



Town Clerk

Les Trigg

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15 Station Road
STONE
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25 November 2020

Dear Councillor,

A **VIRTUAL** meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** will be held on **TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2020 at 7:05pm**, or upon the rising of the Town Council meeting, if later.

The agenda is set out below, and I trust you will be able to attend.

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**
3. **Requests for Dispensations Received**
4. **To receive a report from County Councillors representing Stone Town**
 - County Councillor Mrs J. Hood
 - County Councillor I. Parry
5. **To receive a report from Borough Councillors representing Stone Town**
6. **Representations from Members of the Public**

To consider representations from members of the public on items to be considered at this meeting, in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation.

7. Minutes of Previous Meetings

- a) To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 27 October 2020, Minute No's GP20/275 – GP20/278 (attached).
- b) To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 3 November 2020, Minute No's GP20/279 – GP20/294 (attached).

8. Minutes of Sub-Committees

There are no Sub-Committee Minutes for consideration.

9. Budget 2021-22 to 2023-24 Overview

To consider the report of the Town Clerk (attached).

10. To consider the following requests for grants from local organisations:

- **Stone Scout & Guide Band**

11. Corporate Business Plan

To consider the Town Council's response to Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Business Plan consultation.

An email from the Borough Council's Chief Executive is attached together with an electronic version of the Draft Corporate Business Plan 2021 - 2024.

Further information can also be found at: www.staffordbc.gov.uk/corporate-plan.

12. Christmas Lights Switch-On 2020

To review the Christmas Lights Switch-On arrangements.

13. Non-Cheque Payments

To receive a list of non-cheque payments made by the Council during the period 1 to 30 October 2020 (attached).

14. Update from Working Groups:

- a) Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
- b) Stone Area Parish Liaison Group (notes attached)
- c) Traffic Management in Stone Working Group
- d) Promotion of Stone working Group

15. 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 – Mayor & J. Davies

Age Concern Stone & District – Cllrs: T. Adamson & C. Thornicroft

Stafford & Stone Access Group – Cllr T. Kelt

Stone Common Plot Trustees – Cllrs: T. Adamson, Mrs L. Davies, Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt and R. Kenney
Stone Community Hub Liaison Group – Cllrs: M. Hatton, Mrs J. Hood & J. Powell
SPCA Executive Committee – Cllr M. Green

16. 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.

17. Internal Audit 2020-21 Onwards

To consider the report of the Town Clerk (attached).

Members of the public are welcome to attend the General Purposes Committee meeting as observers and/or to make representations to the committee in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation. Details of the scheme are displayed in the Council's notice boards and website.

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

* 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.

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

Introduction

1. This report sets out the prospects for the Council's 2021-22 to 2023-24 budget. It considers the overall position of the Council, the context in which the budget needs to be set and the standstill budget, which is the starting point for the determination of the 2021-22 precept.

Background

2. Before addressing the figures relating to the budget, it is first necessary to consider the context in which the budget needs to be set.
3. For a number of years, the Council has received payments of almost £30,000 from Stafford Borough Council in addition to the precept. For 2021-22 this includes £18,399 to compensate for a previous reduction in this Council's Taxbase due to benefit changes and £11,461 for the cost of concurrent functions. Neither of these payments are a legal requirement and, at the time of writing this report, neither have been confirmed. The figures in this report assume that these payments will continue into the foreseeable future at the same cash level as 2020-21.
4. The Secretary of State has the power to require a referendum of local people before the Council Tax can be put up by more than a specified percentage. Currently, parish councils are exempt from this requirement, though this may change if Council Tax increases in the sector become excessive.
5. This year's budget is also being prepared with the additional uncertainty resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to better enable the Council to determine its budget in January/February, when the position with the pandemic may be clearer, and to better manage it thereafter, the standstill budget has been prepared on the following basis:
 - a. Individual budget lines have all been prepared on the basis of a return to pre-lockdown (i.e. October 2020) service levels from December 2020, and a return to full, normal service levels from April 2021.
 - b. A "Coronavirus Contingency" has been provided within the General Purposes Committee budget which, at the level currently recommended, should be sufficient to cover the main consequences of the pandemic if the recovery is slower and at least some form of restrictions continue until the summer of 2021. This figure will need to be fully reviewed when the budget is finally determined and the position is, hopefully, clearer.

Standstill Budget

6. The table at Appendix A sets out the Council's current and forecast position for each budget. It is also summarised below by Sub-Committee:

Actual		Budget	Forecast	Budget	Budget	Budget
2019-20		2020-21	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
£		£	£	£	£	£
6,136	Estates	81,600	56,400	48,200	62,800	63,300
17,814	Environment	27,895	24,450	21,200	21,600	21,900
32,327	Tourism & Town Promotion	34,200	30,200	43,100	38,800	39,600
225,564	Management	208,595	204,395	216,200	215,300	249,700
1,838	Neighbourhood Plan	7,900	-	7,900	-	-
-	General Purposes	180,000	129,000	61,700	-	-
114,227	Earmarked Reserves	-148,775	-140,875	-7,900	-	-
397,906	TOTAL	391,415	303,570	390,400	338,500	374,500

7. The figures above and in Appendix A are based on the following:
- Known and forecast expenditure for the remainder of the current financial year.
 - Forecast expenditure for the next three years, based on a standstill position. These figures therefore assume that current services will continue with no growth or cutbacks other than those which are already been committed by previous decisions of the Council.
 - An estimation of likely cost levels for 2021-22, with further inflation of 2% per annum on salaries and other costs from April 2021, unless specific information is available.
 - A 3% per annum increase in fees and charges.
8. In addition, most budgets which are actually under the control of the General Purposes Committee have been included within the Management Sub-Committee above, to ensure that budgets can be examined at the sub-committee level before reporting back to General Purposes for decision.
9. It can be seen from the above table that the current budget is forecast to underspend by around £87,845, after providing for a number of budget adjustments agreed by the Committee during the year. This is largely due to delays in the Heritage Centre project, the renewal of Walton Christmas lights and the refurbishment of the war memorial. Funding has been carried forward to meet the costs of these projects when they are now likely to occur.
10. Based on the indicative Council Tax levels agreed by the Council at the time of setting last year's budget of a 1.1% per annum increase each year over the 2020-21 level of £50.65 for a

Band D property, the three-year standstill budget would show a deficit of £49,441 in 2021-22, with a surplus of £13,751 in 2022-23 and a deficit of £10,723 in 2023-24.

Standstill Budget 2021-22

11. The standstill budget for 2021-22, at £390,400, is £64,800 more than the forecast made when the 2020-21 budget was approved in February 2019. The main reasons for this difference are:
 - a. The delayed opening of the Stone Heritage Centre due to the pandemic. Some capital costs are projected to slip into 2021-22 from the current year, but this is partially offset by lower revenue costs in the year due to the delayed opening.
 - b. The upgrading of Christmas lights at Walton and the refurbishment of the war memorial in Granville Square, both of which have slipped from 2020-21 into 2021-22 together with their associated funding.
 - c. The provision of a contingency to provide for the potential ongoing effects of the pandemic.
12. These and other forecast changes will be considered in more detail in the various reports to sub-committees during December and January.

The Budget Process

13. The standstill budget is, however, just the starting point for the budget process. Members will want to review the amounts provisionally included. In addition, there are likely to be other areas where members will want to undertake new developments, or stop/change the things that the Council is doing now.
14. Budgets have been allocated to each of the sub-committees, and over the next few weeks they will need to consider these budgets in detail to determine the best pattern of spending to meet the Council's objectives and obligations. The results of those deliberations will then be reported to the next meeting of this Committee on the 19th January 2021 to determine the budget recommendations to Council.

Recommendations

15. That the Committee notes the standstill budget position for 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 and the issues related to setting the precept, and:
 - a. Asks each sub-committee to consider its financial needs for the next three years and report back to the General Purposes Committee on 19th January 2021 with its budget proposals,
 - b. Considers whether it wishes to give any specific instructions to these bodies which they would need to have regard to while preparing their proposed budgets.

