

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 2 February 2021

**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, Mrs A. Burgess, J. Davies, Mrs L. Davies, Mrs K. Dawson,  
M. Green, M. Hatton, Mrs J. Hood, J. Hickling, T. Kelt, P. Leason, J. Powell,  
C. Thornicroft and R. Townsend

**ABSENT:** Councillors: K. Argyle and I. Fordham

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**GP20/328**    **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle and I. Fordham

**GP20/329**    **Declarations of Interests**

Councillor R. Townsend declared a personal interest in item 10 (Minute Number GP20/337) – Grant aid to local organisations: Aston Lodge Residents Association

**GP20/330**    **Requests for Dispensations**

None

**GP20/331**    **To receive the report of the County Councillors**

**County Councillor Mrs J. Hood**

Streetscene

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that the funeral of one of Streetscene's operatives who has sadly died from Covid-19, had taken place today (2 February 2021). She asked that everyone puts him in their thoughts as Streetscene are a tremendous team who do a lot for our town.

Vandalism in Town

Councillor Mrs Hood informed the Committee that over the previous year and to the present day, Stone had endured obscene graffiti, damage to business premises with stock stolen, staff being threatened, people high on drugs wondering around the town and drug dealing taking place in private residences.

She said that residents had seen evidence of people trying to break into their cars and properties, and last weekend crime had escalated to a very serious level when a fire had been started in a house in Granville terrace, with a further two fires in the old fire station owned by Joules Brewery. Many thousands of pounds worth of damage had resulted.

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Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that Stone Police officers work long gruelling shifts to take these criminals off the streets and had achieved excellent results, working closely with the community and using intelligence passed to them.

Councillor Mrs Hood said that due to concerns that Stone was being viewed as an unsafe town, she undertook some research before writing to the Staffordshire Commissioner, Matthew Ellis, and was appalled to discover that his staffing bill in 2018-19 was £1,415,000 for 22 backroom staff.

Councillor Mrs Hood informed the Committee that she had written an open letter to Mr Ellis enquiring how the value would equate to police constable wages. Sir Bill Cash (who had been copied in) responded by writing to Matthew Ellis telling him how profoundly concerned he was, but didn't mention how Government funding for police forces throughout the UK had been squeezed.

Councillor Mrs Hood stated that Stone needed funds from the Staffordshire Commissioner's budget for more CCTV and police officers in Stone. She said that getting the town back to the friendly and safe town it has always been required the employment of more police officers.

Councillor Mrs Hood informed the Committee that she was saddened by what had been going on in the town but wants to get the message across that most of the criminals responsible had been caught, charged and imprisoned. She said the police are doing a good job and should receive all our thanks. She suggested others may wish to write to their Member of Parliament and the Staffordshire Commissioner themselves.

**County Councillor I. Parry**

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

**GP20/332     To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

The Chairman invited Councillor Leason to address the Council.

Councillor Leason advised the Committee that he had received a number of complaints from members of the public about the rise in crime, graffiti and anti social behaviour in Stone.

Councillor Leason said Chief Inspector Parsons and his team are doing a good job but resources are stretched. He said he would like to see a review of policing in Stone and resources increased to include a full time sergeant based in the town rather than in Stafford. More police officers are needed not only to reduce the current crime levels but to give residents peace of mind and the knowledge that the money they pay for policing is well spent and good value.

The Chairman, Councillor Kenney, reported that he had attended a Task and Review of Stafford Borough Council's constitution as part of the Borough Council's Scrutiny Committee. Town/Borough Councillor Ian Fordham had put forward a request for the constitution to be changed to allow parish council representatives to speak at the Borough Council's planning committee as a right for three minutes.

Councillor Kenney advised the General Purposes Committee that there had been no support for the proposal, Members considering the rule to be unfair as some parts of the borough are unparished.

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Councillor Kenney reported that another item on the Borough Scrutiny Committee agenda had been a proposal to change the procedural rules relating to Members Motions and their cost implications. Where the cost implications of a Members Motion would likely increase the Borough Council's capital or revenue expenditure or reduce income to the Council, the Councillor's proposal should first be referred to the Chief Executive for referral to Cabinet.

