



THE ANNUAL SANDRIDGE PARISH MEETING

Held on Wednesday 12th April 2023 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT:	Councillors John Hale (Chair), June Reid, John Foster, Graham Leonard, Lyn Bolton, John Newton Davies, Janet Churchard, Geoff Churchard, Jonathan Maskell, Neil Harris, Jenny Roberts
APOLOGIES:	Councillors Patsy Cann, Jonathan Hegerty
ABSENT:	Councillor Sam Vosper
OFFICERS:	Simon Thwaites, Parish Clerk, Emma Hostler, Deputy Clerk, Stef Hayes, Community Centres Manager
IN ATTENDANCE:	1 member of the public

DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There was none

MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th April 2022, having been previously circulated, were taken as a correct record and it was unanimously;

Resolved

That the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th April 2022 be signed by the Chair.

CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

This is my first report for the Annual Parish meeting following my election as Chair of the Council a year ago, a time which has just flown by! We have seen some significant changes over the past year, not least of which was the death of our late Queen Elizabeth the Second and the proclamation of King Charles the Third as our new monarch, and your Council and Councillors have continued to work on your behalf throughout, and I will endeavour to pay tribute to these efforts in this report. So, to begin with I would like to thank the Clerk, Simon Thwaites, Deputy Clerk Emma Hostler, the Projects, Amenities and Community Engagement Officer, Rebecca Pannese and the Community Centres Manager Stef Hayes for their help, encouragement and contributions over the past year.

Open Spaces

The council has responsibility for the Jersey Farm Woodland Park and day-to-day management of the Jersey Farm Open Space. The former has been developed from nothing over the past 25 years by officers, councillors and volunteers to produce a leisure area which continues to receive the Green Flag accolade year after year. This year saw it host the very successful Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration, organised by Councillor Jenny Roberts and the Projects, Amenities and Community Engagement Officer, Rebecca Pannese, who worked tirelessly to ensure the day was well organised and ran smoothly. There was a huge variety of stalls and stage performers and the whole day was rounded off by a splendid musical firework display, much enjoyed by all who attended. The Open Spaces are managed by two of the council's committees, the Jersey Farm Woodland Park Management Committee and the Parish Environment Assets & Paths (PEAP) Committee and these, like many of our committees, include public members, so if you are interested then please get in touch with the office.

The paths around the parish are not the sole responsibility of the council, but we have made a couple of significant improvements in the past year. A new all-weather path through Skyswood has been laid to make this a more pleasurable route from Hazlemere Road through the wood to Sherwood Park. The path into William Bell open space from The Ridgeway, which was being damaged and made treacherous for all users by roots from neighbouring trees, has been re-laid by a specialist company. This provides a smooth and safe passage without damaging those same tree roots. The paths through the woodland park have also been upgraded in the past year.

Playgrounds

The council has several playgrounds in its portfolio, namely: Jersey Farm Adventure Playground, William Bell Open Space, Sherwood Park, Damson Way Open Space, Harness Way Open Space, St. Leonard's Open Space and Spencer Meadow Courts and Outdoor Gym. Throughout the year these areas have all received attention in the form of maintenance and new equipment under the auspices of the Sports and Recreation Grounds Committee. For example, the rugby posts at Jersey Farm were vandalised and a new set has been installed and these continue to be popular, particularly as they double as football goal posts. Most recently we have re-furbished the wooden sections of the slides at Spencer Meadow and William Bell playgrounds. There are plans to install a new outdoor table tennis table at William Bell open space, given the success of the one at St. Leonard's. A new basketball net for Sherwood Park and climbing poles at the Adventure playground are also planned.

Community Centres

During the year we said farewell to Martine Macrae, the long-serving Community Centres' Manager, and hello to Stef Hayes as her replacement and the two community centres have continued to be used by a variety of hirers. It was very unfortunate that the Ashbourne Nursery Group, who used Marshalswick Community Centre five full days a week, ended their contract last year. The effect of Covid-19 on the way people worked meant that many toddlers and young children were kept at home with home-working parents, affecting the viability of the nursery. This caused a significant drop in income for the Council and the Centres' Manager is successfully replacing this with new hirers. Maintenance work on the solar panels on the roof at the Jersey Farm Community Centre to prevent pigeons nesting under them, with the accompanying mess these birds make, has been successfully completed. Likewise, the cladding on three sides of the Marshalswick Community Centre has been repaired and repainted. We have also upgraded the security cameras at both ends of this community centre, working in collaboration with the District Council.

New Arrivals

No doubt many of you will have noticed that the new development at Oaklands Grange (off Sandpit Lane) has continued to expand its numbers over the past year. Many of our new residents have made their home in St. Albans after leaving Hong Kong and the Parish Council hosted a very successful Chinese

Fair at the Marshalswick Community Centre in February, where more than 2,000 people attended. Following on from this, a new resident has volunteered to accept responsibility for one of the raised beds outside the community centre on which he will grow only Chinese vegetables, which will be an interesting experience for many of us and I wish him well.

'Paradise for Pollinators' Initiative

One thing which has caught the imagination of our community is the brainchild of the Projects, Amenities and Community Engagement Officer, Rebecca Pannese. With the depletion of the pollinator population to the detriment of us all, Rebecca has initiated a scheme whereby we – the council and our residents – will plant any areas that we can with mixtures of wild flower seeds provided by the council, appropriate to the planting conditions. The aim was to seed at least half an acre with wild flowers to attract and feed our much-needed pollinators. The campaign began with very successful meetings in which the project was presented to over 80 residents. We now have more than 80 sites seeded and these include schools, churches, private gardens and parish land. In total we are approaching our target of ½ an acre, an area equivalent to 8 tennis courts, or 2023 square metres or 22,000 square feet! I look forward to seeing some of these in bloom as we move into summer. The council would also like to build on this notable beginning by adding more locations each year.

Grants

The Council always sets a budget for grants to local groups and organisations, from football clubs to churches to welfare groups. This past year has been no exception and we have supported a wide range of worthy causes such as Sustainable St Albans, 30th St Albans Guides, St John Fisher School, Sandridge 10k Run, St Mary's Holiday at Home and St. Leonard's Cemetery maintenance. I am sure we will continue to support these and other organisations going forward.

A Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space

Of potential interest and importance to Sandridge is that the District Council has formally identified the Jersey Farm Open Space as a location to benefit from third party (development) funding. The improvements to the JFOS will happen over 20 years and may include pathways, another pond area, tree planting, wild areas, welcome boards and more (possibly a car park). It is not seeking to increase visitors to the open space by any significant numbers but to provide local people with an incentive not to travel further afield for this kind of amenity. This proposed plan for the future of the open space includes the bike track being pursued by the Parish Council. At present it is still at the planning permission stage with ongoing conversations with various parties to resolve outstanding issues. We hope to see construction started this summer.

Your Councillors

It cannot have escaped your notice that there is an election looming for your District Council and this time it will also include the Parish Council as it comes to the end of its four-year cycle. We will be losing more than half of the current membership, some of whom have served on the council for a significant term. I would like to offer my thanks to John Newton-Davies, Janet Churchard, Geoff Churchard, Lyn Bolton, Neil Harris, John Foster, Jon Hegerty, Patsy Cann, Sam Vosper and Jonathan Maskell for their many and varied contributions over the years and to wish them well in their future endeavours. Your new Council will be in place in May 2023.

Graham Leonard
Chair, Sandridge Parish Council

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.19pm.

Chair

Date