



Town Clerk

Les Trigg

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23 November 2020

Dear Councillor,

A **VIRTUAL** meeting of the **TOWN COUNCIL** will be held on **TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2020** at **7:00pm** for consideration of the matters itemised in the following agenda.

The meeting will be streamed live on YouTube and members of the public are welcome to observe.

View Meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXHye7pCvT-mVBouN3IUTWQ>

Les Trigg
Town Clerk

Agenda

1. **To receive apologies for absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations**
3. **Representations from Members of the Public**
4. **To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Town Council held on 3 November 2020, Minute Numbers C20/137 – C20/144 (attached)**

5. **To receive the draft minutes and decisions of the under mentioned Committees:**

- a) General Purposes Committee meeting held on 27 October 2020, Minute Numbers GP20/275 – GP20/278 (attached)
- b) General Purposes Committee meeting held on 3 November 2020, Minute Numbers GP20/279 – GP20/294 (attached)
- c) Planning Consultative Committee meeting held on 3 November 2020, Minute Numbers P20/121 – P20/126 (attached)

6. **Conclusion of Audit 2019-20**

To note receipt of the External Auditor's Report and Certificate for the year ending 31 March 2020 (attached).

7. **Six Month Attendance Rule**

To consider the attached communication in respect of Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

8. **To receive the forthcoming Civic Announcements**

There are no civic announcements.

9. **To receive the Town Mayor's and Deputy Town Mayor's Reports of Engagements**

A report from the Town Mayor is attached.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the virtual Meeting as observers.

Stone Town Council

Minutes of the meeting held virtually on Tuesday 3 November 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 M. Green in the Chair and
Councillors: A. Best, J. Davies, Mrs L. Davies, I. Fordham, Mrs K. Dawson,
Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, R. Kenney, J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and R. Townsend

ABSENT: Councillors: T. Adamson, K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess, M. Hatton, J. Hickling, and
P. Leason

C20/137 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, J. Hickling and P. Leason

C20/138 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations

None received

C20/139 Representations from Members of the Public

None

C20/140 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Town Council held on the 6 October 2020 (Minute Numbers C20/130 – C20/136), be approved as a correct record.

C20/141 Committee Minutes

RESOLVED:

- a) The minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on the 6 October 2020 (Minute Numbers GP20/260 – GP20/274), were noted.
- b) The minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on the 22 September 2020 (Minute Numbers P20/115 – P20/120), were noted.

* 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.

**C20/142 Local Government Transparency Code 2015
Openness of Public Bodies Regulations 2014**

The report of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015* and Openness of Public Bodies Regulations 2014 were noted for the quarter ending 30 September 2020.

C20/143 Civic Announcements

There were no Civic Announcements due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

C20/144 Town Mayor's and Deputy Town Mayor's Reports of Engagements

There were no reports from the Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor on this occasion due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Government requirements on social distancing and mass gatherings.

TOWN MAYOR

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Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 27 October 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: A. Best, J. Davies, Mrs L. Davies, I. Fordham, M. Green, Mrs J. Hood,
P. Leason and C. Thornicroft

ABSENT: Councillors: T. Adamson, K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess, Mrs K. Dawson,
M. Hatton, J. Hickling, T. Kelt, J. Powell and R. Townsend

GP20/275 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, T. Kelt, Mrs K. Dawson and R. Townsend

GP20/276 Declarations of Interests

None

GP20/277 Requests for Dispensations

None

GP20/278 Reform of the Planning System

The Committee considered the Town Council's responses to the following Government consultations on proposed reforms of the planning system:

- White Paper: Planning for the Future
- Transparency and Competition: A call for evidence on data on land control

A copy of the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government consultation papers together with further information on the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, had been attached to the electronic version of the agenda. A 'Planning for the Future' overview had also been included.

The Chairman confirmed that each Committee Member had had an input into the compilation of a draft paper responding to the consultations, which had then been circulated to all.

The Chairman invited Councillor Fordham to speak about the proposed planning reforms and the preparation of a consultation response.

Councillor Fordham informed the Committee that in summary the White Paper proposes a radical simplification and a shortening of the local plan process leading to improvements which in principle the Committee would support. However, many questions are raised about a top down central Government led approach

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which may marginalise other inputs at the expense of local democracy and trust in the planning process. The proposed changes to the planning system also fail to address some important issues.

Councillor Fordham confirmed that the draft response was based on the template provided by the consultation and 26 key questions had been answered. The personal inputs of Members had also been compared with other Councils and it was noted that common issues had been identified.

RESOLVED: That the Committee accepts the draft paper (attached as an appendix to the minutes) as the Town Council's response to the White Paper 'Planning for the Future' Consultation.