Councillor Kenney informed the Committee that the effect of this procedural change would be to remove democracy as the Cabinet would be vetting almost all Members Motions. He said the item had currently been deferred for additional information.

The Chairman advised the Committee that he supported the comments made by Councillor Mrs Hood and Councillor Leason about crime in Stone and reassured residents that he and other Town Councillors were having regular meetings with the Chief Inspector.

**GP20/333 Representations from Members of the Public**

There were no representations from members of the public.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council's Public Participation Scheme was now suspended until after the by-election for the Stonefield and Christchurch Ward. The election cannot be held before 6 May 2021.

**GP20/334 Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 19 January 2021 (Minute No's GP20/312 – GP20/327), be approved as a correct record.

**GP20/335 Minutes of Sub-Committees**

There were no minutes for consideration.

**GP20/336 Meeting Schedule for 2021-22**

The Committee considered a proposed programme of meetings and events for the period May 2021 to April 2022.

RESOLVED: To approve the schedule of meetings and events dates.

**GP20/337 Grant Aid to Local Organisations**

The Committee considered the following requests for a grant:

AEDDONATE

The Committee considered the grant application received from AEDdonate requesting £500 to replace batteries and consumable pads in Stone defibrillators and supplement the loss of income incurred from the closure of shops during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns.

RESOLVED: To award £500 to AEDdonate for use in Stone.

#### STONE CHORAL SOCIETY

The Committee considered the grant application received from Stone Choral Society requesting £500 to educate the public in the arts and sciences – particularly music, by the presentation of concerts and other activities.

RESOLVED: To award £500 to Stone Choral Society.

#### ASTON LODGE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

The Committee considered the grant application received from Aston Lodge Residents Association requesting £250 to install advisory traffic calming signs in various locations around the estate to encourage motorists to slow down.

RESOLVED: To award £250 to Aston Lodge Residents Association.

#### OULTON FIRST SCHOOL

The Committee considered the grant application received from Oulton First School requesting £500 to assist in the purchase of tablet style devices. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions children, parents and school needs to adapt to different types of learning, becoming increasing reliant on information technology resources.

RESOLVED: To award £500 to Oulton First School.

### **GP20/338 Stone Draft Neighbourhood Plan**

The Committee considered the protection of green infrastructure offered by Neighbourhood Plan policy CAF5 and Plan for Stafford Borough policy N4. A description of the policies had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Neighbourhood Plan had been brought back to the meeting because of the sale of land in Heath Gardens (under private ownership) and its designation as local green infrastructure in the Draft Stone Neighbourhood Plan.

He said the Town Council and residents had worked hard over several years creating the plan (at a cost of almost £30,000) for the main purpose of recognising the value of green spaces in Stone and protecting them from future development.

In the original version of the draft Stone Neighbourhood Plan, as submitted to the independent examiner, the land in Heath Gardens had been designated as local green space (reference LGS29) but the examiner had not supported the proposal and asked that the land be designated local green infrastructure. The land is designated local green infrastructure in the latest version of the Plan.

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that as local green infrastructure, the land was covered by Neighbourhood Plan policy CAF5 and Plan for Stafford Borough Council policy N4.

The Draft Stone Neighbourhood plan which is due to go to referendum in May 2021 after having been delayed by one year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, already carries great weight, and the Borough Council's policy on local green infrastructure should protect the land from future development.

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The Committee expressed its confidence in the Neighbourhood Plan, that it would protect listed local green space and green infrastructure and that it would be adopted by residents in May 2021. Assurances were given that the Town Council would challenge all proposals submitted by developers in respect of any of the sites in the future.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the impact of planning policies, whether Stafford Borough or Neighbourhood Plan policies, only come into effect when an application has been made for planning permission and do not prevent the sale and purchase land.

The Committee noted the protections afforded by Neighbourhood Plan policy CAF5 and Plan for Stafford Borough policy N4.

**GP20/339 Road Safety Improvements – A34 Fillybooks and Yarnfield Lane**

The Committee considered a Staffordshire County Council consultation outlining proposals for road safety improvements at the A34 Fillybrooks and Yarnfield Lane, Stone.

