

STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



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

DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday 24th January 2024

Parish Council Meeting

Village Hall ~ 7.00pm

Attendees: Cllr J. Wallace ~ Chair
Cllr K. Mansell
Cllr S. Back
Cllr T. Hall
Mrs J. Allen ~ Clerk

Cllr P. Dumke ~ Vice Chair
Cllr N. Blown
Cllr S. Hall
PC Richard Jones

Members of the public: Five (5)

PUBLIC SESSION ~ NOT PART OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace opened the public session at 7.00pm and thanked the six (6) Councillors, the five (5) members of the public & PC Richard Jones for attending.

Part A. Public Discussions

A member of the public spoke to address concerns that the side roads in the village, such as Button Drive, were not being cleaned by the scarab, where they complained about the amount of litter there was strewn around the streets.

A discussion concerning litter picking ensued, where Cllr T. Hall spoke to volunteer his assistance.

The conversation then moved onto a complaint about ice forming on footpaths in the High Street in Lower Stoke, due to the overflowing drain pipes connected to Kitchener Cottages. The resident spoke further to inform the Parish Council that this matter had been reported to Medway Council, who were supposedly going to fix the issue and ensure the drain pipes extended into the road.

A report by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group was read out by Mr P. Egan (an ex Councillor, who stepped down during the local elections). In response to the formation of this new group, Mr P. Egan asked the Parish Council to pledge their commitment. He read out several points the Parish Council needed to adhere to, alongside the agreed key aims for this plan. (A copy of this full report can be found in item 20). He closed his report in offering to becoming the Chairman of the new working party.

The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace thanked Mr P. Egan and the Neighbourhood Plan committee for their comprehensive report and invited the Parish Councillors to informally discuss their requirements, recognising that this subject had also been listed under item 20 of the agenda for formal discussion. A conversation ensued where; it was tentatively agreed that the Parish Council were in agreement with the Committee's requests and to Mr P. Egan offering to become the Chairman of the new Working Group.

Cllr J. Wallace spoke further to introduce Mr P. Dadson from the Rivermead Trust and to invite him to provide an update on the status of the 'new' school. Mr P. Dadson spoke to thank the Parish Council for his invitation and to provide an extensive report on the progress of the Rivermead Trust's renovation of the old Stoke Primary Academy building into a fully functioning faculty.

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He reported that owing to the discovery of asbestos in one (1) side of the building and subsidence in some of the flooring, that specialised contractors were currently working on site to rectify these issues. He also reported that the Trust were in the process of organising for a deed of variation and that he and his team were still 110% dedicated to the project. He closed his report in inviting any members of the public who might have had any concerns to contact him and by promising to try to attend regular Parish Council meetings to keep everyone updated of the school's progress.

Finally, Cllr J. Wallace invited PC Richard Jones to speak. He provided a brief report on the current matters blighting the Peninsula and compared stats from Christmas 2023 to Christmas 2022. He closed his report in asking members of the public to broach any questions they might have with him.

Part B. Public Discussions on any agenda items
None.

No further questions were raised and the public session closed at 7.33pm where all five (5) members of the public and PC Richard Jones left.

1. Apologies for absence

Min 7818:24 None, although the Chair, commented how nice it was to have a full complement!

2. To receive Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Min 7819:24 None

3. Minutes from the previous Parish Council Meeting held on Wednesday 6th December 2023

a). To receive and approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Wednesday 6th December 2023.

Min 7820:24 The minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Wednesday 6th December 2023, were circulated.

It was proposed by the Vice-Chair, Cllr P. Dumke and seconded by Cllr S. Black that the minutes be approved as a correct record. This motion was carried after it was unanimously agreed.

4. Matters arising from the minutes (not otherwise on the agenda)

Min 7821:24 None.

5. Ward Councillor report

a). A report by Ward Councillor Chris Spalding

Min 7822:24 The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen reported that Ward Cllr C. Spaulding had given his apologies as he was attending a meeting elsewhere but confirmed that he had sent no report in his absence.

