

**MINUTES OF BIGGLESWADE TOWN ANNUAL ASSEMBLY HELD ON TUESDAY 28 MAY 2013 AT
BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBER, SAFFRON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE**

Present: Cllr Mrs H Ramsay (Chair), Cllr S Watkins, Cllr G Wilson, Cllr D Lawrence, Cllr M North, Cllr Mrs J Lawrence, Cllr I Bond, Cllr B Briars, Cllr R Skinner, Cllr Mrs W Smith, Cllr T Woodward, Cllr Mrs M Russell, Cllr D Albone, Cllr B Rix,
Rob McGregor – Town Clerk
Louise Wilcox – Deputy Town Clerk
Jan Durn – Administrative Assistant
Members of the public - 8

1. APOLOGIES

None received

2. MINUTES OF MEETINGS

The meeting received and adopted the Minutes of the Town Assembly held on Tuesday 22 May 2012.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Mr Bacon (MOP) complained about the weeds around Palace Street and the surrounding area and requested action by the Council.

4. ANNUAL REPORT OF BIGGLESWADE TOWN COUNCIL

The Annual Report will be presented by Cllr T Woodward

This year has been overshadowed by two events the sad loss of Cllr Peter Vickers and Cllr Peter Woodward. Both worked extremely hard for Biggleswade and the Council. Their presence in the chamber has been missed along with their sartorial elegance. Not only did they share a first name but both had the honour to hold the post of Mayor of Biggleswade.

After the by-elections that their passing prompted we welcome to the Council Cllr. Michael North and Cllr. Bernard Rix. Both of which have shown their value to the Council in a short time they have been with us.

While it is impossible to mention all the activities that have been undertaken by Councillors, the Town Clerk and all the staff, but I will highlight a few.

The Council took over control of the Christmas lights this year for the first time. This meant a lot of hard work for the Councillors and staff especially for the Off Street Parking Committee. Not everyone was happy with the display. I personally think it was a great start and the Council will add to it in the future. It is also to be remembered that if the Council had not done this there would be no Christmas lights at all.

We are more than aware of the need for more car parking areas and are constantly striving to find ways of improving and adding to this facility. It is of real concern to the Council but I believe I can safely say, please be assured that we will continue to seek a solution as and when opportunities arise.

We have also had closer communication with CBC and are hopeful for the future. We have stressed at meetings our desire to have more responsibility for our town and will continue to seek a way forward and we have now a Joint Committee between CBC and Biggleswade Town Council which meets regularly and is giving a real voice to Biggleswade at Central Beds. This is in addition to the work done by the four Central Beds Councillors.

One Highlight of the year for me was the Queen's Jubilee celebration that took place in June. It was a free event to the people of Biggleswade and was extremely well attended.

On the Civic side of the Chairman's work, I, with the Deputy's assistance, have represented our town at well over 30 events during the year both locally and in other areas of Central Bedfordshire. I have enjoyed them all and very varied they have been. Receptions, Bazaars, Competitions, Youth Units, Schools, Civic services and so on and so on. They were all most enjoyable, interesting, informative and useful.

As I said at the beginning it is impossible to cover all the activities of the Council, but hope this has given you a flavour. Hopefully it will offer reassurance, if necessary, that there is a vast amount of work carried out by Councillor's and staff, day by day that is unseen but essential.

I don't really know why we leave our thanks until the end, it just seems to be the way it is done. It doesn't mean it's of least importance, indeed we wouldn't be going anywhere without all of our employees. I must again express my personal thanks to our excellent Town Clerk, Rob and to Sue for happily and efficiently organising my diary and to Christine, Jan and last but not least our newest employee our Deputy Clerk Louise for all their goodwill and effort. To our ground staff, cleaner's and the Market Superintendent who also deserve much credit for all they do. Thank you as well to all the Town Councillors who have supported me, and more importantly Biggleswade, during the past year.

5. REPORTS

a. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2013

Summary of Results for the Year

The council achieved a modest (£23,000) surplus for the year, somewhat ahead of the positions anticipated at the time of Budget and Precept Setting in January. A significant contribution to this result was as a result of the adoption of a formal Treasury Management Policy in April 2012 to more effectively use the Council's (temporarily and permanently) available Bank Balances to earn a greater amount of interest. Interest earned on such balances increased from £474 in the year ended 31st March 2012 to £12,750 in the year just ended. The balance of the surplus was achieved by various cost savings where possible.

