

STOKE ST. GREGORY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 27th

April 2021 held remotely via Zoom.

Present – Graham Gleed (Chairman), Sara Sollis (Vice-Chair), Ann Finn, Janice Pearce, John Hembrow, Simon Dauncey, Sue Buller (District Councillor), Phil Stone (District Councillor)

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

Prior to the official start of the Annual Parish Meeting GG informs that it is with great sadness he announces that Parish Councillor David House passed away shortly after the last Parish Council meeting on 12th April, in which David participated.

David had been a Parish Councillor for many years as well as a District Councillor, NFU representative, a planning committee member - all being amongst his many roles in serving the community.

David House was a pleasure to deal with, he was attentive, highly regarded, honest and his loss will be felt significantly.

GG expresses the Parish Council's sincerest sympathies to David's wife Jean House and their family. GG hopes they can take solace in that people within our community share their grief with them.

A minute silence is held to remember and reflect on the life of Parish Councillor David House.

Nick Sloan thanks GG for his words and would like to add that David was a "doer and a joiner". David was a great supporter of the HOTV, an original HOTV committee member and was the very first person to buy shares in the project - he will be greatly missed.

1.Chairman's Welcome

GG welcomes all the participants to the meeting and expresses his thanks to the community groups that will make representations this evening and to those who have written reports for the Annual Parish Meeting. All of the reports will be available to view for the next 2 months on the Village website in the 2021 Minutes section - <https://www.stokestgregory.org/parish-council/documents-2/>

GG informs this Annual Parish Council meeting will be different to any other due to being held remotely as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, with no speaker and without the drinks and nibbles - but we must press on. GG asks that any questions or comments on individual reports presented this evening are addressed after each report and if anyone has any questions or comments regarding the reports published on the Village Website, these are made to the Clerk via email on ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk and will be dealt with accordingly.

2.Apologies for absence – Peter House, Heather Venn, and Sonia Satchell (The Baptist Church)

3.Minutes of the previous meeting – The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 16th April 2019 were agreed by all to be accurate and signed by the Chairman.

4. Chairman's Report compiled and presented by Graham Gleed

GG reports that in the two years that have elapsed since the last Annual Parish Meeting, there have been many changes in the village. Some of these will be noted in other presentations, but it is true to say that several of these, such as HOTV and the new pavilion and the housing development are having a profound positive impact on the village.

It is pleasing that the new housing development has - as anticipated - given the opportunity for families that have associations with the Village the opportunity to live in Stoke St Gregory, as well as bringing in new residents.

Following the last APM, the AGM of the Parish Council elected GG as Chairman supported By Sara Sollis as Vice Chair. At the time of the last report in 2019, it was noted that Glynn Banks was standing down from the PC. Glynn was replaced by Janice Pearce. More recently in February Nick Sloan stepped down as a Parish Councillor after making an exceptional contribution over the preceding nine years; Nick's place on the PC was filled by Simon Dauncey.

GG would like to thank every member of the PC individually for their commitment and hard work over the past 24 months and for their attendance to PC meetings. While there is not always agreement there is certainly synergy with each councillor bringing an additive contribution. The PC are always ready to learn, willing to improve and any input from the community will always be welcome.

At the time of the last meeting Kelly de Silva had just been appointed as Parish Clerk. In the subsequent two years, GG would wish it to be noted that Kelly has made an exceptional contribution to both the PC and the community at large for which the whole PC expresses its thanks.

GG also thanked Phil Stone, Sue Buller, and David Fothergill for their conscientious attendance at PC meetings and their support in wider matters of local governance adding their support is appreciated.

While the positive impact of major changes in the village have been widely reported, there remains an undercurrent of intractable issues that demand continuing focus. Not least of these is the continuing poor broadband availability in Meare Green and Curload, the traffic congestion and parking in the School and the Village Square, as well as traffic management both in terms of speed and volume. These will continue to demand the attention of the PC. However, we are hopeful of completing the project to reduce the speed limit to 30mph in the coming months.

Finally, at the time of the last APM the new village website has just been released. In the intervening period it has developed to become one of the 'go to' sources of information about the village and it plays a significant part in positively presenting the community of SSG to the world at large. GG would like to thank NS for his continuing dedication to keeping this site relevant and current, as the world's window into Stoke St Gregory.

5. HOTV Report compiled and presented by Nick Sloan

It has been an extraordinary year for the Heart of the Village or bearing in mind that last year's APM was cancelled, I should say that it has been an even more extraordinary *two* years.

