

STOKE ST. GREGORY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 12th April 2021.

held remotely via Zoom.

Present – Graham Gleed (Chairman), Sara Sollis (Vice-Chair), Heather Venn, Ann Finn, Janice Pearce, Peter House, John Hembrow, David House, Simon Dauncey, David Fothergill (Arrives at 8.15pm)

In Attendance – Kelly de Silva and nine members of the public

1. Apologies for absence –David Fothergill will arrive later due to attending another PC meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting – The minutes of the Parish council meeting held on Monday 8th March 2021 were agreed by all to be accurate and signed by the Chairman.

Considering the recent passing of HRH Prince Phillip, the Chairman requests a one-minute silence is observed by the full council and public in attendance, to reflect on the service and life of HRH Prince Phillip.

GG informs the PC may wish to consider making a donation in memory of HRH to a charity represented by HRH Prince Phillip. GG requests this item is included in the agenda for the next meeting.

Clerk to add the item to the next meeting agenda.

Declarations of interests and dispensations – GG declares an interest in Minute 6 as the Chair of the HOTV and a trustee of the Village Hall. GG will participate in discussions but will abstain from any vote.

SD enquires if he should declare an interest in the HOTV as his spouse is employed by the HOTV. The Clerk informs as he is not directly employed by the HOTV he can participate in discussions and any vote with regards to the HOTV.

HV enquires whether share holders should declare an interest in HOTV. The Clerk informs she has sought advice from SALC and unless a member has purchased an excess of £20,000 in shares in the project, a declaration of an interest is not required.

Public question time – There were no comments from the public in attendance.

2. Planning

36/21/0001/CLA River Tone Railway Bridge. Stanmoor Road, Athelney – Application for prior approval under part 18 Class A for bridge works
DECISION -PRIOR APPROVAL APPROVED (CONDITIONAL) 25-03-01

36/21/0003/LB & 36/21/0002 Brae Barn. Curload, Stoke St Gregory – Installation of 16 No. solar panels to the South West roof with extension wall mounting of a solar inverter and associated battery energy storage unit on the North West of the dwelling.

The following response was agreed:

“Stoke St Gregory Parish Council agree unanimously to support the two planning applications for Brae Barn.”

36/21/0005/LB The Laurels. Stoke Road, Meare Green, Stoke St Gregory – Replacement of mineralised felt roof covering with standing seam zinc covering on the extension to the South West of the dwelling.

The following response was agreed:

“Stoke St Gregory Parish Council agree unanimously to support this planning application.”

36/21/0004 Old Barbers. Curload, Stoke St Gregory – Replacement of extension to the rear, raising of first floor roof, alterations to ground floor openings and partial demolition of garage.

Although the PC was granted an extension on the 21 days to respond to this application, there was a clerical error by the case officer at SWT and approval was granted prior to a comment being submitted from the PC.

36/21/0006 The Gables, Curload, Stoke St Gregory – Erection of a chicken house, chicken run, polytunnel & storage building at the rear.

The following response was agreed:

“Stoke St Gregory Parish Council agree unanimously not to comment on this application.”

36/21/0010 Court Cottage, Stoke Road, Meare Green, Stoke St Gregory – Erection of an extension to storage building at the rear.

The following response was agreed:

“Stoke St Gregory Parish Council agree unanimously to support this planning application.”

The Chairman requests item 12 Willey Road Housing Development is brought forward in the meeting as it includes a planning item.

2.1 Willey Road Housing Development

GG reports that on the 9th April 2021 the Willey Road housing developer submitted a formal planning application regarding the buffer zone behind Church Close. GG continues that this is a significant step forward and states this will be a separate planning application to the original submitted (36/18/0048). This will now be dealt with by the planning department at SWT with the PC expected to be contacted during the consultation phase.

GG informs he has addressed the subject of the fence between the path and houses Nos. 29 & 30 on Church Close - encouraging a wall be built instead as this would be longer-lasting and lower maintenance than a fence. GG states that this request was met with reluctance from the developer as it would involve additional costs, and as the recent application includes a closed board fence separating the houses and the footpath it would require submission of an additional planning application.

HV states there is a requirement to be mindful of who will be responsible for the maintenance of the fence.