Major Activities

During the year the Council also undertook the following projects during the year (all funded from previously earmarked reserves):

1. Boiler at the Council Offices

The previous boiler had become unserviceable and was replaced with a significantly more efficient installation at cost of just under £21,000.
This has undergone refurbishment at a cost (so far) of over £43,000.

2. Cemetery Chapel

This has undergone refurbishment at a cost (so far) of over £43,000

3. Bowls Club Car Park

Has been resurfaced at a cost of nearly £9,000.

All in all a busy but rewarding year and the Council's finances remain in a healthy state to face and cope with the challenges ahead.

b. Public Land and Open Spaces Report for year 2012/2013

Cllr Mrs W Smith – Chair of Public Land and Open Spaces Committee gave the following report:

The Town Council workload increases year on year, and that of our Public Land and Open Spaces is no exception.

We are delighted to report that following Council's deliberations and discussions last year, we have now embarked on an apprenticeship scheme. We feel this is an excellent way forward to train our workforce for the future and our first apprentice is now in post. This is a full time position but for one day per week the employee will attend Shuttleworth College.

Our maintenance programme is closely monitored enabling us to more accurately forecast a budget each year. It isn't possible to complete all the work required as quickly as we would like, but we do track our progress and urgency of work so that we can progress as quickly as possible. Our extensive programme renewing and repairing play equipment, fences, pavilions and all the surrounding area has been maintained.

We also continue to carry out litter collections, grass cutting, hedge cutting and chemical weeding on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council.

Back to the more mundane, the weather! It has during the past year caused many difficulties with which to contend. However, our outside workforce are more than used to dealing with bad weather, particularly ice and snow, so are able to swiftly carry out safety measures at the start of a day particularly in areas of the town centre that are well used and our car parks. This we trust helps to alleviate some of the dangerous conditions that we are all faced with on those really bad days.

Last year we reported of the problems with the Cemetery Chapel in Drove Road and that urgent and extensive restoration work was required. This year we are pleased to be able to say that, in conjunction with the CBC Conservation Officer, we have been able to ensure that the repairs have now been sensitively and fully completed. We are pleased with the finished result and in the future the building will be closely inspected on a regular basis so that necessary maintenance work can be carried out as soon it becomes necessary.

After completion of this work we turned our attention to Stratton Way cemetery and identified issues that need to be addressed there. These are mainly to do with the brick buildings and the wall, so plans are now in hand to rectify the problems in the near future.

Referring to our various play areas: We are disappointed that after many years and many meetings regarding the children's play area in Brunel Drive, no progress has been made. We have never been satisfied with the layout and play equipment provided, but following liaison and discussions with CBC and the housing developer it was hoped that complete refurbishment would have taken place last year. Sadly, this hasn't been the case, but we will keep this item on the agenda!

Our report last year mentioned a problem we were experiencing with the Kitelands Road recreation field. This was brought about by changes made to the entrance without first consulting with the Town Council. It has taken some time, but very recently the entrance was finally returned to its original state.

The play area at Grasmere has caused many problems. Not only was the play equipment no longer fit for purpose but the very wet weather has meant that continuous flooding has prevented the complete removal of the equipment and reinstatement of the grass area. However, this will be rectified as soon as the area has completely dried out.

We continue to carry out tree planting, hedge replacement, bulb planting, hanging baskets and planting of flower beds at various sites around the Town. Thanks to a generous donation from

the Biggleswade Chamber of Trade, we have recently installed additional planters this year in Hitchin Street. These will complement and enhance the newly upgraded road and pavements.

Year on year we have to follow a programme of maintenance to the Town's trees that are our responsibility, to ensure not only their survival but that they pose no danger to the public. A priority last year was the trees that surround parts of Eagle Farm Road and we're pleased to say that half have already been removed and the remaining trees will be taken away or reduced during this coming year.

The wild meadow continues to thrive, improves year on year, and we hope it gives much pleasure to all who pass by. The allotments situated in a nearby area are fully occupied and we currently have a small waiting list. The site is inspected on a monthly basis to ensure that all is in good order. Council officers meet regularly with the Biggleswade Allotment Group, who continue to provide excellent support and networking opportunities for their members.

