

## **Financial Report and Project Summary 2024-2025**

### **Income:**

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

Firstly, income from Council Tax which is known as the precept. This is paid annually by Halton Borough Council (HBC) and is collected as part of the residents Council Tax. SPC use this money to fund the running of the council year to year as well as funding the local projects around the parish.

Secondly, SPC developed the playing fields that are next to Sandymoor Ormiston Academy (SOA). The council charge the school an annual rental of £12,000 for use of the playing fields. The rental money is then ring fenced 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 third form of income is quarterly dividends from our investment fund. These received on a quarterly basis and are from the investment of a dowry that accompanied some parcels of public open space (POS) that SPC now are responsible to maintain.

The annual precept was maintained at the same level for the fourth year in a row at £29.09 for a band D property, which works out at less than 60p per week per household, raising £46,718 to run the parish council and to fund projects.

The dividend income from the land maintenance fund for the 2023-2024 financial year was £35,7423 and from the playing fields sink fund was £1,964. As stated earlier, SPC also received £12,000 in rental income from Sandymoor Ormiston Academy for the playing fields rental contract.

### **POS Strategy and Investment Funds:**

Several years ago, SPC made the decision to pursue the 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 believes that it can deliver a better and more consistent standard of care over a longer period because, unlike maintenance companies, SPC does not make a profit. The fund, safely invested, 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 maintenance companies to go out of business with the loss of the supporting fund, leaving the POS maintenance costs to be covered by residents, as HBC will not take responsibility for any new areas of POS. The current model of investing funds and using the dividends is a proven one and this has given SPC confidence to pursue this strategy.

Currently, SPC is responsible for the maintenance of 4 parcels of land within the parish. This public open space was gifted with the accompanying dowry to both develop the playing fields and maintain the POS. This is where the POS maintenance fund was founded from. The dividends are then used to pay for the maintenance of those public spaces with any unspent funds left at the end of the fiscal year being 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. This investment plus the rental income and the dividends payments are ring fenced for this purpose.

The land the parish council is responsible for includes the attenuation pond at Swans Reach and the large hydro brake balancing pond next to the Jubilee Forest area. There is a map published on the SPC website showing which areas of POS are covered by the current 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. Residents are encouraged to contact SPC if they have any queries over the responsibility for the maintenance of any area of Sandymoor.

SPC is in constant talks with the developers around the parish to take ownership of any public open space within Sandymoor. However, the valuation of the dowry payment must be appropriate to enable the parish council to maintain the land without any further costs to residents 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 regularly by the finance working group.

The money received as a dowry must be ring fenced and can only be used to maintenance of the land it was gifted with. The dividends that are referenced on our monthly finance reports must also only be used for POS maintenance and cannot be used by the parish council for any other purpose. This policy of receiving a gift of land with a dowry has caused some confusion with some members of the public over the parish council finances. Some residents believe all the money within the parish council bank accounts is 'their' money raised from the precept and can be spent 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. The RFO and the finance group are also in the process of moving monies into dedicated savings accounts to both earn a little more interest in the short term as well as clarify the sources of the funds.

## **Spending:**

### **Administration and Staffing:**

Over the 2024-2025 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

administrative 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 of the public open spaces and relating maintenance is handled by the employees and the POS working group within the council. The negotiation of acquiring the POS of any 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 costs 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 lump sum. In fact, there was some excess from those dividends that are being held in the council's bank account while higher interest savings accounts are being opened to separate the different sources of funds.

In addition to the regular quarterly maintenance of the POS, the pond at Swans Reach was cleared of soldier weed as part of its 2–3-year maintenance programme.

### **Projects:**

During 2024-2025, 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.

#### **Road Safety & Speed Awareness**

The Speed Indicator Device (SID), the parish council purchased last year, is giving us valuable data on the size of the speeding problem within the Sandymoor area, including multiple activations in excess of 50mph on residential 30mph roads during times when children are likely to be walking to school. The reports are regularly posted on our website and discussed at the monthly meetings when they become available. The device hasn't been relocated as regularly as initially discussed but is still providing useful information for the council to work on with the relevant authorities.

The parish council have also approached HBC with requests for pedestrian crossings to be installed at locations suggested by residents. Unfortunately, HBC did not agree with the parish council's assessment of the need for these at all the suggested locations. However, the parish council disagree with the reasons for rejecting the request at one of the locations so further discussions and a potential site visit will be requested.

### **Litter**

After it was brought to the attention of the council of a litter hot spot, particularly bags of dog waste, the Parish Council purchased a litter bin and located it in the Swans Reach area. The council also paid for the fortnightly emptying of that bin due to it not being one added by the borough council and therefore not on HBC's emptying schedule. This has successfully cut

down on the amount of litter and dog waste bags discarded in the area. The council will go back to HBC to ask again if they add this bin to their emptying route in the future but in the meantime, SPC will continue to fund the emptying of this bin.

### **Community/Youth Engagement**

The parish council, and some amazing local volunteers, ran Sandymoor Summer fair for the first time since 2019. The fair was a success with over 40 stalls booked and Silcocks fair providing the fairground rides. The entertainment was provided by some local performers showcasing their talent, a dog show featuring the best fancy dress competition and some nostalgia provided by a classic car display. Despite the wet start to the day and England playing in the Euros later on, there was a decent turn out and some lovely feedback around the community atmosphere on the day.