6. Planning

a). Applications

Min 7823:24 It was acknowledged that there had been no new planning applications submitted since the last meeting.

b). Decisions

Min 7824:24 The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace spoke to confirm receipt of three (3) new planning decisions which had been made since the last meeting, details of which are shown below:

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Refused

- MC/21/1528 – Former White Horse PH Site, The Street, Upper Stoke

Approval with Conditions

- MC/23/0106 – Land At Middle Stoke, Adjacent To 1 & 2 Jubilee Cottages
- MC/23/2444 – Court Lodge Farm, The Street

The members spoke collectively about their concerns for the former White Horse Public House site and the granted planning permission for the land at Middle Stoke, where they understood that this site would now be sold at auction to property developers.

c). Appeals and Other Matters.

Min 7825:24 The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen was asked to speak to Medway Council again to chase for an update on the enforcement investigations connected to 'Sturchfield', where they commented that the site was getting larger and that it was now extending into the adjacent farmer's field.

7. Finance

a). Bank balances

Min 7826:24 The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace referred the members to the bank statements provided in their meeting packs where she talked them through the bank balances shown.

b). To agree the financial performance against the budget for December 2023.

Min 7827:24 The members carefully evaluated the Parish Council's financial performance against the budget for December 2023, where they concluded that these balances were acceptable.

The Clerk was also instructed to add three new budget columns for the next financial year which included:

- S126 VAT - Income
- Neighbourhood Plan Grant – Income
- Neighbourhood Plan Fees - Outgoings

c). Accounts paid since the last meeting to be ratified.

Min 7828:24 The members evaluated the payments made since the last meeting, where they concluded that these payments were acceptable.

d). Accounts for payment.

Min 7829:24 After careful consideration the below payments were accepted, having been proposed by the Vice-Chair, Cllr P. Dumke seconded by Cllr S. Hall and unanimously agreed.

Payee	Reference	Payment Method	Amount	Notes
Mrs J. Allen	Min 1436:18	PAID BY BACS	£613.31	December 2023 Wages
Mrs J. Allen	Min 1436:18	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£613.11	January 2024 Wages
Mrs J. Allen	TO BE AGREED RETROSPECTIVELY	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£326.29	Backpay from 2023/2024 New NALC Pay scales
Mrs J. Allen	Min 1436:18	PAID BY BACS	£35.00	Use of home office – December 2023
Mrs J. Allen	Min 1436:18	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£35.00	Use of home office – January 2024

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HMRC	Min 1436:18	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£18.20	Tax & NI charges (December 2023)
HMRC	Min 1436:18	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£18.40	Tax & NI charges (January 2024)
HMRC	Min 1436:18	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£85.14	Tax & NI charges for backpay (January 2024)
Vodafone Telephone & Broadband	Min 1451:18	DIRECT DEBIT	£41.16	Broadband & Telephone line rental for December 2023
Vodafone Telephone & Broadband	Min 1451:18	DIRECT DEBIT	£41.16	Broadband & Telephone line rental for January 2024
Mr J. Treveil	Min 7703:23	PAID BY BACS	£130.00	Deep Clean of all three (3) play parks INV: 23
Go Cardless	TO BE AGREED RETROSPECTIVELY	DIRECT DEBIT	£11.99	Stoke Parish Council Hugo Fox Website January monthly direct debit
Cloud Next Ltd	TO BE AGREED RETROSPECTIVELY	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£119.98	Hosting fee for Parish Council website INV: 213949
Tree Ventures	TO BE AGREED RETROSPECTIVELY	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£440.00	15 monthly tree inspection report INV: S338 2024
The People's Pension	Min 1775:20	DIRECT DEBIT	£51.13	Both Employer & Employee Contributions for December 2023
The People's Pension	Min 1775:20	DIRECT DEBIT	£51.13	Both Employer & Employee Contributions for January 2024
The People's Pension	Min 1775:20	DIRECT DEBIT	£34.66	Both Employer & Employee Contributions for Backpay 23 / 24
TOTAL			£2,665.66	

e). Payment requests to be discussed for approval and payment.

Min 7830:24 None.

f). Budgets for 2024 / 2025

Min 7831:24 The members unanimously agreed to set budgets during their finance meeting, scheduled to take place on Wednesday 17th April.

g). Precept 2024 / 2025.

