

STONY STRATFORD ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

10 March 2020

Held at 7.30pm at St Mary & St Giles Parish Hall, Church Street, Stony Stratford

All parishes hold an annual meeting for electors. This was the nineteenth in Stony Stratford, which became a parish in June 2001.

Rob Gifford, Chair of Stony Stratford Town Council, introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming.

1. The Annual Community Award 2019

Rob Gifford advised that the Annual Community Award is given to the person who has made a lasting contribution and difference to the town, and that this year it would be awarded to Les Grant.

Rob said that Les exhibited a classic case of someone that has seen a problem and has just got on and dealt with it. Les has taken it upon himself to do a daily litter pick in the area, which has been quite an undertaking. He places bin bags at bus stops and empties them, and he does this all by bus and on foot. Les has made a strong contribution to this community.

As Les did not want to come tonight, Jill Dyer from FSRA (Fullers Slade Residents Association) was delighted to accept the Award on his behalf.

2. Apologies of Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Bartlett, Cliff Brett, Simon Cherrill and Peter Scrimshaw.

3. Minutes of the eighteenth Annual Town Meeting, 24th April 2019

Rob Gifford asked the general public present if they accepted the minutes from the last Annual Town Meeting as a correct record and this was proposed by Keith Tilley. The minutes were signed.

Keith Tilley raised a matter from the minutes: he wanted to update everyone on the gravel area car park at Mortimer Park. He said that this was a work in progress, but that it is currently coming to an end - the Town Council are waiting for this to be finalised by Milton Keynes Council.

4. Annual Report of the Chair of the Town Council

Rob Gifford stated that setting a precept was the most difficult thing that any local council has to do. You have to get the balance between the money you need for what you want to do and how much the precept payers are happy to pay. There is always a long debate in the Town Council meeting about this. Whenever the precept is raised the Council has sought to ensure that any increase reflected additional activity undertaken.. This year this will be the work on the interior of the Library.

Rob Gifford asked if there were any questions on the Chair's Annual Report.

Q (Maya Dunn): I have noted that the toilets cost £18,000 per annum – how many people use them?

A (Keith Tilley): It is still being well used. It might look expensive, but it is good for the older generation/utility workers etc. It is a service we provide, but we are never going to make any money on it. However, year on year the figures are up.

Comment (Lynne Compton): We are just about to go out to tender and convert the toilets to semi-automated,

which will vastly improve them.

Comment (Rob Gifford): We also need them for our annual events such as Stony Open Gardens, the vintage car festival etc.

Comment (Liz Gifford): There are lots of cafes etc. that only let you use their toilets if you are a customer. We need the toilets to be welcoming to people attending local events.

Comment (Rob Gifford): The government made a commitment that toilets would not be subject to national non-domestic rates, but they still are. An element of the cost is national non-domestic rate.

Comment (Robin Roy): There was a campaign for pubs/cafes etc. to make toilets available to the public, but I haven't really seen any signs of this. The Plough and The Fox and Hounds said they were going to sign up.

Q (Alan Nall): I see on the report you have 'Highways Initiative – Foamstream' – what is that?

A (Rob Gifford): This is a proposal to borrow Milton Keynes Council's equipment or to buy our own.

A (Lynne Compton): We rent the machine from Wolverton and Greenleys Town Council, and we just need an operative to operate it. It gets rid of weeds, cleans street signs and so forth.

Comment (Rob Gifford): We are looking for places where there is a real problem where we can use the machine.

Comment (Keith Tilley): It was suggested that all the councillors need to walk their wards to see where we need to use it.

Comment (Stuart Earl): We do the litter picking on Fullers Slade, and we have found over 500 laughing gas cannisters. We have spoken to the police and it seems to be a big thing now. I think we need to be aware of it, but there doesn't seem to be a solution to the problem.

Comment (Rob Gifford): The laughing gas issue needs to be fed back to Thames Valley Police as a problem.

Comment (Bianca Bendig-Ceesay): Thames Valley Police said that it is not illegal to buy them, so it is more of a litter problem.

Comment (Barrie Wilde): The trouble is that people are selling them to under 18s.

5. Presentation from Jennifer Marklew, Stony Stratford MKC Member and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Climate Action and Sustainability

Rob Gifford welcomed Jennifer Marklew, the guest speaker on Climate Change. Jennifer advised that she would talk about a) what the council were doing; and b) about climate challenges on a more local level.

Jennifer presented some key information as follows:

- Since a climate emergency was announced last January, Milton Keynes Council have committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030.
- MKC are working on trying to understand carbon usage across the city and our carbon impact.
- Milton Keynes Council accounts for only 2% of carbon emissions – the rest is from residents and businesses.
- MKC have been engaging with experts in this field and have been looking at what projects they need to undertake to get to carbon neutrality.
- There is a lot of biodiversity work going on – working with The Parks Trust and parish councils. MKC are putting nature at the heart of what they are doing.
- There is a city-wide recycling action plan and Milton Keynes has massively increased our rates of recycling.
- An eco-warrior scheme has been launched for schools to take part in to encourage children to recycle.

