

## **Financial Report and Project Summary 2023-2024**

### **Income:**

Sandymoor Parish Council (SPC) income is split into three areas.

Firstly, income from Council Tax known as the precept. This is paid annually by Halton Borough Council (HBC) and is collected as part of your Council Tax. SPC use this money to run the council year to year.

The second area is dividends from money invested to pay for the Public Open Space (POS) that SPC own. These funds were part of a legal agreement between SPC and Homes England and can only be used for POS.

Thirdly, SPC developed the playing fields that are next to Sandymoor Ormiston Academy. SPC charge a rental of £12,000 per annum which is invested to pay for the replacement of the facilities, in particular the 4G pitch and the tennis courts, when they reach the end of their useful life.

The dividend income, that we refer to on our finance reports each month is paid quarterly to SPC from the investment funds, is used solely for the maintenance and management of the POS that the Parish Council currently owns. This money cannot legally be used for any other purpose but must only be used for the maintenance of the POS it is attached to. This has been a source of confusion as some residents believe it is 'their' money raised from the precept and can be spent now on projects within the parish. Unfortunately, this is not the case and the RFO has records to keep track of how much of the money SPC holds is precept and how much is POS money.

For clarity, SPC have published a map on their website that shows which areas of POS are covered by the investment funds. These areas should not be confused with land that is either the responsibility of HBC or still in the ownership of the original developer. For example, the Morris Homes development, the two David Wilson Homes developments of Swans Reach and Lea View and the more recently completed Bloor Homes estates. However, residents are encouraged to contact SPC if they have any queries over the responsibility for maintenance of any area of Sandymoor.

Looking at the annual income this year, SPC held the precept for the third year running at £29.09, for a band D property, which works out at less than 60p per week per household. This raised £42,849 of which around 50% of £21,164 of this money was used to pay our employees.

The dividend income from the land maintenance fund for the 2023-2024 financial year was £34,565 and from the playing fields fund was £1,899 and as stated earlier SPC also received £12,000 in payments from Sandymoor Ormiston Academy for the playing fields rental contract.

### **Background on Investment Funds:**

Several years ago, SPC were gifted land and an accompanying dowry to both develop the playing fields and maintain the POS. This includes the attenuation pond at Swans Reach and the large hydro brake balancing pond next to the Jubilee Forest area. This is where the POS maintenance fund was

founded from. The dividends, as mentioned above, are then used to pay for the maintenance of those public spaces. Any unspent funds left at the end of the fiscal year will be reinvested to help futureproof the investment in the long-term.

The playing fields sink fund is the investment fund for the replacement of the pitch and courts. The supporting numbers, which are reported at every parish council meeting, are listed below in the Financial Overview.

### **Strategy for POS Acquisition**

SPC agreed three years ago to pursue a strategy of acquiring the public open space land from developers within the parish, but this land would only be acquired if the developer gifts the land with a dowry to enable SPC to maintain the land for perpetuity. The definition of perpetuity is estimated to be approximately 20 years.

SPC believed that it can deliver a better and more consistent standard of care over a longer period because, unlike landscape maintenance companies, SPC does not have to make a profit. The fund, therefore, invested safely, will hopefully deliver up to twice the period of time than if the dowry was placed directly in the hands of a maintenance company. It should also be noted that this strategy carries less risk as it has been known for landscaping companies to go out of business with the loss of the supporting fund, leaving POS maintenance to be covered by residents, as HBC will not take on any new areas of POS. The current model of investing funds and using the dividends is a proven model and this has given SPC confidence to pursue this strategy.

This is an ongoing policy of the parish council, and we are in constant talks with developers to take ownership of any public open space within Sandymoor that is not covered by another scheme. However, the valuation of the dowry payment must be appropriate to enable us to maintain the land without any further costs to the residents of the parish and to meet the estimate of perpetuity, as much as possible. The dowry monies are currently invested with the Churches, Charities and Local Authorities fund (CCLA) and are monitored quarterly but the finance working group.

