

Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 4 August 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, Mrs A. Burgess, Mrs L. Davies, J. Davies, I. Fordham, M. Green, Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, P. Leason, J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and R. Townsend.

ABSENT: Councillors: K. Argyle, A. Best, Mrs K. Dawson, M. Hatton, J. Hickling

GP20/223 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, A. Best, Mrs K. Dawson and J. Hickling

GP20/224 Declarations of Interests

None

GP20/225 Requests for Dispensations

None

GP20/226 To receive the report of the County Councillors

County Councillor Mrs J. Hood

Splitter Island

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that she had been working tirelessly for more than three years to secure removal of the splitter island to alleviate the daily traffic build up on Christchurch Way and the Longton Road. She had offered the County Highways Department her Divisional Highway Programme money in support of a removal scheme, but this had been declined by Officers.

Councillor Mrs Hood read aloud the General Purposes Committee Minute Number GP0505 (dated 16 March 2011) which confirmed the splitter island had been installed as an experiment, intended only as a temporary arrangement. She advised that a feasibility study had now been received and called on the County to work with her to achieve a solution.

Councillor Mrs Hood expressed her grateful thanks to Town Councillors for forwarding their valuable comments which had been submitted to the County Council.

Covid-19 Outbreak in Stone

Councillor Mrs Hood informed the Committee about the messages she had received from residents and business owners concerned about the far reaching negative impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on Stone town and consequences for them personally. The virus has been linked to the Crown & Anchor public house and peoples lives have been put in jeopardy.

Councillor Mrs Hood said the cost of the operation to the County Council would eventually be released. She acknowledged the costs to traders and businesses who had worked hard to prepare for reopening after lockdown only for the town to be treated as a 'no go' area. Out of the thousands of people tested there had been a small number of positive diagnoses with 5 cases in Stone.

Councillor Mrs Hood expressed her hope that people would soon regain their confidence and return to shop and eat out in Stone. The town is safe, social distancing measures are being fully observed and visitors will be very warmly welcomed.

Tribute

Councillor Mrs Hood paid tribute to a young man who had tragically taken his own life on Friday night. She said he would be greatly missed by his wider Stone family.

Resurfacing of The Avenue

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that she had received assurances from the County Council that The Avenue was scheduled for pre-surfacing very soon. This would involve a three day programme with a full resurface scheduled for 2023.

County Councillor I. Parry

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

GP20/227 Representations from Members of the Public

None

GP20/228 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on the 7 July 2020 (Minute Numbers GP20/211 – GP20/222), be approved as a correct record.

GP20/229 Minutes of Sub-Committees

There were no minutes for consideration.

The Committee considered the reply received from the Development Manager at Stafford Borough Council, in response to a letter sent by the Town Council and other parish councils suggesting improvements to the Borough Council's process for handling planning applications.

The letter to Stafford Borough Council (written by the Town Council and other parish councils) and letter of response (from the Development Manager) had been distributed with the agenda for the meeting.

The Chairman invited Councillor J. Davies, Chairman of the Stone Area Parish Liaison Group, to share his views on the item.

Councillor Davies expressed his disappointment at both the long delay before receiving a reply and the content of the reply which he did not feel addressed the leading reason for putting the item forward. The Borough Council's published 'Statement of Community Involvement 2018 Update' suggests a commitment to public engagement and active participation but this does not appear to be borne out in practice.

The Committee raised the following points:

- When considering requests for planning permission the application of national and local planning policy is required along with some interpretation and opinion. The Borough Council suggests the Town Council's consideration of weightings/balancing of one factor against another is less important than theirs, even though Town Councillors possess detailed local knowledge of their areas.
- The Borough Council suggests that town and parish councils have the same rights as members of the public to speak in Planning Committee but only one objector and one supporter is permitted on any one application. In reality little or no opportunity is available for Town Councillors to express views in this forum.
- The potential bias that the Borough Council suggests might arise from an unequal number of objectors and supporters ignores the point that Town Council representatives may wish to raise genuine points relating to material planning considerations. Whether those points are in favour or against the application is immaterial.
- The rules around speaking at Planning Committee are embedded in the Borough Council's constitution but this is not immutable and may be amended. There was no acknowledgement that processes can be improved.
- There is just one representative from Stone on the Borough Council's Planning Committee and as local knowledge is a valuable resource, a Town Council spokesman should have an opportunity to support the single Member.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Davies and Councillor Fordham work in tandem to produce a reply to be sent on behalf of Stone Town Council.

