pack at the Greenacre Centre (closing date is 30th March 2022) –

Tel.01462-730064; e-mail enquiries@stotfoldtowncouncil.gov.uk ;

website – http://www.stotfoldtowncouncil.gov.uk/Useful_Documents_22464.aspx

ADDITIONAL DEFIBRILLATOR UNIT – The Stotfold Good Neighbours unit was delivered and fitted on the front of the Memorial Hall to give coverage of that area of the town, Stotfold Town Council are to cover ongoing costs for power, routine testing and replacement batteries. In June Stotfold News Magazine published a list and map showing positions of the 13 units now available for public use and the Town Council also organised two ‘Defib. Awareness’ instruction sessions in October which several members of the public attended.

PLANNING FOR STOTFOLDS FUTURE

STOTFOLD COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN – In March the Council agreed to produce this in conjunction with The Central Bedfordshire Safer Communities Involvement Officer (Daniel Till), Cllr's Steve Buck and John Talbot were nominated as our representatives.

Central Bedfordshire Council themselves adopted their own Strategy for 2021-24 which largely follows the local police force targets notified in my report of last year - To identify and disrupt the 'County Lines' drug trafficking problem including 'cuckooing', to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to monitor the emerging issue of 'Cybercrime'.

Stotfold Town Council issues identified were – Use of electric scooters on footways; road safety issues caused by shared pedestrian & cyclist routes; poor condition of footways around the town; parking of vehicles on pavements and grass verges.

As the NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP (consisting of members of the public alongside Town Councillors) is able to become more active following the Coronavirus restrictions then these community safety issues will be taken into consideration by them along with those raised through the former Town Plan Implementation Group & Town Enhancement Committee.

An initial public consultation has already been held on the current condition of play equipment and open areas around the town, particularly the Riverside Recreation Ground, so that a long-term plan for funding and development can be devised.

The Neighbourhood Plan (For Stotfold & Astwick) will incorporate all aspects of local residents' aspirations for the future development of our town and will, once complete and adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council, guide their Planning / Development departments in considering if proposed developments in or around the town give sustainable improvements that benefit our residents and their environment.

CEMETERY DEVELOPMENTS -

While the Town Council had been aware for some time of the poor and unsightly condition of the timbers surrounding the upper Garden of Rest it had proven very difficult to find a contractor willing to take on the remedial work required.

As reported last year we had finally been able to do this as well as get quotations to produce a further large area for 300 additional cremation interments. Contracts for both areas of work were issued, and that work is now complete, we have sufficient forward space to move toward the recommended 50-year target.

The resurfacing of the footways around the walled areas is due to be undertaken, weather permitting, before the end of March.

PARKS AND PLAY EQUIPMENT -

Further open areas for recreational enjoyment, including play equipment erected on them, are due to be formally handed over from developers to the Town Council in the near future.

The first and largest of these are on the 'Land South of Stotfold' development and include the large park area to the rear of the Greenacre Centre building plus many further green tracts of land within the development, legal papers have been signed and exchanged just a few weeks ago.

The second area is on and around the 'Prince Charles' development off of Queen Street which has had final remedial work carried out by the developers following a very long delay in reaching agreement and we hope should now be transferred within the next few months.

ARLESEY ROAD RECREATION GROUND - I advised last year that plans were well advanced for a new Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), including play and fitness equipment, to be constructed within this area. This is to be funded from Section 106 money due from local developments and is being overseen by Central Bedfordshire Council to ensure all legal criteria are met. Tenders from prospective suppliers were received and assessed towards the end of 2021 and we are hopeful that work will proceed during the spring of this year.

RIVERSIDE RECREATION GROUND – Through the year we have, through various media, asked for your views on the current provisions in this area and included thoughts on the rather neglected former MUGA situated there. You may have noticed some clearance work by the MUGA alongside its border with the former Roker Park football ground in preparation for more major work as part of the overall scheme of improvements?

A steering group are working with our Clerk to collate, bearing in mind the comments received from residents, a number of options to provide an improved Riverside site, welcoming to all ages and respecting its location alongside the River Ivel and surrounding open countryside.