Min 7832:24 The members collectively spoke about the precept balance for 2024 / 2025 and referred to the band calculator provided by Medway Council.

The Clerk reported that a few of the surrounding villages had increased their precepts by more than the average inflation of 7%, owing to rumours that Medway Council would be fixing the percentage a Parish Council could ask for, owing to their poor financial status.

Various discussions surrounding several different figures ensued where it was eventually proposed by the Vice Chair, Cllr P. Dumke that the Parish Council should apply a 17.6% increment and ask Medway Council for a balance of £30,000. This proposal was seconded by Cllr S. Hall and was unanimously agreed.

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8. Management of the Council's land and property

a). To review the play park inspections for:

i Button Drive Playparks Road Playpark

ii Heron Way Playpark

iii Upper Stoke Playpark

Min 7833:24 Cllr K. Mansell spoke to advise that there was no change to any of the play equipment in all three (3) parks.

The conversation then digressed to the best use of the Parish Council's reserves. It was recognised that the members had earmarked the majority of their reserves to be split three (3) ways in order to pay for new play equipment however, it was commented that the Upper Stoke Playpark was barely used. The members discussed the idea of carrying out a survey to enquire if residents would like to see this area reutilised as picnic area to take full advantage of the views of the river and to then re-distribute the play equipment in the other play parks.

They also discussed inserting new bins that held black bin liners as opposed to self-contained bins, which were felt would be easier to change.

b). Cleaning of play equipment.

Min 7834:24 Cllr K. Mansell reported that the equipment was still being cleaned on a regular basis and that the bins were being emptied.

c). Defibrillator

Min 7835:24 The members spoke collectively about possibly renting a device until a permanent casing with an electricity supply could be sourced. Cllr S. Back volunteered to look further into this option, in order to report back at the next meeting.

9. Highways & Transportation

a). Footpaths

Min 7836:24 Cllr S. Back reported that he had been salting the footpaths throughout Lower Stoke during the recent spell of cold weather and following his appointment as Snow Warden.

b). Lighting

Min 7837:24 No report.

c). Highways and verges

Min 7838:24 No report.

d). Pot holes

Min 7839:24 No report.

e). Fly tipping

Min 7840:24 Cllr S. Hall spoke to confirm that several abandoned tyres had been fly tipped close to Hoppers Lane. He advised that he had tried to report these items on the 'Country Eye' App but it appeared not to be working at present.

The members also spoke collectively about a pile of roof tiles that had been fly tipped close to the Button Drive Recreation Ground, which they were hoping would be claimed.

f). Grass cutting

Min 7841:24 No report, as it was identified that grass cutting was still out of season.

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g). Leaking manhole cover on A228 / Grain Road

Min 7842:24 It was identified that the leaking manhole cover on the A228 / Grain Road was still ongoing.

h). Salt / Grit Bins.

Min 7843:24 Cllr S. Back spoke to inform the members that following an email he had sent to MHS Homes requesting a grit bin for Lower Stoke that he had received a response to confirm that his request had been granted.

He closed his report in confirming that he was now waiting to hear about the delivery of this new grit bin, which once received, he asked if the Clerk could upload an update onto the members webpage.

10. Communications

To receive an update on the following methods of communication:

a). Website

b). Social Media Page

Min 7844:24 The members collectively discussed utilising their website more by uploading updates about their recent activities onto their news section and then adding links to this page on their social media account. It was felt in doing this that residents would hopefully feel more included and they would sign up for more updates directly via the Parish Council's website.

c). Parish Council owned tablets

Min 7845:24 The members agreed that alternative devices should be sourced, if they were not allowed to utilise their own equipment. Accordingly, the Clerk was deployed to speak to KALC to clarify the situation.

11. Village Hall

a). To receive an update on the status of the Village Hall, including the Doctors surgery.

Min 7846:24 Cllr K. Mansell (who was also the Treasurer to the Village Hall) spoke to inform the meeting that, despite the Doctors recent correspondence to notify the village of their intention to close the Lower Stoke branch, that the practice had still not handed in their notice into the Village Hall Committee.