At the time of the last Annual Parish Meeting in April 2019 we had recently held a public meeting in the village hall to gauge interest in the project and invite feedback, but we had only just embarked on our Business Plan.

This and the Share Prospectus were released in August that year to coincide with the opening of the share offer.

Towards the end of 2019, following a lot of research, principally by Mike Blair, we had located a container adapted to serve as a shop which was about to become available, and this was delivered to the Village hall car park in time for Ian to transfer the Village Stores into it at the beginning of 2020. Thank you to the PC for helping to fund this.

From January to April 2020, Ian and Karen did sterling work training volunteers to take over the operation of the shop for when it would transfer to HOTV ownership, but then Covid struck in earnest and the March 2020 lockdown defeated our plans and obliged us to hand over the running of the shop from April to Jo and Carolyn, our two managers. They have however done such a brilliant job in building the business that this could be regarded as a blessing in heavy disguise.

The share offer closed in March 2020, having raised £205,650, at which point we started putting together the finance to purchase the Royal Oak and refurbish it.

Our first Annual Members' Meeting took place (via Zoom) in June, which also marks the date from which we had an elected committee. We had a few slightly rocky meetings at which some Members had cold feet as to whether we should proceed in the face of a pandemic, but warmer feet prevailed, and we finally clinched the deal on the Oak at the end of August 2020. Since then, there has been a maelstrom of activity on all fronts, and we could never have got as far as we have without the help of an astonishing number of people.

The first target was to prepare the building to install the shop. Dave Dyer did his magic on the structure, and an amazing team of volunteers led by Tom Stobie and Trevor Daniels came in day after day and worked like Trojans to transform the left-hand bar. The shop opened at 7:30 on 30 November 2020. (I am proud to record that I had the honour of being the first customer!)

You are all aware of how the shop has gone from strength to strength since then, thanks both to the flair, commitment and hard work of Jo and Carolyn, and to the many volunteers, especially Marilyn Clarke, who have assisted them, largely unseen from day one. Meanwhile there was much more work to do to prepare for pub re-opening. To some extent it was an advantage that the enforced closure of pubs took the pressure off, though pressure has mounted as we approached opening day on 16th April.

Anyone who enjoyed a drink in the garden then or since will have appreciated how far we have come. Our volunteers have done us proud outside as well as in, and Helen Gittins and Kathryn Astin in particular have done wonders to the garden, along with their team of garden volunteers. We also owe a massive debt to Carolyn's husband Simon for transforming the cellar, preparing the bar, and handling the whole drinks side of things.

We hope to be able to open the inside bar in May. We welcome our new bar manager Phil Evans who is set to become a familiar face in the village. We look forward to being able to offer cooked food in both the café and the pub once the kitchen has been refurbished and re-equipped. We further look forward to getting the skittle alleys back in action and solving the puzzle of access to the function room to open up more dining space.

To touch briefly on the finances: HOTV turnover for the first year's trading was about £270K, which is ahead of what we had projected despite not being able to receive any appreciable revenue from the pub or café. When taking overheads, depreciation, and finance costs into account we will just about break even, though of course we still have loans to pay off and more capital spend to come. The overall message is that despite the pandemic, we remain on course.

The Royal Oak, and HOTV in general will always remain works in progress. Once we have weathered the pandemic, paid off our debts and put everything on a firm commercial footing it was always the intention to plough most of the profits back into the community in whatever way seems most appropriate. It sometimes feels as though we have a mountain still to climb but looking back to where we came from should give us confidence: it has been a long and rocky climb, but we have come a hell of a long way in a relatively short time.

Finally, more thank-yous: there are far too many people to mention by name, and I would be sure to forget someone vital, but I have to say that this simply would not have happened without the slog and dedication of Graham and John. My fellow committee members Mike Blair and Chris Reah have also done a lot of essential work, and we could not have done without the skills of our demon Treasurer David Crabbe, the book-keeping talents of Sally Taylor or the accounting advice of Sophie Harris.

The volunteers are all heroes, whether they paint walls, clean floors, or serve drinks: thanks to all of you for helping us to create a true community enterprise. As well as those I have already mentioned I'd like to put in a special mention for Sue and Robert Smyth who cheerfully tied themselves in knots doing one of the least glamorous jobs imaginable: repairing and repainting the loos! We love you!

We also appreciate hugely the 250+ Members who bought HOTV shares, thus demonstrating their faith and commitment. In many case Members and volunteers are the same people, but we make no distinction in terms of value: you are all essential and very much appreciated.