### **Spending:**

#### **Administration and Staffing:**

Over the 2023-2024 financial year, the precept money covered the costs involved in running the parish council, including paying the salary of the Proper Officer or Clerk and the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) who also acts as digital officer, various essential administration costs as well as the room hire to host the parish council meetings. It has also covered the costs of any training of employees and new councillors, to enable the parish council to work more effectively in improving the area on behalf of its residents.

#### **Public Open Spaces:**

The administration is handled by the employees and the POS working group within the council. The negotiation of acquiring the POS of new developments is handled by the Clerk and the working group

of Councillors. As always, any recommendations or decisions are brought to the public meetings for ratification by the full council.

The ongoing cost of maintaining the land the council already own has been covered by the dividend received from the POS dowry investment, with no shortfall needing to be covered from the original investment. In fact, there was some excess from those dividends that are being held in the council's bank account while investment advice is being sort on the best way to reinvest those monies to maintain and grow the investment fund.

### **Projects:**

During 2023-2024, the Parish Council have been involved in multiple projects, many of which have been from issues or suggestions initially raised by residents at our meetings or via our clerk.

### **Litter:**

After the issue of litter being raised as a concern by many residents, the council have managed to negotiate with Halton Borough Council to increase the number and/or size of many of the litter bins around the parish as well as adding various litter and dog waste reminder signs to problem areas. Hopefully these initiatives have helped decrease the amount of waste seen around the parish.

### **CCTV:**

Work and negotiations on the possibility of installing CCTV around the village green continued into the new financial year, with the topic of whether it could be linked with HBC's system being raised on multiple occasions. No final agreement was reached, but the conversation will continue for the foreseeable future.

### **Youth Engagement:**

As part of our Youth Engagement project, some students from Sandymoor Ormiston Academy attended one of our meetings to present ideas they had gathered from their peers on activities and facilities they would like to see around our area for teens and young adults. As a direct result of this presentation, the council have spent time investigating options for a local cinema event, an open mic night and some drama facilities, however, to date we have been unable to find an appropriate venue for host such events within the local area, away from the school at the request of the students. The council will continue with their Youth Engagement project to try to make the young adults in our community feel more involved and included in the Parish Council.

### **Jubilee Forest:**

To commemorate the Queens Jubilee, SPC planted 50 trees along with a further 70 saplings from the Ormiston Academy. It was further enhanced by creating a cross design where we placed a bench at each corner. This was formally opened by the deputy Lieutenant of Cheshire Robert Mee, and we placed plaques to recognise the area. It has been designed to create a peaceful haven diverse habitat where residents can enjoy alongside the rewilding strategy. This continues to be maintained to ensure once established it will continue to thrive. The forest is also now registered as part of the Queen's Green Canopy, providing a lasting legacy of the platinum jubilee.

### **Communication:**

With the new homes being built within the Sandymoor area and the subsequent increase in new residents, the council decided to take the initiative and have some local information leaflets designed, printed and distributed to homes around the parish. These leaflets included some lovely local artwork depicting the area as well as useful information and contact details of essential services which may come in handy for anyone just moving in.

### **Planters:**

Following on from the success of the planter project last year, we are pleased to report that the planters volunteer group is still going strong, keeping the plants well-watered, cared for and looking beautiful throughout the year. The parish council are still supporting this group with new plants and compost as required.

### **Health & Safety:**

Many residents have expressed concern about excessive speeding around the parish. The working group investigated this, and it was decided that HBC could not provide enough data through their shared Speed Indicator Device (SID). Therefore, SPC purchased a SID to be purely used by SPC to collect enough data to then enter discussions with HBC, the Police and residents about what can be done to manage the issue. The data is published on our website and clearly shows some activations in 30mph zones in excess of 80mph. We welcome residents wanting to join the debate in trying to make our parish a safer place to live.