It is likely that the project will have to be phased, possibly over several years, as we have to ensure that funding is secured to allow work to be undertaken.

PUBLIC ART (GREENACRE PARK) –

In September artist Tim Ward, who was commissioned to design the two areas of granite sculptures, had them installed on the park and there followed a brief ‘handing over’ ceremony attended by pupils from local schools who were then shown how they could function as human sun dials while also learning about the history and heritage of Stotfold.

Information on the metal plaques was provided by local organisations while various members of the community, led by Tim, assembled the colourful mosaics depicting aspects of the town.

EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS –

The Town Council, along with most other organisations and businesses in and around the town, was severely restricted in events they were able to hold during the period. With due precautions in place we were, thankfully, able to hold the Remembrance Day parade and service which was very well attended.

The Christmas Lights switch-on event, despite the cruel weather, was still well attended with the indoor ice-skating rink proving very popular as was ‘Santa’s Story Time’, Saunders organ music lifted the wind-swept spirits somewhat as did the fairground rides for smaller people and the hot snack wagon for all.

QUEEN’S PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS –

To commemorate this unique event the May Bank Holiday weekend has been extended from Thursday 2nd to Sunday 5th of June 2022 with events planned across the UK and Commonwealth.

In addition to these larger events, it is also hoped that individuals in our communities, both large and small, will organise their own ‘local’ celebrations to mark the occasion. Type and size of event is up to the individual as long as due consideration is given to others and they could be private or commercial.

There is also a call, under the Queens ‘**Green Canopy**’ scheme, to “Plant a Tree for the Jubilee” to help enhance our local environments.

What are your plans?

The Town Council is planning a beacon lighting ceremony at the cemetery and to brighten up the town with new planters and troughs with colourful planting funded by the Government 'Welcome Back' scheme as well as a Thanksgiving service to be held at St Mary's Church.

We also intend to identify places for planting around the town under the 'Green Canopy' scheme and are open to any suggestions from residents on suitable sites or for volunteers to keep an eye on the trees and provide them with sufficient watering in their early years?

Whatever you and neighbours plan we would be interested in hearing from you so that we, along with the Stotfold News Magazine, can publish a programme of events taking place throughout Stotfold and attract the crowds to make it a great and memorable weekend!

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

The Town Clerk explained the report for the Town Council's financial activities during 2021/2022, 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 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.

775. 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 A/Cs 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 particular A/Cs are presented to you tonight, as representatives of your community.

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 (comprising of 5 Flats in Mill Lane), the Ecclesiastical Charity of William Field (which helps to fund the upkeep of the Church) and the Roe's Charity for the Parish Clerk. Income for these is derived from invested money and land.

This year we have finally sorted out the legal status of the Roecroft Centre and the Old School House, in Church Road. These now have been properly registered with

the Charity Commissioners under the title of the H O Roe Charity. We are awaiting confirmation of registration with the Land Registry.

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. This year we have spent quite a bit of money extending the fencing around the allotments, because of the constant break-ins that our tenants were experiencing. That work is now complete.

We also own a parcel of land near Buntingford.

Our main source of income was derived from the sale of the old Brook Street Allotments. £390,000 was invested with CCLA an investment company that specialises in investing for Charities and Churches. That capital sum has now grown to £780,229 from which we are currently receiving approximately £19,000 a year to distribute to good causes in Stotfold and Fairfield, although this year quite a bit was used for the fencing.

Over the years we have distributed in excess of £100,000

This year grants have been made to Pippin Playgroup and the Scouts. Two defibrillators have been purchased, one for Pix Brook Academy and £4000 has gone in grants to help fund students in further education.

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.

Last year we reported that we were looking at our investments with a view to shifting our money into more tightly controlled ethical funds. This has been done and we do not believe that this has caused 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.

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. The Town Clerk read extracts from their presentation of the Police priority setting meetings with regard to our current Police contacts for Stotfold, the responsibilities of a community police officer, the current priorities and how the police engage with the public.

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

Central Beds Councillor S Dixon gave the following report:

As we hopefully see the restrictions of Covid-19 lift from the country, it seems appropriate to start with a reflection on what we have had to endure over the past 24 months.

