

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 13 April 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, Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, P. Leason, J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and  
R. Townsend

**ABSENT:** Councillors: K. Argyle, M. Green, M. Hatton and J. Hickling

---

**GP20/366**    **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, M. Green and J. Hickling

**GP20/367**    **Declarations of Interests**

Councillor R. Kenney declared a pecuniary interest in item 12 (Minute Number GP20/377) – Stone Farmers’ Market.

**GP20/368**    **Requests for Dispensations**

None

**GP20/369**    **To receive the report of the County Councillors**

**County Councillor Mrs J. Hood**

The Chairman invited Councillor Mrs Hood to address the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that she and the Chairman, Councillor Kenney, had been liaising with a number of residents about the recent sale of pockets of land in Stone that were outlined in the Stone Neighbourhood Plan as Local Green Spaces and Local Green Infrastructure.

She said that three pieces of land had been purchased and then sold (via auction) by one single vendor, attracting unsuspecting purchasers who were probably hoping to obtain planning permission. However, professional advice had confirmed that the land would be difficult to develop because of its protected status.

Councillor Mrs Hood asked whether the Town Clerk could identify the pockets of land that might potentially be subject to sale, to assist residents and allay their fears and concerns.

**County Councillor I. Parry**

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

---

\* 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.

**GP20/370 To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

The Chairman invited Councillor Fordham to address the Committee.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that five Borough Independent Councillors had been elected as Members of Stafford Borough Council, all of them representing the two district wards in Stone. To add to this number, a new sixth Borough Independent elected to Haywood and Hixon ward, had recently joined their ranks.

Councillor Fordham said the existing Independent Councillors were very pleased to welcome the new Councillor and looked forward to working with him.

**GP20/371 Representations from Members of the Public**

The Committee noted that the Town Council's Public Participation Scheme had been suspended until after the by-election for the Stonefield and Christchurch Ward.

**GP20/372 Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 24 February 2021 (Minute No's GP20/347 – GP20/350), be approved as a correct record.
- b) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 2 March 2021 (Minute No's GP20/351 – GP20/365), be approved as a correct record.

**GP20/373 Minutes of Sub-Committees**

RESOLVED:

- a) Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee held on 16 March 2021 (Minute Numbers TTP20/058 – TTP20/065), that the draft minutes be noted and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number TTP20/062 be adopted.
- b) Environment Sub-Committee held on 16 March 2021 (Minute Numbers ENV20/045 – ENV20/052), that the draft minutes be noted and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number ENV20/051 be adopted.

The Chairman invited additional new Members to join the Single Use Plastics Working Group and the Environmental Issues Working Group.

As no volunteers came forward the Chairman suggested the item be brought back to the General Purposes Committee on the next occasion that there is a report from the working groups.

**GP20/374**     **Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**

The Committee considered the draft notes of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meeting held on 23 March 2021 which had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting.

The Committee noted an inaccuracy in the notes which stated that the Neighbourhood Plan referendum should be advertised in the 'June' edition of the Stone & Eccleshall Gazette when it should be the 'May/June' edition.

The Chairman invited the Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, Councillor Mrs Hood to address the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that the neighbourhood Plan referendum would be taking place on Thursday 6 May 2021. She provided information on the process and reminded Members about the hard work that had gone in to producing the Plan's detailed content with the support of Urban Vision and in the consultation stages with residents of Stone.

Councillor Mrs Hood stressed the importance of people voting in the referendum for the Neighbourhood Plan which if made, would carry weight legally and form part of the Borough Council's planning process.

Councillor Mrs Hood urged everyone to tell others about the referendum and the need for local people to vote 'yes' for the Neighbourhood Plan. She said that widespread publicity would include advertisements in the May/June edition of the Gazette (which will be issued during the weekend before the referendum), a Little Bit of Stone, the Town Council's website and posters displayed in and around the town.

**GP20/375**     **Appointment of Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor Elect**

The Committee considered the appointment of a Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor Elect.

RESOLVED: That the Mayor Elect for 2021-22 is Councillor J. Powell, and the Deputy Mayor Elect is Councillor Mrs K. Dawson.

**GP20/376**     **Council Meetings**

The Committee considered the report\* of the Town Clerk (circulated with the agenda for the meeting) which considered the arrangements for Council meetings following the ending of legal approval to hold virtual meetings.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that the legal basis of virtual meetings finishes on 6 May 2021 which presents some difficulties for the Town Council as it does not have room to accommodate meetings that will be in accordance with Covid-19 requirements.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that virtual meetings had assisted members of the public significantly in engaging with the work of the Council. Viewing figures had been far in excess of the numbers of people who had regularly attended physical meetings.

---

\* 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 Town Clerk informed the Committee about the Government's request for a call for evidence on whether it should consider making virtual meetings legal in the future. He suggested the Council's experience and viewing figures are put forward in response.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee about a national legal challenge suggesting virtual meetings had always been legal but the outcome of this was not known. He confirmed that he had identified no reasons why meetings that do not make formal decisions could not be held virtually.

Committee Members expressed their views about the importance of returning to face to face meetings when circumstances allow and suggested that opportunities to live stream these physical meetings, for the benefit of people not willing or able to attend in person, be explored.

RESOLVED:

That the Town Council make the following meeting arrangements:

- a. Move the May meetings of the full Council, the General Purposes Committee and the Planning Consultative Committee to 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021 and hold them virtually.
- b. Change the date of the Annual Public Meeting to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- c. Delegate to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Town Mayor and the Chairmen of the General Purposes and Planning Consultative Committees, authority to set the dates of the June Council and Committee meetings.
- d. Consider arrangements for Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings in July 2021 onwards at the June meeting of the General Purposes Committee.
- e. Continue to hold steering group and working group meetings virtually until decided otherwise by the groups themselves.
- f. Organise future Town Hall Trust and Richard Vernon Trust meetings virtually until decided otherwise by each Trust individually.
- g. Authorise the Town Clerk to submit details of the Council's positive experiences regarding public interest in the work of the Council as a result of virtual meetings to the Government's "Call for evidence".
- h. That the Town Clerk investigates the possibility of using technology to live stream and record physical meetings (and determine the time period the recording should be held for).