Stone Town Council

Appendix A

Standstill Budget 2021-22 to 2023-24

Actual 2019-20		Budget 2020-21	Forecast 2020-21	Budget 2021-22	Budget 2022-23	Budget 2023-24
£		£	£	£	£	£
2,343	Frank Jordan Centre	11,715	9,300	4,900	5,000	5,300
9,795	Stone Station	16,860	16,600	12,900	10,500	10,600
-	Stone Heritage Centre	20,000	-	20,000	40,400	40,800
-10,402	Town Market	-2,700	-2,300	-10,300	-10,700	-11,100
100	Car Parking	5,000	5,000	-	-	-
2,748	Bus Shelters & Street Furniture	9,025	5,800	8,400	5,300	5,400
585	Street Lighting	600	800	800	800	800
539	Dog & Litter Bins	700	800	800	800	800
120	Joules Clock	300	300	300	300	300
308	Town Electricity Supply	400	400	400	400	400
-	Building Maintenance	19,700	19,700	10,000	10,000	10,000
15,979	Grounds Maintenance	17,800	17,400	17,700	18,100	18,400
2,893	Crown Meadow Improvements	5,935	6,000	3,400	3,400	3,400
-1,058	Allotments	1,410	-1,700	100	100	100
-	Environmental Initiatives	2,750	2,750	-	-	-
14,900	Christmas Lights	26,600	21,200	23,100	18,400	18,800
360	Advertising	-	-	-	-	-
17,281	Tourism & Town Promotion	7,600	9,000	20,000	20,400	20,800
-214	Community Bus	-	-	-	-	-
5,635	Grants	10,365	10,365	8,200	8,300	8,500
149,018	Salaries & Employment Costs	158,300	162,700	162,300	165,500	168,800
4,915	Accommodation	4,500	5,000	5,100	5,200	5,300
6,632	Insurances	6,700	6,200	6,400	6,500	6,700
34,701	Administration	20,230	20,230	25,600	26,100	26,600
1,086	Audit & Legal Fees	2,000	1,200	2,000	2,000	2,000
26,636	Town Council Elections	-	-	-	-	30,000
2,460	Allowances - Mayor & Deputy Mayor	3,300	2,800	3,300	3,400	3,500
1,199	Regalia & Presentations	500	200	500	500	500
1,540	Civic Dinner & Hospitality	1,700	300	1,700	1,700	1,700
2,069	Remembrance Sunday & War Memorials	7,000	1,300	7,000	2,000	2,000
2,085	Miscellaneous	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000
-950	Interest	-500	-400	-400	-400	-400
1,838	Neighbourhood Plan	7,900	-	7,900	-	-
-	Stone Heritage Centre (Capital)	180,000	125,000	55,000	-	-
-	Coronavirus Contingency	-	4,000	6,700	-	-
-11,461	Concurrent Functions Allowance	-11,500	-11,500	-11,500	-11,500	-11,500
116,065	Rollover Reserve	-140,875	-140,875	-	-	-
-1,838	Neighbourhood Plan Reserve	-7,900	-	-7,900	-	-
397,906	TOTAL	391,415	303,570	390,400	338,500	374,500

Application for Grant Aid



Name of organisation: Stone Scout & Guide Band	
Purpose of organisation: The Scout and Guide movement prepares young people with skills for life. The Scout and Guide Band brings together the Scouts and Guides in the Stone area to learn teamwork, self-discipline and musical skills. The Band is a great ambassador for Stone	
Amount of grant requested: £310.00 (Three hundred and ten pounds)	Total cost of project (if appropriate): Not applicable
Reason for grant request: An impact of Covid-19 on the Band has been to prevent the Band parading and thus to earn any income. However, the Band has still had to meet costs such as rent for use of the Old Pump House and insurance for the band instruments. Prudent budgeting has enabled the Band to survive so far but by the end of the current financial year it may have insufficient funds to continue into the year 21-22. A grant of £310.00 to meet the cost of insuring the Band instruments would be sufficient to enable the Band to continue until parading, and thus income, can resume.	

Benefits to Stone residents:

A direct benefit will be to the young people who are members of the Band.

The town of Stone will benefit from the promotion of the Town that will result from the resumption of parades elsewhere in the county.

Support of the Scout and Guide movement assists in the meeting of the aims of the movement which in turn strengthens the local community now and in the future.

Other sources of funding secured or being explored (with amounts where known):

The local Scout and Guide organisations are being approached to seek a rent reduction or a rent holiday.

Is this an "exceptional" request (see notes)? If so, please explain why the Council should treat it as an exception:

Early consideration is sought because only now is it evident that the effect of Covid-19 on band income will continue for several months.

Grants awarded by the Council in the last two years, and the uses made of the funding:

2019-20: £500.00 towards the Band's participation in the Traditional Youth Marching Bands Association (TYMBA) competition at Whale Island, Portsmouth, over the weekend 20-22 September 2019.

Statement of support from Council appointed representative (if applicable):

Not applicable.

Stone Scout and Guide Band Financial Statement 2019 / 2020

	Expenditure £	Income £
Cash at Bank as at 31st March 2019		2089.02
Transactions		
Membership subs		40.00
Portsmouth donations (TRM)		1000.00
Portsmouth donations (LIONS)		500.00
Portsmouth donations (STC)		500.00
Brereton Carnival		200.00
Portsmouth donations (Rotary)		200.00
Portsmouth donations (St Gregory's)		800.00
Portsmouth donation (R & J Green)		10.00
Stone Festival		200.00
Halesowen Scout Band	35.00	
– Trophies	46.20	
– Costume	21.76	
OYM	19.00	
Insurance	308.72	
Coach – Portsmouth	1600.00	
Portsmouth Scout Council	100.00	
– Uniform	467.26	
Pizza Lunch Band	116.45	
– Portsmouth	333.67	
– Kelsall	134.029	
TYMBA 2020	40.00	
– Instruments & Kit	311.50	
1 st Stone Scouts – Rent	600.00	
Total	4133.85	3450.00
Current Account Balance 31 March 2020	1405.17	
	5539.02	5539.02

From: Corporate Support <corporatesupport@staffordbc.gov.uk>
Sent: 10 November 2020 15:36
Subject: Climate change and Covid-19 are priorities in new council plan

Dear Parish Clerks

We are currently conducting a consultation exercise in respect of the refresh of our Corporate Business Plan. The plan is a strategic document that outlines our aspirations for economic growth, community wellbeing, financial sustainability over the next three years and beyond. The plan incorporates a new business objective that focuses upon climate change and green recovery demonstrating our commitment to this important agenda. It sets out our Covid 19 Recovery Strategy and challenges in relation to Brexit.

I hope that you will take the time to look at the plan and feedback your comments to us: www.staffordbc.gov.uk/corporate-plan. If you would prefer to email comments back to us you can do so by sending them to corporatebusiness@staffordbc.gov.uk by 13 December.

Tim



Tim Clegg | Chief Executive
Stafford Borough Council | Civic Centre | Riverside | Stafford | ST16 3AQ
01785 619200 | TClegg@staffordbc.gov.uk | www.staffordbc.gov.uk



Corporate Support | Democratic and Corporate Services
Stafford Borough Council | Civic Centre | Riverside | Stafford | ST16 3AQ
01785619207 | corporatesupport@staffordbc.gov.uk | www.staffordbc.gov.uk

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Stafford Borough Council

Corporate Business Plan

2021 – 2024

Draft

‘A prosperous and attractive borough with strong communities’

For Consultation

Foreword

Over the past 3 years we have worked with our partners to create a sustainable and vibrant economy. During the past 12 months this has been hugely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our strong economic base and the ambitious programme of development will help us to recover quicker and stronger than many areas. We will continue to promote a dynamic local economy and enterprise culture and capitalise on opportunities such as HS2 in order to grow our economy and attract further investment.