CHAIRMAN

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

RESPONSE BY STONE TOWN COUNCIL TO CONSULTATION ON PLANNING WHITE PAPER

OCTOBER 2020

BACKGROUND

The Government White Paper “Planning for the Future” was published on 10th August 2020, with a 12 week consultation period ending on 29th October 2020.

A principle objective of the White Paper is to “simplify” development of Local Plans by focussing on identifying three ‘new’ land categories:

- **Growth areas;** land identified as suitable for development, where outline approval for substantial development would be automatically secured for the forms and types of development specified in the Plan;
- **Renewal areas;** land suitable for some development, such as ‘gentle densification’;
- **Protected areas:** land where development is ‘restricted’

The proposals seek to **‘halve the time’ it takes to secure planning permission on larger sites** identified in the Plan. Local Authorities would also be encouraged to identify ‘sub-areas’ within the Growth areas for self and custom built homes.

The Government will set out **‘general development policies nationally’ alongside ‘locally produced design codes.’** Time to produce Local Plans will be cut by at least two-thirds. Local plan ‘policies’ will be replaced by ‘a core set of standards and requirements for development.’

The Local Plan consultation process will be ‘streamlined’ to take out ‘delays’ caused by a ‘small minority of voices.’ The entire Local Plan process (from very beginning; call for sites; first proposals, first public consultation, identification and classification of land categories, second public consultation, creation of draft Local Plan document, submission and sign off by Planning Inspectorate for adoption) will be limited, by legislation, to no more than 30 months in total.

Community ‘involvement’ will replace ‘meaningless consultation.’

The Planning process will be digitalised, replacing hard copy documents with electronic data. The Government will equip local authorities with ‘world-class civic engagement and proactive plan-making’ technology and resources.

The Government will also **'facilitate ambitious improvements in energy efficiency standards for buildings to help deliver our world-leading commitment to net-zero by 2050.'**

'Creation of beautiful places' will be made easier for those who want to 'build beautifully through the introduction of a fast track for beauty....to **automatically permit proposals for high quality developments where they reflect local character and preferences.'**

The proposed reforms will **'sweep away months of negotiation of Section 106 Agreements' to be replaced by a 'nationally set, value-based flat rate Infrastructure Levy.'**

The Government will set a new nationally determined and binding housing requirement for local authorities. 'Masterplans and design codes for substantial development sites should seek to include a variety of development types from different builders' (which will be explored further to support faster build out 'as we develop our proposals for the new planning system')

With respect to Neighbourhood Plans, the White Paper says "we think they should be retained in the reformed planning system, BUT we will want to consider whether their content should become more focussed to reflect our proposals for Local Plans.'

RESPONSE FROM STONE TOWN COUNCIL

The key objective of the proposals is to speed up the planning process. **This is desirable but will local knowledge and public scrutiny be sacrificed to facilitate speed and convenience?**

Local authorities will have to deliver decisions on planning applications within 8 weeks for most applications and 13 weeks for major developments. **There will be less opportunity for tier 3 councils and individuals to comment on significant development within their area.**

Local authorities that do not deliver decisions within the statutory time frame will be required to refund the application fee and if the local authority refuses an application that is subsequently allowed on appeal, the fee will be refunded and costs automatically awarded against the local authority. **Such a process may incentivise poor decision making and tip the balance of such decisions in favour of commercial interests at the expense of local needs.**

The current planning process requires simplification and improvement but changing it so that all the cards are stacked in favour of developers is not the way to improve it.

Neighbourhood Plan involvement seems to be an afterthought and may become marginalised calling into question the much vaunted 'Localism Agenda'.

The Paper refers to an ideal of building to reflect local character. **The danger is that 'local character' will be defined too loosely and that developers will build what they like to build, standard units based on standard plans, similar nationwide.**

CONCLUSION

Stone Town Council understands and in principle supports the desire to speed up the development of Local Plans and improve inefficient processes but has serious reservations about the impact of the proposals as outlined below:

- Local democracy and local knowledge will be undermined at the expense of the interests of developers and development;
- Top down policy making will lessen the importance of the LPA, elected members, Planning Committees and residents;
- LPA and public scrutiny of planning proposals will be sacrificed in favour of speed and acquiescence to the wishes of developers incentivised through financial penalties;
- The input of Town and Parish Councils who represent local people will be marginalised;
- Neighbourhood Plans may be retained but would seem destined to be less important at best;
- Insufficient detail is provided to make responses to many of the proposals.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS IN THE WHITE PAPER

1. What three words do you associate most with the planning system in England? Housing, local, complex, lengthy.

2. Do you get involved with planning decisions in your local area?

Yes. The Town Council has a statutory right to be consulted.

3. Our proposals will make it much easier to access plans and contribute your views to planning decisions. How would you like to find out about plans and planning proposals in the future?