Last but by no means least I'd like to thank all the many customers without whom we'd be completely stuffed. Your contribution literally keeps us in business.

There have been a few hiccups and disagreements along the way, but after more than three years of hard work, HOTV has blossomed into exactly the sort of thriving social focus that we had dreamed of, and without which the village would be a much-diminished place.

NS would also like to express his thanks to Sara Sollis and the late David House as original committee members and for David House's true dedication to the project.

GG thanks Nick Sloan for all his hard work and contribution to the HOTV project.

6. Head Teachers Report presented by Dawn Baker

DB states she will cover some of the aspects of the school that have involved the wider community this evening. DB states she has been made to feel very welcome within the community since her arrival before Christmas.

It has been an interesting time to join the school during the Covid pandemic and DB would like to thank GG for his assistance in the community's participation in the "Your positive speaks" assembly. It was a time to focus on the positives around us and to not feel isolated as a result of the pandemic.

The School has required to be quite closed to the community due to the pandemic, but as restrictions are lifted there are hopes to hold a delayed Maypole event in July and a sports day where parents and members of the community can visit and watch.

The Friends of the School have not been able to hold any fund-raising events throughout the pandemic, and it is planned that they will be able to start fund-raising for the school again soon.

DB has interacted with Parish Councillor Janice Pearce with regards to integrating local climate change within the curriculum. DB expresses that she wanted to maintain an open and realistic approach to this with the children to deliver something that was on their level.

The School attempt to stay in touch with the community via a bi-weekly newsletter that is available on the School website that is ever evolving. This can be viewed at www.stokestgregory.school

DB informs she feels she has had a great start since joining the school and it is a great place to work. The atmosphere when the children returned after lockdown was amazing, and although the children have had to adapt to being in groups and socialising again, there has been a great feeling within the school.

GG thanks DB for her dynamic presentation and for her great start since joining the school. SS states that the Spring Trail that was orchestrated by the Friends of the School has been amazing and well received by the community. DB responds this was a great initiative, being creative without breaking Covid rules.

7. Willowset Report presented by Mercedes Rueda (Chair of Trustees) on behalf of Rachel Parish.

'The Willow Set' has been going for over 35 years and is a charity setting for children aged 2-13 years. It is now located in a purpose-built setting within the grounds of Stoke St Gregory primary school. This is a rural village with a diverse and strong community of which we are very much part of. The Willow Set has achieved 'Ofsted Outstanding' three times in a row, mainly because we are passionate about providing children with great building blocks for their future, through the best play and learning environment we can. We also have strong links with the wider community.

Over the years we have supported other areas of Stoke St Gregory including Rachel, the manager, sourcing a grant of £10,000 which was successful and the whole amount put into the village playing field play park.

The willow set is not just a preschool it provides wrap around care for term time and holidays. In total it caters for children from 7.30am – 6pm, 5 days a week for 50 weeks of the year. Our fantastic facility not only provides busy and working parents' flexible childcare but, allows a wonderful integral setting where little pre-schoolers mix with older school children in a thriving 'learn through play' environment where we have specific activities for children to enjoy and engage with, including sports, gardening, arts, cooking, and roller skating, to name but a few. All of this is in a safe rich enabling environment where children can explore and make new friends.

We have had steady growth throughout the last 10 years and in 2018/19 and 2019/20 were at full capacity for most of the days during most of the year. The team and voluntary committee have been looking at options for expansion for some time to enable that holistic growth to continue however as a small charity and with the huge impact of COVID on the bottom line, capital expenditure has been out of reach.

We are now at capacity with a waiting list for children due to go to school September 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. Over 90% of these children are entitled to 15 hours, 30 hours or 15 hours 2-year-old free funding and cannot access this with us if we have no spaces.

Some of the children requesting places are new to the village which we stated would happen in 2019 and are due to start school in September, so it was paramount we address this as quickly as possible as we need to support all children in the transition to reception class. increase

With this in mind, we have made the decision to temporarily increase the floorspace available with an outside classroom and new rotas to meet the short-term space requirement and fulfil the most urgent requests. This will not be a long-term solution as it will only provide enough space to meet the need until the end of July 2021. The new families going to other settings could hugely impact on our future and have a detrimental effect on our village community as often, families will understandably send siblings to the same setting as the eldest child and possibly use shops in that area etc.

MR requests that if there is any help available, please help the Willowset. There are always 30 children in the setting per day, and although all the children are incredibly happy, things are inevitably getting tighter. The Preschool is currently using an outdoor classroom that has been developed in the forest school area. MR thanks DB for allowing the use of this space. MR continues that the setting supports children from not only the village, but also Stathe, Burrowbridge, North Curry and Middlezoy – they come to the setting as Rachel is constantly striving and training to be the best.