We want Stafford to be a great place to live and work and we have delivered popular improvements in leisure including:

- **£2.5m investment in Victoria Park**
- **£9m investment in Stone Leisure**
- **£380k investment in Charnley Road Play Area**

(Insert image of Victoria Park/Charnley Road)

In addition to this we are working with, and supporting, our partners to deliver:

- **£62m Stafford Western Access Road**
- **Town Centre Transformation**
- **A new £25m Skills and Innovation Centre at Newcastle and Stafford College**

(Insert image of Stone Leisure)

We also want to ensure that our communities are sustainable and strong and that our residents have access to green open space in order to enjoy healthier lifestyles. Our Climate Change and Green Recovery Strategy outlines how we will reduce carbon emissions from our own activities, how we can work with our communities to raise awareness and promote low carbon initiatives and protect and enhance our biodiversity and wildlife.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore how important it is that local authorities have the powers and resources devolved to them to enable them to deliver services to their communities.

The council has worked tirelessly to become financially sustainable and, over the past 3-years, has consistently delivered a balanced budget. Financial sustainability is a workstream under the broader Covid-19 recovery plans of the council which is considering the wider implications of Brexit and further local government reorganisation that is planned. With this in mind, we will continue to lobby and work hard with our local MP's, businesses and residents on these agendas in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for all of our residents and businesses.

Councillor Patrick Farrington
Leader of the Council

Introduction

This three-year Corporate Business Plan sets out how we will continue to deliver and sustain economic growth, respect our environment, support our communities and ensure that the borough is a great place in which to live, work and visit. Over the past three years we have been able to deliver some huge projects in the Borough that have benefitted our residents but 2020 will be the year that is remembered by most. The outbreak of Covid-19 has had a devastating effect on the whole Country, on the lives that have been lost, the economy, and the way we now live our lives. During our response to Covid-19 we were able to keep those critical services going and to provide much needed support to those residents who were most vulnerable. Our Covid-19 recovery plans recognised the impact that the pandemic had on different groups such as BAME communities and areas of deprivation so we implemented a new community impact assessment as part of our equalities duty to guarantee that different groups' position in society, accelerating issues of poverty, health and wellbeing are taken into account.

As we now continue to work our way through Covid recovery towards reform, we have taken a strategic look at how the pandemic situation had changed lives on an ongoing basis for residents, businesses and the Council as an organisation. We now have a clear understanding of priorities and are realigning resources to support this. There still remains much uncertainty about the pandemic with lockdown restrictions easing in some areas and being imposed in others and it is likely that this uncertainty will remain until a vaccine is found. Effective planning is, and will continue to be, critical to aiding the recovery of the Borough and the Council over the next few months as we focus on gaining a clear understanding of the challenges of recovery and impact of Covid-19 in the short, medium and longer term. Our plans focus on Economic, Community, Organisational and Financial Recovery and this work been integrated into the objectives of the refresh of this business plan.

In addition to this, there are a number of key issues that are presenting further challenges to us in relation to Brexit and the prospect of further local government reorganisation. There are many unknowns at present in relation to these which is why we are continuing to work with our MP's and partners at a local, regional and national level to lobby central government and advocate the importance of the work that we do. This Corporate Business Plan has been written with those considerations in mind and that we need to continue to deliver and sustain economic growth; protect and safeguard those who are most vulnerable in our society as well as creating the conditions where people can equitably achieve their optimum health; adapt and respond to climate change and green recovery, and make the council financially sustainable. It encapsulates the ethos of collaborative working with new and existing partnerships and sharing of resources in order to improve life and outcomes for all those people who live, work and visit the borough, through joint priorities, plans and opportunities for collaborative commissioning activities.

Insert images

Our Vision

A prosperous and attractive borough with resilient communities

Over the next three years we will focus on the following corporate business objectives:

1. To deliver innovative, sustainable economic and housing growth to provide income and jobs¹.
2. To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing resilient communities that promote health and wellbeing.
3. To tackle Climate Change by implementing our Climate Change and Green Recovery objectives
4. To be a well-run, financially sustainable and ambitious organisation, responsive to the needs of our customers and communities and focussed on delivering our objectives.

Insert images

¹ In July 2017, the Secretary of State deposited in Parliament the hybrid Bill for Phase 2a of the HS2 railway. This is another step on the pathway to building a route from the West Midlands to Crewe. We will ensure we get the maximum benefits for our economy that this project will bring. But we will continue to work to mitigate the disruption this will have on our communities while helping to making sure that those most affected will be properly compensated.

Borough Profile

Stafford Borough is Staffordshire's largest district, covering an area of approximately 230 square miles and encompasses the towns of Stafford, Stone and Eccleshall as well as many picturesque and vibrant villages.

The Borough is a mainly rural area with a wide range of habitats that include many sites of local, national and some of international importance. In total there are **15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), two of which are National Nature Reserves.**

Stafford Borough is well connected, you can travel to London in 1.20 hours, Birmingham in 30 minutes and Manchester in 55 minutes.

The population is currently 135,880 and this figure is expected to increase to approximately 142,900 by 2033.

The Borough has an ageing population, with more people living here who are over 65 years; there is a lower proportion of children and young people aged under 24 years of age with average proportions of adults aged 35 – 50 years. The ethnicity of the population is approximately 94% White British, which is comparable to the population of Staffordshire.

Insert infographics (demographics?)

Overall average annual earnings in Stafford Borough are around £1,370 per year higher than the national average and are amongst the higher earning levels in the Staffordshire area. Levels of overall deprivation in the Borough are broadly in line regional averages, but there are four pockets of

considerable deprivation – all ranking in the Top 20% most deprived nationally.

Insert infographics on houses/house prices

There are approximately 60,000 households in the borough which are predominantly owner-occupied.

The average price of a house in Stafford Borough is £184,156². This is above the Staffordshire average price, but below the national and regional average. For those on lower incomes, homeownership is less affordable than both the West Midlands and England. As well as continuing our strong delivery of new housing in the Borough, we will work with partners to ensure we deliver the new affordable housing that is needed and will work closely with private sector landlords to ensure our residents can live in good quality, safe homes.

Insert infographics on visitors/visitor economy

² ONS median price for the Borough as a whole.

Because we are well connected, our local economy benefits greatly from our visitors, whether that be for tourism, leisure or work.

As well as being home to major tourist attractions including the Ancient High House, Stafford Castle, Victoria Park, Trentham Estate, Shugborough and Cannock Chase, the borough also caters for business tourism and conferencing with first class facilities at the County Showground and Yarnfield Park.

Residents of Stafford Borough generally live longer, with the healthy life expectancy in the district better than the national average for both males and females.

Generally people are happy with their local area as a place to live compared to the overall figure for the county. We want to ensure that quality of life is maintained. The Borough is a safe place to be. We will continue working with our partners to focus on a prevention and early intervention approach to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. Feeling safe and being able to live independently in your own home and surrounding area are vital to our wellbeing. As part of our wellbeing agenda we want to work with all our communities to support them to help themselves.

Stafford Borough has a rich historic culture that is evident whenever you visit here. A good range of leisure and cultural facilities help to bring local people together to enjoy plays, concerts and films. As part of our community wellbeing agenda we want to work together with our communities to continue to create safe and attractive environments which our residents want to occupy and use, creating a strong and positive sense of communal identity. We want to strengthen the relationships we have with our communities and to actively support them in realising their full potential.

We proactively work with our 'Friends of' groups to maintain our local nature reserves and parks, and our Community

Awards recognises the contribution that individuals make to improve their communities and surrounding areas.

We want to ensure that these areas are kept clean and are protected from fly tipping, litter, dog fouling and pests that are harmful to public health.

Insert image of LNR's

Although the funding to local authorities has been substantially reduced in recent years, the council still works to protect front-line services by reducing the cost of the services we provide by cutting waste and looking for different ways to provide services. Examples of this are providing Leisure and Culture Services in partnership with a not for-profit trust, introducing a new separated paper recycling collection service and sharing services with other authorities. We also share the Civic Centre with other organisations to reduce our costs, improve partnership working and make access to services easier for local people.