We continue to work closely with the Community Safety Task Group, the local S.N.T and our CCTV provider for the benefit of our residents. Our Town Council mobile CCTV camera should be moved to a new site once a month and is normally the case unless there are exceptional circumstances. This camera enables us to speedily set-up and monitor areas of our town, including on or near recreational sites, should anti-social behaviour become apparent.

We continue to work hard to keep the areas of our town for which we are responsible in good order, and are always happy for any feedback that will help us to achieve our aim. If you have a problem please do phone the office or speak to any of our workforce, they will be happy to listen and advise or refer your query on.

Our Town Council has an excellent workforce in the office and outside. We are grateful to them all for their diligence and hard work and all their efforts during the past year. We are very fortunate to have such helpful employees and we thank them

c. Off Street Car Parking Report 2012/2013

Cllr Mrs M Russell gave the following report:

This has been a busy year for the Committee. Parking is the major issue for Biggleswade, particularly for access around the town centre and commuter parking in residential areas. There is insufficient off-street parking in the town and the majority of it is privately-owned, which makes a cohesive policy difficult. The Committee and Council have spent much time and effort in seeking to work with landowners both to secure the current parking and to seek more capacity. This cannot be reported in detail because of its commercial sensitivity. It is difficult to invest money in some of these areas unless the car park is going to be available to the public in the longer term.

We have had some success in negotiations with Aldi. They have acknowledged that the northern part of the car park (behind Iceland) is for general use, not just Aldi customers and have agreed to change the signage. However, we have been unable to persuade them to increase the time limit to at least two hours, but preferably three.

The other high profile issue we have dealt with is the Christmas lighting in the town centre. The Town Council took overall responsibility for the lights at rather short notice but continues to work in conjunction with the Chamber of Trade. The existing lights were worn out and Council decided to lease lights rather than buy outright. Arrangements were made in time for a switch-on which was slightly later than usual but very successful.

Whether you liked the new lights or not, one thing that everyone seems to agree on is that there were not enough lights. Certainly we would have liked to extend the lights further along the High Street and into Hitchin Street. However, the display was limited by the amount of money available, which was in line with previous years. Even with leasing, the costs were higher in the first year due to the need to put some infrastructure in place. Costs will be slightly less in years 2 and 3 of the contract, allowing a small expansion of the scheme.

The OSCP Committee is currently researching all the options for 2013 and will make a recommendation to Council in due course. Council will then have to decide whether to go ahead with a similar display or whether to invest further funding.

On several occasions over the last three years, the Town Council has supported residents in asking Central Bedfordshire Council to impose parking restrictions to control commuter parking in streets near the station. CBC has put the necessary orders in place to stop parking on the lower part of Dells Lane, nearest to London Road. The police are monitoring the situation because some of the parking in the area is illegal. Town Council is still pushing for further restrictions, including the option of funding some of the necessary orders to put restrictions in place.

Finally, we are pleased that CBC have upgraded part of Hitchin Street and are looking at the possible reversal of traffic flow to assist trade in the town. The Town Council has contributed funding for benches and cycle racks and the Chamber of Trade have funded the flower planters. Other issues which the Committee has addressed include operation of the Saturday and Tuesday markets; upgrading of the New Inn Yard; CCTV in the town centre; problems with deliveries in Bonds Lane; the licensing of tables and 'A' boards on pavements; street cleaning and understanding how the CBC parking strategy will impact on Biggleswade.

d) Biggleswade Joint Committee

Cllr. Mrs H Ramsay gave the following report:

Biggleswade Masterplan

The £400k shared space / single surface Hitchin Street Improvement Scheme was completed in January 2013. After a few initial teething problems, it is now proving very popular with both residents and traders.

Empty premises in the area have reduced from five to two, and the Brown Bear Pub is considering re-opening.

Car Parking

Work is beginning on the Car Parking Strategy for Biggleswade. A brief has been developed and tenders are expected in May 2013 for a range of surveys for both on and off street parking. These surveys will give a clear picture about what parking provision is needed.

Stakeholder workshops are planned in the summer, and it is anticipated that final conclusions will be drawn in the autumn.

A1 South Roundabout

A £7m scheme to improve the roundabout on the A1 South is starting later this year, which will support expansion of Stratton Business Park, London Road Retail Park and housing development on Land East. Construction is expected to take 6-12 months.

Biggleswade Transport Interchange

Designs are about to be commissioned for improving facilities for users of the railway station.