SS informs the developer has previously suggested the maintenance of the fence will be the responsibility of the occupants of the houses Nos. 29 & 30 Church Close; SS states this would be a considerable amount of fencing to maintain.

GG enquires whether the PC feel it is appropriate to pursue the build of a wall instead of the close board fence. SS responds that this should be a matter to discuss with the current occupants of the houses in question.

GG recommends that dialogue is opened with the occupants to assist in resolving the issue.

GG to correspond with the homeowners regarding the matter.

Review of site visits for planning applications as lockdown restrictions are lifted.

GG reports that during the lockdown, planning applications have been reviewed via the online planning portal prior to submitting comments. GG asks whether - with the lifting of lockdown restrictions – the PC should resume on-site visits.

It is agreed that site visits should be reinstated however visits would be at the discretion of the individual PC members and the applicant, with social distancing guidelines being adhered to.

Clerk to arrange site visits for future planning applications.

3. Insurance Renewal

The Clerk reports the insurance renewal documents were circulated prior to the meeting to the PC. The policy is up for renewal on 31st May 2021, this will be the final year of the 3-year fixed-cost agreement arranged in 2019. The Clerk informs the only addition to the asset register to be included in the renewed policy is the Memorial Plaque at the Pavilion at a cost of £305.00.

GG proposes the insurance is renewed as per the current policy. HV seconds the motion, all were in favour.

GG to renew the policy with Came and Co.

4. Road Traffic and Parking in the Square and around the centre of the village.

GG informs that with the School, pre-school staff, and some parents now using the Royal Oak car park, there has been some minor improvement of the traffic and parking situation within the centre of the village. GG continues that with the extra cars and volunteers parking in the car park it is full at times, and this needs to be a watching brief.

SS agrees that there has been a little improvement, but there are still people parking irresponsibly on the Willey Road, with children exiting and entering vehicles into the oncoming traffic.

SD suggests a factor that may be exasperating the parking situation in the Square is people parking directly outside the shop gates with the intention of only being in the shop for a brief time. SD asks how best to request that customers refrain from parking in the bay.

GG informs that in the long term, the plan is for the bay to become blue badge holders only but suggests the traffic cones currently stored at the village hall could be used to prohibit customers parking there.

SS notes that this could disadvantage customers who require easy access to the shop and suggests a sign could be used to request that customers use the car park provided.

GG to discuss with the HOTV committee the possibility of signage requesting people to use the carpark.

5. Grant for the Playing Fields

GG reports a grant application was submitted to the PC 08-03-21 for the sum of £3,000, but it was not received in sufficient time to be included in the March PC meeting.

GG continues the PFMC would have raised this sum from the Stoke Stampede, which was cancelled due to pandemic. Unfortunately, the Playing Fields has been unable to qualify for any funding as the pavilion is a new build - it has been classed as a non-rateable building, but the running costs of the new pavilion have increased; mowing and maintenance is required, and there has been minimal financial income.

DH states that the playing fields and pavilion are an important asset for the village. SD agrees with DH and asks what other options are left for the PFMC to raise money.

GG replies the PFMC could possibly hold small fundraising events, but these have not been permitted due to the pandemic.

SS states the village have been incredibly lucky to have the playing fields throughout the lockdowns. SS continues that although the village is surrounded by fields, most of these have been underwater throughout winter and the flooding season. The PFMC have worked extremely hard throughout the pandemic to keep the playing fields safe and have incurred huge financial losses. SS adds that the grass cutting alone is £2,500 per year.

AF enquires whether the Stoke Stampede could be arranged for later in the year.

SS responds the outlay for the road closures, preparation, and planning cost approximately £7,500, and if it were to be cancelled again the PFMC could not afford to lose that amount of money.

JH states the PC should support the playing fields and the pavilion.

HV requests information about the PFMC's financial situation and asks if the PC could assist with the grass cutting payments.

(There is some discussion around the PFMC finances that will not be published in the PC minutes.)

GG concludes that the Playing Fields is an important asset for the community that is managed prudently by the committee.

GG proposes the sum of £3,000 required for general grass cutting and maintenance is granted to the Playing Fields to offset the financial losses resulting from the pandemic. JH seconds the motion, all were in favour.