Insert Image

Corporate Business Objective 1: To deliver sustainable economic and housing growth to provide income and jobs

Over the past three years the council has achieved a considerable amount in terms of economic and housing growth.

We said we would

Facilitate the delivery of 500 new homes in the borough per year with 210 being affordable homes

Deliver key projects and infrastructure proposals that will promote economic growth and investment for the Borough

Work in partnership to generate economic and sustainable growth

Develop a new Local Plan

We delivered

- 600 new homes and 185 affordable home every year
- Processed 94.8% of major applications and 96.1% of non-major applications on time
- Delivered Stone Leisure (phase 1)
- Successfully attained funding of £750k to develop the proposal for the Meecebrook Garden Community
- Appointed consultants to help develop and deliver the masterplan for Stafford Station Gateway
- Submitted a bid to the Future High Streets Fund to support economic growth and sustainability in our high streets
- Formed a new economic growth partnership and developed a multi-agency economic growth strategy
- Developed a Visitor Economy Recovery Plan
- Supported the development of the Stafford Western Access Road
- We are currently working on developing the new Local Plan and have consulted on the issues and options.
- £150k feasibility grant awarded from Highways England for a project that will reconnect people and communities with green spaces and watercourses in their local area (Stafford Brooks Project).
- Continued to monitor HS2 construction works to ensure that any adverse environmental effects are mitigated.

We have continued to deliver housing growth consistently above target for the past four years and cumulatively exceeded our affordable housing target. We have attracted significant inward investment with more than 1,200 jobs been delivered at the £11m Redhill Business Park, and the relocation of Arctrend, who are a lead metal hose and bellows manufacturer, from outside of the Borough to Meaford Business Park in Stone. We have also put in place the

strategic framework to deliver future growth in the Borough, including the Economic Growth Strategy, the emerging new Local Plan, Garden Communities Programme, Future High Streets Fund bid and Stafford Town Centre Strategic Framework.

All four strategic development locations within the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough are now either built and occupied or under construction.

Insert image of Burleyfields here

The Council were awarded £750,000 in March 2019 for a proposed garden community to the north of the Borough, to develop a business case for investment. In January 2020 we launched a consultation on the Issues and Options stage of our new Local Plan which included proposals for new garden communities at seven potential sites in the Borough.

In July 2019 **we were selected as one of only 50 local authorities to go through to the second round of bidding for the Future High Streets Fund** and in June 2020 were able to submit our final business case which includes proposals for transformative change and repurposing of the high street in Stafford. This work forms part of the overarching development strategy for Stafford Town Centre. **Multinational businesses such as GE, St Gobain and Omicron have made significant investments in the borough, contributing to the creation of jobs and also in developing additional manufacturing facilities.** In addition to this we are supporting Newcastle and Stafford College Group in its exciting regeneration proposals for the Earl Street campus which will deliver a new £25m Skills and Innovation Centre. We want to build on this and to attract further investment to draw people to locate here to live and work.

The borough is well connected with two major motorway junctions and also two of the main stops on the west coast mainline. HS2 will only enhance this further and will enable business leaders to travel to London in just over 50 minutes, Manchester in 30 minutes and Birmingham in only 20 minutes. This, together with the access to the M6 and A50, makes the borough an attractive location for businesses to expand or re-locate. We want to ensure that we build high quality developments that provide attractive, well connected places for local people to live and work. Good design of settlements and individual buildings can improve the health, wellbeing and resilience of the general public in various ways, from encouraging physical activity and improving mental health, to creating healthy independent living in safe environments.

Over the next three years we will be faced with some challenges that have been brought about by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic but will continue with our focus of supporting future growth in the economy. Covid-19 continues to have, a huge impact on our economy. The impact of the pandemic saw the UK economy contract by a quarter and although much uncertainty still remains, it is predicted that the economy will start to show signs of recovery during the latter part of the year, with GDP predicted to rise slightly from -2.6 to 1.7 (ONS, KPMG Forecasts). The council and our partners continue to assess the long-term impacts of Covid-19 and to develop our Economic Recovery strategy, focusing on understanding the potential impact on the local economy over the short, medium and long-term, identifying Government support and considering local support requirements. We need to develop a granular understanding of the impacts and opportunities generated by the pandemic for different demographics and sectors, work with local businesses to support transition from state support, develop an understanding of new supply and demand trends in order to promote

economic resilience and growth. This will run in parallel with the other recovery workstreams for community, organisation and financial to ensure that cross cutting areas of priority are considered such as working with those residents hardest hit by the pandemic to reskill and secure employment and developing projects and programmes that reflect our aspirations for our society, environment and economy.

Part of our recovery strategy is focused around ensuring that as a borough we have a dynamic local enterprise culture as this is vital for the long-term competitiveness and overall economic success of the borough. In this work we will also include a full assessment of the programmes for key major projects such as the Garden Settlement, Stafford Station Gateway and the Future High Streets Fund/Stafford Town Centre Framework to reflect the impact of the pandemic on the objectives and delivery timescales for these key projects. This work will be undertaken in conjunction with the Stafford Growth, Regeneration and Infrastructure Partnership (SGRIP), which included key stakeholders such as Staffordshire County Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Town Centre Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce.

Over the next three years we will continue to:

- Assess the economic implications for the Borough of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit over the medium and long term
- Facilitate the delivery of 500 new homes in the borough per year with 210 being affordable homes
- Deliver key projects and support infrastructure proposals that will create cohesive communities, promote economic growth and investment for the Borough
- Work in partnership to generate economic and sustainable growth for the long-term prosperity of our residents, visitors and businesses
- Develop a new Local Plan that reflects our corporate ambitions for growth, and works in partnership with Parish Councils, other local authorities and key stakeholders

Corporate Business Objective 2: To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing.

The Council continue to make excellent progress to improve the quality of life of local people and have delivered a huge amount that contributes to this. During the past three years we said:

We said we would

Ensure that businesses are compliant with food safety legislation

Investigate enviro-crime complaints within 72hrs of receipt

Encourage households to increase recycling and minimise residual waste

Invest in the refurbishment of Victoria Park and play areas in the Borough

Deliver the first phase of the Stone Leisure Project

Encourage volunteering to assist with the health and wellbeing of our communities

Provide support for homelessness and rough sleeping

We delivered

- Supported 91% of businesses being compliant with food safety legislation

- Answered 99% of enviro-crime complaints within 72 hours

- Collected 105 kgs of residual household waste and sent 55% of household waste for recycling, reuse and composting.
- Introduced a new blue bag recycling scheme that resulted in improvements in the quality and quantity of paper and cardboard recycled and reduced contamination rates from 15% to 8%.

- Completed the £2.5 million-pound Heritage Lottery Fund refurbishment of Victoria Park and the £380,000 in Charnley Road Play Area

- Completed the £9 million-pound Stone Leisure Centre

- Implemented a successful annual Community Awards
- Supported the voluntary sector in Stafford Borough with the provision of £150k worth of grants and donations
- Implemented and managed a Community HUB in response to Covid-19 that provided support to in excess of 7000 residents

- Implemented the provisions in the new Homeless Reduction Act and have reduced rough sleeping in the Borough
- Implemented Everyone off the Streets in response to Covid-19

During the past 3 years the council has been commended nationally for their work on homelessness and rough sleeping through the introduction of innovative approaches such as setting up a multi-agency inclusion team, developing single support plans with rough sleepers to get them into accommodation and receiving funding for a dual diagnosis worker. The dual diagnosis worker with support rough sleepers with mental health and multiple addiction needs. The council funds a tenancy sustainment officer who provides intensive support to prevent homelessness from occurring and to help get people into sustainable tenancies.

Over the next three years we want to build on this good work and support people to facilitate access to decent homes across a range of tenures which are suitable and affordable for every household's individual circumstances. We have a responsibility to meet the needs of individuals, families, older and disabled people with quality, warm and safe homes that are secure and stable, with the earliest possible help available to prevent homelessness and accidents at home. We will aim to future-proof the housing stock in Stafford across our demographic profile with building and improvements carried out to the best possible standards that will improve the well-being and safety of residents, and that contribute to our climate change objectives.