The existing process may work for those involved but seems opaque to many members of the public. It is not clear how these proposals will clarify matters. More detail of alternative approaches is needed before making further comment. A Town Council should however, have a right to be represented at any formal hearings/reviews.

4. **What are your top three priorities for planning in your local area? [Building homes for young people / building homes for the homeless / Protection of green spaces / The environment, biodiversity and action on climate change / Increasing the affordability of housing / The design of new homes and places / Supporting the high street / Supporting the local economy / More or better local infrastructure / Protection of existing heritage buildings or areas / Other – please specify]**

To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and to encourage people to engage in developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing.

5. **Do you agree that Local Plans should be simplified in line with our proposals? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

Agree with the need to improve the speed and reduce the complexity of preparing Local Plans. Have severe reservations with many of the proposals and the lack of detail and clarity. Sense that the concept of 'Localism' will be diminished and that timeframes for community engagement will limit opportunities for comment. Greater clarity is needed on how Local Plans with a reduced level of detail will work and the future of Neighbourhood Plans. The Government should provide for greater local democratic processes by enabling local authorities to have discretion about whether to grant planning permission for development in Growth and Renewal areas. If low / zero build practices were required under Building Regulations, this aspect could be removed from the planning function, allowing a greater focus on sustainable place making. Limiting the amount of time for consultation through the new system may lead to reduce community engagement with planning. Different areas and communities will have different levels of participation through the new digital approach. The new system seems to be overly top down (national dictating too much to local). There is no evidence to suggest that such a revolution, rather than gradual improvement through evolution will work better. The current democratic oversight and local connection will be lost, because decisions will be made nationally through development management policies.

6. **Do you agree with our proposals for streamlining the development management content of Local Plans, and setting out general development management policies nationally? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]**

The ambition to open the market to smaller builders and developers is welcome – however volume builders control the market. Whilst the new system would give certainty to developers on land allocation through Local Plans, it will not prevent speculative applications which would be considered under national policy and local design codes. More clarity is required on the statutory weight given to local design codes. It is presumed that developers would retain the right of appeal as well as a benefit from an extension of permitted development rights. This would appear to be a developer's charter with few benefits to local communities. Whatever a streamlined plan looks like it must ensure protection of our heritage and natural assets. There should be concern about the automatic granting of outline planning permission for Growth areas as this could result in poor quality housing development.

7a) Do you agree with our proposals to replace existing legal and policy tests for Local Plans with a consolidated test of “sustainable development”, which would include consideration of environmental impact? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

The White Paper does not provide a sufficient definition of sustainable development. There is a lack of detail on how to integrate nature into the planning system. Section 106 payments are crucial to the maintenance of ecology. Any replacement must set a priority for wildlife recovery and management programmes – and support climate change measures such as carbon sequestration. The role of the planning system should be to build healthy, sustainable places - not just to build, build, build. The overall scope of the White Paper is very narrow and almost entirely focused on housing delivery.

7b. How could strategic, cross-boundary issues be best planned for in the absence of a formal Duty to Cooperate?

Not applicable to a Town Council.

8a. Do you agree that a standard method for establishing housing requirements (that takes into account constraints) should be introduced? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

It is evident the Government wishes to secure an increase in housing delivery. We understand that Stafford Borough has calculated that its annual requirement under these proposals will increase from 400 to 829 which will have fundamental impacts on quality of

life. Any housing increase should be agreed alongside sufficient infrastructure provision yet these needs are not adequately acknowledged. No binding short term figure should be applied ahead of a Local Plan.

8b. Do you agree that affordability and the extent of existing urban areas are appropriate indicators of the quantity of development to be accommodated? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sufficient in themselves – refer to comments re quality of life.

9a. Do you agree that there should be automatic outline permission for areas for substantial development (Growth areas) with faster routes for detailed consent? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. Such an approach will remove democratic oversight in favour of the convenience of a streamlined process. Community engagement and input is important to democracy and trust in government both locally and nationally. It is not democratic to remove the right of local people to comment, question, and disagree with a Local Plan proposal, application or development.

9b. Do you agree with our proposals above for the consent arrangements for Renewal and Protected areas? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

The proposals do not appear to integrate ecology/nature into the three types of area and therefore offer less protection than is available under the current system. No explanation is given on how planning will contribute beyond unsupported net gain commitments. By making all decisions through the Local Plan, valuable new information gained later, would carry no weight.

9c. Do you think there is a case for allowing new settlements to be brought forward under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. Allowing new settlements to be brought forward under NSIP will further erode trust in the planning system. Development Corporations, if used, must be locally led and accountable.

10. Do you agree with our proposals to make decision-making faster and more certain? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes, but scrutiny should not be sacrificed in favour of speed. The White paper is long on objectives, but very short on detail.

