

SANDBACH TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2003/4

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the second Annual Report following the introduction of the concept of Quality Councils.

The start of the year was marked by the four yearly Town Council elections at which four of last year's members chose not to stand and a further four failed to be re-elected. Of the eight new members only one, Cllr John Keeling, had served on the Town Council before. It was he who was elected Chairman of the Council at the Annual Meeting. In December he became too ill to carry out his duties and a few weeks later on 28 January, he died.

At the Town Council meeting on 5 February, Members expressed their appreciation of Cllr Keeling's contribution to the Town and the high esteem in which he was held. Condolences were offered to his family and friends

The Council's activities can be divided into three main areas, the ceremonial, the discussion and promotion of local issues and the provision of financial support.

2. PROCEDURE

The Joint Meetings with the Chamber of Trade & Commerce have re-started and generally have been considered valuable.

The Town Council wishes to work closely with the Sandbach Partnership. The aims of the two organisations are broadly similar in that they both wish to implement improvements to the Town for the benefit of its inhabitants. The Council brings to the Partnership the authority of elected representatives and the possibility of financial support. During the last year the Council was represented on the Partnership by Cllr Mrs Michelle Smith.

At its meeting on the 22 May last year the Council resolved that it should seek to attain quality status. To this end it set up a committee to examine the implications. The areas in which the Council had to make changes were the Clerk's qualifications, allowing public questions at Council Meetings, the improvement in communication with the electorate and the setting up of surgeries. One of the consequences of becoming a Quality Council is that it should be easier to attract external funding.

A Local Government Review is in progress with likelihood that the County and Borough Councils will be replaced by a unitary authority. Whatever the size of this authority it is likely that Quality Town Councils will be encouraged to take on some of the local direct services at present administered by the Borough. The Council is investigating the implications of such a move.

The Town Council is now a full member of the Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils.

3. EVENTS

The major Civic events were the Civic Parade and Service on 15 June 2003 and the Chairman's Ball on 30 January. The Ball took place two days after the Chairman's death. The Chairman had said he wished the Ball to continue no matter what happened to him and his family agreed. It was most successful in raising money for the Chairman's charity. The annual bowls match with the Marriott House Veterans was most enjoyable and the result of the match a little closer this year.

Mrs Charlotte Peters Rock put on an exhibition at the Sandbach Literary Institution with the help of the Council showing the importance of Cranage Airfield during the Second World War.

The Council supported the Foden Richardson Brass Band on their visit to Chicago to take part in the North American Brass Band Championship which they won. The Chairman organised an unforgettable reception for the Band on their return.

The Council supported the Christmas Lights Festival which attracted a large number of children and adults into the Town.

The Transport Festival which is also supported by the Council goes from strength to strength and with the Town Crier competition has become one of the Borough's top events of the year.

4. LOCAL ISSUES

The following issues were debated in the Council Chamber.

4.1 Policeman for Sandbach

During the previous year the Council had decided to investigate the possibility of hiring a dedicated Police Officer for a trial period of two years. This followed a suggestion made by Cheshire Constabulary during discussions about how the problems of alcohol fuelled antisocial behaviour in Sandbach could be resolved. Negotiations took place during the year with Cheshire Constabulary on the details of how the Town could have its own Police Constable. After considerable effort a contract was prepared but at its meeting on the 1 April the Council decided not to go ahead with the proposal.

4.2 Security

The use of the CCTV in Sandbach Centre has been a frequent topic. The Council has been delighted with its successful use but has been frustrated by some of the technical problems.

Following vandalism and inappropriate behaviour at the Cemetery the Borough requested the Town Council's views on what measures should be taken. The Council recommended that all the gates at the far end of the Cemetery should be permanently locked or removed and any gaps in the hedge or fence made good and sealed. The main entrance gate should be kept locked outside clearly defined opening hours which should be posted on the gate. No dogs should be allowed other than guide dogs. Following complaints from the public there has been an easing of this position.

4.3 Sandbach Market

The Town Council was represented on the Borough Council Committee to select new management for the Sandbach Market. The key points of the Council's policy were a move from the Common to provide additional parking, the erection of stalls by the stallholders, thus freeing a commercially valuable property adjacent to the Common and much stronger management of the waste issue.

4.4 Environment

Sandbach won the 2003 Civic Pride award for the 10 – 30,000 population category. This was due to a lot of hard work by the Sandbach in Bloom Committee, support from various quarters and despite mindless vandalism. This is the fourth award the Town has received since 1991. Plaques recording the achievements have been mounted on the Town Hall and on the Sandbach road signs on the entry to the Town.

Children from Crewe Road School had observed a large amount of litter and graffiti on their regular walks to and from the Leisure Centre and their School. They had decided to write letters describing what they had observed and saying what they thought should be done to improve the situation. They visited the Council Chamber to hear members debate the issue.

