

STOKE ST. GREGORY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 11th October 2021.

Held in The Williams Hall, Dark Lane, Stoke St Gregory.

Present – Graham Glead (Chairman), Sara Sollis (Vice-Chair), Janice Pearce, Ann Finn, Anne Merritt, John Hembrow, Peter House, Simon Dauncey, David Fothergill (County Councillor), Sue Buller (District Councillor)

In Attendance – Kelly de Silva (Clerk), Ian Upshall (IU) (SEG) 1 member of the public

129. Apologies for absence – Heather Venn, Barrie Hall (District Councillor),

Minutes of the previous meeting – The minutes of the Parish council meeting held on Monday 13th September 2021 were agreed by all to be accurate and signed by the Chairman.

Declarations of Interests and Dispensations – None

Public Question Time – No matters were raised.

130. Planning

No planning decisions to report

36/21/0028 Sunnycroft. Stoke Road, Stoke St Gregory – Removal of conservatory and erection of a single storey extensions to both sides and rear of the dwelling

The following response was agreed:

“Stoke St Gregory Parish Council supports this application.”

36/21/0029/CQ Holly Farm House. Stoke Road, Stoke St Gregory – Prior approval for proposed change of use from agricultural building to 2 No. dwellings (use class C3) and associated building operations

It was agreed that the PC response from the original application 36/21/0024/CQ is still valid and should be resubmitted. The response was as follows:

“Stoke St Gregory Parish Council fully support this planning application as it is set well off the road with no visual impact on neighbouring properties and will add to the housing stock within the village”

131. Opening up safely and reconnecting communities fund submissions and application update

The Clerk reports that the original submission to SALC for the first round of available funding included 5 village groups. These were as follows.

- The SSG Scouts / Beavers and Cubs
- Stoke Environment Group
- The SSG Tennis Club
- SSG Baptist Church
- SSG Church Room

It was agreed (Min 111 13-09-21) that the maximum of £1,500 would be applied for and distributed evenly between the groups that had applied.

The Clerk informs that even though it was stressed to SALC that the Church Rooms operates as an independent registered charity separate from the Church, SALC refused the Church Room application citing Local Government Act 1894 Section 8 which prevents the granting of money to church property by the Council.

The Clerk then amended the application, applying for the £1,500 to be distributed evenly between the remaining four groups. This subsequent application was successful, and each remaining group will receive £375 each.

The Clerk informs that the details of the application for the second round of funding (£5,000 for the Willowset) remains unchanged, and it is expected SALC will make a decision by the end of October.

Clerk to include distribution of the awarded funds with the online banking payments for the month.

132. CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy)

SD reports receipt of 90 completed survey, with a bulk of these being returned to the community shop. Out of the 450 printed and distributed this equates to a 20% return rate, which was disappointing given there is unlikely to be this level of investment again for some time in the future. SD gives an overview stating the infrastructure items which received the greatest support were maintenance and improvement of footpaths and bridleways, highways including potholes and speed limit reduction in Meare Green; Broadband / Mobile coverage improvements, and sports / improved facilities for older children and adults.

SD continues that Environmental impact received good feedback, with an item proposing an increase in open spaces receiving double figure responses.

SD informs that investment in the Willowset preschool proposal for a modular building received a mix of both positive and negative responses.

SD states that some suggestions were not viable such as installing a footpath from Polkesfield to the centre of the village as the road width would not allow for this, but other suggestions such as improving, and cleaning road signage could be viable.

GG recommends the results of the survey are made available on the website ahead of the next PC meeting. SS suggests analysis of the results is necessary as some suggestions are already a work in progress, such as the steps at Broomfield Park.

AF states that with such a low response rate, the community has missed an opportunity to give their views.

Clerk to add the item to the next agenda.

SD to collate results of the survey, GG to publish on the website.

Potholes and other road defects received a large volume of feedback from the community. This is not within the remit of the Parish Council and potholes should be reported via the SCC website

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-pothole-or-road-defect/>

133. Road Traffic and parking in the Square and around the centre of the village

GG informs that there has been a welcomed increase of people using the Playing Fields car park rather than the roads within the immediate vicinity of the school.

SD reports there are still incidences when patrons of the shop/café are not using the car park provided, instead choosing to park in the square for convenience, and this is still causing some disruption.

SS enquires if the side entrance could be used more to persuade people to use the car park. GG responds that this could compromise the security of the venue when the pub is not open. SS states there is no easy solution, but the issue will be accentuated as winter sets in, and safety should come over convenience before an accident occurs.

