

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 1 December 2020

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

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

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

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### **GP20/295 Apologies**

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

### **GP20/296 Declarations of Interests**

None

### **GP20/297 Requests for Dispensations**

None

### **GP20/298 To receive the report of the County Councillors**

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

#### Staffordshire SEND Strategy 2020-2025

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that the first draft of Staffordshire County Council's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy was now available to read. The consultation, which runs from 26 November 2020 to 24 January 2021, considers how commissioning groups can work with others to improve the delivery of these services to children and better meet their needs. She asked that Members contribute to its content if they can.

#### Care Home Development at Tilling Drive

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that she was continuing to monitor the preparations for the construction of a care home in Tilling Drive and a newly formed residents group was doing the same.

She confirmed that no heavy machinery is allowed anywhere near the Tilling Drive site during school start and finish times.

The Chief Executive of Stafford Borough Council has been very helpful in liaising with L & T Care, and herself. She will have the opportunity to approach the Directors when problems arise in order to quickly achieve a solution.

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#### Drug dealing in Stone

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that following Stone Independent Councillors' work with Chief Inspector Parsons a closure order had been issued at an address in Kent Grove under S.80 of the Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The action will prevent further drug dealing from taking place at the address.

#### Oak Tree in Tilling Drive

Councillor Mrs Hood reported that after a two year time period trying to identify who was responsible for a tree at the far end of Tilling Drive, Stafford & Rural Homes had decided to prune it and residents in the nearby flats are now able to enjoy daylight to their homes.

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

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

### **GP20/299 To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

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

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that the Borough Council's fees and charges for 2021 had been approved which included a £36 annual charge for the collection of garden waste. He commented that all of the Borough Councillors representing Stone had voted against introduction of this charge.

The Borough Council has also approved its Climate Change and Green Recovery Strategy which will provide an important support for Stone Town Council's own Green Strategy, emerging through the Environment Sub-Committee.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that in the new year the Borough Council will be carrying out a review of its constitution. As part of the review he will be proposing that town and parish councils are given an automatic right to address Planning Committee on items that have been called in.

Reviews indicate that more than 80% of English town and parish councils already have this right which is considered to be a basic right of local democracy, and supports the Localism Agenda.

### **GP20/300 Representations from Members of the Public**

None

### **GP20/301 Minutes**

RESOLVED:

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

**GP20/302**     **Minutes of Sub-Committees**

There were no sub-committee minutes for consideration.

**GP20/303**     **Budget 2021-22 to 2023-24 Overview**

The Committee received the report\* of the Town Clerk setting out the prospects for the Council's 2021-22 to 2023-24 budget. The report considered 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 determination of the precept for 2021-22.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the biggest challenge this year had been with the impact and uncertainty of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. All the figures for the standstill budget had been prepared on the basis of a return to the Government's Tier 2 rules from December 2020, with a return to normal life in April 2021. A contingency (as a total figure) had been provided in the General Purposes Committee budget to allow for those targets not being met.

RESOLVED: To note the standstill budget position for 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 and the issues related to setting the precept.

RESOLVED: That each sub-committee considers its financial needs for the next three years and reports back to the General Purposes Committee on 19 January 2021 with its budget proposals.

**GP20/304**     **Requests for Grants from Local Organisations**

**Stone Scout & Guide Band**

The Committee considered the grant application from Stone Scout & Guide Band requesting £310 towards the cost of insuring the Band instruments. The Covid-19 pandemic had prevented parading and an opportunity to earn income to meet its ongoing costs.

RESOLVED: To award £310 to Stone Scout & Guide Band.

**GP20/305**     **Corporate Business Plan**

The Committee considered the Town Council's response to Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Business Plan consultation. The plan is a strategic document outlining aspirations for economic growth, community wellbeing and financial sustainability over the next three years and beyond.

An email from the Borough Council's Chief Executive and an electronic version of the Draft Corporate Business Plan 2021 – 2024 had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting.

The Town Council noted the consultation and concluded that no collective response would be submitted to the Borough Council.

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**GP20/306 Christmas Lights Switch-On 2020**

The Committee considered the virtual Christmas Lights Switch-On 2020 held in Stone this year after it had not been possible to host a traditional Switch-On event in the High Street.

The Chairman invited Councillor Mrs Hood, Chairman of the Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee, to address the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Hood said it had taken the two alumni Digital Marketing students at Staffordshire University a big effort to produce the video which they had done at no cost.

