

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 2 November 2021

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

Officers: Mr L. Trigg and Mrs T. Williams

**ABSENT:** Councillors: Mrs K. Dawson (on Mayoral Duty), M. Green, J. Hickling and S. Walley

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### **GP22/101**    **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors: Mrs K. Dawson (on Mayoral Duty),  
M. Green, J. Hickling and S. Walley.

### **GP22/102**    **Declarations of Interests**

None

### **GP22/103**    **Requests for Dispensations**

None

### **GP22/104**    **To receive the report of the County Councillors**

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

The Chairman invited Councillor Mrs Hood to address the Committee.

#### Fallen Trees in the River Trent

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that a tree had come down and was lodged underneath the old Walton Bridge. She has met with the Environment Agency who are planning to remove it when the water level reduces. The Stafford & Stone Canoe club will use the cut timber to shore up the river bank.

Councillor Mrs Hood has been assured that there is no danger to the bridge as the foundations are sound.

Another tree has come down in the river on Crown Meadow which will be left for wildlife as there is no danger of it moving position and causing an obstruction.

#### Traffic in the High Street

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that she had spent a lot of time in the High Street on Saturday, noting the safety risks caused by motorists travelling through the town. Only one bollard was installed in Mill Street leaving a large gap allowing access to vehicles. The Police have visited the High Street and approached a number of motorists.

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Councillor Mrs Hood informed the Committee that she had met with County Highways to discuss the possibility of an extension to the pedestrianised zone times to make the area safer for shoppers.

Traders have been invited to complete a tick box survey giving their views on what they would like to see happen. Taking account of loading and unloading requirements is an important consideration.

Councillor Mrs Hood said the road sign at the top of the High Street needed to give a clearer message to motorists.

#### Library Opening at Walton Priory Middle School

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that she had been invited to Walton Priory Middle School to the reopening of the library and had invited the Deputy Town Mayor to cut the ribbon with her. She said it was a delight to see the young children.

#### Meeting with Children

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that on Monday 18 October she had been invited to the 'Voice Project' where she had been delighted to meet a number of looked after children. It had been incredible to hear them talk about their lives as fostered children, their pathway through education and what they wanted to do when they left school.

Councillor Mrs Hood informed the Committee that there was a desperate shortage of foster carers and asked Town Councillors to spread the word.

#### Afghani Children and Families

Councillor Mrs Hood said that donations to Afghani children and families in Staffordshire can be made through a Just Giving page which is easily found through Google.

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

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

#### **GP22/105 To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

The Chairman invited Councillor Fordham to address the Committee.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that the subjects on which he was intending to speak were all covered later in the agenda.

#### **GP22/106 Representations from Members of the Public**

The Chairman invited the Town Clerk to brief the Committee on the procedure for receiving representations from members of the public.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that two people had made requests to speak at the meeting and each had a time slot of five minutes. At the end of their presentations there would be no response or questions from the Committee and speakers should take no further part in the meeting (other than as observers).

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Mr Andy Osgathorpe

Mr Osgathorpe advised the Committee that he wished to comment on the planning and design implications for the latest Westbridge Park Destination Park proposals.

Mr Osgathorpe referred the Committee to the changes from earlier proposed plans and expressed concern that the new design may not be a good idea due to issues related to anti social behaviour, flood risk, repositioning of the play facilities and the size of playing fields.

Mr Osgathorpe advised the Committee that whilst supporting the concept of destination parks to attract people to our town, Stafford Borough Council's policy on sports provision appears to be doing the opposite, causing an exodus of teams and supporters to playing fields outside of town. He said that there was a need to honour commitments to facilitate and develop community facilities like the sports courts, sports halls and Astro facilities at Alleyne's Academy. He also raised concerns about the provision of another car park.

A full copy of Mr Osgathorpe's address is attached to the signed minutes of the Council.

Mrs Susan Crookshank – Chair of Governors at Alleyne's Academy

Mrs Crookshank advised the Committee that she wished to comment on Stafford Borough Council's broader Leisure strategy as she believes the new strategy will have a significant negative impact on sports provision in the town.

She referred to the changes since the 2016 strategy related to sports provision at the school and their negative impacts on the school and community.

The School warmly welcomes the Borough Council's investment in the town but believes more could be achieved. The sports centre has enormous potential with extensive football pitches, large sports hall, squash courts, free parking and a large MUGA (which at Alleyne's is 3 netball pitches) but more could be done with the swimming pool building converted to a sports hall or a multi-studio complex.