- MKC have very little impact on buses as these services are run by Arriva etc. The bus services are not up to scratch, but as they are a private enterprise MKC don't have a way of dealing with this.
- MKC are looking at improving the redways, encouraging people to get on their bikes.
- Planning is a great place for the council to have an impact on carbon. If they can make all new houses that are built carbon negative, then they can offset some of the carbon produced from existing homes.
- A Task and Finish Group has been set up at Milton Keynes Council as a way of bringing in experts to talk to the council about what they can do. The group has brought recommendations to MKC about what they should do to become carbon neutral. These ideas will be worked into a strategic action plan.
- MKC are hoping to set up a citizen's assembly to have an opportunity to respond to and to be heard from people who really understand the challenges.
- The Council understand that for many people day to day life is enough of a struggle without having to think about energy bills, walking instead of driving etc.

Jennifer advised that her focus has been very strategic, as it is really challenging to get anything done. She is aware that Milton Keynes Council have been very poor in engaging with people, but now they are really thinking about what they need to do.

Jennifer stated that she was extremely proud of Stony Stratford for the efforts that they have been making such as the green bus shelter roofs that Stony Stratford In Bloom have created and the solar panels the Town Council are putting on the Library building. However, she said that she is aware that we need to be doing more but is not sure how we achieve that without putting too much pressure on people.

The floor was then opened for questions.

The issues that were raised, and the suggestions and ideas given on Climate Change were as follows:

Actions

- What are the next steps as a Town Council and at a community level?

Environment

- MKC are giving out mixed messages such as cutting down trees in the city centre.
- SSIB like to work with children in the local area to encourage them to grow things and learn about the environment. They are also planting trees with them.
- There has been tree planting along the edges of Fairfield, but it looks like 'token' planting.

Resources

- People need access to litter picking equipment and bags.
- Residents need to be able to get recycling bags, as older residents are not on-line and cannot request them via the website.

Energy

- Need to look at natural sources of energy renewal – such as considering wind turbines in urban areas.
- Ask MKC to do an audit of all buildings they currently own to look at what the leakage of carbon is i.e. the Small Meeting Place in Galley Hill could have a green roof put on it.
- Negative behaviour – people leaving car engines running all the time for long periods – some places have 'stop idling engines' signs, which is something to consider.
- MKC needs to support residents in getting their boilers up to scratch.
- Need to move away from gas as it is not sustainable. We are moving towards distributed systems, which is particularly important in Stony as there are a lot of older buildings. The Council needs to look at district schemes.

Transport

- Need more local electric car charging points.
- The redways run out at Stony - need to get cycle ways into the town.
- Need more cycle racks/scooter racks in the town.
- Need better bus routes – it was suggested the 301 could be diverted through Galley Hill and Fullers Slade so the number of buses serving these areas could be increased.
- No space has been allocated for redways in the new estates that are being built.
- There are areas of Stony that it is dangerous to cycle in.
- The signage is bad on the redways and it is easy to get lost.
- Commuting is an issue as it's grid-locked from Northampton to Milton Keynes.

- It is difficult to walk/cycle along the A508 as the footpath is overgrown.
- Possibility of a park and ride system for the city – we don't have a good understanding of where people are coming from to work in the city.
- Clarity is needed on whether mobility scooters can be used on the redways.

Housing

- It was questioned as to why MKC are knocking down 50-year-old houses in Fullers Slade.
- The issue with low carbon housing is that the energy that has gone into building it is very significant in the first place and might not be offset for quite some time – making buildings carbon neutral is essential.

Business

- The area has a lot of charity shops which is good for recycling goods.
- The refill shop in Stony is a great idea.
- Need a decent supermarket in Stony so that people can walk to do their shopping, rather than driving to a supermarket.
- Is there a council policy for restricting waste from takeaways?

Rob Gifford mentioned that the Town Council Projects Committee have been looking at the issue of Climate Change already. The challenge for them is to set up a small group of interested residents that would help the Town Council and Jennifer in what she needs to do with Milton Keynes Council.

Rob thanked Jenny for her presentation.

6. Any Other Business

Rob Gifford reminded all present that there would be Town Council elections in May. If anyone is interested in being a councillor, they should come and talk to Lynne Compton. Rob advised that he will not be standing again.

Rob Gifford thanked those present for attending. There was no other business and the meeting closed at 21.05 hours.

Melanie Hyde, Information Officer, Stony Stratford Town Council.