

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

## DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Annual Parish Meeting ~ 7.00 pm

Attendees: Cllr B. Stone Cllr J. Wallace  
Cllr K. Mansell Cllr P. Dumke  
Mrs J. Allen ~ Clerk

Members of the public: Twenty (20)

The meeting commenced at 7.10 pm.

1. **Welcome by the Chairman**

Cllr B. Stone, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

2. **Minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting 2021**

**To receive the last minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting, held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022.**

The minutes from the Annual Parish meeting, held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022, were circulated.

The document was carefully studied, where it was unanimously agreed that the minutes were a true record of the meeting.

3. **The Parish Council**

**To receive a report from the Parish Chairman on the events and activities of the Parish Council during the last year.**

Cllr B. Stone, spoke and provided the following report, commenting that he was disappointed that only three (3) residents had put themselves forward at the last local elections.

*This is my last report, as after 20 years as chairman and many more years as a parish councillor, I have decided to step down from the council and make way for fresh faces. I was therefore very disappointed that only one person put themselves forward for election in May. There have been so many negative comments regarding the parish council during the past year that I felt sure there would be a rush of people willing to try to do a better job. Parish councillors give freely of their time to work on behalf of the village, within the confines of the protocols laid down for all PC's to follow. We cannot wave a magic wand to improve roads, electricity supply, litter, flooding, parking and the lack of doctors to name but a few of the recent concerns, as most of these are beyond our remit and can only be passed on to the relevant parties to hopefully investigate and remedy.*

*As a parish council we have tried to keep the village precept as low as possible, as we are aware of the cost implications to households in these difficult times and therefore careful consideration is given to how this money is spent. During the last twelve months we have purchased two wooden seats to celebrate our late Queen's Jubilee, one for Upper Stoke and the other for Middle Stoke. The carpark has been revamped, with parking spaces marked and planters installed. My thanks to councillor Peter Egan for organising this. We continue to maintain the three playparks and would like to*

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

*update the equipment finances permitting, but to put them on a par with those in Hoo and High Halstow with their much larger populations would not be realistic.*

*People complain about the litter in the village, but where does it come from? Sweet papers, food wrappers, cans, broken bottles, used face masks, they only become litter when people leave them lying in the street. There are bins in the playparks and in the carpark and what's wrong with taking your rubbish home, Medway Council arrange for it to be collected every week. We should all be responsible for our own rubbish and educate our children to do the same.*

*It was lovely to see all the bunting put up for the jubilee and the coronation. I must thank all the people who worked so hard to organise the street parties to celebrate both these occasions, which were so successful. These events require a lot of planning and hard work by everyone concerned but it is all worthwhile when they are so well attended and enjoyed.*

*Both the church in Upper Stoke and the chapel in Lower Stoke open their doors to all for coffee mornings and other activities and these are both well attended.*

*I would like to thank the parish councillors I have worked with during the year for all their hard work and support. My thanks also to Jenny our parish clerk, without whom the parish council couldn't function. I'm sorry to leave the present council, Julie and Karen and new member Paul (the only person to put his name forward for election) so short of numbers. I hope the village will support their efforts and remember that as councillors they give up their time to work for the good of the village. It is very easy to criticize the council via social media, but why not come along to the meetings, raise your concerns and give councillors the chance to reply. If you feel so strongly about how the council is run why not put your name forward for co-option on to the council as there are vacancies.*

*A big thank you to all the people who over the years have contributed in so many ways to benefit the village, mowing grass, clearing weeds and litter picking as well as organising events and raising money for good causes.*

*Thank you to everyone who has supported me during my time as councillor and just to set the record straight no-one has ever given me a brown paper bag full or otherwise!*

#### 4. **Financial Situation**

##### **To receive a report from the Stoke Parish Council Chairman on the Parish Council's Financial situation**

Cllr B. Stone spoke to advise that owing to further increased costs, the Parish Councillors had carefully decided to increase their precept by 8.7%, to £25,000 for the Financial Year 2023/2024.

He closed his report in confirming that the Parish Council's reserve account currently stood at £31,478, which had been ringfenced for improvements to the playparks and their current account stood at £6,815, which the members were using as working capital.

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

## 5. Rivermead School

**To receive an update from the Rivermead School in Gillingham, concerning their plans to utilise the old Stoke Primary Academy Building in Lower Stoke.**

Cllr B. Stone handed the floor over to Mr P. Dadson from the Rivermead Trust, who provided a very detailed report on the Trust's progress in converting the old Stoke Primary School Academy building into a suitable premises for SEN pupils.