**GP20/377**    **Stone Farmers' Market**

Having declared a pecuniary interest in this item, Councillor Mrs Hood took the Chair and the Chairman, Councillor Kenney, left the meeting.

---

\* 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 Committee considered the use of the Market Square as part of the Stone Farmers' Markets on 1st May 2021 and 5th June 2021 to help support the return of the Market to the High Street. The item required consideration because Market Square is currently rented out for use by The Lounge, an adjoining bar and restaurant.

The Committee expressed its desire to support the long awaited return of the Farmer's Market in the High Street, which would benefit all traders in the town as well as surrounding local businesses.

RESOLVED: That The Town Clerk is asked to inform The Lounge that Market Square will not be available for use on the Farmer's Market dates of 1 May and 5 June 2021.

Upon the conclusion of the item Councillor Kenney returned to the chair.

**GP20/378 Welcome Back Fund**

The Committee considered a letter (circulated with the agenda for the meeting) sent by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to the Chairman of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) regarding the sharing of Welcome Back Fund allocations received by principal councils with town and parish councils in their area. Stafford Borough Council had been allocated £121,848 from this Fund.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk is asked to advise Stafford Borough Council that it would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Borough Council on the use of the Welcome Back funds in the Stone area and to ask that it considers passing some of the funding to the Town Council, as strongly encouraged by the Secretary of State.

**GP20/379 Stafford District (B) Payphone Consultation**

The Committee considered a British Telecom consultation seeking views on proposals to remove telephone boxes in Stone after research had shown that the payphones were no longer regularly used.

An email from Stafford Borough Council had been included with the agenda for the meeting, along with a spreadsheet detailing the locations of the telephone boxes and a BT notice offering information on kiosk adoption.

The Chairman informed the Committee that there was just one telephone box listed in the Stone parish which was new style and located on the Lichfield Road (near to the Three Crowns Public House).

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk advises Stafford Borough Council that the Town Council has no objections to removal of the payphone but asks whether British Telecom would consider putting the kiosk to an alternative use.

**GP20/380 Parish Council Workshop – Invitation**

The Committee considered an invitation from Stafford Borough Council to a Parish Council Workshop on the topic of communication and how best to engage with residents. A copy of the invitation had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting.

---

\* 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.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council expresses (to the Borough Council) the preference for the Parish Council Workshop to be arranged on Tuesday 27 April 2021 at 6:00pm and that Councillors: R. Kenney, J. Powell and R. Townsend would attend.

**GP20/381 Town Council Payments**

RESOLVED: To note the list\* of Town Council payments made by the Council during the period 1 to 28 February 2021.

**GP20/382 Update from Working Groups:**

**Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**

A summary of the content of the meeting had been given by Councillor Mrs Hood earlier in the agenda.

**Stone Area Parish Liaison Group**

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that the next meeting of the Liaison Group would be held tomorrow (14 April 2021).

**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 Working Group was currently in the process of setting a suitable date for the next meeting.

**Heritage Centre Working Group**

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that the first meeting of the Working Group had taken place on site. The Group had accessed the fire station (which was not yet ready to be handed over) and had met with several possible new external members of the working group.

The Chairman invited Councillor Leason to give the names of potential group members which included the Managing Director of Joules, a retired school teacher and local historian, the author of The Staffordshire Encyclopaedia and other work, an expert on the Trent and Mersey Canal and owner of a railway and canal museum.

The Committee suggested appointing a member with a strong commercial and marketing background and it was acknowledged that the services of a professional specialist could be employed as necessary.

Councillor Leason advised the Committee that the County Museums Officer would be recommending a member that had skills in modern technology, relating to uses in a modern heritage centre setting.

Councillor Mrs Hood said that she had been asked to contact a teacher who had a great interest in culture and heritage and was waiting for a reply on whether they were interested in joining the Working Group. She asked the Committee to bear this in mind.

---

\* 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.

Councillor Mrs Davies asked to be considered as a Town Council member of the working group and the Chairman requested that the item be added to the agenda for the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee.

RESOLVED: That the following external (non Councillor) members are co-opted to the Heritage centre Working Group:

- Steve Nuttall (Managing Director at Joules Brewery)
- Steve Booth (Retired School Teacher and local historian)
- Tim Cockin (Author of The Staffordshire Encyclopaedia and other works)
- Teresa Fuller (Expert on the Trent & Mersey Canal and owner of a railway and canal museum)

**GP20/383 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 although no meeting had taken place, he was able to share an update from the Trustees.

Age Concern had continued to offer assistance to members of the public, despite the office being closed over the period of the lockdown. The answerphone goes through to the Stone Helpline which in turn passes potential clients back. The Age Concern team is continuing to offer support with attendance allowance and carers allowance claims. There were plans for the office to open after Easter but it wasn't known when the usual activities (hospital transport, coffee mornings and lunch club) could recommence.

**Stafford & Stone Access Group**

No report was invited or given but a meeting of the Access Group had been due to take place in April.

**Stone Common Plot Trustees**

Councillor Kenney confirmed that no meeting had taken place.

**Stone Community Hub Liaison Group**

Councillor Powell advised that no meeting had taken place.

**SPCA Executive Committee**

Councillor Green was not available to provide a report.

**CHAIRMAN**