11. Do you agree with our proposals for accessible, web-based Local Plans? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes, in principle, if this avoids marginalising sections of the community.

12. Do you agree with our proposals for a 30 month statutory timescale for the production of Local Plans? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

It may be desirable in theory but not at the expense of local democracy and scrutiny. The aim appears unrealistic and no evidence is given on how it will be achieved other than placing most authority at national level and implementing a top down approach.

13. a. Do you agree that Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes, Neighbourhood Plans should be given more rather than less weight as they are evidence of local democracy in action and essential to public trust. However, the White Paper proposals seem to reduce their importance significantly. Neighbourhood Plans offer the opportunity to shape the design of a development, match it to local needs and have the potential to secure locally led development. Further detail is required about the relationship between Neighbourhood Plans and the new-style Local Plans to ensure continuing community engagement

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13b. How can the neighbourhood planning process be developed to meet our objectives, such as in the use of digital tools and reflecting community preferences about design?

By providing them with greater importance.

14. Do you agree there should be a stronger emphasis on the build out of developments? And if so, what further measures would you support? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

In principle, having a mix of different builders one development area may encourage more variety of styles, However, this could lead to competition between developers and a race to the bottom in order to ensure sales.

15.What do you think about the design of new development that has happened recently in your area? [Not sure or indifferent / Beautiful and/or well-designed / Ugly and/or poorly-designed / There hasn't been any / Other – please specify]

Developments by the major developers who control the market are often convenient and bland copies of house designs that can be found anywhere in the Country. Allowing design criteria to be specified at local level might remove this problem. Design should embrace not only the housing but also density, design of roads, pavements and green spaces, and parking allocations. Quality of life/wellbeing issues should be part of the considerations when it comes to a design code.

16.Sustainability is at the heart of our proposals. What is your priority for sustainability in your area? [Less reliance on cars / More green and open spaces / Energy efficiency of new buildings / More trees / Other – please specify]

We do not believe that sustainability is at the heart of the proposals. More detailed consideration of the wider environmental issues is required, especially green spaces, energy efficiency and transport. There is a stated commitment for new homes to be carbon neutral by 2050. Carbon neutral homes can already be a reality if there is the determination but there is little detail on how this might actually come about.

17.Do you agree with our proposals for improving the production and use of design guides and codes? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes, in principle this could be valuable. A National Model Design Code might be welcome as would design guides that offer further detail, but what weight will they carry without a legal status?

18.Do you agree that we should establish a new body to support design coding and building better places, and that each authority should have a chief officer for design and place-making? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sure.

19 Do you agree with our proposal to consider how design might be given greater emphasis in the strategic objectives for Homes England? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Agree emphasis on better external appearance and improved thermal properties for new developments. Not sure what Homes England is. The actual creation and application of locally specific characterisation requires more detail.

20. Do you agree with our proposals for implementing a fast-track for beauty? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

The independent Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, published in January 2020, should be endorsed through the new planning system. However, 'beauty' should be reflected throughout the range of building - small and large, major development, self build and small development.

21. When new development happens in your area, what is your priority for what comes with it? [More affordable housing / More or better infrastructure (such as transport, schools, health provision) / Design of new buildings / More shops and/or employment space / Green space / Don't know / Other – please specify]

Infrastructure needs should be carefully assessed and agreed in advance of commencement and its implementation should come before or alongside the new development. The quality of life of residents can suffer greatly due to time lags or lack of implementation under the current system. A more joined up approach is required. The protection of green spaces is vital to the well-being of local people and their protection should be prioritised.

22. a. Should the Government replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 planning obligations with a new consolidated Infrastructure Levy, which is charged as a fixed proportion of development value above a set threshold? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Any new Infrastructure Levy fully (replacing the current S106 system) should generate at least the same amount of infrastructure funding and affordable housing should be included. A Town Council/Parish should also be entitled to a percentage of the amount generated for investment in its geographical area.

22b. Should the Infrastructure Levy rates be set nationally at a single rate, set nationally at an area-specific rate, or set locally? [Nationally at a single rate / Nationally at an area-specific rate / Locally]

The national Infrastructure Levy rate should reflect differing development values across the country rather than a one size fits all approach. Guidance is required on what is meant as 'area-specific'. There is concern that the proposals fail to address one of the key barriers to housing and affordable housing delivery which is the price of land.

22c. Should the Infrastructure Levy aim to capture the same amount of value overall, or more value, to support greater investment in infrastructure, affordable housing and local communities? [Same amount overall / More value / Less value / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

At least the same and ideally more. Developers benefit from development and a proportion of this financial gain needs to be channelled back into improving life for the community. This latter process should involve far more transparency.

22d. Should we allow local authorities to borrow against the Infrastructure Levy, to support infrastructure delivery in their area? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sure. Government support will be required in some form, perhaps via the underwriting of risk taken against agreed criteria.