GG asks how the PC can assist in breaking the cycle of inconsiderate parking which is congesting the square, and what can be done to prevent it happening.

SD informs that there is insufficient lighting in the car park with the days getting shorter and the slope from the car park could prove hazardous as the weather deteriorates.

GG informs that there are plans to drop the curb and designate the bay immediately outside the shop/pub as blue badge and loading only. GG suggests the HOTV could explore the option of applying for grants to mitigate the dangers of the slope from the car park.

It is agreed to keep a watch in brief on the item and remove it from the agenda.

Clerk to remove the item from the agenda

GG to raise the issues with the HOTV

134. Phone box at the playing fields.

The Clerk reports she has received an invoice from KH for the purchase of the paint to renovate the phone box and KH hopes that work will soon start before the weather changes.

GG states that the function or purpose of the renovated phone kiosk is still to be decided and welcomes any thoughts the Parishioners on this matter.

SS expresses she is reluctant about some of the suggestions that propose books or leaflets due to concern that these would end up littering the playing field.

If you have a suggestion of how best to utilise the phone kiosk once it has been renovated, please share your suggestions with the Parish Clerk at sggparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk or text 07701 053903 if you do not have internet access.

135. Request for a replacement bench at Polkesfield

GG reports the PC were contacted by a Parishioner regarding the state of disrepair of the bench near the bus stop at Polkesfield and asks if the PC should look at replacing it immediately.

The Clerk informs that Cllr. Barrie Hall has made enquiries to fund a replacement via the HRA fund.
GG to contact Cllr. Hall to assess a timeline on funding from the HRA or if the PC purchase a replacement.

136. Tree planting week 28-11-21 – 05-12-21 Free Trees from SWT

GG informs that as part of tree planting week SWT are allowing Parish and Town Councils to apply for £50 worth of free trees. GG ask IU for his input on the uptake of the offer.

IU responds there could be a potential space for them, but this would require some discussion.

SS suggests the playing fields could benefit from the offer.

IU responds the SEG is in preliminary discussion with the PFMC with regards to replacing dead trees.

PH asks if there is any suitable location for planting near the allotment. GG agrees to ask the allotment association.

**Clerk to investigate varieties of trees available and consult with IU and GG prior to ordering
GG to ask the allotment association if there would be any uptake from them**

137. Young People; First steps

GG informs that it has always been the intention of the HOTV to provide a designated space for younger people. GG has been in contact with the Community Youth Project (CYP) representatives and has been impressed by their approach.

GG continues that the project will require more than the HOTV simply providing a space.

Safeguarding and CRB checks are a major consideration. GG suggests a meeting with young people should be arranged to determine their needs and establish how best to address these requirements.

GG draws attention to the potential costs associated with this scheme. Guidance from the (CYP) plus mentoring and assistance could cost approximately £4,000.

GG states the lack of facilities within the village for children 8 years and over is widely recognised.

GG asks if to provide a facility for young people to develop within the village, an amount of £4,000 for funding and maintaining the project should be considered in the 2022-23 budget and precept. This would equate to an extra £1 per month per household.

AM informs that the way the CYP representatives had presented the initiative was similar to a youth club or youth council, but investment is needed for the project to be realised.

GG states there are some grant funding options available for schemes of this nature, but the application process can be very lengthy.

JP expresses support for this initiative, stating the village used to have a thriving youth club, but now the older children have very little. JP continues that provision of structured activities would be nice for the young people.

AM informs that one idea for the scheme is to promote intergenerational activities that incorporate the younger and older generations in order to address the stereotypical divide between the age groups.

SS expresses reservations about increasing the precept as with rising costs for fuel and energy there will be cases of people having to choose between heating and eating in the coming months.

PH asks that if the PC were to support the initial £4,000, how will the scheme fund itself with ongoing costs. GG responds that subscriptions will contribute to these costs.

GG asks if there are any objections to start the meeting process identify needs and next steps. There were no objections.

GG to commence with arranging the relevant meetings, Clerk to add the item to the next agenda

138. Flood Wardens – Curload

GG reports the flood warden co-ordinator that was based in Curload has now moved and wishes to step down as flood co-ordinator and asks who a suitable replacement would be.

PH informs that the current flood wardens and contact details for each area are on the village website and are as follows:

- Curload – Nick Sloan
- Stanmoor – Peter House
- Village Centre – Tom Duxbury, Janet Daniels, and Trevor Williams
- Meare Green and Huntham – Chris Coate and Tony Yaskin

It is agreed to remove this item from the agenda and a co-ordinator replacement is achieved organically within the flood warden group.