GG thanks Mercedes for her presentation and states that the School and the Willowset will remain a top priority, recognising the urgency and need of both the Willowset and the School, with the setting's proposed expansion being a case for which the community will need to come together.

AF enquires how many children are enrolled at the Willowset and how many of these children are from the village.

MR responds she does not have the exact figures to hand, but there are around 30 children using the setting each day and most of the children that will be going to Primary school in September are from Burrowbridge and Stoke St Gregory.

DB responds that currently the County Council have allowed for 13 placements at the School for these children, with 17 places being applied for. The School is supporting families with the appeal process to allow them to attend SSG Primary School, there is hope that County will allow all 17 children applying to attend.

MR notes that once children returned to the preschool after lockdown, there was an increase in expectant Mothers – this will be the second generation of children attending the Willowset, numbers will undoubtedly increase.

GG states that David Fothergill should be present and made aware of this situation. During previous PC discussions surrounding the school DF had stated there was every indication that pupil numbers would decline, and the opposite is happening. GG states the PC will further discussions around this matter in Full Council.

8. Playing Fields Report compiled and presented by Neil Sollis

The playing field has proven to be a valuable asset to the community over the last year with lots of people using it for exercise and socializing.

Although it didn't go according to plan and we haven't been able to use it as much as we'd hoped the new pavilion was handed over in May 2020. Along with the required changing rooms, the pavilion has a great meeting space and fully fitted kitchen, it's fully heated so usable all year round.

Along with the new pavilion the field has seen lots of improvements over the last 12 months, the tennis courts have been resurfaced and are looking very smart. We have a new parking area, new gates, and new steps for the footpath.

The Stampede will not take place in 2020 and we are very grateful to the parish council for the grant that they have recently awarded us as the Stampede is the main fundraiser for the playing field.

If you have been out and about recently you would have seen lots of activity on the playing field. Along with Stoke Cricket team we now have a team from Curry Rivel playing on the field on Sundays.

The team will also be running All Star Cricket for 5–11-year olds on Friday evenings from 7th May. The tennis club continue to provide tennis for all ages. Although the season has ended early Ruishton Under 13's Football team have returned to training on Saturday mornings and will return to play their home games in the Autumn. We have two exercise groups using the field every week. African Somerset will return to the field on 10 July and the school leavers camp returns in July as well.

The playing field celebrates its 70th anniversary on the 29th of May and we will mark this along with the official opening of the pavilion on 21st August with an event. We will hold the annual village bonfire on the 7th of November and the Stampede will return in January 2021.

GG thanks Neil for his presentation and states the occupancy of the playing field and the new pavilion has been phenomenal.

MR asks if there are any plans to offer something for the teenagers and older children within the community. GG responds there is some discussion over the possibility of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA). GG acknowledges there is an issue with young people within the village stating there is currently no services for them and there is an obligation to offer a safe space and amenities for the 11–16-year olds.

NS states it has always been the intention of the HOTV to offer something for the teenagers and if anyone has any ideas about what can be offered, please submit them to the HOTV directly.

Stuart Mark of The SSG Tennis Club states there is also very little available within the village for the older aged groups and there is a requirement for activities for this group. SM informs the Tennis Club has set up a "Rusty Rackets" group on a Sunday. It is aimed at the older generation and is free to play. For more information, please contact the SSG Tennis Club. SM continues that as lockdown restrictions are lifted the local tennis coach will contact the school regarding offering lessons.

GG asks all participants if there are any further questions or comments on the reports presented this evening or those that have been submitted and available on the website from:

The Allotment Association	The Parish Council
The Parochial Church Council	The HOTV
Reeves Feast	SSG Primary School
SSG Players	The Willowset
The Village Hall Committee	The Playing Fields
The Baptist Church	
Women's Institute	

There were no comments or questions.

GG thanked all participants for attending.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.20pm.

All the reports within the minutes were compiled and presented by the organisations they were representing. The reports will be available on the village website for the next 2 months at <https://www.stokestgregory.org/parish-council/documents-2/>

If you do not have internet access and would like a copy of any of the submitted reports, please request these from the Parish Clerk Kelly de Silva on 07701 053903 or ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk

If you have any comments or questions about the reports that have been presented and submitted please email these to either the Chairman Graham Gleed grahiamgleed@gmail.com or the Parish Clerk Kelly de Silva ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk

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