The filming of the town had been recorded at 5am on a Monday morning when Councillor Jonathan Powell, Councillor Mrs Hood, the two students and Mr Camacho from The Mill Restaurant (who did the drone work) met with the Christmas Lights contractor. Father Christmas and Dolly Daydream had been filmed during daylight hours, outside The Mill.

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that to date, the video had received over 18,000 viewings from all over the world. She thanked the Stone in Bloom volunteers who wrapped all the trees in lights and Councillor Rob Kenney who had climbed the ladder (at least 100 times) to switch on each set of Christmas tree lights, which look beautiful.

Councillor Mrs Hood said that one of the points highlighted from the virtual event had been the number of people who had commented that this was the first time they had been able to see the lights switched on because they are unable to get out of their homes.

She said the town looks beautiful and they have a film that will last forever which is all down to the students, Father Christmas, Dolly Daydream and the team that joined in.

Councillor Mrs Hood said the video had been a huge success and on behalf of Stone Town Council she thanked everyone involved in the production and in particular the students, Amber Mottershead and Olivia Bethell.

Councillor Leason asked that the Town Council's grateful thanks and congratulations to Councillor Mrs Hood are recorded in recognition of her work on the project in assisting with the delivery of a fantastic Christmas Lights Switch-On 2020.

**GP20/307 Non-Cheque Payments**

RESOLVED: To note the list\* of non-cheque payments made by the Council during the period 1 to 31 October 2020.

**GP20/308 Update from Working Groups:**

**Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**

Councillor Mrs Hood confirmed that there was nothing to report.

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### **Stone Area Parish Liaison Group**

The Chairman of the Liaison Group, Councillor Davies, advised the Committee that the next meeting of the Liaison Group would take place in January 2021 and the notes to the previous meeting had been enclosed with the agenda.

### **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 two meetings of the Promotion of Stone Working Group had taken place.

The first meeting was held on 19 November 2020 and the following items were discussed:

- The Second Lockdown – trader representatives were very upset that small independent shops had been closed for a second time. They believed there was no rationale behind the decision as statistics had showed that there was a much higher risk of transferring the virus in schools, colleges and supermarkets. There was also concerns about mental health issues amongst small business owners with no assistance on offer from the Government.
- Cars in the High Street – which are causing issues at certain times.
- Click and Collect – retailers have been trying to set up online services to enable them to continue to trade.
- Pubs – there is much concern from Stone based pubs and fear that some may not reopen.
- Strategy – to look at short, medium and long term strategy
- Solutions – signage to promote Stone from roadways and canals, encouraging businesses to take on empty premises, promoting click & collect, compiling a 2021 events calendar.
- Steps agreed – the display of ‘free Saturday car parking’ posters promoting free parking in Stone shops. Susan Hughes has done a very good job of circulating the information on Facebook. There has been a promotion of shops showing Christmas themed windows, published last week by A Little Bit of Stone.

At the second meeting of the Working Group the following items were discussed:

- Promotion during the term leading up to Christmas. Hospitality sector is very low indeed. There is a risk they won't be open for the rest of the year.
- Promote the reopening of shops in a Covid-19 safe manner.
- Promote free parking with the Farmers' Market being a kickstart
- Saturday is small business day

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- Jon Cook has promoted as much as he can through A Little Bit of Stone – positive messages about hospitality businesses in Stone. Messages that people are thinking of them.
- The next meeting will be on 10 December 2020

**GP20/309 To receive reports from Town Councillors on attendance at meetings of local organisations and outside bodies as a representative of the Town Council**

**Stone ATC**

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

**Age Concern Stone & District**

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

**Stafford & Stone Access Group**

Councillor T. Kelt advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place and that the next meeting would be in January 2021.

**Stone Common Plot Trustees**

Councillor Kelt confirmed that the Plot are collecting all outstanding signatories from the Trustees for the Nat West Transfer which he believed had gone ahead.

**Stone Community Hub Liaison Group**

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

**SPCA Executive Committee**

Councillor Green advised the Committee that the next meeting of the Executive Committee would be the AGM on 7 December 2020.

**The meeting was temporarily suspended at this point, before reconvening, after the open session of the Planning Consultative Committee meeting had taken place.**

**GP20/310 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

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

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

**GP20/311 Internal Audit 2020-21 Onwards**

The Committee considered the confidential report\* of the Town Clerk which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting. The report considered the Council's internal audit arrangements for the current financial year and onwards.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council retain the current scope of internal audit work.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk is authorised to re-appoint the current internal auditor, Sandie Morris, for a further period of three years.

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RESOLVED: That the Town Council's internal audit provision is reviewed again for the 2023-24 financial year.

**CHAIRMAN**