Insert image

Overall crime rates of recorded crime and anti-social behaviour are below the regional and national averages. However, more young people are experiencing issues with drugs, alcohol, mental health and exploitation, and the over 65 age categories are considered to be vulnerable to issues of fraud. We will be continuing our work with the Community Wellbeing Partnership to tackle these issues over the next three years.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge and lasting impact on our residents and the communities in which they live. On-going restrictions on movement, particularly for vulnerable people has placed additional stress on households and individuals which has resulted in increased loneliness, mental health problems and breakdowns in relationships. In addition to this it has also been widely reported that Covid-19 has had a big impact on different groups such as BAME communities, deprived areas and disabled people so our recovery and reform work has taken into account different groups' position in society, accelerating issues of poverty, increased demand on health, children and adult social care systems and also the economy. We have worked very closely with our partners and developed a community hub model of provision that provided help, support and signposting to our most vulnerable residents. Part of our recovery work will be to look at how we can work in partnership to sustain this in the future and

to work with the voluntary and community sector, our communities, partners and parish councils to support the delivery of social, cultural, environmental and economic outcomes.

Over the next three years we will:

- Work with our communities to continually assess the impact of Covid-19
- Keep the streets and parks clean and attractive for everyone to enjoy
- Support and promote community health and wellbeing to all our residents, businesses, staff and members
- Work with our partners to ensure the borough is a safe place to be at all times
- Work towards everyone having access to safe and suitable accommodation

Corporate Business Objective 3: To tackle Climate Change by implementing our Climate Change and Green Recovery objectives

We have a leadership role in achieving a sustainable climate, but we recognise that we cannot achieve this on our own. We will need to work with, and have the support of, the whole community, as we believe that climate change is everybody's responsibility.

The council has a good reputation for being proactive in respect of climate change and sustainable development. The council has been at the forefront of implementing a number of initiatives that support this agenda. Results from the 2019 Friends of the Earth Survey on how climate-friendly local authorities are, places Stafford Borough Council as first in the county.

In July 2019, we joined with other council in declaring a climate emergency and made the commitment that we would become a carbon neutral authority by 2040. In that commitment we also indicated that we would work with the Government and other elected bodies to determine best practice methods to limit Global Warming to less than 1.5°C and consider how this could be addressed through the Local Plan process. We also stated that we will explore the expansion of community energy with a view to keeping the benefits of our local energy generation in our local economy. The main driver for taking this work forward is through our Climate Change and Green Recovery Strategy that was published in October 2020. When we talk about green recovery we mean aligning economic recovery measures with the achievement of long-term climate change goals in order to work towards a new socio-economic model that is climate-neutral, resilient, sustainable and inclusive; which safeguards the natural assets of geology, soil, air, water and all living things that make up our life support system; capturing the value of nature in our economic planning.

Through our recovery work we will focus on economic growth through the promotion of green jobs and technology and support the creation of cohesive communities that promote vibrancy, protect the environment, encourage healthy living and support community engagement and social capital. The borough is mainly rural area with a wide range of habitats that include many sites of local, national and some of international importance and our green open space is essential to individual wellbeing. We want to conserve and enhance these areas and their characteristic biodiversity for present and future generations as this constitutes the borough's natural capital. The services that natural capital provides are essential for people and wildlife. We will therefore carry out measures to increase accessible green space and enhance our Nature Recovery Network in order to protect and increase our biodiversity, benefit health and wellbeing and provide climate change adaptation.

We want developers to contribute to biodiversity net gain by including habitats in their plans (including wildlife corridors) that are beneficial for wildlife and communities, as well as ensuring the protection and enhancement of internationally, nationally and local designated nature conservation sites. This work will be managed and co-ordinated by the Climate Change and Green Recovery Group who will develop action plans and set targets on how we can achieve what we have set out to deliver.

Over the next three years we will:

- Reduce emissions from our own activities
- Work in partnership with Government, Elected Bodies, Elected Members, Partners, Residents and Businesses across the Borough to take action that contributes to carbon neutrality and sustainable development within communities across the natural environment
- Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change
- Implement our green recovery objectives

Corporate Business Objective 4: To be a well-run, financially sustainable and ambitious organisation, responsive to the needs of our customers and communities and focussed on delivering our objectives.

The Council approved its medium-term financial plan in XX which considered arrangements for organisational and financial recovery and reform. The budget plan for the next three years focusses upon delivering the four main business objectives: Economic Growth, Community Wellbeing, Climate Change and Financial Resilience and Sustainability. We also want to acknowledge the council's role as a place shaper to facilitate opportunities to utilise land acquisition as a strategic intervention to catalyse sustainable growth.

The Council has delivered a substantial amount of work in relation to this business objective. The Corporate Peer Challenge conducted by the Local Government Association recognised the council as being '**well run and financially managed, a supportive and proactive partner with valued front-line services**'.

Over the past three years we said:

We said we would

Use our resources in the most effective and efficient way to maximise income and reduce cost

Introduce additional ways for our customers to access our services

Ensure those services provided on behalf of the Council by other organisations have effective contract management and procurement process in place

We

- Consistently delivered a balanced budget
- Spent £2.894 million on capital projects in 2019/20 that supported the delivery of improvements to Charnley Road Destination Park, Victoria Park and Stone Leisure Centre
- Facilitated 70% of the workforce to work from home
- Implemented a comprehensive induction programme for members to support them in their roles as community champions
- Implemented a new telephony system
- Implemented a comprehensive communications strategy
- Maintained consistently good levels of customer satisfaction with our contact centre
- Appointed a Contract and Procurement Manager
- Reviewed all existing Council Contracts
- Implemented a contract framework

The next three years are going to be the most challenging for us as a local authority as we work towards recovery and reform and also try to negotiate our way through local government reorganisation and identify the impact of Brexit. The major funding uncertainties in relation to changes to the Local Government Finance Regime and in particular Business Rates and New Homes Bonus remain unresolved. Our financial recovery will focus on providing a financial recovery plan, growth and savings options, evaluations of the financial impact of the on-going response to Covid-19 and the financial resources required to support economic, community and organisational recovery and reform.

However, the Council continues to adopt its proactive financial management to put in measures to respond to these challenges. We will continue to explore other avenues for income generation such as maximising our assets and opportunities for further sharing of services in order to try and achieve financial sustainability. Stafford Borough Council has a responsibility to provide excellent services to the public and value for money to the taxpayer.

Over the next three years we will:

- Use our resources in the most effective, efficient way by focusing on financial recovery and sustainability
- Continue to work towards organisational and transformational recovery and reform

Insert image or infographics

Communications and Engagement

We implemented a new Corporate communications strategy in 2020. That strategy was led by the ambitions within the Corporate Business Plan. It ensures that every major project or key initiative, for example, must have an agreed Communications Plan. The strategy places an emphasis on two-way communications – using relevant channels to share information that residents, businesses, partners and other organisations within our communities need to know. And listening to residents, customers, businesses and others through both formal and informal consultations.

Monitoring and Review

This Corporate Business Plan will run for a period of three years 2021 – 2024. There will be a delivery plan that will sit behind this plan that will be proactively performance managed through our senior management team and elected members by the Council's Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committees. This delivery plan will be subject to an annual review to determine what progress is being made against each of the business objectives.

As part of this process we will ensure that progress is reported to our residents via:

- Publishing progress on the website, social media and the local press
- Sharing our progress with our partners

We will be open and transparent in how we work and conduct consultation and engagement activities for all of our major projects so that we can ensure our residents are able to have their say and be part of the process. This will be evidenced through the completion of Community Impact Assessments which we will publish on our website.

Insert testimonials and images

You can contact Stafford Borough Council in the following ways:

Telephone: 01785 619000

E mail: info@staffordbc.gov.uk

Twitter: @staffordbc

Website: www.staffordbc.gov.uk



This document can be made available in other languages and alternative formats (large print, audio tape, computer disk and Braille) on request from the Contact Centre on telephone: 01785 619000

Stone Town Council - Non-Cheque Payments

The table below lists non-cheque payments made by the Council in the period since the last report, for the Committee's information.