Mr P. Dadson spoke of the pressures to accommodate more SEN pupils, where he advised that he was regrettably having to turn down applications from prospective new students on a weekly basis. With the conversion of the old Stoke Primary Academy building however, it was hoped that this fantastic opportunity would allow the school to expand and to be able to take on more pupils by increasing their class sizes. The new premises would also improve their resources and create some much-needed outdoor space, which in turn could then help students regulate their own feelings, by allowing them an opportunity to 'be by themselves'.

Mr P. Dadson spoke of the Trust's ideas to use the house attached to the school to enable students develop new life skills. He spoke of the school's intention to integrate into the community and in time, to be able to hopefully be able to tap into the various resident's expertise.

To prevent as much upset as possible, existing students would be integrated into the new premises, by phasing students in from Years 7 & 8, without the need to uproot those near the top end of the school. Owing to the pupil's various needs, it was understood that students would be transported to and from the school by minibus, therefore the traffic coming in and out of the the village would be kept to a minimum. Mr P. Dadson also spoke of developing a new one-way system for the mini buses in and out the village.

He advised that the outside of the building would undergo a makeover, where the Trust hoped to improve its kerb appeal by replacing fencing, installing parking spaces for staff and developing its green space. Internal changes would take place too, with the replacement of several internal walls however, the outside structure would remain the same.

Owing to the need for additional space, it was understood that the Trust would also be applying for permission to add an outside modular building onto the back of the property, however this conversion would not be taller than the existing building and would not change the look of the building from the road.

Residents were reassured that students would be supervised at all times, both in and outside of the premises, and the Trust were eventually hoping to be able to offer the hall and facilities for private hire.

Owing to various issues with planning, it was understood that the Trust had had to extend their consultation period and that they were still in discussions with Medway Council concerning the total cost of works (where quotes to convert the building into a suitable premises, had come in considerably more expensive than originally thought, owing to the discovery of asbestos in two main roofs and rot)..

Mr P. Dadson informed the village that the Trust were still very committed to the site however, this was a long-term project, due to the sheer amount of work involved, including the need for planning permission now to install staff car parking spaces to the side and add a modular extension on the back.

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

Following this update, Mr P. Dadson invited members of the public present to speak, where he answered several of their questions.

## 6. Medway Council's 'Surface Water Management Plan'

**To receive an update from Ms G. Bussley of Medway Council, concerning Medway Council's 'Surface Water Management Plan' for the Peninsula.**

Ms G. Bussley of the Planning Service team at Medway Council spoke to address the 'Surface Water Management Plan' she was undertaking, where she confirmed that there were currently ten (10) options available.

She advised that she was meeting with her team later that week and that she hoped to be able to share the details with the Village shortly, alongside costings for a business base.

She spoke of improving pipe networks and working closer with developers to increase drainage capacity, alongside working in conjunction with the Amazon Distribution warehouse in Hoo, to help them clear their reservoir and speaking further with Network Rail.

In addition to the above she advised that the Unitary Authority would be looking at the maintenance of their own River Walls and delving further into land ownership on the Peninsula, alongside building better relationships with Southern Water & MTS. Where she hoped to be able to talk these companies into presenting their ideas to the village, to help reduce the amount of surface water there was.

Finally, she closed her reporting in confirming that she would be organising for a separate meeting to discuss the options with the whole village and that the details of this meeting would be advertised in due course.

Ms G. Bussley opened the floor to questions, where she answered several enquiries as best she could.

## 7. **Community Reports**

**To receive reports from community groups in Stoke.**

The following community reports were read.

### wHoo Cares

**(Verbal report, no hard copy provided).**

### Men in Sheds

**(Verbal report, no hard copy provided).**

### St Peter & St Paul's Church

**(Verbal report, no hard copy provided).**

### Stoke Community Project

Once again, we had a wonderful year celebrating events with our amazing village.

We held four quiz nights, all were well attended, feedback was that everyone had fun so if you haven't joined us yet please do. Everyone is very friendly and if you do not have a table someone will always welcome you to go on theirs. Our next one this year is on the 10th June.

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

For the children we held Easter and Halloween discos. Julie very kindly allowed us to hold these in the Nag's Head Garden. It is always lovely to see the children dressed up and having fun. We are hoping to add an end of term disco this year with a prom theme.

Last year saw us combine the annual Big Lunch celebration with the Jubilee Street Party. This was a big success and was followed by the Big Lunch/Coronation event this year. It was nice to collaborate with the Parish Council on these. Many people have approached us and told us how much they and their families enjoyed themselves. I believe there may still be some of the Coronation mugs the Parish Council purchased for children living in the village available. Please speak to Julie from the Nags Head for these.

2022 was the first time we took part in the Grain Carnival; our theme was Be Kind. The children all looked incredible in their costumes and had fun riding on the lorry. We were absolutely delighted to win the competition for best float!

