

STOKE ST. GREGORY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 10th July 2023 in the meeting room at The Williams Hall, Dark Lane, Stoke St Gregory.

Present – Janice Pearce (Chair), Anne Merritt, Peter House, John Hembrow, Heather Venn, Ann Finn, Norman Cavill (Somerset Councillor)

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

71. Apologies for absence – David Fothergill (Somerset Councillor)

Approve and sign the minutes of the June meeting – The minutes were agreed to be accurate and signed accordingly.

Interests and dispensations – JP declares an interest in Minute 76 – as she is a member of the WI and will abstain from any vote.

Public Question Time – IU is present as a representative of the Community Plan Delivery Team and as lead of the SEG.

JP informs there has been some issues with the formatting of the tracker. IU informs the document circulated is a PDF of an excel spreadsheet and will discuss the circulation of the working excel sheet with the Community Plan Delivery Team (CPDT). IU also agrees to discuss the availability of hard copies in prominent places within the village, as the monitoring document in its current form may present issues to those who are visually impaired or unable to use certain computer programmes.

IU informs that it is not the purpose of the CPDT to tell people how to do things, they are there to oversee, encourage people to work together and offer feedback on actions. The actions will be down to the skills, expertise, knowledge, enthusiasm, and determination of each of the groups concerned. IU explains how the SEG will be using the actions and tracker to incorporate into a plan for the coming year. IU informs the SEG will be happy to work with the PC on environmental issues and exchanging ideas such as creating a Climate Emergency Group but would be keen to see the PC incorporate other groups within the village and get them involved in such a working group.

IU states it is important to emphasise that everyone has a voice and an important role to play in our unique community with regards to climate action.

JP notes we have many factions within the community to include such as the farming community and the younger people – who are really interested in climate awareness.

JP refers to the tracker and the climate emergency section. JP informs in the past the PC have acknowledged the Climate Emergency with meetings being held and attendance to COP21 events. HV suggests the reflective score on the tracker (2.4) does not reflect the work that has already been done in this section. JP agrees citing the PC have adopted a Green Charter and initially the SEG was set up as a steering group of the PC. JP informs the document is slightly scathing as the PC has been chipping away for many months at many of the issues within the plan, quite proficiently. HV informs the PC is responsible for most things within the document and raises concerns that some of the items are not realistically achievable within the timeframes that have been set out.

JP suggests a few items should be picked as ‘focus points’ and do those things well and steadily otherwise there is a risk of spreading ourselves too much and not achieving anything.

JP informs from a personal point of view; the Community Plan was politically motivated by the local authority ahead of the Unitary Council taking effect. Due to cutbacks, there is a need for more volunteers to assist with things that would have formerly been within the remit of the District Council. JP informs we are lucky the village is run by volunteers – with the HOTV, Meals on Wheels, Luncheon Club, TWiGS – JP is worried that more pressure on volunteers that go above and beyond, how much of that good will, will dissipate. If people feel they are not good enough by being scored on a points basis within the tracker they will stop volunteering. Praise, appreciation, and encouragement goes further than naming, shaming, and scoring people.

JP continues that a key feature within the Community Plan was wellbeing; promoting wellbeing is not creating unnecessary anxiety – which is why the scoring may need revision.

HV agrees with JP and notes that when social media posts are uploaded regarding the Community Plan, no one comments anymore – are they following it? Can they access it? So much has been done to engage the community, has it got to the point that it is overpowering and too much for people to digest?

A discussion ensues on the work the day to day work the PC do behind the scenes which is not reported.

IU responds the monitoring is not “scoring” it is monitoring progress – its monitoring the actions.

People are not seeing actions. IU asks the PC and all groups to report on progress that is being made on actions.

72. Planning

36/23/0017 Sturts Barn. Huntham Lane, Stoke St Gregory - Conversion of attached store building to annexe accommodation (E04.07.23)

Stoke St Gregory Parish Council agreed to support this planning application.

36/22/0021 Willow Farm. Curload, Stoke St Gregory - Demolition of brick outhouse and erection of garage/workshop, change of use of land to domestic garden on part section of land (E04.07.23)

Stoke St Gregory Parish Council agreed to support this planning application.

36/23/0015/AGN Laburnham Farm. Woodhill, Stoke St Gregory - Application for prior notification for the erection of an extension to an agricultural building
DECISION - NO OBJECTION 19.06.23.

36/23/0010/AGN & 36/23/0011/AGN Slough Court. Slough Lane, Stoke St Gregory - Application for prior notification for the erection of an extension to an agricultural building to cover an open yard.
DECISION - NO OBJECTION 19.05.23.

73. Stoke St Gregory Community Plan

Discussed during public question time.

74. Project Play

Planning for a NU MUGA

JP refers to a correspondence sent by DJ, the lead of the project. The Clerk informs a query was sent to the CIL officer regarding a third-party funding application and whether CIL could be incorporated as part of the funding for the application. The CIL officer informed that this would not be an option on this particular application.