139. Covid 19

GG reports that there are ongoing positive cases within the village and residents should remain vigilant and follow the necessary precautions.

DF reports that case numbers in Somerset over the last five weeks make up 27% of all cases in the county since the start of the pandemic. DF continues that in one particular secondary school there are over 300 cases, this implies case numbers are being driven by school-aged children and anti-vaxxers demonstrating at some school gates is not helping the situation.

DF informs that hospital covid admissions are still low even though cases are high.

140. Unitarian Authority

GG informs that the latest SWT Newsletter (No.79) included proposals on the new wards for Somerset - GG recommends that Parish Councillors read it because the article is indicative of what is happening.

GG reports he attended a Somerset LGR: T&PC Conference recently which seemed to be more focused on generating enthusiasm rather than dealing with tangible issues.

GG continues that there are many questions raised about how the network groups will be determined to include local authorities such as the Police, Parish Councils, ward councillors and the voluntary sector. GG expresses concern that the latter will promote political ideologies which is what a Parish Council does not want.

GG informs that there appears to be a heavy reliance on the support of the voluntary sector with the proposals which leaves a feeling of “things only get done if the volunteers do it.”

GG expresses that this model will be difficult within Parishes similar to Stoke St Gregory due to the implications involved and lack of clarity.

DF reports that currently the Unitarian proposal is for 100 Unitarian Ward Councillors with the Secretary of State suggesting between 85 or 110. It is hoped for a boundary review of wards before the 2022 May elections, however with divisions not happening until March and the deadline for Councillor elections being 5th March, this remains to be seen.

DF responds to GG's point regarding the network groups; it will be aimed at communities working together with common interests binding them. DF suggests that bringing parishes and agencies together in this format will have a bigger influence than a single Parish. Unitarian boards will be based locally with plans for 4 in South Somerset, 2 in Somerset West and Taunton, 2 in Mendip and 1 in Sedgemoor.

GG asks if SB has anything to add from a district perspective. SB responds that the district knows very little but have had input on the ward boundaries. SB states she will be keeping an open mind as the plans progress.

141. Willey Road Housing Development

SS asks if there is any information on the delay of the planning application for Willey Road (36/21/0015) being reviewed.

GG reports that the positioning of the wall at the front of the development has caused some delay as the SWT planning case officer wanted to change this. GG continues that the case officer is still insisting on a post and rail fence, which is totally nonsense as the residents and PC have all requested and supported a close board fence.

SB informs that the post and rail fence was included in the original submission in order to maintain the appearance of a rural setting, but possibly the perspective has changed now that people have moved in.

SB agreed to check if there are any updates.

(DF, SB and 1 member of the public leave)

GG requests that the item Budget and Precept planning is brought forward in the agenda.

142. Budget and Precept planning for 2022-23

The Clerk/RFO circulated a first draft of the 2022-23 budget for consideration by the members of council.

At this preliminary stage, the Clerk/RFO is suggesting an increase in precept from £16,000 - £19,000 with an annual budget spend of £24,895.34. This is a median of the previous 3 years budget spending. GG suggests that as the village has grown from 332 dwellings to 360 dwellings, the per capita spread over more properties would offset the rise of the precept to individual households.

There is some discussion around the precept, reserves being ringfenced and budgeted lines that have not been spent but relocated to other areas such as grants - grants being the PC's largest outlay.

SS expresses sincere concern about raising the precept at a time when more people are liable to experience financial difficulties. The Clerk responds that the precept has not been increased since 2000, emphasising that 2021's budget was intentionally set in order that the precept remained flat last year in acknowledgement that some parishioners were facing financial impacts of the pandemic.

It is agreed for the Clerk / RFO to re-visit certain historical budget lines to establish if certain test lines can be removed or redistributed.

Clerk to amend and re-circulate the draft budget prior to the next meeting

Clerk to add the item to the next agenda.

143. Highways

Speed Limit in Meare Green

The Clerk reports that since the last meeting, unfortunately there still has been no progress to report.

The Clerk informs the TMO at SCC replied to the Clerk's most recent email (sent prior to the September meeting (Min 118)) after they returned from leave. In the response the TMO expressed understanding of the frustration of the PC and Parishioners regarding the length of time it has taken to move this project forward. The TMO informed that with C19 and the '20 when lights show' project, it has left the department under-resourced for many months. The TMO had managed to measure the distances for the extended 30mph limit and hopes to advertise the TRO soon. Once the TRO has been advertised and if no objections are received, then the TMO can submit the works order to a contractor.