In response to this news, she confirmed that the committee would be looking further at the surgery's leasehold agreement, as she understood the practice paid quarterly and three (3) months in arrears.

b). To consider making an additional donation towards the Village Hall's upkeep.

Min 7846:24 The members discussed making an additional contribution towards the upkeep of the Village Hall, where it was understood that the new Chairman of the committee had recently indicated that he might be able to get the roof repaired, without the need to totally replace it.

A discussion concerning the essential repairs ensued and owing to the sheer amount of work required, it was felt that the Parish Council should wait to see sight of the quote(s) first.

The conversation then digressed to the internal décor of the village hall, including the need for new floor covering in the kitchen. It was understood that the new Chairman was in the process of trying to negotiate for some complementary paint and that a quote for some new flooring was being sourced.

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Finally, Cllr T. Hall spoke to offer his assistance in painting the barriers to the entrance of the Village Hall, where concerns were raised as to if the village hall actually owned these receptacles.

12. External Contractors

a). To discuss and approve any new work requests or discuss any existing orders.

Min 7847:24 None.

13. Stoke Community Project

a). To receive a report from the Stoke Community Project concerning their latest projects.

Min 7848:24 The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace spoke to advise that she understood the Stoke Community Project team were taking a short break.

Min 7849:24 Cllr N. Blown also spoke to air his concerns that the 'Christmas Light Switch on' Event, that had taken place during the month of December, had not been very well planned. He stressed the need for the Parish Council to be far more organised this December and urged the members to consider planning everything well in advance, which the other members agreed with.

14. Events - Appendix F

a). 80th Anniversary of D-Day on 06/06/2024.

Min 7850:24 The members discussed the KALC circular the Clerk had included in their meeting packs where, it was acknowledged there were commemorative events happening throughout the UK to mark the 80th Anniversary of D-Day, which were due to be held on Thursday 6th June.

The Parish Councillors discussed asking if the Stoke Community Project would like to become involved and the Clerk, Mrs J. Allen was deployed to write to them to enquire and to place this item back on the agenda for further discussion in March.

15. IT Equipment

a). To consider purchasing the Clerk a new office laptop.

Min 7851:24 Following communications from the Clerk that her existing office laptop was broken and several years old, it was proposed by Cllr K. Mansell to grant Mrs J. Allen a budget of £600 (including VAT) to purchase a new Parish Council owned laptop. This proposal was seconded by Cllr N. Blown and was unanimously agreed.

b). To consider trialling a new tablet for Parish Council members.

Min 7852:24 Please refer to item 10 C, ref: **Min 7845:24** ,

16. Stoke Parish Council Surgery

a). To consider holding a Parish Council surgery once a month in the Village Hall, to address any concerns residents may have.

Min 7853:24 Cllr S. Back spoke of an idea he had had of setting up a Parish Council surgery, which he hoped could be held in the Village Hall once a month, where residents could come and speak to the Parish Councillors face to face about any village related concerns they had.

A discussion regarding this item ensued.

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Whilst it was agreed that the surgery was a great idea, it was suggested that the workload and the responsibilities should be shared and not just left to one Parish Councillor to run. Accordingly, the Clerk was asked to ensure this item was listed on the agenda for March.

17. Electricity Supplies in Stoke – ANNEX A

a). To discuss the situation with the intermittent electricity supplies in Stoke.

Min 7854:24 Cllr K. Mansell spoke to inform the meeting that she had emailed local MP Kelly Tolhurst for an update on the situation with the intermittent electricity supplies in Stoke, to which she had already received a response. She read out loud the response, details of which are shown in Annex A.

18. Flood Update

a). To receive a report from Cllr S. Back (Flood Warden) on the recent flooding in Stoke.

Min 7855:24 Cllr S. Back spoke to inform the members that he was in the process of organising for a face-to-face meeting with Cllr S. Curry of Medway Council, who he understood was the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration.

He closed his report in advising that owing to the exceptional wet weather the UK had experienced during early January, which caused lots of localised flooding, that he had been very busy speaking with Medway Council to assist them in locating the 'problem areas', putting up signage to warn residents of the worst hit streets and laying sandbags. He advised that since his appointment as Flood Warden he had subsequently established that he was currently the only Flood Warden appointed to the Peninsula, which was a lot of work in itself.