The table includes payments by direct debit, telephone banking and online banking. It excludes salary and related payments, payments from the Mayor's Charity, and transfers between the Council's bank accounts, which can be seen by any Member on request. All amounts exclude VAT.

Date	Reference	Supplier	Description	Amount	Month
01/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Prism Solutions	Anallgue Line Rental	£46.69	Oct-20
01/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Prism Solutions	Anallgue Line Rental	£44.45	Oct-20
02/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Pozitive Energy	Gas 10/08/20 to 11/09/20	£159.24	Oct-20
02/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Pozitive Energy	Gas 09/08/20 to 10/09/20	£134.89	Oct-20
05/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Virgin Media Business	Sep Calls and Oct rental	£42.25	Oct-20
05/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Stafford Borough Council	SBC Rates - Station	£225.00	Oct-20
05/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Pozitive Energy	Elec 22/06/20 to 31/07/20	£213.03	Oct-20
05/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Stafford Borough Council	SBC Rates - Mkt Square	£52.00	Oct-20
05/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Stafford Borough Council	SBC Rates - FJC	£434.00	Oct-20
07/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Jones & Shuffs	Materials for refurb of CC suite	£433.66	Oct-20
07/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	EE	Mobile Phone Sep 2020	£21.30	Oct-20
07/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	EE	Mobile Phone Sep 2020	£21.30	Oct-20
08/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Water Logic	Water Cooler charges	£5.50	Oct-20
08/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Water Logic	Water Cooler charges	£11.55	Oct-20
08/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Water Logic	Water Cooler charges	£5.00	Oct-20
09/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Veolia ES (UK) Ltd	Waste Collection Sep 2020	£69.92	Oct-20
09/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Veolia ES (UK) Ltd	Waste Collection Sep 2020	£57.92	Oct-20
12/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	British Gas Lite	Feeder Pillar 1 - Sep 2020	£7.67	Oct-20
12/10/2020	026/20	Virgin Media Business	Monthly broadband charges	£51.75	Oct-20
12/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	British Gas Lite	Feeder Pillar 2 - Sep 2020	£9.92	Oct-20
14/10/2020	Elec 027/20	Stafford Borough Council	Free Saturday Parking Oct to Dec	£5,000.00	Oct-20
15/10/2020	Elec 029/20	MJ Plant	Grounds maint for Crown Meadow / amphitheatre / allotments	£1,509.00	Oct-20
15/10/2020	Elec 029/20	MJ Plant	Annual weed control at Crown Meadow and amphitheatre	£300.00	Oct-20
15/10/2020	Elec 029/20	MJ Plant	Repair gate at Mount Rd Allotment	£68.00	Oct-20
16/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Opayo by Elavon	Sage Pay - Sep 2020 - 18 transactions	£15.00	Oct-20
16/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Pozitive Energy	Elec 02/09/20 to 01/10/20	£110.77	Oct-20
19/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Zoom Video Comm Inc	Zoom Standard Charge - Oct / Nov 2020	£35.97	Oct-20
20/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	World Pay	Worldpay Service fee - sep 2020	£12.50	Oct-20
20/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	World Pay	Worldpay Transaction Charges Sep 2020	£8.28	Oct-20
20/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	World Pay	Worldpay Dashboard & Safer Payments fees - Sep 2020	£9.99	Oct-20

Date	Reference	Supplier	Description	Amount	Month
21/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Pozitive Energy	Elec 01/09/20 to 30/09/20	£180.44	Oct-20
22/10/2020	Elec 030/20	E On	Highway Lighting Energy 2020/21	£397.10	Oct-20
22/10/2020	Elec 030/20	Microsoft Ireland Operations Ltd	Balance to clear for shredding confidential documents	£33.20	Oct-20
22/10/2020	Elec 030/20	E On	Highway Lighting Maint 2020/21	£233.81	Oct-20
22/10/2020	Elec 030/20	Stafford Borough Council	Qtr Rent Station Rd Office	£150.00	Oct-20
23/10/2020	Elec 033/20	Stafford Borough Council	Annual Premises Licence - Mkt Sq Ref 88822	£70.00	Oct-20
26/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Zoom Video Comm Inc	Zoom Additional Charge from 3 to 4 sessions Oct / Nov 2020	£9.28	Oct-20
26/10/2020	D/Dbt 016/20	Prism Solutions	Prism Service Fee - Nov 2020	£714.92	Oct-20
26/10/2020	Elec 033/20	Printdesigns LTD	3 x PVC Banners for Free Parking	£89.31	Oct-20
27/10/2020	ELEC 032/20	Call Handling Services Ltd	Call Handling Sep 2020	£8.64	Oct-20
27/10/2020	Elec 033/20	Stafford Borough Council	Annual Lottery Registration	£20.00	Oct-20
27/10/2020	Elec 033/20	Mailing room	Maint Contract - Franking Machine 26/09/20 to 25/09/21	£168.00	Oct-20
30/10/2020	D/Dbt 017/20	NatWest	Bank Charges - October 2020	£46.90	Oct-20

Stone Area Parish Liaison Group

Notes of the meeting held Virtually on Wednesday 14 October 2020

NOTE: Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) and Government Guidelines on public gatherings, the meeting was held virtually on Zoom.

PRESENT: Councillors: J. Davies (Stone Town Council) in the Chair, and B. Fletcher (Stone Rural Parish Council), B. Eyre (Yarnfield & Cold Meece Parish Council), Mrs S. Hughes (Yarnfield & Cold Meece Parish Council) and P. Jones (Eccleshall Parish Council)

Also:

Mr J. Fraser (Parish Clerk to Yarnfield & Cold Meece Parish Council)
Mrs L. Harrington Jones (Parish Clerk to Chebsey Parish Council and Swynnerton Parish Council)
Ms K. St Leger (Parish Clerk to Barlaston Parish Council)
Mr L. Trigg (Town Clerk to Stone Town Council)
Trudy Williams (Assistant Clerk to Stone Town Council)

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman (elected in 2019) should continue in post for the time being, given the continuing situation with Covid-19.

L20/029 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor C. Wilkins (Eccleshall Parish Council), Councillor S. Shelley & Councillors (Sandon & Burston Parish Council), Chief Inspector G. Parsons and Mr D. Croxford (Clerk to Salt & Enson Parish Council).

L20/030 Declarations of Interest

None received.

L20/031 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 15 January 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

L20/032 Update on Policing in Staffordshire

Chief Inspector Giles Parsons had been unable to attend the meeting and no police report was available.

The Chairman, Councillor Davies, reported that the Police in Stone had been very active in identifying villains/suspects/criminals operating in the town and seem to have a good knowledge of who these people are.

The Chairman invited representatives to give an update on Policing matters in their parishes:

Barlaston

The Police are looking to put a road show/community engagement van in at Orchard Place on or around the 24 October 2020 subject to approval by Stafford & Rural Homes. Residents want to pursue a cohesive approach in responding to crime particularly following occurrences of vandalism (Church windows and play areas etc.). The village is looking to set up a Neighbourhood Watch as soon as it is possible to hold a physical meeting with the Police. Residents are being kept informed of what is going on in their Neighbourhood.

Speeding is a big issue in Barlaston, and the village now has three speed indicator devices. Twelve months' worth of statistical data has been collected and passed to the Police with some extremely high speeds of travel recorded. Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) have offered their support with this exercise. Unfortunately, they have limited powers in respect of stopping or fining people which is a frustration.

Barlaston Parish Council is looking to invite County Councillor David Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to visit the village (and look at the statistics) with a view to gaining support for traffic calming measures. There are three dangerous roads with a school patrol officer installed on one of them.

County Councillor Parry has agreed to set up a resident Parish Council Strategy Group in Barlaston after attending a recent meeting of the Council.

Eccleshall

Eccleshall has a well-established Neighbourhood Watch group and there is good communication with local PCSO's who have reported that things are relatively quiet at present. There are however some issues which include recent milk bottle thefts.