AM informs that SPARKS have supplied the project leads with a list of possible grant funding options. The steering group are confident there are plenty of fund-raising options to consider and apply for to add to the CIL allocation. AM informs that by this time next year it is hoped that the fundraising and project will be realised.

JP refers to the project play progress chart and commends the group on the work achieved so far and reiterates the PC offers its continued support to the project.

75. PFMC proposals for funding, equipment, and CCTV

JP reports that the two further quotes for shelters have been provided by the PFMC which were requested at the last meeting. The PFMC chair is continuing to build good rapport and relationships with the younger people. JP informs that it is proposed the PC and PFMC would contribute equally to the cost of the equipment, although this is yet to be finalised.

The Clerk suggests that in the interest of transparency, fairness and as the Clerk will be standing down soon, a CIL application is submitted for the funding required by the PFMC for the project which in turn will be required by the CIL officer when submitted the annual CIL returns.

JP explains the benefits of having a shelter for the youngsters and having a designated covered place to meet and how it can be used by other users of the playing fields.

AM suggests the PFMC should be encouraged to proactively fundraise for the project as well as apply for CIL funding. AM recommends the remainder of the CIL money should not be allocated at this time citing there is funding out there which can be applied for – in a similar way to how the project play team have investigated and applied for funding.

A conversation ensues on the allocation of the remaining £20,000 which is not earmarked for projects and how the proposal should be considered.

The Clerk re-iterates that the PFMC should complete a CIL application and submit the relevant documentation for the PC to consider the proposal.

JH proposes the PC agree to support the application in principle to the sum of 50% of the total cost of the project following submission of an adequate CIL application and supporting documentation. PH seconds the motion, all in favour.

Clerk to send a CIL application to the Chair of the PFMC for submission.

76. CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) Update

Petanque Court

The Clerk reports that further to communications with the Village Hall committee it was recommended that the CIL allocation will be paid to the WI and the WI will pay for the community asset. AF informs this is a shame as the VAT will not be recoverable – but it is the tax rules that must be adhered to.

PH informs work will commence imminently on the community asset.

77. Casual Vacancies for 3 Parish Councillors and a co-option process

The Clerk informs the Electoral Officer should inform in the next week that the PC can commence with co-option at the next meeting. This is due to statutory periods that must be adhered to. Once the Electoral Officer informs the co-option can commence the Clerk will display the posters and advertise on the social media channels.

If you have a few hours a month to spare to help your village, please email the Clerk for more information and an application form.

78. Vacancy for the position of Parish Clerk

The Clerk reports there has only been one application so far.

A discussion ensues on the interviewing process and who will be interviewing the applicants. It is agreed JP, AM, KdS and HV will be on the interviewing panel.

The Clerk position is a rewarding role with flexible working hours which fit perfectly around having a young family. No experience is necessary as training will be provided. You just need to be available on the second Monday evening of the month, have good computer and organisational skills and a passion for your village. For further information please contact the Clerk at ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk

79. Anti-social behaviour

Fly tipping in the ditch at Polkesfield

JP thanks AM for the posters that she has erected at Polkesfield to request fly tipping (especially of garden waste) at the ditch that runs down the side of Polkesfield.

The Clerk informs requests to Somerset Council have confirmed it is not a County Council maintained footpath or land, so they are unable to assist.

AM suggests permanent signage could be considered as since the poster was erected the incidents of fly tipping have decreased dramatically.

AM to obtain quotes for permanent signage.

80. Somerset Councillor report

Cllr. Cavill confirms the Somerset Council report has been circulated to the PC.

Cllr. Cavill adds to the circulated report that this fiscal year the budget will be an anticipated £41.9 Million over, the following year £45.6 Million and the year after that its predicted to be a further £98 Million overspent. This equates to £170 Million cumulatively over. Cllr. Cavell informs there is another factor that comes in March 2026 special educational needs high dependency block within

these figures. There has been a special government allowance which allows the liabilities to be carried over until this date meaning whatever the amount is needs to be paid off. It is expected this figure will be another £70 Million so there is the potential for the budget to be £240 Million adrift. At that stage, in 18 months' time if these forecasted figures are still anticipated, the finance officer is liable to serve a 114 notice, meaning a commissioner officer will come in at a cost of thousands per day and the Council will no longer be in control of their finances.

Cllr Cavill reports there will be an upcoming Executive meeting looking at particular areas – one is commercial investment property. The district council have invested quite large sums borrowed in commercial property for return – which the Government advised against – SWTC invested £98 Million (in offices, B&Qs, factories and alike) of which £73 Million was on short term borrowing, the rest from reserves amongst other sources. This and other things means that £240 million worth of debt was transferred from District to the unitary authority. It is not yet clear what other debts districts have handed over to the Unitary Council but by 6th August they expect to know and difficult decisions on what is to be sold or kept, what income is lost and then what large projects will be invested in will be reviewed. Cllr. Cavell informs the time is now to “put the ship right” and it can’t wait until budgets are set in February as it will be too late.