Speed Watch

Nothing to report.

144. Footpaths

GG informs there has been a significant amount of clearing happening around gates, stiles, and steps with thanks to the SEG.

AF reports she has written to George Montague (SCC Rights of Way Officer) regarding the unsafe steps on footpath T25/15 requesting a handrail is installed to make them safer.

AF continues she has been in dialogue with landowners near to the location of the dangerous steps and they informed the steps and drove has no ownership. As a result, SCC should be responsible for fixing and maintaining them.

AF informs she will attend a local access forum being held in the coming week.

145. Climate / Environmental Issues

SEG Update

JP reports plans for the Envirofair on Saturday (16th) are well underway with 14 participants taking part including the Somerset Wildlife Trust, SWP, Beekeepers, Dykes Organic Dairy, Coates English Willow and displays made by pupils at the school. It is hoped many in the village will attend.

IU reports the first phase of the hedge planting at the Village Hall is complete with the membrane being secured. IU informs the 400 whips hedge will be supplied by re-imagining the levels and it is hoped to plan a community event for planting day.

GG reports the SEG had sent a proposal to the PC regarding work on the Spinney (that has been overplanted) to use this space to promote a biodiverse area that focuses on wildlife. IU expresses the importance of managing its original purpose as a sound barrier and wildlife area. GG informs the item has been included on the Village Hall trustee meeting agenda.

146. Floods

Nothing to report

147. Playing Fields

SS reports the Village Bonfire will be held on Sunday 7th November 2021 at 5pm. If anyone has any wood suitable for the fire, please contact Neil Sollis on neil.sollis@btinternet.com

SS informs that the 2022 Stoke Stampede will go ahead on Sunday 9th January with all 450 places filled within 3 hours – it promises to be one of SSG's not to be missed events.

148. Heart of the Village

Nothing to report

149. Village Website

GG informs that due to a technical issue, Nick Sloan will assume the role of webmaster for the interim.

GG proposes that NS is offered payment of the fee ringfenced for this role until such a time it is ready to hand over. AF seconds the motion; all were in favour.

GG to communicate with NS and BC on developments

150. Broadband

The Clerk reports that the representative from Airband Broadband was scheduled to attend the November PC meeting. Unfortunately, this person has now left the post and the Clerk is waiting for a rescheduled date once a new representative is appointed.

151. Consultations and Surveys

NALC – Local nature recovery strategies

It is agreed to respond in support of the NALC suggestions that the responsible authority for a local nature recovery strategy will consult / involve Parish Councils and will include Parish Council representatives within local nature recovery strategies in partnership arrangements to oversee and monitor delivery.

A358 improvement consultation

It is agreed that the PC is not required to make a representation and that the consultation will be published on the village website for the residents of the village.

GG to publish on the website

152. Financial Matters

Standing Order

01-10-21 K de Silva – Clerks Salary for September

£377.00

Payments for authorisation

K de Silva – Clerks expenses – Printer ink, envelopes, stamps, and secure postage	£40.27
G Wagen and James – Strim mow burial ground	£72.00
Rockwell sign and print – Autumn newsletter and survey printing	£149.00
J Williams – strim/mow and cut hedge in the burial ground	£140.00
Transfer of £500 seed funding to the SEG (Min 100)	£500.00
Transfer of the SALC grant to be distributed evenly to the 4 successful applicants – SSG Tennis Club, SSG Baptist Church, SEG, SSG Scouts and Beavers (£375 each)	£1500.00
Payments received	
SWT Precept – second annual instalment	£8000.00
Purchase of plot in the burial ground	£600.00

GG proposes all payments are made; SS seconds the motion; all were in favour.

Other financial items

Monthly bank reconciliation completed by GG

Quarterly accounts circulated by the Clerk 01-10-21 – no issues were reported.

153. Other items for discussion

Review of meetings in the main hall.

GG reports the Scouts/Beavers have changed the times they will use the hall and will vacate by 7pm in time for PC meetings to be held in the main hall.

Attendance to the SALC Levels climate forum SCOP26

JP and a member of the SEG will attend.

(IU leaves)

Confidential item

Due to the nature of this item, it will not be published in the public minutes.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 9.37pm.

The next Parish Council Meeting will be held in the main hall at The Williams Hall, Dark Lane, Stoke St Gregory on Monday 8th November at 7.30pm.

Face Masks and Social Distancing are advised.

Please email any items for the agenda to the clerk (ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk) or the Chairman (grahiamgleed@gmail.com) by Saturday 30th October 2021.