23. Do you agree that the scope of the reformed Infrastructure Levy should capture changes of use through permitted development rights? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. It is a further means of residents sharing the benefit of development in their community.

24a. Do you agree that we should aim to secure at least the same amount of affordable housing under the Infrastructure Levy, and as much on-site affordable provision, as at present? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

It is important that development continues to deliver affordable housing as part of any new system and would suggest this is ring-fenced.

24b. Should affordable housing be secured as in-kind payment towards the Infrastructure Levy, or as a 'right to purchase' at discounted rates for local authorities? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

There is insufficient detail on how this new system would work.

24c. If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, should we mitigate against local authority overpayment risk? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sure, insufficient detail provided.

24d. If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, are there additional steps that would need to be taken to support affordable housing quality? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sure, insufficient detail provided.

25. Should local authorities have fewer restrictions over how they spend the Infrastructure Levy? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.] a. If yes, should an affordable housing 'ring-fence' be developed? [Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Agree in principle. Even within a single authority area, the needs of a community can differ greatly and therefore having flexibility to meet these needs is important. However, benefits should accrue to the community impacted by the development.

26. Do you have any views on the potential impact of the proposals raised in this consultation on people with protected characteristics as defined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010?

No comment.

Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 3 November 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: A. Best, J. Davies, Mrs L. Davies, I. Fordham, Mrs K. Dawson, M. Green,
Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and R. Townsend

ABSENT: Councillors: T. Adamson, K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess, M. Hatton, J. Hickling and
P. Leason

GP20/279 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, J. Hickling and P. Leason

GP20/280 Declarations of Interests

None

GP20/281 Requests for Dispensations

None

GP20/282 To receive the report of the County Councillors

County Councillor Mrs J. Hood

Highways – Potholes

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that the County Highways Department had been out fixing potholes on local roads which included remedial work at Walton Roundabout.

Tilling Drive – New Development

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that L & T Care were making preparations to begin the care home build on Tilling Drive playing field and had delivered a portacabin which arrived on a large HGV that had parked in Tilling Drive.

Councillor Mrs Hood expressed concern that L & T Care may be planning to install the site entrance on Tilling Drive which is used daily by large numbers of families with young children attending a number of nearby schools and nurseries.

Councillor Mrs Hood said she was investigating the matter as she had understood the access would be on the A34 and no notice of any amendments to the plans had been received. She urged parents to exercise extreme caution, particularly in respect of children attending Walton Priory Middle School.

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Councillor Mrs Hood said she had been given assurances that heavy construction vehicles would not be entering Tilling Drive at school start and finish times.

County Councillor I. Parry

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

GP20/283 Representations from Members of the Public

None

GP20/284 Minutes

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 6 October 2020 (Minute No's GP20/260 – GP20/274), be approved as a correct record.

GP20/285 Minutes of Sub-Committees

RESOLVED:

- a) Estates Sub-Committee held on 13 October 2020 (Minute Numbers EST20/024 – MAN20/029), that the draft minutes be noted.
- b) Environment Sub-Committee held on 13 October 2020 (Minute Numbers ENV20/031 – ENV20/037), that the draft minutes be noted and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number ENV20/035 be adopted.

GP20/286 Budget Monitoring Report – September 2020

The report of the Town Clerk* was noted.

GP20/287 Appointment to Outside Bodies

The Committee considered appointments as the Council's representatives on outside bodies.

RESOLVED: To make the following appointments of council representatives to the following bodies:

Stone ATC (Mayor plus 1 member)
Councillors: M. Green and J. Davies

Age Concern Stone & District (2 members)
Councillors: T. Adamson & C. Thornicroft

Stafford & Stone Access Group (1 member)
Councillor T. Kelt

Trustees of the Town Hall Charity (all members)
All members

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Stone Community Hub Group (3 Members)

Councillors: M. Hatton, Mrs J. Hood and J. Powell

Stone Area Parish Liaison Group (1 Member)

J. Davies

NOTE: Current membership of the following bodies will continue until the stated dates, or until retirement by an individual member, even if the members cease to be members of the Council

Stone Common Plot Trustees (four year term is standard)

Councillors: Mrs L. Davies, Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt and R. Kenney to May 2023

Councillor T. Adamson to 2023

Richard Vernon Trust (four year term)

Councillors: J. Powell to 2023, J. Davies and Mrs L. Davies to 2023

SPCA Executive Committee (one Member for a two year term)

Councillor M. Green (to December 2021)

GP20/288 Premises Licence Review – Crown & Anchor

The Committee considered the appointment of a representative to address Stafford Borough Council's Licensing Sub-Committee, required in support of the Town Council's application for a premises licence review (Minute Number GP20/255: General Purposes Committee meeting on 22 September 2020).