Working in partnership with Network Rail and First Capital Connect, Central Bedfordshire Council is leading on the development and consultation process.

Sign off is expected early 2014.

Pride In Biggleswade - 20 March 2013

Partner agencies involved included Central Bedfordshire Council, Biggleswade Town Council, Bedfordshire Fire Service, Police Partnership (Bobby Van), Neighbourhood Watch and Biggleswade Community Safety Group and Aragon Housing Association.

The following results were recorded for the day:

- Operation "Your Numbers Up" (vehicle index plate security fixings) = 14
- Personal Attack Alarms issued = 18
- Home Security Light Switch Timers issued = 5

- Neighbourhood Watch referrals (potential new members) = 6
- Catalytic Convertor Marking Kits issued = 28
- Home Crime Prevention Leaflets delivered = 260 (Dells Lane and London Road)
- Smoke Detectors Fitted = 1
- Inappropriate Parking Letters sent = 10 (Dells Lane)

Despite the poor weather, the day was a success with reassurance provided to local residents and levels of awareness relating to Vehicle Crime and Burglary Dwellings delivered.

Special mention has to be made to those volunteer partners, Biggleswade Community Safety Group and Neighbourhood Watch, who turned up on the day and braved the weather to support this event.

e. Biggleswade Town Plan Steering Group – Mr P Jenkins

Biggleswade Town Plan Steering Group was set up in 2008 to deliver a Town Plan based on a series of public consultations identifying the services and facilities the people of Biggleswade wanted. The Town Plan was published and distributed in 2010 with the support of Biggleswade Town Council (BTC).

The group's role now is to monitor and report progress on the actions identified in the plan. The past year has seen a number of changes within the group, including a new Chair and Secretary, and a redesigned website is under development. We have seen a number of positive steps arising from the Plan, including:

- BTC's resolution supporting the principles of Fairtrade
- extended platforms at the railway station (although access and scheduling issues are still on our agenda)
- BTC and the Chamber of Trade working together to ensure the continuation of the town's Christmas lights (and we look forward to an even better display this year)
- the continued development of the Green Wheel
- the redevelopment of the London Road retail park, which will offer an increased choice of retail outlets and bring a number of jobs into the area.

Our focus for the year ahead is to engage further with identified stakeholders and community groups to explore ways to further improve the quality of life for people in Biggleswade, through face-to-face meetings, local media channels, lobbying and online through our website and social media.

f. Biggleswade & District Pensioners

Mrs S Grayston, Chairman

The Association held its inaugural meeting on 8 June 1994 at the former Mid Beds Council Offices in London Road, Biggleswade. The original Chair, Arthur Utting, and Secretary, Mary Howell, are both still serving members of the Committee giving valuable guidance to younger newcomers like myself. The Association had the full support of Mid Beds District Council and

they supported them with a £50.00 grant plus the use of a room at the Council's London Road Offices. In recent times the Association has received a grant from Biggleswade Town Council. The Aims of the Association have remained constant, as have the bi-monthly meetings to discuss topics that are of interest to the members.

- to represent the interests of local pensioners and senior citizens
- to help, where possible, to improve the well-being of both able bodied and disabled pensioners
- to campaign for pensioner's rights
- to act as a focal point between pensioners, local and public authorities

Over the past 19 years members of the Association have campaigned for pension increases, free dental and optical services, free transport, exemption from Standing Charges on utility bills and free T.V. licences. During the Committee's recent meeting with Alistair Burt, M.P. the protection of these hard won concessions was a major topic in view of opinions that have been voiced by various Government Ministers.

The most recent concern for many of our members is the demise of the local bus service for residents in the Mead End and Holme Court Avenue area of Biggleswade as the bus service has been terminated at 2.00 p.m. each day. Many of our members have written to the local newspapers, Central Bedfordshire Council, local councillors, seeking their support to provide reinstatement or an alternative transport service.

Our membership ranges from the newly retired to the longer termed retired but we all consider we are "not so young people". Whilst we are no longer full-time employed people thankfully most of us are still mobile, in good health with active brains and participating in our community.

New members are always welcome – meetings are at 2.30 p.m. on 2nd Wednesday of June, August, October at The Labour Hall, Crab Lane, Biggleswade (please be assured we are not a political organisation). The December meeting is our Christmas Party, 2.30 p.m. on 2nd Wednesday in December at The Weatherly Centre, Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade.