Clerk to liaise with the PFMC to arrange payment of the grant.

6. CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy)

GG reports that due to the pandemic, there has been a change in the payment schedule of CIL payments from SWT, as a result the final and largest tranche of the PC portion of CIL money is now not expected until October 2021. GG informs the PC has so far received £32,195.35 CIL from the Willey Road Housing development and £907.42 from a development on Woodhill, totalling £33,102.77, with the remaining £32,195.35 not expected to be paid to the PC until October. The total expected PC CIL portion will be £65,298.12.

GG states there is the requirement that the PC have a CIL allocation process in place that considers the best interests of the whole community.

GG presents a breakdown of applications received by the PC for CIL funding to date.

The Willowset pre-school – purchase and build of a modular building - £64,230

The Women's Institute – petanque Court in the grounds of the Village Hall - £2,000

The HOTV – purchase of kitchen equipment for the Royal Oak - £10,000

GG suggests the Meare Green speed limit reduction and associated works - which has received positive feedback from the community - may use CIL funding with an approximate quote of £8,000.

GG continues The SSG Tennis Club are considering an application for floodlights, and another possible investment into broadband supply for the outskirts of the village including Meare Green and Curload has been suggested.

(DF Joins the meeting)

GG asks how the PC decides which projects will serve the community the best. He also asks whether the whole amount of the PC portion of the CIL should be made available at once or should a portion be retained to allow time to gauge if further infrastructure investment is required as a result of the Willey Road housing development.

DH states the Petanque Court would be a good addition as there is very little available in the village for the older community.

SS adds there is also very little within the village for the teenagers and children of a high school age.

A member of the public requests something should be provided for the over 11-year-olds such as a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) to expend their energy productively.

SS informs there has been previous adult interest in a MUGA, and it is a project that the PFMC keep considering.

HV enquires as to the criteria for the CIL allocation; is it to provide infrastructure required as a result of the new housing development, or should it be used to benefit the whole village?

HV continues that there are decisions to be made about making the decisions, and this will not be a quick process.

GG responds the whole village should benefit from the infrastructure investment and agrees the allocation of funding will be a long process. GG stresses there is a requirement to make sure the community do not feel ignored or over-ruled.

HV states that it is critical to agree a timeline for applications and funding as soon as possible. HV continues that applications such as the Willowset are dependant on a more immediate funding allocation. Applicants such as these should be informed that a decision on their CIL funding application may not deliver an immediate and instant funding solution for their projects.

GG agrees and adds the timeline of allocation may also have implications for the application from the HOTV. HV responds the HOTV is a business and may be able to use revenue from the shop/pub/cafe to purchase equipment that it requires.

SS states she has many questions about the applications that have been received. SS continues she has never visited the school or the pre-school to see the resources they have and better understand their requirements. The PC do not yet know what impact the housing development demographic will have. So far, the only certainty is more cars and traffic within the village.

GG informs that the Clerk has researched similar parishes and their approach to CIL allocation. One in particular, (Gislingham PC in Suffolk) compiled a survey for their residents including all projects and ideas that had been submitted. GG continues there must be an assessment process; the PC need to engage with the community, gather information and allow the community to offer their views – this process will undoubtedly take time.

PH asks if the PC will be permitted to partially fund projects and what the implications would be if the remaining part-funding could not be raised.

DH responds, prior to CIL allocation the PC would require a commitment that other funds could be raised with the PC possibly offering to match funding.

PH notes that if an application required planning permission, planning approval should be sought before funding is allocated.

HV requests applicants for CIL funding must demonstrate what the issues are – both positive and negative implications – the PC will require a full understanding in order to assess the application effectively.

JH suggests it may be beneficial to consider multiple projects of benefit to the village rather than a single project as it is unlikely a development providing this amount of CIL will happen again within the village for a significant amount of time. JH continues the PC do not yet know whether infrastructure investment will be required due to the housing development in the future.

JP agrees stating there are a considerable number of organisations within the community that due to the pandemic have been unable to meet in order to discuss if an application for CIL funding would benefit them. JP adds there is a requirement to develop a timeline and a strategy.

AF states the PC should allocate the CIL funding to benefit as many people in the community as possible.