RESOLVED: That Councillor Mrs J. Hood is appointed to represent the Town Council (as the applicant), at the Crown & Anchor Premises Licence Review hearing.

GP20/289 Appeal Hearing – Land off Sadler Avenue

The Committee confirmed the appointment of a representative to speak at the above appeal on behalf of Stone Town Council, if required.

GP20/290 Bank Mandate

The Committee considered the following proposed resolution in order to update the Council's bank mandate to include the Deputy Town Clerk, rather than the Assistant Town Clerk (Business).

In respect of the proposed resolution, the authorised signatories are Councillors Andrew Best, Kerry Dawson, Jim Davies, Lin Davies, Mark Green and Jill Hood together with the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk, and the signing rules are as stated paragraph 5.10 of the Council's Financial Regulations.

*"That a banking relationship will be maintained with National Westminster Bank Plc (the **Bank**) in accordance with this mandate and that:*

- *the individuals identified as **Authorised Signatories** may, in accordance with the **Signing Rules**:*
 - *sign cheques and give instructions for Standing Orders, Direct Debits, electronic payments, banker's drafts and other*

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- *payments on the accounts even if it causes an account to be overdrawn or exceed any limit*
- *sign, accept or endorse bills of exchange.*
- *request and give counter-indemnities for the issue of letters of credit or Guarantees (including bonds, indemnities and undertakings)*
- ***Authorised Signatories identified in the Signing Rules for unlimited amounts may, in accordance with the Signing Rules:***
 - *sign agreements for electronic products, including payment systems, and appoint or remove administrators and operators of those electronic products. The Business / Organisation authorises the administrators and operators to exercise the powers detailed in the terms of each electronic product. These powers may be extensive and include the power to make payments and access information on behalf of the Business / Organisation, and in the case of administrators, the power to appoint and remove other administrators (with the same powers) and operators*
- *any Authorised Signatory may give other instructions or requests for information to the Bank in relation to the accounts; opening accounts with the same Signing Rules and Authorised Signatories; closing accounts; or other banking services or products*
- *the Bank may accept instructions that do not have an original written signature provided the Bank is satisfied that the instruction is genuine and subject to any other agreement the Bank may require for those instructions*
- *The mandate will continue until the Customer completes a new mandate I passes a new Authority advising the changes in authority on the account(s)."*

RESOLVED: That the changes to the bank mandate are accepted.

RESOLVED: That the authorised signatories are: Councillors Andrew Best, Kerry Dawson, Jim Davies, Lin Davies, Mark Green and Jill Hood together with the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk, and the signing rules are as stated in paragraph 5.10 of the Council's Financial Regulations (GP20/123).

GP20/291 Stafford Borough Council Election Costs

The Committee considered the charges received from Stafford Borough Council for the 2019 Town Council elections in Stone.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the value of the invoice for the Stonefield & Christchurch Town Ward was £8,497.13 which was very similar in value to the charge levied by the Borough Council in 2016 after a by-election had occurred in the same ward. The costs for the by-election had been £8,493.96.

The Town Clerk explained that the two sets of costs were not expected to be the same in value because the 2019 election costs should have been shared with Stafford Borough Council who had held its borough council elections concurrently.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk is asked to request from Stafford Borough Council a breakdown of the 2019 election costs for the Stonefield & Christchurch town ward.

* 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.

GP20/292 Non-Cheque Payments

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

GP20/293 Update from Working Groups:

Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Councillor Mrs Hood confirmed that there had been no meeting.

Stone Area Parish Liaison Group

The Chairman of the Liaison Group, Councillor Davies, advised the Committee that a very useful, constructive and productive meeting had been held in October particularly in respect of work to improve communications with the Borough Council on planning consultations and to realise the aspirations of the Local Plan.

Traffic Management in Stone Working Group

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

Promotion of Stone Working Group

Councillor Powell advised the Committee that the Promotion of Stone Working Group's first meeting had taken place on 22 October 2020. A very productive and positive meeting had taken place and the issues discussed included:

- Clarification on membership, format and how the Group would work.
- Aims and expectations of the Group – the promotion of Stone as a safe environment for business and enjoyment of retail and hospitality venues in town; the actions that would be taken in the future (to be seen by the local community as a positive thing); the focus on Stone as a whole which would be inclusive of all business types large and small.
- Challenges identified by business representatives and their members – there is a lot of bad press; lack of footfall in most retail business; correlation between national and local bad press/news reports and footfall; negative comments by social media users and groups towards Stone and its businesses.
- Moving forward – signage and notices of COVID-19 safety measures that are being adopted; promotion of a safe Stone environment; use of digital media for signposting; signage to promote Stone on roadways and canals; promotional film to showcase the town and its community; use of A Little Bit of Stone website; promotion of all businesses in Stone; a Christmas promotion.
- Next Steps – investigate funding opportunities for actions and publicity material; use of A Little Bit of Stone for promotional purposes; explore the creation of a video production; promotional item in the Stone & Eccleshall Gazette; create publicity, titles and action statements for the use of Stone promotions.