In response to Cllr S. Back's report the Clerk mooted the idea of asking the Village Voices to do an article on his role, which she hoped might spur more volunteers to come forward.

19. External Committee Updates

a). KALC.

Min 7856:24 The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen spoke to confirm that she will still chasing for confirmation when the next KALC meeting was due to take place.

b). Rural Liaison

Min 7857:24 The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace spoke to confirm that she had no report, as no Rural Liaison meeting had taken place since the last Parish Council meeting.

20. Correspondence – ANNEX B

a). To receive an update on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Min 7858:24 The members referred to the report that Mr P. Egan had read out loud during the public session. (Please see Annex B for a copy of this report).

A brief discussion ensued, where it was proposed by Cllr S. Back to agree to the Neighbourhood Plan Committee's requests (as listed in their report) and to accept Mr P. Egan's offer to become Chairman. This proposal was seconded by the Vice-Chair Cllr P. Dumke and was unanimously agreed.

Accordingly, the Clerk was deployed to respond to Mr P. Egan to confirm the above and to ask him and the Neighbourhood Plan Committee to proceed.

21. Any other business

Min 7859:24 None.

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22. Date of next meeting

Min 7860:24 The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace spoke to inform the members that the next Parish Council meeting would take place in the Village Hall on Wednesday 6th March 2024.

23. Section 100A (4)

Min 7861:24 The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace read out loud the statement listed on the agenda in relation to Section 100A (4). Accordingly, it was proposed by Cllr K. Mansell that the public be excluded from the next item, which was seconded by Cllr N. Blown and was unanimously agreed.

24. Personnel

a). NALC 2023 / 2024 Pay scales

Min 7862:24 The members carefully considered the new 2023/2024 pay scales, as adopted by NALC (National Association of Local Councils) in November. Accordingly, it was proposed by Cllr K. Mansell, seconded by Cllr S. Hall and unanimously agreed to apply the cost of living increment to the Clerk, and to back date the payments until April 2023 (as recommended by NALC).

25. Close of meeting

Min 7863:24 The Chair, Cllr J. Wallace closed the meeting at 9.10 pm and thanked the Parish Councillors for attending.

The next Parish Council meeting will be held on:

Wednesday 6 th March 2024	7.00pm	The Village Hall
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ANNEXES

ANNEX A

17a). Electricity Supplies in Stoke - To discuss the situation with the intermittent electricity supplies in Stoke. Min 7854:24

(TO BE UPLOADED)

ANNEX B

20a). Correspondence - To receive an update on the Neighbourhood Plan. Min 7858:24

The committee's objective is to develop a local neighbourhood plan that allows the community to have a say in what type and size development is undertaken within the parish, while locking in funding to reinvigorate local community facilities for the benefit of present and future residents.

Our vision: to transform stoke parish into a sustainable, resilient and resident focused community, fit for the present day and resident needs up to 2040.

We must understand in line with government regulations and the needs of the parish social and private residents looking forward, we cannot write a plan to stop housing in full (it is simple not allowed) but we can develop a plan that enables housing in line with our wishes.

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The keys aims of the neighbourhood plan:

- to reduce or remove the impact of local development on the existing residents.
- to make sure any development within the parish is of good quality and fitting with the rural setting.
- to greatly reduce the impacts of flooding on the parish, from development and existing flooding sources.
- to reduce the impact of increased traffic on the local community from development.
- to improve local community facilities and promote social engagement.
- to lock in 25% of construction levy being allocated to the parish council.
- to improve community access to the local landscape and neighbouring communities.

Commitment required from the parish council:

- to agree the vision and aims of the neighbourhood plan.
- to review and confirm the neighbourhood plan prior to submission.
- to implement a local referendum on the local plan once reviewed by an external independent assessor.
- to review future planning applications in line with the neighbourhood plan if agreed by referendum.

The Neighbourhood Plan Committee will commit to updating the Parish Council bi monthly and will keep them engaged throughout the process.

Peter Egan has volunteered to chair the committee and a full team breakdown will be presented at the next council meeting.

Mr P. Egan

DRAFT