

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 7 July 2020

**NOTE: Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) and Government Guidelines on public gatherings, the meeting was held virtually on Zoom. Members of the public were invited to observe the meeting streamed live on YouTube.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor R. Kenney in the Chair, and  
Councillors: T. Adamson, A. Best, Mrs L. Davies, J. Davies, I. Fordham, M. Green,  
J. Hickling, Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, P. Leason, J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and  
R. Townsend.

**ABSENT:** Councillors: K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess, Mrs K. Dawson and M. Hatton

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### **GP20/211 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess and  
Mrs K. Dawson

### **GP20/212 Declarations of Interests**

None

### **GP20/213 Requests for Dispensations**

None

### **GP20/214 To receive the report of the County Councillors**

#### **County Councillor Mrs J. Hood**

Councillor Mrs Hood delivered her County Councillor's report which included the following updates:

- There have been three serious flooding incidents in Stone recently. These have been in the Red Hill Coppice area, Cross Street (onto the Longton Road) and Stuart Close North.

Councillor Mrs Hood gave her grateful thanks to both Broad Oak Developers and to Severn Trent Water whose work had been exemplary in remedying the cause of the flooding at all sites.

- The rising bollards connecting Stone Business Park to Beacon Rise were restored to working order once again on 13 May. It is hoped that CCTV will be installed there in the future.
- The County Council has today commenced a longstanding repair to a large dip/crater in a section of pavement in Station Road after receiving approval from Network Rail.
- The Highways team have been working through the night to repair potholes throughout the town. The road surface around Walton

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Roundabout is again in poor condition and the defects have been reported to the County.

- Stone Library will be opening on 27 July from 10am to 4pm on Monday to Friday. Residents who are shielding will have an opportunity to receive a free home delivery of a hard copy book of their choice.
- Schools will be returning in September which is a mandatory requirement with absence fines imposed at the discretion of local heads. Regular information/updates are being received from Government.
- Trees have been cut back on The Avenue and on the A34 enabling pedestrians to walk freely between the fire station and the railway bridge.
- Each County Councillor has been given an additional £2000 to support community groups in their areas. Eligibility criteria apply but it is one of the easier grants to access and is suitable for groups disadvantaged (perhaps through lost revenue) during the Coronavirus pandemic.
- County Councillors are allocated £20,000 each year to spend on highways improvements and Councillor Mrs Hood has asked whether she could commit the whole value to one splitter island project. Although a feasibility study has been undertaken, the request has been declined by the Highways team.

Councillor Mrs Hood said that all Town Councillors' suggestions on how the money should be used – which fully support removal of the splitter island – have been submitted to the County Council.

Councillor Mrs Hood gave her assurances that she is doing her utmost to have the splitter island removed and does not support the suggestion that the cause of traffic congestion on Christchurch Way (consistently in the lane heading to Stafford Street) is the traffic coming out of Morrisons supermarket.

#### **County Councillor I. Parry**

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

#### **GP20/215 To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

##### **Borough Councillor I. Fordham**

Councillor Fordham delivered his Borough Councillor's report which included the following updates:

- There is a good deal of work currently in progress on behalf of residents of St Michael's and Stonefield wards. The work relates to flooding, planning and a Japanese Knotweed problem on the Priory Estate.
- The lockdown has resulted in an increase in costs and a reduction in income for the Borough Council, generating a shortfall in excess of £2 million. It is hoped that central Government will help to mitigate the shortfall to prevent pressure on services and capital expenditure.

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- Committee meetings have been continuing remotely and the Town Council is well represented on a number of committees including: Planning, Resources Scrutiny, Audit and Accounts, Economic Development & Planning Scrutiny, Licensing, Standards and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny.
- The Local Plan Issues and Options consultation has been extended as a result of the Coronavirus crisis. All responses (including the Town Council's response submitted in April) should be uploaded to the portal by the end of the month.

**GP20/216 Representations from Members of the Public**

None

**GP20/217 Minutes**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on the 24 March 2020 (Minute Numbers GP20/200 – GP20/210), be approved as a correct record.

**GP20/218 Minutes of Sub-Committees**

There were no minutes for consideration.

**GP20/219 Reports of Committee and Sub-Committee Chairmen on COVID-19 responses and moving forward**

The Committee received reports from Committee and Sub-Committee Chairmen.

- a) General Purposes Committee – Councillor Kenney thanked Mr Cook and his team at 'A Little Bit of Stone', for operating the COVID-19 support helpline, and all the volunteers who have very kindly provided assistance during the lockdown. Originally the helpline was set up for a three month period but this has been extended to twelve months (within the budget made available for the project).
- b) Planning Committee – Councillor J. Davies informed the Committee that the last 'normal' meeting of the Planning Committee had taken place on 3 March 2020. Subsequently, some 22 planning applications have been reviewed on-line under the COVID-19 emergency process. In each case feedback has been invited by Members, agreement reached among those responding, and timely submissions sent to Stafford Borough Council.
- c) Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee – Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that due to the COVID-19 pandemic all Town Council events had been cancelled to the end of August, which was extremely disappointing. The Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee will need to decide whether the Classic Car event should go ahead in September.

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that despite the COVID-19 lockdown, Stone in Bloom had begun its work to make the town look

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beautiful. She gave thanks to the Streetscene Department for the work they had undertaken.

- d) Estates Sub-Committee – Councillor Fordham reminded the Committee that his written report on the Frank Jordan and Stone Station community centres, had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that following Government permissions the Estates Sub-Committee is looking to open both venues some time in August. In order to do this safely, the buildings will need to be COVID secure, requiring risk assessments from both the Town Council and potential users.

