

STOKE ST. GREGORY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 12th December 2022 in the meeting room at The Williams Hall, Dark Lane, Stoke St Gregory.

Present – Janice Pearce (Chair), Peter House, John Hembrow, Ian Upshall, Danny James, David Fothergill (County Councillor)

In Attendance – Kelly de Silva (Clerk) and one member of the public

183. Apologies for absence – Anne Merritt (Vice Chair), Ann Finn, Heather Venn, Jason Morgan, Sue Buller (District Councillor), Nick Sloan.

Declarations of Interests and Dispensations – JH declares an interest in Minute 184; planning application 36/22/0023 and will abstain from any vote.

JP declares an interest in Minute 187. Petanque Court application as a member of the WI.

Public question time – A member of the footpath group thanks the PC for the replacement strimmer which has been a useful and successful addition for the work the group do for the community.

The member of the footpath group requests the PC formally thank the SCC footpath Officer for their hard work and assistance to improve the Parish footpath network.

DF offers to express the gratitude and acknowledge the work from the newly appointed Officer on behalf of the PC.

JP thanks the footpath group for all the voluntary work carried out in last 12 months by all members of the footpath group which has made a significant improvement on the footpaths within the village.

One member of the public leaves

184. Planning

36/22/0017 – Sunnycroft. Stoke Road, Meare Green, Stoke St Gregory – Removal of conservatory and erection of a single storey extensions to both sides and the rear

DECISION – CONDITIONAL APPROVAL 08/11/2022

36/22/0023 – Huntham Farm, Huntham Lane, Stoke St Gregory – Erection of an agricultural building to cover open cattle yard.

The following response was agreed;

Stoke St Gregory Parish Council support the application in principle but would like to highlight there are inconsistencies within the 2 documents: the biodiversity and climate emergency checklists. There is water filled ditches / rhynes and an orchard near to the site (within 500m). Within the list it has been ticked 'NO' which is inconsistent with the area.

36/22/0021 – Willow Farm. Curload, Stoke St Gregory – Demolition of brick out house and erection of a workshop on land

The following response was agreed;

Stoke St Gregory Parish Council support the application in principle but highlight there are inconsistencies within the 2 documents: the biodiversity and climate emergency checklists. The site is situated near a rhine (within 500m) it has been ticked 'NO' it is not near a watercourse on the documents which is inconsistent with the area.

36/22/0010 – Dark Lane Farm. Dark Lane, Stoke St Gregory – Erection of a two-storey extension (Application amended)

The following response was agreed;

Stoke St Gregory support the application amendments with the original response submitted citing "Stoke St Gregory Parish Council agreed to support this planning application along with the recommendations of the bat survey."

185. Parking issues on the Willey Road

JP reports she has been in contact with the school to raise the issues of inconsiderate and unsafe parking on the Willey Road particularly at school drop off and pick up times. JP informs the local PCSO's attended the site on 6th December but reported there were no obvious issues or concerns whilst they were present; which is often the case. The PCSO's have informed they will continue to be mindful of the issues reported and will include the village on patrols when possible.

DJ informs on the Willey Road and Dark Lane there is an element of danger to pedestrians with no footpath or safe walking route. IU agrees suggesting a more integrated approach could be considered throughout the centre of the village, such as a white line painted on the highway for visual impact to allow a safe route for pedestrians to walk.

JH informs the current parking does lend itself to natural traffic calming but residents driveways should be kept clear at all times, and people should not park on the zig zags near the school.

DF reports parking issues around schools is a problem throughout the County. DF suggests a single white line may not be a solution. In other areas the red tarmac to highlight pedestrian access has been implemented as a virtual footpath.

PH reports this suggestion may not have the required impact as cars would move to the other side of the road making it effectively a single-track road and it would not remedy the inconsiderate parking.

Clerk to contact the TMO to seek advice on possible road safety schemes which could be considered.

IU reports there are still issues of people parking over the fire hydrant outside the old bakery in the square. There was an incident earlier this year when the fire brigade required access to this hydrant in an emergency but could not access it.

During school drop off and pick up times local facilities such as The Playing Fields, The Royal Oak, The Village Hall, and the Church Car Park have all kindly offered use of their parking areas during these times to allow for a safe and short walking route for children to get to school. The Parish Council kindly request parents use these facilities for the safety of all children, road users and the residents of the Willey Road.

It is illegal to obstruct a fire hydrant, but the offence is only committed when the hydrant is required for firefighting. Please could residents avoid parking over the fire hydrant in case it is required in an emergency.

186. Village website

Due to the website administrator being unable to attend the meeting this item is deferred until the next PC meeting.