Mrs Crookshank advised the Committee that she is asking that the Borough reinstate funding for the new astro pitch and not divert section 106 sports money to the park and to work with the school to redevelop the swimming pool as a sports centre. She hoped Stone Town Council would support this request to protect sport in the Town.

A full copy of Mrs Crookshank's address is attached to the signed minutes of the council.

**GP22/107**     **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 5 October 2021 (Minute Numbers GP22/079 – GP22/100), be approved as a correct record.

**GP22/108     Minutes of Sub-Committees**

- a) Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee held on 19 October 2021 (Minute Numbers TTP22/018 – TTP22/025), that the draft minutes be noted and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number TP22/024 be adopted.
  
- b) Environment Sub-Committee held on 19 October 2021 (Minute Numbers ENV22/014 – ENV22/020), that the draft minutes be noted and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number ENV22/018 be adopted.
  
- c) Management Sub-Committee held on 19 October 2021 (Minute Numbers MAN22/011 – MAN22/014), that the draft minutes be noted and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number MAN22/014 be adopted.

**GP22/109     Redevelopment of Westbridge Park**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Carolyn Trowbridge, Stafford Borough Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Leisure Portfolio; and Robert Simpson, Head of Operations at Stafford Borough Council to the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised the Committee that she had planned to speak about the Westbridge Park proposal but not the wider leisure strategy on this occasion.

She said that it was fantastic to see the Leisure Centre fully open and parks and green spaces appreciated for their health and wellbeing benefits. While covid and its legacy will be with us for some time we can now look forward to continuing with the plan to create an excellent destination park in Stone for the local community and visitors.

The budget which has gone through Cabinet is £1.5 million and should be sufficient to create something worthy of this beautiful green space between the river and the canal with access to the towpath and close proximity to town. The last destination park delivered in the borough ran to the cost of £400,000 and was received extremely well by the local community.

The consultation has now ended with 182 responses. The vast majority of which thought the indicative plan to be good or excellent. There were good points made including one about a walkway around the outside having 200m markers. This feature has been delivered at other parks and is well used by all ages.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised the Committee that she wanted the people of Stone to own the park, to feel part of it and for it to be theirs. She said it also needed to be sustainable and retain the natural beauty and tranquillity in some of these areas. The plan has to fit the needs of the people of Stone.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge said that she had read through all the paperwork back to 2014. The 2018 plan is very similar but the play area was further back which was liked by some but not by others. There were requests for more CCTV and toilet

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facilities and for the play area to be visible from the road. Due to the anti social behaviour on this site she thought it prudent to incorporate all of these asks.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge also requested that the site be kept as open as possible, making the protection of the wildlife a priority with inclusivity for all.

She said that she was hoping to be going in the right direction. Keeping an events space was important to Stone, making the project challenging. The biggest challenge is the weather and ground conditions and she has asked for hydraulic modelling to be carried out so that the effects of extra hardstanding can be understood.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised the Committee that the next step was to work through the consultation comments. She said she was eagerly awaiting the Town Council's representation as they were more important than any other because they represented so many people in Stone.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge talked about the design features of the Plan. She said the sunken garden by the side of Marks and Spencer is something which has never been done before. She said seating would be positioned along the canal side and an outdoor gym at the back. All car parks will be upgraded (canoe club and scout club). A Woodland area and nature play trails could be beautiful for children. A wheeled sports area would lead to the cycle path, there would be team play and a toilet block. All children's play will be kept together for parents to be able to monitor children of different ages.

There will be a main events entrance with other pedestrian entrances with planting.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge and Mr Robert Simpson took questions and noted comments from Town Councillors

**What was the rationale for moving the position of the play areas towards Stafford Road (rather than accepting option C)?**

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised the Committee that a lot of consultation comments had raised the issue of anti social behaviour, questioning the reason the play areas had been positioned further back. She said the park will never be locked up and will not have gates. Anti social behaviour is a big issue and plenty of CCTV coverage will be introduced.

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge said the plans are subject to change and there will be a process of assessment and amendment. Once approved by full Council on 23 November with the agreed spend of £1.5 million, the project will go to tender and then through the planning process. Further consultations will take place at that time.

When the project goes to planning it will move from being an indicative plan to a final plan.

**Over ten years ago disabled wooden adventure areas were removed from Westbridge Park. These were never replaced even though the money was available. Where has previous \$106 money gone?**

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised the Committee that the destination park project was scheduled for completion by 2023 but no one knows exactly when it will be finished. She said she was unable to talk about the wider historic issue as she hadn't been a Cabinet member for very long. However she gave assurances that S.106 money has stayed in Stone.