The resilience and spirit of residents throughout Stotfold, CBC and indeed the country, has been incredible. The challenge Covid-19 has placed before us all has set new boundaries in our ability to adapt to fast moving circumstances and we should all take a moment to reflect on the fantastic community Stotfold has shown during this time. The work of the Need Project, the Good Neighbour Scheme and many other groups in the town has been exceptional and shown the true values our community has. But our thoughts are also with those who have lost loved ones to the pandemic.

The Ward of Stotfold and Langford has regularly been placed in the top quartile of cases shared with communities across the authority. This has been as a consequence of the size of the ward and the good behaviour of residents in being prepared to test rather than ignore the circumstances we have faced. Can we thank all residents for their support for those challenges and while we need to appreciate that Covid-19 isn't completely behind us, we hopefully are past the worst.

Despite the pandemics best efforts to distract our attentions during the past 12 months, the need to operate as many frontline services as possible has existed. From caring for the vulnerable to collecting the bins have had to continue regardless. We have continued to work with residents and Stotfold Town Council on planning matters in particular, in a period where planning applications have risen by some 30 percent. The CBC Local Plan has been adopted in the last 12 months and we continue to fight rogue applications despite the attempts of certain developers to bulldoze through their unwelcome schemes.

The commitment to a more sustainable CBC has also remained a focus during the year. More emphasis on active travel, such as the Pendleton Way, is gaining traction across our area and the missing links to allow connected walking and cycling options are nearly complete. A contract for the rollout of electric vehicle charging points (EVCP) across CBC owned assets has recently been let and this will aid confidence in anyone looking to transition to an electric vehicle. Indeed the procurement of all capital projects in CBC will now have a positive sustainability focus, as seen with the construction of Pix Brook Academy.

At the time of writing, CBC has just approved its budgets for 2022/23 and we are mindful of the increasing pressures all households are likely to face in the next couple of years. We have sought to protect frontline services and invest in opportunities to reduce long term costs to the authority. Plans for a new library in the town are due to be consulted on shortly recognising the role they play in more than just a repository for books. A focus on the co-benefits we can derive from such investment will hopefully be apparent. These decisions are never easy, but we hope the scrutiny of our objectives will be appreciated as putting our residents first and supporting the communities we represent.

Thank you again for your resilience and please do keep in touch.

778. GUEST SPEAKERS:

Councillor Steve Buck, Chairman of the Stotfold & Astwick Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and Jemma McLean , Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, on the process of forming a neighbourhood Plan for Stotfold & Astwick.

Hello I'm Councillor Steve Buck and I head up the Neighbourhood Steering team here and this is Jemma McLean from BRCC.

Jemma McLean

Neighbourhood plans have been around since 2011, so they are not something new. They are a progression of the parish and town plans, Stotfold's being adopted in 2009.

They are also a Statutory planning document, which focuses more on land use and planning rather than Town Plans that are community and activity based.

The community can set out their priorities for the next 10, 15 or 20 years to secure what happens in housing, land use and planning, and also preservation of green spaces in the area.

It is a strategic planning document with certain criteria to meet and a formal process to follow. Any future planning applications will need to look and reference the Neighbourhood plan.

Neighbourhood plans cannot contradict the National Planning Policy or the Central Bedfordshire Local plan. They can add detail to the Central Bedfordshire local plan with more local detail and knowledge for Stotfold.

The process is a big task, around 2 years to produce, comprising of 6 weeks consultation, independent examination and a referendum to determine support and adoption.

Funding is available through National Government. Volunteers from the community will be required to steer the plan and to help complete the work required

Support production is available from Central Bedfordshire Council who have their own Neighbourhood Plan Support officer and provide information from their archives, independent impartial advice and support.

Councillor Steve Buck

Thanks Jemma, two years ago Stotfold Town Council decided to embark on the Neighbourhood Plan route and formulate a steering group, then we had a pandemic which has paused the process due to the consultation not being possible.

Now that the restrictions have been released enabling us to do events such as this evening, we can now do the resident engagement that the plan is focus around.

Currently we have a number of councillors on this, Cllr Brian Collier, Cllr John Talbot, Cllr Liz Anderson and myself and the added bonus of a former councillor Colin Phelps, as a resident member.