An email, a letter and a drawing (reference: D4274L-R01-01-P2) with details of the scheme, had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

The Committee agreed that safety improvements were needed at The Fillybrooks and Yarnfield lane and that the proposals involved low key works which did not raise obvious concerns, and appeared to have few negative impacts.

The Committee observed that quite a lot of cutting back of verges was proposed to improve visibility and prevent signage from getting obscured. It was pointed out that vegetation does have a beneficial presence in absorbing pollutants from the main road and the environmental impact of its removal had not been addressed.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council forwards the following comments to the County Council in response to the road safety consultation: 'where vegetation is cut back to prevent obscuring the road signage, an environmental impact is considered to maintain low level vegetation and encourage biodiversity on those junctions'.

**GP20/340 Staffordshire Pension Fund – Draft Exit Credit Policy**

The Committee considered the Staffordshire Pension Fund Draft Exit Credit Policy which is open for consultation with its employers to 13 February 2021.

A copy of the policy had been issued with the agenda for the meeting.

The Town Clerk explained that the policy had little or no direct impact on the Town Council but had impact on the overall fund because of an agreement where organisations leaving the fund can take any profit they hold with them. This reduces the value of the fund for other members although the impact on parish councils is considered negligible.

The Committee noted the Draft Exit Credit Policy.

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**GP20/341**     **Staffordshire Police Survey - Your police. Your voice.**

The Chairman reminded Committee Members to complete the Staffordshire Police 'Your police. Your voice' survey by the deadline of 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021 to help the Police to get a better understanding of the issues that matter most to our communities, and ensure that services and resources are being delivered in the best way to address any concerns. The Police have also asked that the survey link is distributed as widely as possible.

A copy of the email from Staffordshire Police had been attached to the agenda for the meeting and the link to the survey provided.

**GP20/342**     **Non-Cheque Payments**

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

**GP20/343**     **Update from Working Groups:**

**Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**

Councillor Mrs Hood confirmed that there was no update.

**Stone Area Parish Liaison Group**

The Chairman of the Liaison Group, Councillor Davies, advised the Committee that a meeting had taken place on 20 January 2021 which had been very well attended by contiguous councils. The Group has a lot of common interests and is proving to be valuable for comparing notes and for parish councils in the northern part of the borough to join together with Stone. The feeling is sometimes that the area is overlooked by the Borough Council.

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that Chief Inspector Parsons had attended the meeting and it had been beneficial for him to be able to share information with a number of parish councils at the same time.

Councillor Davies reminded the Committee that the request for the Borough Council to amend its constitution to allow a parish council representative to speak at Planning Committee as a right had originated with the liaison group.

The Chairman advised the Committee that the next meeting would be held in April and Members would be very welcome to Zoom in to the virtual meeting.

**Traffic Management in Stone Working Group**

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

**Promotion of Stone Working Group**

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that the Promotion of Stone Working Group was due to have a meeting soon and would be providing a report at the next meeting.

**GP20/344**     **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.

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#### **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. He also advised that the publicity for the website had been taken on by Mr Peter Jones.

#### **Stone Common Plot Trustees**

Councillor Mrs Hood confirmed that no meeting had taken place.

#### **Stone Community Hub Liaison Group**

Councillor Mrs Hood confirmed that she had attended the Hub's Annual General Meeting which was interesting. The finances are extremely healthy and the Hub is supporting a huge number of residents with the food bank.

#### **SPCA Executive Committee**

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

**The meeting was suspended at this point to enable the Planning Committee meeting and confidential section of the Town Council meeting to take place.**

**The General Purposes Committee meetings was then reconvened for the confidential item on the agenda.**

#### **GP20/345 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.

#### **GP20/346 Stone Heritage Centre**

The Committee considered the Town Clerk's report\* on Stone Heritage Centre which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting.

The report considers the Council's position with regards to the proposed Stone Heritage Centre and asked the Committee to confirm that it wished to enter into an agreement with Joules Brewery for the operation of the Centre.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

- a. Asks the Town Clerk to confirm to Joules Brewery that the Town Council intends to continue with the Heritage Centre project and enter into a lease along the lines of the Heads of Terms previously considered by the Committee.
- b. Suspends standing order 19.7 relating to the tendering of contracts in respect of this project.

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**CHAIRMAN**

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