Due to DJ being unable to attend the latter part of the meeting it is agreed to move items 7, 9 and 21 within the agenda

187. SSG village plan update

DJ reports the survey went live on the 28th of November. It will close on 31st December. There has currently been over 300 responses - which is a phenomenal response rate. There has been drop -in sessions held in the cafe to engage the community and to offer assistance to complete the survey. A flyer was distributed with the Stoke Newsletter with an article published in the Parish Magazine. Paper copies have been distributed to those who require them, and support offered to complete the survey if needed.

The Collective Commitment document signed by the PC in November has been well received with more village groups also signing the document.

Every child in the school has provided their thoughts on what they love about the village and what they want to see. The children have also provided art work, which will be included in the final plan.

The village plan steering group have requested photos of the village with some fantastic submissions already received.

The next steps will be analysing the results of the survey. This is anticipated to happen in mid-January with subsequent opportunities for outcomes to be discussed. DJ concludes the CCS have commended the work of the steering group and there has been good feedback received on the survey from the community.

JP thanks DJ and the village plan steering group for all the work and effort put into the survey so far. JP suggests there is a group of residents who are cynical about the survey and the outcomes. DJ responds the point of the survey and village plan is to make things happen in the village that the residents want to happen. Once the plan is devised; no member of the community can say the steering group did not do everything possible to engage with the whole community. The plan will be a working document reviewed regularly. DJ thanks all residents who have taken the time to complete the survey.

The village plan survey has been extended until the end of December. To complete the survey and have your say please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/StokeStGregoryVP>

If you have any photographs of the village which could be used as part of the village plan, please send these ssg2023villageplan@gmail.com

188. The younger generation project

DJ reports the Youth initiative/younger generation project will be renamed in due course to something more suitable and inclusive with the current title being a working project title.

DJ informs work is happening in the background based on the CIL consultation results and anticipated results from the village plan survey to offer reasoned responses to the input from the community regarding any project proposals.

DJ informs that as the new lead of the project, he would like to take a wholistic approach to the project and enquires if it is necessary to have a dedicated working group for the project adding another layer of bureaucracy or is there any other possibilities that could be considered.

The current proposed CIL investment heavily relies on the collaboration of stakeholders and the playing fields committee. DJ informs to be able to achieve something positive and realise the potential of the investment of the project there needs to be in agreement with all parties to provide a community space available to everyone and utilised to its absolute potential to deliver the best return on investment for the community and its young people.

IU recommends the project should be about evolution - not revolution; to apply a focused vision, with community engagement and potential revitalisation.

189. Playing Fields

Review of PC representatives on the PFMC

DJ suggests the current PC representation on the PFMC should be reviewed to ascertain if those elected in May 2022 still wish to hold the position as a PC delegated representative.

Clerk to draft a letter for approval to send to the PC delegated representatives

Clerk to add the item to the next agenda

190. CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy)

Petanque Court update

JP reports the trustees of the Village Hall have reconsidered the proposals of a Petanque court within the grounds. Since reviewing the location for a Petanque Court and the size of the area required the former site of the 'shop in a box' is almost the dimension of the proposed Petanque Court and deemed a viable location. There is a hardstanding adjacent to the flagpole which could be utilised for appropriate usage with the court; which would mean there is very little impact on the grounds of the hall or for the users of the facility. The VH committee wish to ascertain how to proceed with the proposals and seek assurances the facility and its maintenance will be the responsibility of the Parish Council.

JP informs the WI have offered to take responsibility for the upkeep and responsibility of the proposed Petanque Court. The Clerk informs the facility would remain the property of the PC if the WI did agree to maintain the site.

IU states it would be a good investment for the whole village; especially the older generation, although it is a loss of a wild area, for the anticipated cost of £2,500 the investment for the community is great – but it must be accessible to the whole community.

DJ offers to build a planning application for approval and submission to SWTC. Once this has been approved by the PC, the Clerk can progress with obtaining an updated quote from the original contractor and acquire two separate quotes.

Clerk to add the item to the next agenda

191. Transfer of the allotments to the PC

Nothing to report

192. County Councillor report

DF reports finance is an ongoing concern with an anticipated £21million deficit in the next fiscal year. This should be covered by using reserves for the 23/24 year, with an anticipated £40million deficit for the 24/25 year which will be required to be addressed. Vesting day for the unitary authority is fast approaching with only 10 weeks left to go. The new Somerset authority logo is being released this week which includes the Somerset dragon and a teal colour scheme.

Policies on Council Tax relief, business rates and council house rental rates for the county are being reviewed in time for the vesting day of the unitary authority.

193. Emergency and Incident Response Plan

JP thanks IU for the work on the draft plan which is being developed.

IU reports he is conscious that in the past there has only ever been a requirement for a plan due to floods. IU feels there should be more to a plan to manage the first few hours of any incident or emergency until external agencies are able to attend.