In June & July, a lot of the councils' time was dedicated to negotiating, mitigating and overcoming any problems caused by the temporary closure of the Daresbury expressway. There were some major issues at the beginning of the closure but, after that, there was far less disruption than was feared. There were some larger issues and damage caused in our adjoining parishes that have taken some time to repair but Sandymoor Parish itself coped with the disruption very well.

After a suggestion from one of the Sandymoor residents, the council looked into the possibility of installing a defibrillator within the area. By the end of the 2023-24 financial year, the Clerk secured three publicly accessible defibrillators within Sandymoor, one which was funded by the Parish Council and two which were the result of applications to the Northwest Ambulance Service (NWAS). One defibrillator is positioned on the wall outside the front entrance to Hazlehurst, one outside Chatwins Bakery in the local centre and the final one is outside the main entrance to Sandymoor Ormiston Academy. The locations of these life-saving devices are hopefully spread out throughout the area so most residents will be within reasonable distance to one should the need ever arise, whatever the time of day or night. Along with the installation of the defibrillators, the parish council hosted free training in the use of the devices which those who attended found very helpful and informative. In response to feedback from the training session, the Parish Council also hosted a free first aid course for those residents that wished to attend, which had similarly positive feedback.

### **Other Projects:**

Discussions have been held by the parish council, between the Academy and Hazlehurst about a greenhouse or gardening project for our youth and older residents to work on together. There has

been some initial interest from both sides and these discussions will continue into the following financial year to work out if it is a feasible and practical project to get going.

This year for the first time, Sandymoor Parish council installed their own Christmas tree at the local centre. There were solar powered lights decorating the tree but, as many residents pointed out, the lights were not as bright as were expected. In the future, we are seeking a location that can have mains power and therefore hopefully the lighting will be more festive.

## **Conclusion**

Over the 2023-2024 financial year, the council have been involved in a wide variety of projects throughout the area. We have installed three permanently accessible, public defibrillators that we hope will never be needed but are there in case the worst happens. The council have also purchased a SID and have been involved in litter reduction initiatives to aim to make the area a safe and nicer place to be. All councillors and employees of the council are working hard behind the scenes on the resident's behalf to work on projects for all areas of the community from trying to find places for our young people to spend their leisure time to starting a gardening project for some of our older residents, whilst continuing to work with outside agencies, such as HBC, Cheshire Police, Sandymoor Ormiston Academy and the developers building new homes, to improve our area in the long term. Sandymoor Parish Council have successfully completed a number of projects over the 2023-2024 year and have done a lot of preparation work for projects planned for the next financial year.

## Financial Overview

<b>Money in</b>		
Precept	£	42,849.00
POS Dividend (any unspent excess ringfenced to reinvest)	£	34,565.06
Playing Fields Rental & Dividend (ringfenced to reinvest)	£	13,899.26
VAT Rebate	£	4,089.56
<b>Total In</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>95,402.88</b>
<b>Money Out</b>		
<b>Running Costs</b>		
Staffing Costs (inc. Training & IT hardware)	£	21,164.12
Admin (Room hire, insurance, IT, audits, legal & membership fees)	£	4,749.88
<b>Running Costs Total</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>25,914.00</b>
<b>Projects</b>		
POS Maintenance (SLA1, Swans Reach Pond & Surroundings)	£	9,832.17
Planters Maintenance (new plants, compost etc)	£	578.46
Jubilee Forest Maintenance	£	4,323.40
SID	£	4,200.00
Sandymoor Information Leaflets	£	375.00
Benches, bins, noticeboard & signage	£	4,818.27
Defibrillators	£	2,278.49
Litter Picking Cart	£	177.60
Events (inc Christmas tree, lights, election & remembrance wreath)	£	1,045.00
<b>Total Spent on Projects</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>27,628.39</b>
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>53,542.39</b>
<b>Funds left at end of year (inc POS &amp; sink fund excess)</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>41,860.49</b>
<b>POS &amp; Sink Fund Excess to Reinvest</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>34,308.75</b>
<b>Final Excess Figure</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>7,551.74</b>