Part of the process which Jemma mentioned is the designation area which we have worked on and finally decided (please see the map at the back of the room).

Whilst we decided on this, we did liaise with Astwick Parish Meeting and through conversations had found that the things that matter to us matter to them. Having only a small proportion of houses they could produce a NHP of their own however it was

thought that they could participate in our NHP as a collective which is why their Parish Meeting Chairman, Madeline Struthers-Palmer took the decision to come and join the group with us.

Currently we have our designation area out for consultation and once this has been approved, we will be looking to discuss with the community.

Neighbourhood plans can be short they can also be long; however, they are all unique to the area they cover and I think we need to take the time to progress a plan fit for the town something that we can use as a building block for the future and can adapt in time with the CBC local plan.

The task that we gave ourselves is a challenge and I would ask any of you here present this evening to commit some time to assist us. We are still looking at how this will develop and are in the infancy deciding what and how to do a master plan.

As a final thought from me on the table over there are some post it pads. please give us some ideas on what you like / dislike about the town. What areas do you see as needing to be protected or further enhanced? If you are new to the town what was the attraction?

The town has changed from a village into the town we have now and the future growth in the area needs to benefit the residents and enhance the area. For us as residents we can take part in shaping it.

Please sign up for assisting in the plan.

779. 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.

Mr Chris Hall

The first of those to be awarded this evening is to a relative newcomer to the town who has taken a practical interest in the cleanliness and wellbeing of our surroundings, particularly our remaining verges and hedgerows. Through another interest in photography, he records scenes around the town both on foot and by use of an aerial drone, we hope some of these photographs may find their way on to future Stotfold Calendars or produce cover shots for the Stotfold News Magazine?

During the pandemic crisis he extended his own efforts in removing litter from our streets and footpaths by personally funding the purchase of litter pickers, bag support rings and high visibility jackets which he then offered, free of charge, to motivate other residents to take part in their own chosen areas. This has been highly successful such that at weekends and evenings both individuals and family groups can be seen all over the town keeping our surroundings clean and pleasant for all of us to enjoy.

He still strives to spot other “hands on” activities required such as clearing fallen trees blown on to roadways by the recent fierce winds or tethering watering pots at the cemetery, so they don’t get blown around on windy days.

He has already contributed greatly to our community, and I ask you to join me in congratulating him as I ask Mr Chris Hall to come forward to receive his Citizens Award.

Mrs Mollie Jennings

The second of this evening’s awards is to a much longer established member of our community who, being a lady, I will only reveal was born in Stotfold ‘between the wars’ as Miss Davies. She has spent the greater part of her life living in Regent Street, sadly losing husband James, or Jim, in 1975 aged only 54, leaving her with daughters Mary & Kay.

Stotfold Bowls Club, then a virtually all male domain, was established on its present site in 1941 and our candidate became involved around 1958 when she strove to bring about the emancipation from their long-established rules as a founder member of the Ladies Bowls Club with her first personal competition win coming in 1966. Over the years she has functioned as Captain of both Club & League Teams, Ladies & Joint President, Club Chair and Secretary.

As well as being involved in the ‘official’ running of the club and competitions she helped in social events both for the club and in support of charity and worthy causes. For several years she has organised ‘Pink Friday’ cake and coffee mornings to raise money for breast cancer research, even persuading the Mayor to attend with his pink shirt & feather boa along with matching handbag!

She stepped down as Chair in November last year and in return for her many years’ service was nominated for recognition of this.

At their latest Award Night, Bowls England, the governing body of outdoor lawn bowls, announced the names of the single male and female nominees to be awarded a prestigious “Certificate of Merit” and our lady received the recognition she has truly earned. Last Saturday Mary & I were pleased to attend the Stotfold Bowls Club members celebration evening where a collection of over £600 was presented to Mrs Mollie Jennings.

I ask you to join me in congratulating her as she comes forward to receive her Citizens Award.

780. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION FROM THE FLOOR

There were no items for discussion.

There being no further questions the Mayor thanked all present for attending the meeting and closed the meeting at 8.17pm

CHAIRMAN

DATED