

Report to Annual Parish Meeting

April 2022

Ten years ago I wrote my first report as Chair of the Parish Council and I have revisited that report this year. In that report I wrote:

“This is my first report as Chairman of Sandridge Parish Council and I will start on a personal note. I have found being Chairman a rewarding and enjoyable experience, although at times frustrating. I hope my chairmanship has not been too frustrating for the other members of the Council.”

That sentiment still holds true as I complete my seventh year as Chair and fifteenth year as a parish councillor.

This report is described on the agenda as the Chairman’s report on activities of Sandridge Parish Council over the past year. I would therefore like to thank, on behalf of the council, the Parish Clerk and the other officers for their efforts throughout the year. It is their hard work which delivers the activities of the Parish Council and I have been grateful for their support.

As I reported ten years ago, Sandridge Parish consists of Sandridge village, Jersey Farm and that part of Marshalswick to the east and north of St Albans Road, Marshalswick Lane and Sandpit Lane. In total, the parish includes approximately 5,000 homes. The Parish Council is responsible for the management of two community centres, seven recreational areas, the Jersey Farm Woodland Park and various other activities.

Unlike last year we are now back meeting in person for our annual parish meeting.

Our Community

The last couple of years have I believe demonstrated the importance of the community in coping with adversity. The last twelve months have again been challenging, but despite those challenges our community has continued to grow and develop.

I was reminded of this recently when I attended Wheatfields Infants and Nursery School to celebrate the opening of Woodlands their new

purpose built sensory room. This was built with support from the parents, The Mark Lindgren Memorial Fund, Sandridge Parish Council and many others. We are fortunate in our parish to have the individuals willing to help with projects such as this.

Across the parish there have been other community projects. Following a suggestion from a resident, the parish council organised the planting of spring bulbs under street name plates and this spring we have enjoyed the sight of crocuses, irises and daffodils flowering there. Another suggestion from a resident has resulted in the parish council organising some training in the use of defibrillators. This training will take place in 2022. Over the years a number of defibrillators have been installed by the council and other groups across the parish.

Across the district and county there have been numerous groups planting trees this year, including here at St Leonards where the parish has planted a tree to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. This is just one of many trees planted this year by volunteers working with the parish council.

Last year I mentioned the community garden at the Marshalswick Community Centre and I am pleased to say that it has continued to grow. I would like to say a big thank-you to the volunteers who have helped manage the garden over the year. Those volunteers and the ones who help with our environmental projects on the Woodland Park and elsewhere are another example of the community working together.

Community Garden

During the Sustainable St Albans festival last year the parish council held an open evening at the community garden and we were pleased that on that occasion and a few days later we had visits from Daisy Cooper MP and Bim Afolami MP.

Neighbourhood Plan

Another result of community involvement is our Neighbourhood Plan, it took many years of work involving a large number of volunteers, but last May the plan was approved in the referendum and has been formally adopted by the District Council as part of their planning policies.

We are already seeing references to the plan not only in decisions about planning applications, but also in the applications, as developers explain how what they want to build complies with the wishes of the community.

Safer Roads

The parish council working with local residents is continuing to press for improvements to be made to the St Albans Road and High Street, Sandridge to make them safer. We are pleased that some new signs have been installed, but we would like to see more done to encourage more responsible driving.

Regrettably my report ten years ago also mentioned the issue of speeding traffic along this road.

Community Centres

After being closed for most of 2020/21 the community centres reopened in 2021 and we have seen groups returning to meeting there. This has not been without some issues.

One significant change is that the Marshalswick Community Centre is now being used by Ashbourne Day Nurseries, who are using more of the facility for longer hours than the previous nursery provider. This has caused some problems and the parish council is continuing to work with the nursery to mitigate those. It has however meant an increase in income for the parish council which has helped with the council's funding. The additional income has also helped with some improvements to the area behind the community centre, which has recently been reurfed.

Open Spaces

Our open spaces have continued to be well used throughout the year.

Ten years ago, the Jersey Farm Woodland Park won a Green Flag Community Award, which recognises “the best green spaces in the country”. I am pleased that it has continued to win Green Flags over the years, including this year.

As reported last year, the council is looking at the installation of a cycle track (Pump Track) in the Jersey Farm Open Space and following further consultation with residents a location has been chosen and a contract should be awarded soon for the construction, subject to planning permission.

During the year, we installed a new all purpose surface at Spencer Meadow and I am pleased we are getting good reports from users.

As already mentioned, a team of volunteers have been continuing to help with the management of the wilder parts of those open spaces helping to lay hedges, plant and coppice trees, and other tasks. If you would like to volunteer please contact the office.

Our Councillors

There have been a couple of changes on the parish council with James Lancaster and Claudio Duran resigning and being replaced with Sam Vosper and Jonathan Maskell. I will take this opportunity to thank James and Claudio for their contributions over the years and to welcome Sam and Jonathan.

Council Precept (Tax)

In 2012/13 the cost per Band D property of the Parish Council was £43.74, over the ten years that has risen to £85.11. This year we managed to produce a budget that has resulted in a small reduction in the cost for residents of 1.5%.

John Hale, Chair