

Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 2 March 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,
I. Fordham, M. Green, T. Kelt, P. Leason, J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and R. Townsend

ABSENT: Councillors: K. Argyle, M. Hatton, J. Hickling and Mrs J. Hood

GP20/351 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle and Mrs J. Hood

GP20/352 **Declarations of Interests**

None

GP20/353 **Requests for Dispensations**

None

GP20/354 **To receive the report of the County Councillors**

County Councillor Mrs J. Hood

Councillor Mrs Hood was not in attendance at the meeting.

County Councillor I. Parry

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

GP20/355 **To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

The Chairman invited Councillor Fordham to address the Committee.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that following a public consultation, the Borough Council had (at its last meeting) approved its Corporate Business Plan 2021-24. The vote had been 22 in favour to 0, but with 17 abstentions. All Borough Independent Councillors abstained on the vote due to concerns that the Plan had failed to mention the second phase development on Westbridge Park. Reassurances have been given that the project remains in the plans.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that Stafford Borough Council (at the same meeting) had agreed a 1.9% rise in the tax residents will pay for Borough Council services in the year 2021-22.

Councillor Fordham reported on an initiative led by Stone Borough Councillors in response to concerns about recent crime levels in the town.

* 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.

The three ward councillors for St Michael's and Stonefield have been meeting with the local Police Commander and his deputy since the autumn to discuss crime levels in Stone. The purpose of the meetings was to understand and support the police response and help with intelligence gathering and dissemination of information. The liaison meetings, which have been productive for both Councillors and Police, are now being expanded to a town wide initiative by including the ward Councillors for Walton.

Town Councillors have also been asked to nominate a representative from their number for each of the four town wards. Residents will now be represented by their elected member, maximising the possibility of productive dialogue with the Police and a positive change to the levels of crime in the town.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that, notwithstanding its resource constraints, Staffordshire Police had been very active and increasingly successful in apprehending offenders and bringing them before the courts.

GP20/356 Representations from Members of the Public

The Town Clerk reminded the Committee that the Town Council's Public Participation Scheme was now suspended until after the by-election for the Stonefield and Christchurch Ward.

GP20/357 Minutes

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 2 February 2021 (Minute No's GP20/328 – GP20/346), be approved as a correct record.

GP20/358 Minutes of Sub-Committees

There were no minutes for consideration.

GP20/359 Heritage Centre

The Committee considered the membership of a working group to consider the internal layout, fittings and use of the Heritage Centre.

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Kenney, Councillor Mrs J. Hood and Councillor Leason to the Heritage Centre Working Group. These representatives will identify and invite further members with appropriate skills and knowledge to join the Group, subject to the approval of the General Purposes Committee.

GP20/360 Planning Application Validation Criteria Consultation

The Committee considered a Stafford Borough Council consultation seeking views on its Planning Application Validation Criteria setting out the information needed to assess planning applications.

An email from Stafford Borough Council had been attached to the agenda for the meeting and a copy of the Local Validation Requirements had been attached to the electronic version of the agenda.

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The Chairman invited the Chairman of the Planning Consultative Committee, Councillor J. Davies, to lead the item.

Councillor Davies informed the Committee that he welcomed the intentions of the consultation, believing it to provide useful guidance to planning applicants, but that it could be more user friendly.

Councillor Davies said the steps comprising the planning process are not explained and should be set out clearly, perhaps in the form of a flow chart, giving easy reference to the appropriate details that will guide prospective applicants. He suggested the decision making process (how and when) be made clear and the circumstances where the Borough Council's Planning Committee become involved. Information should also be included about the ward Member who may call the application in.

Councillor Davies expressed the view that it was both disappointing and worrying that the role of town and parish councils was not mentioned in the document which he considered was further evidence of the local planning authority's disdain for the opinion that local councils represent. He said Town Councillors had been mystified by the Borough Council's decision to reject the call to amend its constitution to give parishes an absolute right to speak at planning committee meetings. The reason for declining to do so was unconvincing and the Borough Council remain out of alignment with the practices of over 90% of other district level councils in England.

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that there was no formal reference or acknowledgement in the Planning Application Validation Criteria to neighbourhood plans. Made and adopted neighbourhood plans should form part of the statutory Development Plan along with Part 1 and Part 2 of the adopted Local Plan.

Councillor Davies informed the Committee that Barlaston Parish Council was unhappy that the adopted Barlaston Neighbourhood Plan had been disregarded by the Borough Council. He called for Stafford Borough Council to be asked to explain the reason they are ignoring neighbourhood plans.

He thanked the Parish Clerk at Barlaston for sharing the views of the parish council's planning consultant, Urban Vision, who had also given the Town Council highly valuable services in the preparation of its own neighbourhood plan.

Councillor Davies questioned the reason the Borough Council is unwilling to engage with local communities and made reference to non compliance with its own 'Statement of Community Involvement' policy.

The Committee were invited to add additional comments and Councillor Fordham suggested that the timescales for the planning application validation and consultation processes are also included as useful information for applicants.

RESOLVED: That a response to the Planning Application Validation Criteria Consultation is compiled (before the close date of 14 April 2021) by the Town Clerk in consultation with Councillor J. Davies, Councillor R. Kenney and Councillor I. Fordham.

GP20/361 Non-Cheque Payments

RESOLVED: To note the list* of non-cheque payments made by the Council during the period 1 to 31 January 2021.

GP20/362 Update from Working Groups:

Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Councillor Kenney confirmed that there was no update as the Town Council await the Stone Neighbourhood Plan referendum in May.

Stone Area Parish Liaison Group

Councillor Davies, advised the Committee that the notes for the meeting in January had been circulated. He said they illustrated the value of the discussion taking place and a lot of good work with the Police. The next meeting will be in April.

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 there had been three productive meetings of the Working Group this year.

The trader representatives had reported that the Christmas period had been quiet but the feedback was very positive in respect of the free parking provision. There was a positive attitude to 2021 and all believe the economic bounce back will be speedy.

Councillor Powell reported that the Working Group was midway, looking at promotions to help the town through lockdown and post lockdown with continued restrictions. It was focusing on local businesses and residents and how best to put the plans into action.

He said that a 'No Place Like Stone' promotion was being formulated along with other promotions, although moving forward with ongoing uncertainty was challenging. He said that all members of the Group were focussed on the future.

Councillor Powell advised the Committee that the Working Group was building a plan for marketing its ideas and was getting closer to putting them into action. With that in mind the group will be asking for a fund to cover promotional and marketing needs.

GP20/363 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

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

Stone Common Plot Trustees

Councillor Kenney confirmed that no meeting had taken place.

Stone Community Hub Liaison Group

Councillor Kenney confirmed that no meeting had taken place.

SPCA Executive Committee

Councillor Green advised the Committee that for personal reasons he had been unable to attend the meeting held last night.

GP20/364 **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.

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 meeting was then reconvened for the confidential item on the agenda.

GP20/365 **Confidential Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Confidential Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on the 2 February 2021 (Minute Numbers GP20/328 and GP20/346), be approved as a correct record.

CHAIRMAN