The parish council held discussions with the management at Hazlehurst and Sandymoor Ormiston Academy around a garden or greenhouse project to give some of the older residents of Sandymoor the opportunity to work with some of the students from the academy, growing flowers and vegetables. Both organisations are keen to get involved in a cross-generational project.

### **Planters**

The planters project is still going strong with the planters volunteer group doing a fantastic job 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.

### **Grants**

There were two successful grant applications during the 2024-2025 financial year.

The first one was made by Northwest Basketball Partnership, a community interest company set up to promote and encourage children's participation in basketball in the northwest area, particularly for girls. A £1,000 donation was given to the group to assist in the purchase of essential equipment. This group is based out of Sandymoor Ormiston Academy and was growing well but due to an error by Edu-lettings, the group had no venue for a while and are now having to regain the initial momentum.

Mersey Weaver District Scouts were the second group to make a grant application. This was to help raise money to send a number of local young people to Kanderstag, the World Scout Centre in Switzerland. This application was also accepted and a donation of £1,000 was made towards the project.

### **Christmas Tree**

The parish council installed their own Christmas Tree for the second year running. To improve on last year, new mains-powered lights and a timer were bought and installed along with the electrics to be able to connect them. Unfortunately, shortly after the installation of the tree, it was subject to vandalism which meant further cost for repairs. Despite this setback, the tree looked very festive and much improved on the previous year.

## **Finances**

The councils' finances and financial practices were all inspected again and were approved by both the internal and external auditors as being satisfactory.

Throughout the year, work has been going on in the background to diversify the parish council bank accounts, with extra savings accounts being opened to divide the monies held by the parish council into separate accounts for each of the different pots of money. The parish council now has three additional higher interest savings accounts for the POS money, the sink fund money, and the precept reserves. On a regular basis, the RFO will move money from the current account into these accounts as appropriate to maximise the interest earned.

Discussions have also been held between members of the Finance working group and CCLA and a new investment account option was suggested for any future dowry monies from new areas of public open space the parish council may acquire.

## **Guest Speakers**

During the year the parish council have welcomed two guest speakers to meetings. In November, Dan Price, the police & crime commissioner for Cheshire came to our meeting to share his plans for the role and to explain how we could work together to improve the area.

The Chief Executive of HBC, Stephen Young, was our guest speaker at the March meeting. He gave an upbeat report on the regeneration activities around the Runcorn, Daresbury and Widnes areas and a commitment to improving transport links to Daresbury by the Liverpool City Region.

## **Conclusion**

Over the 2024-2025 financial year, the council have been involved in a variety of projects throughout the area. We have continued to administrate the maintenance of the areas of public open space, including the pond at Swans Reach and the Jubilee Forest. The council have improved the litter issue at a hot spot near the Swans Reach area with the installation and fortnightly emptying of a new bin. Several parish councillors, along with some amazing local volunteers, successfully organised and ran the first Sandymoor Fair for 5 years. The parish council have also supported local community groups with grant funding for the benefit of local youngsters. All councillors and employees of the council continue to work hard behind the scenes on the resident's behalf on projects for all areas of the community from supporting the planters volunteer group, maintaining the defibrillators, and compiling the SID data to getting the preparation work done for the gardening project and negotiating with developers about future areas of public open spaces within the new developments. As well as this, the council have continued to work with other outside agencies, such as HBC, Cheshire Police and Sandymoor Ormiston Academy, to improve our area in the long term. Although some projects were planned and costed in the budget for this year, they didn't come to fruition, but the groundwork for some of these projects has been carried out and the budget money will be carried over into the next fiscal year.

## Financial Overview

<b>Money in</b>		
Precept	£	46,718
POS Dividend (any unspent excess ringfenced to reinvest)	£	35,743
Playing Fields Rental & Dividend (ringfenced to reinvest)	£	13,964
VAT Rebate (POS)	£	2,957
VAT Rebate (Precept)	£	1,450
Other (Summer Fair)	£	1,685
<b>Total In</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>102,517</b>
<b>Money Out</b>		
<b>Running Costs</b>		
Staffing Costs (inc. Training & IT hardware)	£	25,547
Admin (Room hire, insurance, IT, audits, legal & membership fees)	£	4,142
<b>Running Costs Total</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>29,690</b>
<b>Projects</b>		
POS Maintenance (SLA1, Swans Reach Pond & Surroundings)	£	18,363
Planters Maintenance (new plants, compost etc)	£	401
Jubilee Forest Maintenance	£	6,604
Grants	£	2,000
Summer Fair	£	3,146
Litter Reduction	£	1,635
Defibrillators	£	70
Events (inc Christmas tree, lights, election & remembrance wreath)	£	3,353
<b>Total Spent on Projects</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>35,573</b>
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>65,262</b>
<b>Funds left at end of year (inc POS &amp; sink fund excess)</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>37,255</b>
<b>POS &amp; Sink Fund Excess to Reinvest</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>27,696</b>
<b>Final Excess Figure</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>9,559</b>