Eccleshall had two new Speed Indicator Devices fitted last year and now have a total of four. The raw data is frightening but once analysed does show interesting patterns.

Hilderstone

Hilderstone Parish Council has installed a speed indicator device and has received a couple of months' worth of data which will provide useful evidence for the Police and Staffordshire County Council in highlighting any need for traffic calming measures.

Yarnfield

Earlier in the year there was a lot of active involvement with PCSO's and their presence continues. Communication has more recently been by telephone, particularly around the time of parish meetings.

Chebsey & Swynnerton

The local PCSO's make regular reports to the Parish Clerk.

It is hoped that a Speed Awareness Group will be set up in Norton Bridge, but this is currently on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Stone

Stone Town Council has regular contact with the Police although this is not part of the formal council meeting structure.

It helps enormously that the Force are in an adjoining room in the same building.

L20/033 Impact of Covid-19

The Chairman advised the Liaison Group that a lot had been happening since the last meeting and the item had been listed for the purpose of comparing notes and learning lessons for the future.

The Chairman invited a report on how parishes have managed through the Covid-19 lockdown:

Stone

At the beginning of the lockdown immediate steps were taken regarding the offices closing, protecting staff, getting Zoom up and running with public access via YouTube and setting up a helpline for the town.

Virtual meetings have worked well, and large numbers of people have accessed them. The offices are back open now after staff had worked from home for a number of months. The technology has held up and the investment in a reasonably resilient technical infrastructure has been worthwhile.

The Council is in the process of drawing up a post event evaluation detailing what has been done well, what has not gone so well and what could be organised better next time, should there be a re-occurrence or something similar.

One of the biggest impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on Stone town has been the absence of events which has greatly affected both morale and the local economy.

Stone Town has also been severely affected by Covid-19 after the outbreak at the Crown & Anchor at the end of July which is now closed until further notice. The Town Council has since been concerned with offering support to businesses in the town, which had been doing well until the virus outbreak.

Yarnfield & Cold Meece

In Yarnfield there is a new landlord at the 'Labour in Vain' public house which

is due to open at the end of the month after a refurbishment.

The Parish Council (Yarnfield and Cold Meece) is keeping its valued volunteers and the systems it put in place in February March and April, on standby as they may be called upon once again to support vulnerable people with shopping etc. There may be a long way to go before normality resumes.

The parish council has seen a phenomenal response to meetings going online. Thirty to forty people are viewing each month and they have been highly successful. Virtual meetings have been arranged to the end of the financial year and it is anticipated that there may be some resistance to the return of a traditional face to face arrangement.

Hilderstone

In Hilderstone, the 'Roebuck' is now open.

Barlaston

Barlaston Parish Council has only missed one meeting before Members were up and running again with virtual meetings.

Karen St Leger, Parish Clerk, has stepped in to assist another local council with its meeting arrangements and external audit (after coming close to the six-month rule). It had embraced the new approach and probably won't go back to full time face to face meetings.

There is now likely to be space for virtual meetings and blended meetings might need to be considered in the future.

Stone Rural

Stone Rural being out in the sticks has not had any Zoom meetings. Meetings have either not been arranged or they have been socially distanced physical meetings. No members of the public have been present.

Chebsey

Chebsey has no reliable internet connection and Councillors have met in the church hall, complying with Covid-19 guidelines, which has worked well.

Swynnerton

Swynnerton Parish Council has had face to face meetings in a Covid-19 safe way. Members of the public have attended on some occasions and on others have provided the Clerk with information for her to brief the Councillors.

Eccleshall

In Eccleshall, people are keeping in touch, but social interaction is missing due to the loss of community events. The lockdown has accelerated learning about the village's population and what people's needs are in the community.

Eccleshall Parish Council has met virtually on Zoom although face to face

meetings are preferred. No members of the public have been present.

Other Points

Questions were raised about how parish councils manage physical meetings while they are uncertain about the number of people who will attend and the requirement to meet safety standards.

It was acknowledged that this is a problem (and the meeting would need to be closed) in situations where the number of people exceed the designated safe number for the venue. Members of the public have the right to attend. Parish meetings are public meetings.

Virtual meetings have assisted greatly in making the work of parish councils more accessible and visible to a bigger proportion of their communities. The ability to dial in from the comfort of their own home has provided convenience, flexibility and been good for local democracy.

L20/034 Joint Calendar of Events

The Chairman advised the Liaison Group that there was no information to share on events except that the Town Council was planning to hold a short Remembrance service on 8 November at the war memorials (Stone and Walton). The services will be in line with Covid-19 requirements set out by the Borough Council and Government and involve no High Street parade or service at St Michael and St Wulfad's Church.

Balancing the desire of people of the town and those who would normally lay wreaths, against the need to manage the levels of risk in the community was proving to be a challenge.

In Stone the wreath stand will be installed earlier than usual and people will be encouraged to lay wreaths during the week before Remembrance Sunday so that at 11:00am on the 8th a two minute silence can be held and wreaths laid by a small number of guests. The Town Council is planning to cordon off an area around the war memorial while encouraging members of the public to remember at home. There will be a bugler but no standard bearers, no band and no music or hymns.

In Eccleshall the biggest challenge is in keeping people away from the cenotaph. Posters have been distributed asking people to take part in a doorstep commemoration at 11:00am on Remembrance Sunday. Church bells will ring and four representatives will lay wreaths. The Parish Council will not be encouraging people to attend the cenotaph and will do all possible to ensure that people do not gather in numbers.

In Barlaston the Church would like to organise a memorial service on parish council land. Three village greens are located around the memorial area where people are able to socially distance but the parish council is recommending that a ceremony is avoided and that time slots are given for people to lay their wreaths. The situation is a difficult one because people feel strongly that a Remembrance service takes place.

It was acknowledged that managing the arrangements for Remembrance

commemorative events alongside the Covid-19 guidelines is difficult but the occasion must be marked appropriately. Local authorities need to be mindful of not leaving themselves open to accusations that guidelines have been breached. Councils must be able to prove that all risks have been evaluated.

The Town Clerk has forwarded his Risk assessment for the Stone service to the Borough Council who have indicated that they are satisfied with the proposals. The Police must also approve the plans.

The Christmas lights in Stone will be installed and illuminated as normal but there will be no Christmas Lights Switch-On ceremony.

There will be Advent Windows in town but not the daily opening visits for the singing of Christmas carols.

The Group concluded that everyone was doing their best to keep the Christmas spirit alive but there was no point compiling a full diary of events just yet.

L20/035 Planning Applications Processing

The Chairman advised the Liaison Group that, since the meeting in January, a response had been received from the Borough Council's Development manager to the joint letter (sent on behalf of Stone Town Council, Eccleshall Parish Council and Hilderstone Parish Council) expressing concerns about the planning consultation process and level of representation of parish councils at Borough Council Planning Committees.

The main issues are:

- That parish council comments are not given sufficient weight and consideration.
- That upon the determination of planning applications where the decision is contrary to the recommendation of a parish council, no explanation is given as to the reasons.
- There is no automatic right for parish council representatives to speak at the Borough Council's Planning Committee.

The Chairman informed the Liaison Group that the Town Council's General Purposes Committee had considered the Development Manager's comments in the summer and had formulated its own response, sent by letter in August 2020.

A copy of the letter to the Development Manager (dated 18 September 2019), the Development Manager's response (dated 2 July 2020) and the Town Council's letter to the Development Manager (dated 19 August 2020) had been enclosed with the agenda for the Liaison Group meeting.

The Chairman reported that one of the Town and Borough Councillors had undertaken some research and found that only 5% of District Councils in England do not allow their parish councils as a matter of right, to address their Planning Committees.

Mr Fraser, Clerk to Yarnfield and Cold Meece Parish Council, advised the

Liaison Group that the Borough Council's Resources Scrutiny Committee, which will next meet on 19 November 2020, is scheduled to receive a report from the Head of Law and Administration on the Review of the Council's Constitution. This will set out the arrangements for the annual review of the constitution, set up a task and finish group to oversee the review and invite councillors to put forward changes that they feel are necessary.