Councillor Fordham provided an update on the Frank Jordan Community Centre:

- Following the Town Council's support with additional space in St Michael's Suite, Stone Community Hub has continued to operate its food bank service reaching significantly increased numbers of people (approximately ten fold) adversely affected by COVID-19 and the lockdown.
- There is a major upgrade of the Christchurch Suite currently underway which will make the room more attractive to hirers in the future.
- An upgrade to the kitchen is required and proposals will be brought back to a future General Purposes or Estates Committee meeting for consideration.
- There are external works going on to the building including the car park, entrance, boundary walls etc

Councillor Fordham said that the objective is to have all work completed by the end of July with costs (except the kitchen) covered by the existing budget. Upon completion of the work the Community Centre should offer a best in class facility to the local community.

Councillor Fordham provided an update on the Stone Station Community Centre:

- There has been some limited water ingress for which a cost effective solution and a quotation are awaited, prior to redecoration. The damage is minor and will not prevent the venue's reopening.
  - The availability of parking spaces in Station Approach for use by hirers has been highlighted as a concern and potential solutions to the issue will be considered in the future.
- e) Environment Sub-Committee – Councillor Leason advised the Committee that due to the lockdown the grounds maintenance contractor had only been able to undertake the standard grass cutting and general maintenance on Crown Meadow. Work will be carried out on the scrapes and to screening at the appropriate time of the year – in the autumn.

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He said that during the warm weather Crown Meadow had been very well used.

Councillor Leason has today received a complaint about the steps to the amphitheatre and will ask the contractor to look at these.

He said that Mr Robinson will judge the allotment competition on his own this year due to COVID-19 and the necessity to socially distance.

Councillor Leason advised that the lockdown has resulted in a growing interest in gardening and a number of enquiries have been received about renting allotments for which there is now a waiting list.

He advised that a meeting of the Single Use Plastics Working Group will be held as soon as circumstances allow.

- f) Management Sub-Committee – Councillor Davies advised that no meeting has been possible since 17 December 2019. Ongoing work has been hampered by the COVID-19 lockdown and a staffing shortage.

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that although the Service Continuity Plan (SCP) had not been formalised before lockdown, sufficient capability has been available to maintain the reduced level of service required by the town from the Town Council. In particular the decision in 2019 to provide iPads to all councillors had proved to be a most fortunate and timely enhancement. However, as soon as it becomes possible, an early action will be to revise the SCP in the light of the COVID-19 experience.

The budget for 2020-21 had been agreed before lockdown although the financial plan now needs a complete review. The Town Council has saved money from the cancellation and postponement of planned events, but income has been lost through cancellation of markets and closure of community centres. There has also been some additional costs relating to COVID-19.

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that Stafford Borough Council has responded to the Town Council's suggestions to improve the planning consultation process and he will be drafting a reply for consideration by the Council.

Councillor Davies said that in order to clarify the nature of the Town Council's consideration of planning applications and to help avoid misunderstandings he will be proposing that the Planning Committee be renamed the 'Planning Consultative Committee'.

## **GP20/220     Stone Heritage Centre**

The Committee considered whether to progress with an application for a grant for Stone Heritage Centre under the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Programme. A full application would need to follow an expression of interest which had been submitted by the Town Council and accepted in March 2020 by the Rural Payments Agency.

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A copy of the programme handbook had been attached to the electronic version of the agenda.

The Assistant Town Clerk (Business & Finance) advised the Committee that the Town Clerk had indicated from the beginning of the process that the biggest weakness of the application with regards to securing the grant was that the Town Council already had the money within its budget. Now that the application literature has been received (including detailed notes and an online presentation) it has become clear that the eligibility criteria cannot be fulfilled. The point is made in the application guidance notes that 'projects which would progress as proposed, with or without grant funding, would not be supported'.

RESOLVED: That a full application for a grant for Stone Heritage Centre under the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Programme is not pursued.

**GP20/221 Update from Working Groups:**

**Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**

The Chairman reported that no meetings had taken place.

**Stone Area Parish Liaison Group**

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that the meetings in April and July had been cancelled, but he hoped the meeting in October would go ahead.

**Traffic Management in Stone Working Group**

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place.

**VE Day 2020 Commemoration Working Group**

Councillor Kenney suggested to the Committee that as commemorative events could not take place this year, consideration could be given to VE Day celebrations in 2021.

**GP20/222 To receive reports from Town Councillors on attendance at meetings of local organisations and outside bodies as a representative of the Town Council**

**Stone ATC**

Councillor Davies reported that Stone ATC had not had any physical meetings but Cadets were taking part in virtual activities and doing their best under the circumstances.

**Age Concern Stone & District**

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that a meeting had taken place on Friday 20 March to discuss closure of the office during the Coronavirus lockdown.

**Stafford & Stone Access Group**

Councillor T. Kelt advised the Committee that virtual meetings of the Access Group had been taking place which included the AGM in June. Councillor Kelt has been working on redesigning the website.

**Stone Common Plot Trustees**

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that no meeting of the Trustees had taken place.

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**Stone Community Hub Liaison Group**

It was confirmed that no meetings of the Hub Liaison Group had taken place.

**SPCA Executive Committee**

Councillor Green advised the Committee that no Executive Committee meetings had taken place.

Before the meeting ended, the Chairman apologised for a technical issue at the beginning of the meeting. The first three items on the agenda: 1 (apologies), 2 (declarations of Interest) and 3 (requests for dispensations received) had not been live streamed on YouTube and were repeated for the benefit of observers.

**CHAIRMAN**