SS enquires if a sub-group of the PC would be permitted to meet to discuss forming a strategy. The Clerk informs this would only be possible if it were an open meeting, with members of the public being able to attend as maintaining openness and transparency throughout the process is essential.

(A power cut happens in Stoke St Gregory. Power resumes shortly after with 7 members of the public re-joining the meeting, David House is unable to re-join, the rest of the PC is present)

PH suggests that if the PC are compiling a list of applications, then before consultation with the community can happen a closing date should be agreed. PH recommends the closing date for applications should be in October (when the final tranche of money is due).

HV agrees adding this would give an opportunity for leveraging communications such as the newsletter, PC reports, parish magazine etc. HV suggests an application deadline of September 2021, with a decision anticipated by October 2021 and funds allocated shortly thereafter. HV adds that she personally does not agree with spreading the funds too thinly or capping the amount of funding that can be applied for.

GG suggests a number of PC members could possibly have a discussion to formulate the process and methodology for allocating CIL funding prior to the next meeting. SS, SD, and JP offer to participate.

Clerk to liaise with SALC to confirm if this is a lawful route to pursue before any meeting is arranged.

Clerk to add CIL to the next agenda.

GG to inform applicants that decisions on applications are not likely to be made until the final tranche of funding has been received in October 2021.

7. Verges around the Village

HV reports that larger vehicles in general as well as larger farm machinery are eroding the verges surrounding the village.

PH suggests this should be SCC Highways responsibility and requires reporting.

AF adds too often verges are re-instated but subsequently bollards protecting the reinstated verges are knocked down and more damage is done. AF refers to the Stoke Road approaching North Curry where the verge has collapsed. AF suggests contractors in large vehicles should be held responsible.

GG states this matter is a vexatious subject. The size of all road vehicles has increased and as a result the verges are suffering significant damage. GG refers to the incident on Huntham Lane where the verge collapsed under a large tanker. GG asks what remedial action SCC Highways can take and what practical steps can be made to mitigate the issue.

JP states that contractors with larger vehicles should be held accountable. It is a joint contribution of larger vehicles and careless driving.

JH adds it is a fact of rural life, it is difficult to do anything about as results from a combination of factors.

HV recommends communicating with local farmers to request the mindfulness of the verges and encouraging them to make good verges that have been damaged.

AF reports along the top of Huntham Lane someone has reseeded the damaged verge and tidied it up. JH responds this was him.

GG proposes a communication could be devised reminding farmers and contractors of the verges, but recent communications from the PC regarding ploughing and rights of way on the footpaths have been ignored. This will be discussed under item 14 in the meeting.

DH reports the road at the brow of Dark Lane is sinking and subsiding – this should be reported.

PH adds the structures of the roads in and surrounding the Village are not suitable for the size of vehicles using them.

**GG to write a correspondence to farmers and contractors advising mindfulness of the verges.
Clerk to report the road defect on Dark Lane to SCC Highways**

8. Phone Box at the Playing Fields

GG reports work is in motion to transform the phone box from its current dilapidated state. The surrounding overgrowth and trees have been cleared to assist with work commencing.

9. Annual Parish Meeting

GG reports he has devised the agenda for the APM to be held via Zoom on Tuesday 27th April and has sent invites to local groups. The PC, HOTV, School, Pre-school and Playing Fields have been invited to present a report in person, with other local groups submitting reports that will be displayed on a dedicated page on the Village website for 2 months. Towards the end of the meeting there will be an opportunity for public comments and questions about the reports. GG states he will re-enforce the communication with a start time of 7.30pm closer to the time.

10. Internal Audit of the PC accounts prior to AGAR

The Clerk reports that she will be undertaking the end of year accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) this month. Prior to completing the AGAR, the accounts require auditing by an Internal Auditor. The Clerk suggests asking Liz Hembrow as she has historically completed the internal audit prior to sending the accounts to the external auditor, PKF Littlejohn.

GG proposes contacting Liz Hembrow to ask if she would complete the internal audit, HV seconds the motion, all were in favour.

Clerk to contact Liz Hembrow.