Sheila Grayston – Chair of BDPA –

Tel: 01767 314290 e-mail: sheila.grayston@ntlworld.com

g. Biggleswade Green Wheel – Mr G Lawrence

Update for the Biggleswade Annual General Meeting – 28 May 2013

The Biggleswade Green Wheel Greenspace Masterplan 2013 has been produced by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC), Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) and Biggleswade Town Council (BTC) who have worked together to create a vision for a 'green wheel' around Biggleswade. Creating a wildlife rich setting through attractive landscape corridors, the green wheel will provide walking and ultimately cycling access both around the urban fringe and into and out of the town.

The document is currently in the final stages of approval by CBC and BTC following public consultation at the end of 2012. This demonstrated strong support for the Biggleswade Green Wheel (BGW); of the 67 people who completed the questionnaire, 58 (87%) strongly agreed or agreed with the long term vision for the BGW.

In the last year the following works have been undertaken which form part of the BGW:

- Creation of the link path to join the path in the linear woods to the east of Saxon Drive with the new path that the developer has installed around the East of Biggleswade development
- Installation of sculpted benches and natural play facilities in the linear woods adjacent to the path that was surfaced early in 2012
- Completion of archaeological surveys on the CBC land which will become Jubilee Wood (close to Kennel Farm to the east of Biggleswade). Planting of native woodland and an orchard will be conducted during the winter months (2013-14), avoiding the archaeologically sensitive areas of the site.

BRCC have also recently been awarded £64,830 from CBC Green Infrastructure Planning Obligations funding which will enable the delivery of a number of additional projects around the Green Wheel. These include:

- Surfacing of two sections of the BGW at Derwent Avenue and between Dunton Lane and London Road
- Provision of a new route with associated access structures at Fairfield Sports Ground
- General Rights of Way surfacing improvements between Shortmead Crossing and Potton Road
- Signage, interpretation and information points at various locations on the GW route.
- Biodiversity and landscape enhancements including hedge and woodland improvements and the planting of new hedges, trees and native bulbs.
- The provision of seating and bike stands at appropriate locations around the GW.

BRCC have applied for Lottery funding to help establish the 'Friends of Biggleswade Green Wheel' for which it hopes to recruit volunteers later in 2013.

In addition CBC are currently working with The Shuttleworth Trust to create a new cycleway which will link Holme Mills to Mill Lane and which will provide a safe link to the Rights of Way network to the west of Biggleswade and the A1. It is hoped that this path will be created during the summer of 2013.

Caroline Romans (CBC)/Cliff Andrews (BRCC)

6. PRESENTATIONS

No presentations were made.

7. RESOLUTION AND QUESTIONS

Questions were asked regarding shop closure in the town and how these closures can be reduced. Cllr Tim Woodward replied that a lot of negativity had been experienced from residents, particularly towards coffee shops, and that we should be encouraging new businesses and increasing footfalls. With the additional new housing we could encourage a subsidised bus requirement to facilitate movement both ways. Development of markets such as European, theme and Sunday markets would also draw in people from the surrounding areas.

Cllr M Russell supported in general the reversal of Hitchin Street. However, Central Bedfordshire Council are considering this at a meeting on the 16th June, but it is likely that they will reject the proposal.

Cllr M Russell also pointed out that the threat of losing some car parks will have a direct impact on parking and subsequently footfall.

The car parking is a major current challenge, and is essential in bringing more people to Biggleswade and to the town.

8. OPEN FORUM

The Chairman asked for questions to be taken at this point:

- Finance Report – no questions
- Public Land and Open Spaces – no questions
- Off Street Car Parking – no questions

- Biggleswade Joint Committee – Mr G Lawrence outlined problems with the new slabs where over 40 needed replacement due to cracked, uneven and broken surfaces. The Town Clerk will take this forward with Central Bedfordshire Council.

- Mr Strange queried the removal of items of play equipment in play areas. The Deputy Town Clerk has audited these areas and has had to sanction the removal of certain items of play equipment as replacement parts are now obsolete. New play equipment is an agenda item on the next Land and Open Spaces Meeting.
- MOP asked the members to consider the installation of a hearing loop in the Chamber for those people hard of hearing. The Town Clerk will take this forward to the next Council Meeting.
- Mr Strange said that the completed work on the Cemetery Chapel is excellent, and asked that it be noted on the website.