

Stoke St Mary Parish Council

Minutes of a meeting of Stoke St Mary Parish Council held on Thursday, 21st September 2023, at Stoke St Mary Village Hall at 7.30pm

23.40 Attendance and Apologies

Councillors Present : Cllrs Colin Fisher (Chair), Dan Fallance, Patricia Fallance (Vice Chair), Rob Hossell, Tania Watt.

Apologies: None

In attendance: Cllr Ross Henley (Somerset Council) – joined the meeting at 7.50pm
Cllr Sarah Wakefield (Somerset Council) – joined the meeting at 7.50pm
Sarah Fisher, Clerk

23.41 Declarations of Interest – none received

23.42 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on 20th July 2023 were circulated in advance of the meeting and these were approved and signed by the Chair.

23.43 Finance

a) Balances (as at 15/09/2023):

Current a/c: £2792.71

Deposit a/c: £9546.91

Cllr Watt confirmed these balances as correct.

b) Expenditure approval:

	£
Parsons Landscapes (16908 & 16962)	162.08
Clerk's Expenses;	
Stationery (plastic files)	7.99
Printer cartridge	33.95
Proludic replacement slide rail for play area	348.11

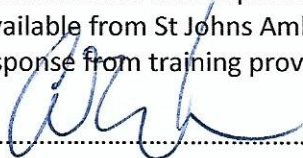
All payments listed above were approved.

23.44 Budget Planning for 2024/25:

It was agreed that Cllrs Fisher, Watt and the Clerk would prepare a draft budget for the November meeting, and that allowance should be made in future budget planning for maintenance of assets (eg play area, defibrillator, noticeboards) and should also take account of the deficit facing Somerset Council (SC).

23.45 Clerk's report/action list from previous meeting:

a) **Defibrillator/first aid training;** no progress has been made on organising this as the providers have not responded to our enquiries. It was agreed that a virtual session (available from St Johns Ambulance) would not be adequate. Clerk to continue to try to get a response from training providers.

Signed:  (Chair) Date: 16/11/23

- b) **PC Debit card (for use by Clerk);** despite several attempts by the Chair, this has still not been processed by Natwest. The Chair will now make a formal complaint to Natwest.
- c) **Litter Bins;** following a site meeting between Andrew Sollis (SC), Cllr Pat Fallance and the Clerk, SC agreed to replace the broken bin situated behind the bench at Church End and this has now been done. We requested that the replacement bin would be relocated further up the hill (away from the bench) but this was not done. Due to numerous cables in the vicinity, we are unable to relocate the bin ourselves as it will require ground levelling.
- d) **Website;** the Clerk reported that the Stoke St Mary Community website had been reorganised and is now more Parish Council-dedicated.
- e) **Grit bins;** the Clerk reported that SC are surveying all grit bins in each Parish and their findings will be shared with PCs, after which the grit bins will be filled by SC.
- f) **Footpath signs by Stoke Hill House;** the Clerk has been approached by Sarah Cresswell, Rights of Way Warden at SC, concerning vandalization of the finger posts at the top of footpath T26/11, which is at the entrance to Stoke Hill House. The posts have been sawn off on a regular basis. There is a £1000 fine for this under the Highways Act 1980 Sec 131 (2,3). The Parish Council agreed to assist in any way possible.
- g) **Allotments;** the pile of waste generated from the clearance work earlier this year has still not been burnt and we have received a complaint from an allotment tenant. Cllr Dan Fallance committed to do this in the week following this meeting.
- h) **Stoke Hill/top of Ash Road;** the Clerk has contacted SC about the deteriorating state of the road surface following recent utility works. SC have confirmed this will be taken up with the contractors and appropriate repairs will be carried out. West Hatch PC have also complained.
- i) **Rural Prosperity Fund;** it was agreed that the timing for this grant application was too tight and we would not pursue it. Cllr Watt suggested we compile a portfolio of projects so that we can respond quickly to similar opportunities in future.

23.46 Play Area:

The Clerk reported that a working group had met twice and there was strong interest in developing the Play Area. Quotations are being prepared but early findings suggest the costs will be c £30k. The working group expect to provide the PC with proposals at the November meeting.


A replacement part for the small slide has been ordered.

Cllr Pat Fallance expressed concerns about the plans to develop the play area;

- i) that welfare of our parishioners should take priority over funding the play area
- ii) we should take account of the age profile of parishioners
- iii) we have no obligation to cater for children living outside of our Parish
- iv) the play area brings maintenance and safety obligations.

The Chair noted that despite this, the play area belongs to the PC and it has to be maintained. Cllr Wakefield observed that having a playground is a community asset that may assist in attracting more young families into the village.