4.5 Transport

The Transportation Project continues to be a major topic of debate in the Council Chamber. With completion of Phase 1 of the work it is apparent that some road users are having difficulty with the new High Street arrangement. One problem is that of motorists being unwilling to park in the designated bays designated for disabled parking.

County Council transport engineers addressed councillors' questions on the Transportation Project. It is believed that the exchange was useful for both parties.

The Council was very unhappy about the deteriorating state of the cobbles in the Market Square and had agreed to support a Joint Highways refurbishment project to a maximum of £10,000 to ensure that the work was done during the last financial year. Unfortunately, the project has not yet started.

The Council's campaign for improvements to the London Road, Elworth, pedestrian crossing was unsuccessful.

4.6 Regional Assembly

The Council's position that it supports the principle and proposed establishment of a Regional Assembly for the North West Region of England has not changed.

The Town Council expects reform but has not adopted a position on the form of, or area for, a unitary authority. However, the Council believes there is a need for a meaningful and enhanced role for Town Councils and this should be defined within the new arrangements.

5. PLANNING

The Council is entitled to comment on any planning application in its area. The Planning Committee meets the most regularly of all the committees.

The application by Garden Park Ltd to build a Garden Centre on Congleton Road was perhaps the most contentious plan. The Council's position is that they welcome the proposed economic activity but believe that the location is incorrect.

6. PROJECTS

The Council completed its payments to the Borough Council in support of the work carried out on Sandbach Town Hall.

The Council supported the recent modification to the Library that has enlarged the space available on the ground floor.

The Town Council does not have its own office. The Clerk works from home. The Council accepts that this arrangement is unsatisfactory and intends to look for alternatives.

6.1 Website

The Council has its own website www.sandbach.gov.uk

It has been used to make available minutes, agendas and other documents to the public. It is an important part of the move towards becoming a quality council.

6.2 Town Guide

A new guide has been completely rewritten and is now available at the Library and at Westfields' reception. It is hoped to transfer the information contained in it to the website and make it a 'live' document.

6.3 Dr Charles Latham Memorial

The Council is working towards the resiting of the memorial back near its original position in High Street.

6.4 Donations, Grants and Contributions

The following donations, grants or contributions were made during the financial year 2003/4.

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| Congleton Borough Council, HERS grants | 12,020 |
| Cheshire County Council, Offley Infant School | 500 |
| 3rd Sandbach Scout Troup, grant | 250 |
| CBC, Town Hall contribution | 15,000 |
| Sandbach School, Grant for All weather pitch | 5,000 |
| CVS, Donation | 1,000 |
| 1st Sandbach Guides, Donation | 100 |
| U3A (Sandbach), Donation | 250 |
| British Legion, Book project | 1,832 |
| Sandbach Photographic Society, grant | 200 |
| N W Army Cadet Force Trust, grant | 500 |
| 1873 Sandbach Squadron ATC, grant | 500 |
| Sandbach Voices Concert Account, grant | 150 |
| Sandbach Today Youth, grant | 500 |
| Foden Richardsons Brass Band, grant | 2,000 |
| St John's Church heating, donation | 2,500 |
| Sandbach Christmas Lights Festival, donation | 600 |
| Sandbach Literary Institution, Room rent for Cranage exhibition | 50 |
| Sandbach & District Talking Newspaper, grant | 1,000 |
| Cheshire County Council, grant to Crewe Rd CP School | 1,250 |
| Sandbach School, grant OAP Xmas meal | 200 |
| Sandbach & District Arts Association, grant towards concert | 100 |
| CVS, grant | 1,030 |
| Sandbach RUFC , grant | 350 |
| Wheelock Community Association, grant for annual fete | 250 |
| Lions Youth Brass, grant for Czeck tour | 500 |
| Sandbach Stars Dance Troupe, grant to attend competition | 320 |
| CAMSHAFT, Annual Donation | 400 |
| Sandbach in Bloom, Annual Donation | 1,000 |
| Relate, Annual Donation | 200 |
| Marriott House Bowling Club, V J Cup Annual Donation | 100 |
| St Mary's Church, Churchyard Maintenance | 400 |
| St John's Church, Churchyard Maintenance | 200 |
| St Peter's Church, Churchyard Maintenance | 200 |
| Christ Church, Churchyard Maintenance | 200 |
| Ettiley Heath Methodist Church, Churchyard Maintenance | 200 |
| D Robinson, Town Crier honorarium | 520 |
| Sandbach Christmas Lights Committee, Annual Donation | 2,000 |
| Total | £53,372 |

7. CONCLUSION

This report has not covered all activities but it shows that the Council plays an important role in local life.