GP20/231 **BT Payphones**

The Committee considered an email from British Telecom which is consulting on a proposal to remove a payphone in Stone town.

An email from Stafford Borough Council, a letter from British Telecom and a comments form stating the location of the telephone box (which is outside the library PC01 in Market Square) had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

The Committee expressed the view that although the use of payphones has declined, this payphone is a well used facility located in the centre of town. Not everyone has the use of a mobile phone at all times and the public telephone provides an opportunity for people to call for assistance in the event of an emergency.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council writes to Stafford Borough Council objecting to British Telecom's removal of the payphone in Market Square which is a well used community asset in the centre of town.

GP20/232 **Members Motions**

Councillor Mrs Kerry Dawson

"I have recently been contacted by a resident in my ward who expressed concerns about the speed of traffic using Manor Rise, specifically during school drop off and rush hour. He informed me that there had already been several near misses and a few minor incidents and is worried that it is only a matter of time before a child is hurt, given that Manor Rise is used daily by children who attend Manor Hill First School, Pirehill First School and Walton Priory Middle School as their main walking route.

I share these concerns, and ask the Committee to agree that the Town Clerk should write to Staffordshire County Council regarding the traffic issues on Manor Rise to ask them to monitor/report on the issue and take action to curb speeding motorists in the area."

RESOLVED: As the proposer was not present at the meeting, the motion could not be considered.

GP20/233 **Non-Cheque Payments**

RESOLVED: To note the list* of non-cheque payments made by the Council during the period 1 February to 30 June 2020.

GP20/234 **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 meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19.

Traffic Management in Stone Working Group

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

GP20/235

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 advised the Committee that no meetings had taken place.

Age Concern Stone & District

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

Stafford & Stone Access Group

Councillor T. Kelt advised the Committee that a meeting had been held with the secretary of the Group to discuss the ongoing development of the website.

Stone Common Plot Trustees

It was reported that no meeting of the Trustees had taken place.

Stone Community Hub Liaison Group

Councillor Mrs Hood confirmed that no meetings of the Hub Liaison Group had taken place.

SPCA Executive Committee

Councillor Green advised the Committee that he had been unable to attend the last meeting of the Executive Committee.

GP20/236

Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve, pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting whilst the next items of business are discussed on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the debate

RESOLVED: To exclude the Press and Public from the next item of business.

GP20/237

Frank Jordan Centre

The Sub-Committee considered the potential merits of relocating Stone Community Hub from the Walton Suite to the Christchurch Suite which may offer advantages to the Hub, Town Council and other centre hirers.

RESOLVED: It was resolved that the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee and the Chairman of the Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee consult Stone Community Hub for its views on moving its operation from the Walton Suite to Christchurch Suite at the Frank Jordan Centre.

GP20/238 **Staffing Item**

The Committee considered the report* of the Town Clerk on recruitment to the post of Deputy Town Clerk following the resignation of the current postholder.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council supports recruitment to the post of Deputy Town Clerk in accordance with the proposals in the report.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council gives authority to the Town Clerk to recruit to the post in accordance with the Council's Staffing Guidelines.

RESOLVED: That members of the final interview panel will include the Chairmen of the: General Purposes Committee, Management Sub-Committee and Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED: That the closing date will be 17 August 2020 with interviews to be held in the week commencing 24 August 2020.

CHAIRMAN

* Items marked with an asterisk refer to reports or papers circulated with the agenda or distributed at the meeting. They are attached as an appendix to the signed copy of the Council minutes.