Mr Fraser has written to his two ward members asking for their support. He advised that it wasn't necessary to be on the Resources and Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations as Officers and Councillors not on the Committee could also make recommendations.

The aim of submitting recommendations to the Annual Review is to secure amendments to Section 6 of the Borough Council's Constitution: 'Regulatory Committee Procedure Rules' which set out the rules in relation to Planning Committee.

The Protocol on 'Making Representations to Planning Committee' states that members of the public objecting or supporting an application can apply to speak for a maximum of 3 minutes each and Members representing a ward in which the matter is located or a neighbouring ward affected by the application can speak for a maximum of 5 minutes.

It was agreed that the protocol seemed at odds with the Borough Council's 'Statement of Community Involvement 2018 Update' which documents a commitment to involving the community, strengthening local community participation and stakeholder involvement in shaping future development and reaching planning decisions.

The Town Clerk suggested contacting the group to the west of Stafford who may have similar interests in the item and Karen St Leger, in her role as Chair to SLCC for Staffordshire, offered to put the message out to Clerks for disseminating to their parish councils (with advice on the format it should go in).

Councillor Fletcher raised the point that members of the public attending planning appeals are usually asked by the inspector whether they have anything to say and are given the opportunity to speak when they hadn't planned to.

The following additional points were made about planning matters at parish level:

- The situation has arisen at a parish council planning meeting where the applicant, their family members and villagers had been allowed to speak publicly to express their support for the proposed development under consideration. An opportunity had also been available for an objector to speak but had declined because of the intimidating environment created by the other contributors. The meeting had the characteristics of a public forum event.

The Liaison Group concluded that the order/format of a meeting depends on the Chairman with guidance from the Clerk. In addition, the limitations of the powers of parish councils are sometimes mis-

understood by the general public, not recognising that they have no direct decision-making capability on planning.

- Situations where people oppose planning applications for reasons that are not material planning considerations can be a difficult area. Members of the public are not necessarily aware (understandably) that there are matters that can be taken into account in deciding planning applications and matters that cannot.
- It was agreed that members of the public must be given the opportunity to have their say at parish meetings but in a controlled way that does not get out of hand. It is the parish council's role to support or object to development proposals and to make collective observations.
- If members of the public are strong minded about a planning application, they should be encouraged to speak to Members of the Council who will offer guidance on submitting their own objections.
- The submission of written observations should be encouraged, and the submission of petitions should not. Individual observations in small or large numbers have strength and impact. The responses are also published on the Borough Council's planning portal.

It was agreed that there may be very few occasions where parish council representatives would wish to speak at the Borough Council's Planning Committee, but they would like to have the option should the need arise.

The outcome of the annual review of the Borough Council's constitution will be awaited with interest.

L20/036 Ongoing Items of Interest

a. Update on Neighbourhood Plans

Stone Neighbourhood Plan

The draft Stone Neighbourhood Plan is on hold until the springtime, awaiting the arrangement for a referendum.

Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan

The Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan is complete and fully adopted. It should now be carrying full weight in line with the Borough Council's Local Plan.

The Parish Council is however finding that the Borough Council is not acknowledging or making any reference to the Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan when processing local planning applications.

As a result of the lack of acknowledgement, Barlaston Parish Council has started to reject every planning application that does not make reference to either the Plan or other policies that are contained therein. The Borough council has been asked to provide a link or to

make reference to the Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan when pre application advice is given.

In Barlaston residents are concerned about the development of a field where a developer is looking to build 42 social houses. The site is in the Green Belt and outside the settlement boundary.

The Borough Council has not advised the developer that Barlaston has a Neighbourhood Plan and has indicated that an environmental assessment is not needed. The Parish Council will be objecting on the grounds that the development is outside the settlement boundary and inappropriate in the Green Belt.

The Parish Council has submitted an expression of interest in the Wedgwood Memorial College site and the procurement is going through.

The Borough Council had commissioned Lichfield District Council to produce a development plan known as the 'Lichfield Plan' which is referenced in the Neighbourhood Plan but the Borough Council has not adopted it. Barlaston Parish Council has asked whether it could be adopted as it is sympathetic to the village in a number of ways but the Borough Council believes it to be outdated and could put off prospective purchasers.

The Parish Council disagrees that the Plan is outdated. Its planning consultant has advised that, although the Borough Council must comply with planning policy, it cannot be forced to adopt the Lichfield Plan.

b. HS2

The Chairman invited updates on HS2:

It was confirmed that the House of Lords had been in private session (today) and it is suspected they are writing their report in response to the Stone, Yarnfield and Chebsey petition.

Representatives of Yarnfield, Stone and Chebsey were at the House of Lords on 15th September 2020 presenting the joint petition. They had a day to give evidence but were restricted on the topics they could talk about and the railhead and IMB-R on Yarnfield Lane was excluded.

Stone Railhead Crisis Group (SRCG) has achieved coverage in the national press. Aside from their parish council role they have a wider remit talking about the finances of HS2 and have submitted evidence to the Public Accounts Committee who are reviewing the HS2 project. They continue to press ahead and are hopeful about the outcome.

Stone and Chebsey SRCG will host a virtual meeting once the House of Lords results have been made public.

The HS2 company is producing webinars to talk about their investigative and archaeology work in the area which includes Stone. The material has nothing to do with policy or political issues related to whether the project should go ahead or not.

c. Traffic and Parking

The Chairman invited updates on traffic and parking:

Stone Town Council has paid the Borough Council £5,000 to pick up the cost of car parking charges on Saturdays at Borough Council car parks in the town (from 3 October to 26 December 2020) to allow users to park for free. The purpose of the project is to encourage people to visit, to support traders and to revitalise the town after the Covid-19 outbreak at the Crown & Anchor.

There has been an underspend on the Tourism & Town Promotion Budget through the absence of events and this is considered a good use of the money. Liaison Group representatives were asked to disseminate the information to their residents.

Eccleshall has issues with parking but doesn't have any car parks.

d. Leisure and Recreation

The Chairman invited updates on matter relating to leisure and recreation:

Stone Leisure Centre – is open for business.

Community groups – such as choirs and amateur dramatics etc are frustrated at having to wait to see what happens with Covid-19.

Crown Wharf – work is continuing but at a slower pace. The site is looking encouraging.

Walking to Health Group in Barlaston – the group is doing well and the parish council has agreed to fund a number of kissing gates which are slowly being installed. The project had been put on hold for a while after a challenge about the gate types.

e. Commercial and Retail Activity

The Chairman invited updates on commercial and retail activity:

It was reported that a number of shops in both Stone and Eccleshall have closed. Very hard times have been endured over the previous year and it is hoped the situation doesn't get any worse for businesses.

f. Devolution – Sharing of Contractors/Equipment

The Chairman invited updates on devolution matters:

Information was shared about a letter issued by the Conservative party about a devolution project. Stoke on Trent City Council is looking at becoming a larger unitary authority which may involve taking some of the smaller surrounding parishes in with it.

The Staffordshire County Council website, with resources for local councils to find out about their options for keeping areas looking good, can be accessed at: <http://www.highwaysyourway.info/>

L20/037 Schedule of Future Meeting Dates and times

The Group agreed that a schedule of future meeting dates is deferred to a future meeting due to continuing uncertainty with Covid-19.

The Group agreed that the next meeting would begin at 3:00pm again as the time was convenient for many and stayed within office working hours. Sandon and Burston Parish Council had asked whether it might be possible to hold meetings later in the day (5:00pm suggested) as members are unable to attend because of ongoing work commitments.

L20/038 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 20 January 2021 at 3pm, in St Michael's Suite at the Frank Jordan Centre, Stone (if the meeting does not take place virtually).

Karen St Leger advised the Liaison Group that she had some material on the Government's White Paper 'Planning for the Future' consultation which might assist parish councils in formulating their responses. Trudy Williams will forward this to Liaison Group members.