11. Covid 19

DF reports that current Covid cases in Somerset are 17.6 per 100,000, with cases in SWT district at 12.2 cases per 100,000. DF continues that this is a 60% drop in case numbers over the last month, so the figures are definitely moving in the right direction, but numbers are

lower today as testing numbers fell 30% over the Easter Bank Holiday Weekend, so inevitably these numbers will rise slightly. Vaccination of the over 50's in Somerset has been completed – the vaccination programme is moving at a pace. DF urges caution as it could all go wrong if people do not adhere to current guidelines, this is not the time for complacency.

12. Willey Road Housing Development

GG states this item was brought forward in the meeting into the planning section under minute 2.1 as it involved a planning issue.

GG reports that he has been unable to contact the previous footpath officer with regards to the gate that was supposed to be installed between Church Close and the Allotments.

AF suggests that Phil Stone has a stock of gates from Rights of Way and maybe he could be contacted for one.

GG to contact PS to enquire about obtaining a replacement gate.

13. Highways

Speed Limit in Meare Green

The Clerk reports that she was last updated by the SCC Traffic Management Officer (TMO) on 9th March 2021 to report they were visiting the proposed site within the next week to mark up and take measurements for preparing the TRO for advertising. The Clerk continues that the TMO was unable to submit any new works orders until April but could start preparing beforehand. The TMO advised the TRO must be advertised for 3 weeks and if there are any objections these will need to be addressed before any works can take place. The TMO was hopeful that a works order could be submitted by the end of April.

Speed Watch

Speed watch has not resumed due to lockdown restrictions.

14. Footpaths

GG reports that an agreed correspondence was sent to local landowners and Farmers on 24th March 2021 requesting a sufficient margin of 1.5m at the edge of fields that are subject to Rights of Way.

GG shares a screen shot of photographs of Footpath T25-19 showing ploughing of the footpath with no margin being left.

GG states due to the ploughing this Rights of Way footpath is impossible to walk. GG continues it is very disappointing that one week after a letter is issued requesting a sufficient margin is left, the footpath is completely ploughed.

JH suggests the matter is reported to Rights of Way.

GG recommends a correspondence of a note of concern from the PC should be written to the Farmer of this particular field.

GG to prepare a correspondence to the Farmer for circulation prior to sending.

15. Climate / Environmental Issues

Climate Forward Strategy Group

GG reports the minutes of the FSG were forwarded to the PC on 01-04-21 and invited any comments on the strategy and carbon footprint actions.

JH responds that some points are not factually correct, not just with farming, but as a whole.

GG asks if the FSG should be affiliated with the PC as it has taken on a life of its own and could function independently of the PC.

HV enquires how community engagement would be sought. GG responds that DE has offered to take the lead in developing this topic.

PH asks if the group would be able to apply for financial assistance from the PC. GG informs the group would be able to apply to the PC for funding by the same process as any other group in the community. GG continues that Climate Action Athelney has offered funding for surveys to be completed.

JP recommends the item should still be included on PC agendas as a regular item for discussion.

HV asks whether the group requires a PC representative. GG responds there are several members of the PC involved with the group, the PC would participate in discussions but have no control in matters.

The group will now lose FSG from its title and act independently of the PC.

Reversing insect decline and No Mow May

GG advises these items will be discussed by the Climate Action Group.

Great British Spring Clean

GG reports historically the PC has participated in this and borrowed the equipment.

Unfortunately, this site has now ceased, and the equipment has been discarded.

GG continues that a member of the community has offered to purchase their own equipment to carry out local litter picking if the PC could co-ordinate a drop off point for litter collected. GG asks the PC if it wishes to consider the purchase of litter picking equipment that can be used by the community to collect litter with the incentive of a free tea or coffee at the Royal Oak for each bag of rubbish collected.

GG to obtain costings for equipment and storage of litter collected.

Clerk to add the item to the next agenda.

16. Floods

Nothing to report.

17. Playing Fields

SS reports there will be a new exercise class on the playing fields on Tuesdays as of 13th April 2021, Cricket will also commence from Saturday 17th April at 12pm.

18. Heart of the Village

GG reports the pub will be open from Friday 16th April, 6pm – 9pm. Tables are outside for 6 people and requiring booking in advance by emailing pub@hotvssg.org. GG informs the pub will be open Fridays 6pm-9pm, Saturday 6pm-9pm and Sunday 12-3pm.