GP20/294 To receive reports from Town Councillors on attendance at meetings of local organisations and outside bodies as a representative of the Town Council

* 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.

Stone ATC

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place and no meetings were planned.

Age Concern Stone & District

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that an Age Concern meeting had taken place on Monday 16 October in a Covid-19 secure environment.

Councillor Thornicroft reported that the charity's main source of income (tombola and hospital transport scheme) had disappeared during the pandemic. However, Mr Norman had reported his success in obtaining a substantial grant from Severn Trent Water through a scheme devised to help organisations replace lost revenue. In addition, some other smaller grants and donations had helped fund the costs of making the office COVID-19 safe. A small surplus was reported in the account which was excellent news.

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that Age concern had been working in conjunction with the Stone Helpline mainly in assisting people with Blue Badge and Attendance Allowance queries.

He said the office had reopened at the beginning of August on a two day week basis with two volunteers. The hospital transport scheme and coffee club are not currently operating but there was discussion about restarting the transport scheme in a COVID-19 secure way.

Stafford & Stone Access Group

Councillor T. Kelt advised the Committee that the group had had both an AGM and an ordinary meeting since the last General Purposes Committee. The main issue to report is that the Access Group's website has been redesigned, updated and is now published.

Councillor Kelt said that the website lists all businesses and services in Stone, which is a precursor to doing the same in other areas within the borough. He will be approaching Councillors for suggestions on publicising the website and for ideas on additional content.

Stone Common Plot Trustees

Councillor Kenney confirmed that no report was available on a meeting that had recently taken place.

Stone Community Hub Liaison Group

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

SPCA Executive Committee

Councillor Green advised the Committee that there had been no meeting of the Executive Committee.

CHAIRMAN

Stone Town Council – Planning Consultative Committee

Minutes of the meeting held virtually on Tuesday 3 November 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 J. Davies in the Chair, and
Councillors: A. Best, Mrs L. Davies, Mrs K. Dawson, I. Fordham, M. Green,
Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, R. Kenney, J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and R. Townsend

ABSENT: Councillors: T. Adamson, K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess, M. Hatton, J. Hickling and
P. Leason

P20/121 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, J. Hickling and
P. Leason

P20/122 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations

Councillor Best declared a personal interest in planning application
20/33063/HOU.

Councillor Mrs Hood confirmed that, as a member of Stafford Borough Council's
Planning Committee, she would not comment on the planning applications listed
and abstained from voting on all items.

P20/123 Representations from Members of the Public

None received

P20/124 Minutes

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 6 October
2020 (Minute Numbers P20/115 – P20/120), be approved as a correct
record.

P20/125 Planning Applications

Application Number – 20/33063/HOU

Applicant – Mr K. Turner

Location – 83 Oulton Road, Stone

Development – rear extension

Observations: No objections

Application Number – 20/33146/FUL

Applicant – Mr & Mrs Stant

Location – 49 High Street, Stone

Development – Rear storey extension to retail unit and conversion of 1st and 2nd floor to 2 no self contained apartments

Observations: No objections

Application Number – 20/32679/FUL

Applicant – Dr G. Rhys

Location – 6 Mill Farm Barns, Mill Street, Stone

Development – Retrospective boundary fence

Observations: The Town Council supports the comments made by Councillor I. Fordham in the 'Call In' document submitted to Stafford Borough Council.

Application Number – 20/33313/COU

Applicant – Mr H. Khadar

Location – 13 High Street, Stone

Development – Change of use to ground floor from two retail units to mixed Sui Generis use including sale of hot and cold food A5/A3 and including sale of hot and cold desserts.

Observations: The Town Council would welcome a daytime hot and cold food takeaway provision to add to the amenities of the town. However, it would not support evening takeaway services which could increase the flow of traffic in the High Street, on street parking and other consequential risks.

P20/126

To note the following items considered under delegated powers where no objections were forwarded to Stafford Borough Council due to no Member asking for the item to be considered by a special meeting of the Committee.

None

CHAIRMAN

Mr W L Trigg
Stone Town Council
15 Station Road
Stone
Staffordshire
ST15 8JP

Direct +44 (0)191 383 6348
Dial
Email local.councils@mazars.co.uk

23 November 2020

Dear Mr Trigg

Completion of the audit for the year ended 31 March 2020

We have completed our audit for the year ended 31 March 2020 and I have pleasure in enclosing the certified Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The External Auditor's Certificate and Report is given in Section 3.