We have a new theme this year. Anyone wanting their child to take part can contact any one of us and we will share this with them so they can organise their costumes (the organiser likes us to keep it a secret until the big day).

Our complimentary Senior's Afternoon Tea was also well attended and I know for many of us this is our favourite event. Santa made an appearance and everyone went home with a present.

Christmas saw our Santa delivery around the village once again. We were very kindly donated extra sweets so every child we saw along the way received a gift. We rounded off 2022 with hot chocolate and mulled wine around the Christmas tree in the village car park.

As always, we need to thank our very many generous supporters we couldn't do it without them. So, thank you to the Parish Council, Patrons of the Nags Head, Roses Tea Rooms, Aj from the shop, our wonderful village DJ Juan and his apprentice, W H Groundworks, the Indian, Trevor Smith, the guys who manned the burger stall for us at the Coronation event this year and finally the many people who turn out to help us set up at each event! Hopefully we haven't missed anyone.

## **The Peninsula Methodist Church**

The missional activities of The Peninsula Methodist Church at Stoke are going reasonably well, considering the very small group of members who are responsible for these activities happening regularly.

The Men's Shed is doing remarkably well and would welcome people calling in to see what they are doing and perhaps you could join in as well. Whilst it is primarily a Men's group they would not be unwelcoming if a lady turned up. They are a welcoming and friendly group who will answer questions and share their expertise with you.

The Wednesday drop in has a book swap and although it has not been blessed with huge numbers we are appreciated by those who do come along and share in a time of laughter, chat and hot drinks with a biscuit or two. We would be more than happy to see new faces come and join us,

We have a fellowship once a month on a Sunday evening - where we challenge ourselves with some bible study and prayer. New faces again would be most welcome in joining us and tea or coffee is always available.

Whilst the church is a very small group, they are open to new missional opportunities within the community. But as you the Parish Council are aware organising and running such

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

events take a great deal of commitment, effort and time all of which is voluntary.

Sadly, we have become aware of comments made on social media regarding the condition of the graveyard. Whilst we are aware it is not nice it is extremely challenging to stay on top when there are so few of us. We have had a gardener who came a few times a year but he has not for whatever reason not come to the chapel this year.

We are sorry for those who are annoyed or angry but we just do not have the manpower to get this done in one day. One of our almost 80-year-old members has tried to make a start on it but it is very heavy going and is extremely hard work.

We apologise to the Parish Council and acknowledge that the graveyard is not your responsibility despite some of comments that were made.

Gardeners cost money that the chapel currently does not have. It is the weekly / monthly giving of its members that maintain the building and allow it to stay open as well as when we can pay someone to mow / strim the graveyard. (The Methodist Church does NOT get help in maintaining burial grounds nor is there a central pot for it either).

Historically the church and the burial ground was purchased and built by its members. It was the members who would have maintained the churchyard and the buildings but as that membership dwindled so then have the resources and not just financial but people power as well.

The Parish Council, both the parish church and the chapel, the events in the village hall and those organised events by the community group happen because of the goodwill, commitment, time and unwavering efforts of a few volunteers in our community. It is not kind or helpful when the efforts of these volunteers are regularly criticised on social media, it is in fact demoralising and disheartening. We do what we can for our communities because we feel that it is right for us to do something, to give back to where we live but we need also for the community to take some responsibility as well.

Things do not just magically happen it is people their time and efforts ensure that our villages continue to have parks, churches etc.

Tiredness, demoralisation, unrealistic expectations and unfair criticism will eventually wear volunteers down and we in the church are not immune to that. No members at the chapel mean that the Methodist Church (Centrally) will deem it unviable despite that if you the community believe it ought to be there. No members WILL result in the closure and the sale of the building; charity law says we would have to accept the best price and that in all likelihood will be a developer.

We are happy to hear of the potential opportunity of Rivermead taking over the old primary school building and we pray for them and wish them well in their potential new venture and we would love to be a part of your community in some small way if possible.

Each of us at the chapel love our village and despite what it looks like we want you to know we are trying our best but we are only human. We would like to take this opportunity to reach out to you our community, because it is your community too and to ask you to consider if you can help even if it is only in a small way because as the proverb says 'Many hands make light work.'

We would like to take this opportunity to say a very big thank you to the people who just turned up at the chapel yesterday (Tuesday) morning and worked extremely hard

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

trimming and cutting. We are extremely grateful so extend to you all- Thank you.  
Thank you for your time.

We at the chapel will continue to hold the village, the organisations and the Parish Council in their prayers and we thank them for their support in the past year.

## 8. Conclusion

Cllr B. Stone, thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

**The meeting closed at 8.10pm.**

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