GG offers his thanks to SD for his work to enable the serving of beverages.

19. Village Website

Nothing to report.

20. Broadband

GG reports this item has been historically covered by Nick Sloan before he stood down from the PC. GG continues that NS has been in discussions with a member of the community who is interested in taking on this item for progression.

21. Consultations and Surveys

Feedback on Somewhere House Somerset proposal for a new mobile Health and Wellbeing service in the community.

GG reports that Somewhere House are asking for feedback on a mobile unit for supporting Health and Wellbeing. This will involve:

- Promoting positive Mental Health – travelling to rural communities providing a safe space where people can get advice and support from a qualified Councillor.
- Combat loneliness and isolation.
- Promote a remote counselling service and offer guidance on using technology to access this service.
- Provide information on events and other services available, as well as attending local schools and providing educational workshops.

GG recommends the PC register an interest in this project and should respond positively. SD agrees stating people all too often suffer in silence. SS states that prior to the pandemic 1 in 4 people were likely to suffer mental health issues during their lifetime and this would be a very good way of offering support.

GG to respond offering support for the service.

Somerset Unitarisation Consultation – deadline 19-04-21

It is agreed that members of the PC will complete this survey as individuals.

22. Financial Matters

Standing Order

01-4-21 K de Silva – Clerks Salary £377.00

Payments for Authorisation

Rockwell Print and Sign – Spring Newsletter £63.00

K de Silva – Clerks Expenses £31.85

(Book of stamps @ £5.10 and secure postage to return the laptop to be fixed under warranty @ £26.75)

Josh Williams – Sunrise Horticultural Services – Grass Maintenance £90.00

SALC – Clerk attendance to planning application training £25.00.

Payments Received

None

GG proposes all payments are made. HV seconds the motion, all were in favour.

Other Financial Items

The Clerk reports Jean House has asked if the PC would authorise extra copies of the newsletter to be printed to accommodate the new housing development. This would see the price increase from £63.00 per issue to £69.00. GG proposes the PC support this request, HV seconds the motion, all were in favour.

Bank reconciliation check to the end of March was completed by SS with no issues to report.

The Clerk reports she will now complete the end of year accounts, AGAR and prepare the VAT reclaim for 2020-21.

The Clerk reports she had circulated her contract of employment prior to the meeting for consideration and required the remuneration agreed at the March Meeting to be formally minuted. All agreed the Clerks contract was in order.

GG proposes the clerks remuneration will increase to £13.00 per hour as of 1st April 2021 and the Clerks contract to be signed, SS seconds the motion, all were in favour.

GG signs the Clerks contract as Chairman of the PC. Clerk to sign on return of the contract.

23. Other Items for discussion

Possibility of lateral flow testing for face-to-face PC meetings.

The Clerk informs that as of Friday 9th April 2021, Lateral Flow Testing kits became available for all and can be ordered by the Gov.UK website for home delivery or collected from Bridgewater Town Hall. The Clerk suggests that with face-to-face meetings resuming, members of the PC may wish to take a test prior to the meeting.

GG suggests members of the PC would be encouraged to complete a lateral flow test before face-to-face meetings.

AF informs there is an ongoing issue with a gate that was erected on Turkey Drove being locked preventing access, including to Farmers. AF continues that although it is not a Public Right of Way, there is an excessive amount of background to support that it should be. AF informs she applied for a modification order for the Right of Way in 2013 but due to the severe backlog, it has yet to be addressed. AF plans to ask SCC if this request can be expedited.

GG asks DF about the Climate Emergency Grant that was awarded for the installation of solar panels at the Royal Oak stating he has not been able to receive a response or information about receiving the funds. DF responds there is a bottleneck of confirming funds to the successful applicants and will check the progress for this project.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 9.43pm.

The next Full Council meeting will be held remotely via Zoom on Tuesday 4th May 2021 at 7.30pm.

Please email any items for the agenda to the Clerk (ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk) and the chairman (grahiamgleed@gmail.com) by 30th April 2021.

The APM will be held via Zoom on Tuesday 27th April 2021 at 7.30pm – all are invited.

DRAFT