Cllr. Cavill warns to expect various cuts in the next 6 months and other measures being taken to balance the books.

Cllr. Cavell informs the PC of the Somerset Local Plan which is now available to view online (<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/>) which includes transport, planning, waste collections, climate emergency amongst other things.

81. Emergency Incident and Response Plan

JP informs IU has sent an update. JP informs IU has put a lot of work into this and requests the PC review the document and provide comments to enable its completion and implementation as soon as possible.

82. Broomfield Park

The Clerk informs the planning application is apparently going through a second consultation on the variation of the conditions, but the Clerk has not been informed about this by the Somerset Council. HV informs some residents have received written information on this. Cllr. Cavill reports he will enquire about this and report back to the PC.

Clerk to email the planning officer for an update.

83. Highways

The Clerk informs information on Community Funded 20mph speed limits has been circulated. This requires £500 non-refundable application fee. This is open until the end of August with another opportunity being available the same time next year.

AM expresses concern as the speed limit in Meare Green is not being adhered to. The Clerk agrees citing the shame is you do not just drive through SSG, it is the residents that are the ones speeding a majority of the time.

The Clerk informs that small improvement schemes are no longer available and ongoing investigations for a SID are being sought through Avon & Somerset police road safety fund.

Cllr. Cavill suggests discussing the application with the TMO to establish if SSG could be suitable for an application.

A discussion ensues on whether this would be appropriate at this time or whether a more wholistic, rather than piecemeal, solution is sought as speeding and traffic has been highlighted as an issue in the community plan.

AF notes that people should be encouraged to drive to the road conditions rather than specified speed limits – we are after all a rural village.

Parking in the village square

JP reports that despite signage being erected and removed without authority, parking in the square remains to be a problem.

The Clerk informs there has been no further reports and issues have decreased since the school has been on holiday.

AM informs one issue is people parking directly outside the shop despite several requests that additional signage is used to request patrons use the car park provided, this includes parking over the fire hydrant which is unlawful. A member of the public informs that it is part of the highway code that drivers are advised not to park opposite or within 10m of a junction – it is an accident waiting to happen.

AM requests the HOTV are contacted again to request patrons use the car park provided and do not park directly outside the shop and to request a designated blue badge bay is implemented outside the shop.

HV requests that school staff are explicitly asked to not park on the streets or the square, as they are on site all day, and use the car parks within the village.

PH informs the reported blocked drains at Woodhill have been attended to, but the issues still remain. It is on an annual schedule and the Somerset Council do not seem interested in resolving the cause which is either a severely blocked or collapsed drain.

84. Footpaths

JP expresses gratitude to Sarah Evans for a comprehensive report on the ongoing work of the footpath group within the village. JH informs new stiles and gates are also being installed. HV would like to respectfully remind people of the importance of closing gates whilst out walking.

85. Stoke Environment Group

JP thanks Ian Upshall for the update and congratulates the groups on the Envirofair and the current work at the orchard at the allotments.

86. Community Woodland Proposal

The Clerk asks IU if there is anything the PC can do to support the work to make the woodland a realisation. IU responds just apply pressure and appeal to the Local Authorities to assist with finding a suitable piece of land which can be used for the benefit of the whole village and the environment in a positive way. A tremendous amount can be achieved with just a small parcel of land.

87. Playing Fields Annual Insurance

The Clerk informs the premium is slightly less than last year and is within the budget. This year's premium is £622.84. All agree to pay the insurance premium.

88. Allotment Annual Insurance

The Clerk informs this is also less than last years premium at £208.00 and is within the budget. All agree to pay the insurance premium.

89. HOTV

Nothing to report.

90. Consultations and Surveys

None received.

JP informs the PC representatives are still active with the ongoing bus consultations.

91. Financial Matters

Standing Orders

01-05-23K de Silva –Clerks Salary for June(29 Hours)	£395.85
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Payments to be authorised

N Sloan -Web admin for June and purchase of PDF embedder	£134.00
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J Williams -Hedge cutting in burial ground and grass verges	£160.00
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G Wagen and James -Burial ground mowing	£138.60
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Clerks Expenses –

21.05.23 Black ink and paper	£20.20
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10.06.23 Black Ink and paper	£21.35
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14.06.23 XL colour and black ink	£31.50
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28.06.23 Secure postage	£7.65
30.06.23 8x 1st class stamps	£8.80
26.06.23 Planning permission fee	£179.50
Total for Clerk expenses	£268.40

Payments Received

None

Other financial items

None

The Clerk explains the amount of printer ink required to print the required hard copies of the AGAR has contributed to a high amount of purchased ink in the last month.

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

92. Other items for discussion

Due to holidays and the Clerks annual leave, there will be no meeting in August.

There being no further business to discuss the meeting was closed at 9.32pm

The next Parish Council meeting will be held on Monday 11th September at 7.30pm in the meeting room at The Williams Hall, Dark Lane, Stoke St Gregory.