IU informs the flood plan requires updating with co-ordinators verified.

IU reports he has been in contact with the village agents who support local communities in different ways. IU explains he contacted the agents to ascertain how to identify the vulnerable which would require immediate assistance. IU refers to the recent internet outage; which was an inconvenience for some; but for others like the elderly, it knocked out the Piper system which alerts services in an emergency/fall/incident. This should be included within the plan as this impacted the most vulnerable within the community and this had the potential to be a serious incident

IU continues one outcome of conversations with the agents was learning of a ‘talking café’ initiative which is proving popular in neighbouring Parishes. This project could potentially be utilised within the warm community hub project.

IU to circulate talking café details to the warm hub initiative to explore a collaboration

Clerk to add the item to the next agenda

DJ offers apologies and leaves the meeting

194. Warm community hubs

JP circulated the following report to the PC ahead of the meeting.

Following a very successful meeting in the Royal Oak on the 7th November, we followed it up with a similar meeting on the 21st which was a disappointment as turnout was poor. This was a combination of the weather, the first England Match at the same time and that the publicity was not on the same scale as the first one. We delivered invitations door to door last time.

The general consensus from the committee and the volunteers was that there is a need for the provision of a warm hub facility for people who are elderly and frail. The hub is a welcome idea for those who live alone and are reluctant to go to events by themselves or without a partner. Enjoying the company of others and getting out of the house seemed to be a welcome idea. Volunteering is beyond the remit of some, and current organizations have a limited appeal when it is just social interaction that is needed. Transport to a common meeting hub is also a challenge for some due to severe mobility issues. There are enough volunteers to support such a group on a fortnightly or monthly basis. Keeping warm during the severely cold periods when heating costs are rocketing is still an issue.

It is intended that the original group that met in October in the Church rooms will meet up again in the New Year to review this. To date the weather has been mild but now the weather has turned cooler the situation may well change.

Any ideas on how we can take this forward would be very welcome.

The Village Larder

The Village Larder is now well stocked and up and running in the Parish Church at the back on the left-hand side behind the pews. It consists of a metal cabinet in which packets and boxes are stored to protect them from roaming rodents. There is a shelf unit for tins, jars, and bottles. Unfortunately, there is no facility for fresh food items as a fridge is a challenge to manage food safety wise in the Church. Items have been donated by the churchgoers and from people going into the village shop and buying items to donate. The community shop have been very good about collecting items and keeping them in a box to be collected

The Larder has now been advertised in the Stoke News, on The Stoke Next Door web site.

Once again as the weather gets colder and people find their heating bills rise this may be welcome.

We have made a start in responding to a crisis and we may well review our actions as time progresses.

195. Street lighting in Church Close

DF reports investigations have confirmed the current lighting columns are on a sensor. This means that to have the lights on a timer to turn off between certain hours of the night would require the columns to be replaced which have a huge cost implication. DF informs an alternative is consulting the residents to ascertain if the street lighting is turned off altogether, but this action would need to be agreed by a majority of the residents.

DF leaves the meeting

196. Budget and precept planning

The Clerk reports the SW&T revised tax base figures based on a Band D property for 23/24 has increased from £393.82 to £410.74 (£16.92 4.30%).

At the end of the November meeting the proposed budgeted PC expenditure for 23/24 was currently at £30,814.08. To provide for this expenditure; it would require an increase on the precept of 25.20%.

The Clerk recommends it is unjustifiable to increase the precept above the rate of inflation during a cost-of-living crisis - but the cost of everything is increasing, including the costs incurred by the Parish Council. The Clerk explains since 2020 the precept has only been increased inline with the increase in housing stock from Broomfield Park. The Clerk recommends increasing the precept by 11.08% from £17,600 to £19,550 in line with inflation and decreasing the expenditure lines to come in line with the income of the PC.

This proposal would mean a Band D precept increase from £44.69 to £47.60 (£2.91 6.5%). For all other Band properties, the increase would be as follows;

		22/23	23/24	Increase/(decrease)	
				amount	%
Tax Base		393.82	410.74	16.92	4.30%
Precept		17600	19550	1,950	11.08%
Band D amount		44.69	47.60	2.91	6.50%
A	6 / 9	29.79	31.73	1.94	6.50%
B	7 / 9	34.76	37.02	2.26	6.50%
C	8 / 9	39.72	42.31	2.58	6.50%
D	9 / 9	44.69	47.60	2.91	6.50%
E	11 / 9	54.62	58.17	3.55	6.50%
F	13 / 9	64.55	68.75	4.20	6.50%
G	15 / 9	74.48	79.33	4.84	6.50%
H	18 / 9	89.38	95.19	5.81	6.50%

The Clerk recommends reviewing the budget lines to come in line with the proposed precept amount based on an 11.08% increase which is slightly below the rate of inflation and circulating the proposals ahead of the January PC meeting when the budget and precept is required to be finalised. All agree.