If there are any significant matters arising from the audit, they are summarised in the External Auditor's certificate in Section 3. If we have identified minor scope for improvement we have recorded this on page 2 of this letter. The Council must consider these matters and decide what action is required. In most cases this will be self-evident. In some instances we have referred to further guidance available, in particular, in the publication "*Governance and Accountability for Local Councils – A Practitioners' Guide (England) 2010*". This can be obtained via your NALC or SLCC branch, or downloaded free of charge.

Action you are required to take

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 set out what you must do at the conclusion of the audit. In summary, you are required to:

Publish (which must include publication on the authority's website) a statement:

- that the audit has been concluded and that the statement of accounts has been published;
- of the rights of inspection conferred on local government electors by section 25 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; and
- the address at which, and the hours during which, those rights may be exercised.
- Keep copies of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum.
- Ensure that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return remains available for public access for a period of not less than five years beginning with the date on which the Annual Governance and Accountability Return was first published.

Mazars LLP is the UK firm of Mazars, an integrated international advisory and accountancy organisation. Mazars LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC308299 and with its registered office at Tower Bridge House, St Katharine's Way, London E1W 1DD.

We are registered to carry on audit work in the UK by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. Details about our audit registration can be viewed at www.auditregister.org.uk under reference number C001139861.

VAT number: 839 8356 73

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 do not specify the period the Completion Notice needs to be on the council's website but this period must be reasonable.

Minor scope for improvement in 2020/21

No minor issues identified.

Accessibility Regulations

We are aware that the Accounts and Audit Regulations requirement for a physical 'wet ink' signature on the original AGAR, does not allow parish council's to fully comply with the Accessibility Regulations. The National Audit Office are aware that the two pieces of legislation are not compatible, therefore smaller authorities are advised to make it clear on their website that the document is a scan and will not be fully compliant with the Accessibility Regulations.

Audit fee

Our fee note for the audit, which is in accordance with the audit fee scales set by SAAA, and available at <http://www.localaudits.co.uk/fees.html> will follow.

We would be grateful if you could arrange for this to be paid at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely

Cameron Waddell
Partner

Section 3 – External Auditor Report and Certificate 2019/20

In respect of

Stone Town Council

1 Respective responsibilities of the body and the auditor

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2020; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

Our responsibility is to review Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with guidance issued by the National Audit Office NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General see note below . Our work **does not** constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would do.

2 External auditor report 2019/20

On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

In undertaking the review of the 2019/20 Annual Governance and Accountability Return it came to our attention that in 2020 the Council has not met the requirements of the 2015 Accounts and Audit Regulations to start the period of 30 working days for the public to inspect the accounts the day after the AGAR was published and to do so as soon as possible after it was approved. In 2019/20 the AGAR was published on 20 August 2020 but the public rights period did not start until 24 August 2020. The Council should ensure that in 2020/2021 they comply with the Regulations and respond no to the relevant assertion (assertion 4) in its Annual Governance Statement.

3 External auditor certificate 2019/20

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2020.

*We do not certify completion because:

Not applicable

External Auditor Name

Mazars LLP, Durham, DH1 5TS

External Auditor Signature

Mazars LLP

Date

23 November 2020

*Note: the NAO issued guidance applicable to external auditors' work on limited assurance reviews in Auditor Guidance Note AGN/02. The AGN is available from the NAO website (www.nao.org.uk)

Les Trigg

From: Ken Argyle <ken.argyle@gmail.com>
Sent: 18 November 2020 15:08
To: Les Trigg
Subject: Formally request.

Dear Les

I am writing to formally request that the Council waive the requirements of Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 in respect of my attendance of meetings .

As these meetings are now virtual meetings, I am unable to take [part.as](#) I possess no Smartphone nor any video facilities so have no means of attending .I am aware that I could take part in a limited audio only ,way by telephone but do not feel this would enable me to participate adequately in meetings where all other attendees use video link .

This has in no way affected my ability to stay in touch with my fellow councillors,nor react to the situations that I have been asked to do so by residents in Walton .

I am more than happy to attend any physical meeting.

Regards .

Ken Argyle.
Councillor Walton South

TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT – to 20 November 2020

Sunday 8th November

This morning was Remembrance Sunday. Because of the current situation the event had to be scaled down to just a few wreath layers and a few words from the Rev. Prev. Ian Cardinal. The usual organisations were asked to lay them earlier or later in the day. Many thanks to all those who made this event possible and hopefully we can get back to normal next year.

Wednesday 11th November

Today I went along to the war memorial at 11.00 and laid a posy of poppies in front of our wreath. Then stood in silence for 2 minutes.

DEPUTY TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT – to 20 November 2020

There are no Deputy Town Mayor engagements to report on this occasion.