The Parish Council agreed to receive Cllr Henley and Cllr Wakefield's reports at this point and to reorder the agenda, to allow them to leave the meeting:

Signed:  (Chair) Date: 16/11/23

23.50 To receive reports from County Councillors:

1. *Cllr Wakefield reported that SC face significant financial challenges, with a rising deficit. There will be two main consequences; rescheduling of capital projects and cutbacks. Some SC responsibilities will be devolved to PCs. Cllr Wakefield suggests the PC thinks about community resilience, and suggests a 10% precept increase. The Chair asked Cllr Wakefield to inform the PC which activities are likely to fall to the PC asap, for budgeting purposes.*
2. *New access road being put in from Stoke Road into Stoke Woods (at the Ruishton/Stoke St Mary parish boundary). Both Cllrs Henley and Wakefield advised that the Planning Enforcement Officer from SC should visit site to consider if any breach in planning permission had taken place.*
3. *Cllr Henley reported that despite the financial challenges and choices, SC will continue to do positive work, but that current levels of local government funding (from government) is not sustainable.*

Cllr Dan Fallance asked Cllrs Henley and Wakefield what reserves SC held: Currently £50m but this will reduce due to being over budget. The recent collapse of the sea wall at Watchet has heavily impacted SC budget, and allowance must be made for similar events. Cllr Wakefield explained that SC are limited in how much they can increase Council Tax, but central government are increasing the demands on local councils. Currently 63% of SC spend is on statutory activities (eg social care). In real terms, there has been a significant drop in SC's funding. Parish Councils do not have the same restrictions on increasing Precept, and Cllr Wakefield recommended we increase our Precept to fund activities that SC will no longer be able to provide. (The current Band D precept in SSM is £25.53).


23.49 Strategic Plan – “Creating Spaces for People” survey:

Cllr Hossell expressed concerns about this consultation (closing 16th Oct 2023); it ignores the basic requirements of how and where to control development. Cllr Wakefield replied that the consultation is just the start of a long process leading to the plan by 2027. This matter will be taken up with Local Community Networks (LCNs) by Cllr Hossell and the Chair.

Cllr Hossell expressed frustration about speed limits through Shoreditch, which should be 30pmh throughout. Cllrs Henley and Wakefield will discuss with Kate Brown at SC.

Cllrs Henley and Wakefield left the meeting at 8.53pm.

The Parish Council thanks Cllrs Henley and Wakefield for their contribution.

Signed:  (Chair) Date: 16/11/23

23.47 To receive Reports from Parish Council Portfolio:

Chair –

Local Council Networks (LCNs); the Chair attended the first LCN meeting on 2nd August. Keith Read (West Hatch) was elected Chair, and Cllr Wakefield Vice Chair. Areas of interest were identified;

- A358
- rural transport
- Planning, in particular, development east of M5. This group will include Chair and Cllr Hossell
- AONB – expansion to include the vale

- Speeding/state of roads
- Flooding
- Dentistry/healthcare

Cllr Hossell/Chair –

Traffic management;

- given the costs of getting 20mph limit, focus is now on acquiring a Speed Indicator Display (SID) especially for Haydon. Chair reported that the police will part fund if we can demonstrate need. Chair has asked SC for traffic monitor in Haydon – to measure traffic volumes and speed as the basis of an application for support; cost is £250 and will be installed in October.
- Speedwatch scheme – dwindling interest, not considered a priority

Cllr Hossell –

Lines/signs;

- Following a site meeting/review with Kate Brown (SC), we are waiting for many of the lines within the Parish to be repainted, and signs to be reinstated/restored.

A358

National Highways (NH) requested individual meetings with local PCs to develop position statements ahead of Development Consent Order. Communities of Parish (COP) unhappy with approach as process removes any control from COP. Chair responded to NH with several concerns.

Cllrs Pat and Dan Fallance-


Rights of Way; Nothing significant to report (see 23.45 f) above)

Village Hall -Cllr Dan Fallance reported bookings are down slightly, and that rates for hall hire are maintained but an increase is expected soon, pending new contract with electricity supplier.

Roads – see 23.45 h) above

Play area – this was discussed under item no 23.46 above.

Police – Cllr Fallance reported a number of agricultural and equestrian break-ins

Signed:  (Chair) Date: 16/11/23

23.48 Planning:

One application has been received and has been supported:

Application no 37/23/0009 – change of use of land to dual agricultural and equestrian use with minor engineering works to level paddock at Cherry Grove, Stoke Road, Stoke St Mary
Enforcement proceedings – Cllr Hossell reported that recent activity at Stoke Wood, to create an access road from Stoke Road, has been reported to SC Planning Department (see also 23.50, 2 above)

23.49 Strategic Plan – Creating Space for People Survey:

This item was brought forward on the agenda and is reported above in italics.

23.50 To receive reports from County Councillors:

This item is reported under 23.47 in italics.

23.51 Clerk's hours

Nothing to report


23.52 Parishioners Forum

No parishioners were present

23.53 Date of next meeting:

Thursday, 16th November 2023 at 7.30pm

The meeting closed at 9.10pm

Signed:  (Chair) Date: 16/11/23