Clerk to amend the budget expenditure based on an overall precept increase of 11.08% and circulate for consideration. Parish Councillors to feedback any amendments ahead of agreeing the proposals at the next meeting.

197. Private hedge cutting and maintenance

Nothing to report

198. Grant application from the Baptist Church

The Clerk reports a grant application, and all supporting documentation (as per the PC grant policy) has been received from the Baptist Church requesting £1000 for works to create a new soak away and drain for the chapel. Currently the inadequate drainage is causing tremendous expense to treat dry rot in the vestry and schoolroom floors where local groups meet such as the luncheon club and TWiGS. PH enquires if the funding will be allocated through CIL or the PC grant subaccount. The Clerk informs there is adequate funds remaining in the PC grant pot to grant the funds if agreed by the PC. The grant application and documentation is reviewed by the PC.

IU proposes the PC support the application with the full amount of £1000. PH seconds the motion, all in favour. MOTION CARRIED.

Clerk to inform the Baptist Church and include the grant on the payment schedule

199. Broomfield Park

Nothing to report

200. Highways

Nothing to report

201. Footpaths

PH informs the gates accessing the allotments from Slough Lane is inaccessible for pushchairs or mobility vehicles. Only part of the gate opens which means pushchairs are required to be lifted over. PH explains this footpath is a safer route for pedestrians to walk to the playing fields from Slough Lane rather than navigate the lane with no footpath and Willey Road. PH asks if the main gate could be unlocked to allow easier access. The Clerk responds that due to thefts from the allotments in the past, this may be why the main gate is kept locked.

Clerk to add gates to the next agenda for allotment footpath access and Church Close

202. Stoke Environment Group update

IU circulated a report ahead of the meeting which included the following information;

- *Willey Road telephone box – this is planned for Spring 2023 when the box will be made water-tight and refitted. The area to the side of the box has been tidied and planted with shrubs and perennials.*
- *The Steering Group is still considering the merits of a community hub based at Curload. It has been ascertained that a container could cost as little as £400-500 which would be funded by the group. However, the plans are on hold at present whilst we further investigate the possibility of obtaining land for a community woodland garden nearer the centre of the village.*
- *Work on coppicing and trimming in The Spinney will commence in the new year. It is hoped that more habitats can be installed – particularly for birds*
- *As previously reported, the dry weather accounted for 19 hedge plants around the village hall. These are to be replaced by Reimagining the Levels.*

- *Planning for Envirofair 23, to be held Saturday 3 June 2023 at the Village Hall, continues.*
- *An 'open garden' scheme is to be planned next year to raise funds.*
- *Footpaths work continues and new/improved route marking is underway. Good liaison with the County Footpaths Officer has had a very beneficial impact and there are now clear and rewarding lines of communications with landowners*
- *SEG is very happy to improve the impact of the Royal Oak bus stop.*

The SEG has also planted about 500 wild daffodils, plus crocus, wood anemones, bluebells, and snowdrops. Many in and around the village and most of the latter in the vicinity of The Spinney. It is hoped to undertake another planting session next autumn.

203. Floods

IU reports the flood plan requires updating, hopefully within the Emergency Incident Response plan. PH informs that Currymoor is currently being used as part of the DEFRA ELMs (Environmental Land Management Scheme) trial.

More information on this can be found on the SRA (Somerset Rivers Authority) website.

204. Community woodland proposals

IU reports he has been in contact with land agents regarding a prospective piece of land with talks progressing slowly – but with small steps forward.

205. Heart of the village

Nothing to report

206. Broadband

Nothing to report

207. Consultations and Surveys

None received

208. Financial matters

Standing Orders

01-11-22 K de Silva – Clerks Salary for November (29 Hours)	£395.85
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Payments to be authorised

K de Silva - Clerks expenses - Stamps, secure postage	£10.45
Janice Pearce - Reimbursement for Queen memorial wreath (agreed last meeting cheque requires signing and receipt obtaining)	£50.00
Nick Sloan - Website administration October	£120.00
PFMC - Hire of pavilion for November PC meeting	£25.00

Payments Received

Purchase of plot in the burial ground	£403.00
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Other financial items

None

JH proposes all payments are made, IU seconds the motion; all in favour. MOTION CARRIED

209. Other items for discussion

Memorial bench/plaque for Cllr. David House – Deferred

There being no further business to discuss the meeting was closed at 9.40pm

The next Parish Council Meeting will be held in the meeting room at The Williams Hall, Dark Lane, Stoke St Gregory on Monday 9th January 2023 at 7.30pm.