**What is the point of having a footbath pitch that isn't to FA standard size?**

Mr Simpson advised the Committee that a number of pitches don't meet FA Standards but pitches don't have to meet the standard to be used and enjoyed.

**The Festival Committee and the Food and Drink Committee are concerned about the event space and their considerations must be taken into account before the plan is finalised. The Stone Festival and the Food and Drink Festival deliver tremendous community events and attract a large number of visitors to Stone.**

Mr Simpson advised the Committee that he had been in touch with Richard Stevens over many weeks and access to the site was a key consideration. The Borough Council supports those events and will continue to support them in the future. Access will not affect the playing field.

**The Town Council were told the new leisure centre would be delivered before M&S but it was the opposite way around. There should not have been a need to sell land at Tilling Drive to plug a hole in the finances.**

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge said she would be here to connect with the Town Council but was unable to comment on what had happened in the past.

**Orienteering marker posts should be installed to provide training for orienteering. They could link to the one kilometre run with turnaround points. Attract interest along the canal side and installing markers. 1.7km all the way around.**

This idea was acknowledged as a good one. The Borough Council are in contact with Stone Master Marathoners Running Club.

**The proposals for Westbridge Park are fantastic but it is disappointing that sports provision cannot be delivered at Alleyne's Academy. The Leisure Centre provides a gym and a swimming pool but the Borough should secure funding to develop a multi sports centre with 3d pitch, badminton and other racket sports. Not to do this would let a huge proportion of the townspeople down.**

**How can we guarantee the safety of young people using the park when the festival will be bringing huge HGV vehicles through the area where they play? Has a risk assessment been undertaken? Can the entrance to the park be changed?**

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised the Committee that the event entrance and road will be a lot safer to drive on and will be a surfaced road. Green areas will be reinforced and vehicles coming on to the site will not put children risk. Full risk assessments will be undertaken to ensure there is no risk.

**Careful consideration needs to be given to the canoe club car park. Last Saturday 248 vehicles were parked on this very small car park.**

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The Canoe Club would like the opportunity to develop their own car park.

Borough Councillors will be consulted on the number of car parking spaces, looking at charges and disabled spaces to ensure they are not limited by design.

**Car parking charges feel like a loss rather than a gain.**

Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised the Committee that the first two hours may be free with a nominal fee after that. The fees will increase after 4 to 5 hours to prevent commuter/long stay parking.

**Is the £1.5million locked or will it increase to take on additional costs?**

Approval hasn't been given by full Council yet. The Cabinet has agreed to put money aside and this decision will be considered on 23 November. There will be no additional money as the Borough Council has commitments to other projects.

**Why is all of the available money being spent in Stone rather than outlying parks such as Whitemill? Many of the smaller parks are in a dilapidated state and the Borough Council should have a rethink.**

The Borough Council's strategy is to develop destination parks and move to green space at other smaller parks. Equipment will be maintained but not replaced at the end of its life. Work with community to look at how the park can continue.

**Are there plans to install a crossing on Stafford Road?**

The roads outside the boundary of the park are not included in the project. Councillor Mrs Trowbridge advised consultation with County Councillors on this.

**Are there plans to plant more trees?**

Yes there are plans to plant more trees.

The Council concluded that most of the proposal content will be welcomed with two areas of concern. Access to heavy vehicles needs to be safe and Festival events must work comfortably within the footprint/space.

Before leaving the meeting Councillor Mrs Trowbridge and Mr Simpson were thanked for their presentations.

**GP22/110 Westbridge Destination Park Consultation**

The Committee considered a Stafford Borough Council consultation inviting views on the redevelopment of Westbridge Park.

An email from the Borough Council with a link to the Online Survey had been issued with the agenda for the meeting. An accompanying poster detailing the transformation plans had also been enclosed.

The Committee noted that the Borough Council had approved an extension for the Town Council's comments to be submitted on 3 November (after the consultation had closed).

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A written proposal was distributed at the meeting (attached as an appendix to these Minutes) and the Committee was asked to consider whether its content should be submitted as the Town Council's response to the consultation.

The Committee agreed that the following amendments be incorporated into the proposal:

- That the Borough Council's objectives for the Park include 'safety of the public' (first paragraph).
- That Alleyne's Academy is written in full (second paragraph).
- That the Town Council 'urge' the Borough Council to 'continue' working productively with organisations (third paragraph).
- That the Town Council asks for a development time table for the project (fourth paragraph).

RESOLVED: That the form of words circulated at the meeting be submitted as the Town Council's representation on the Westbridge Park consultation with the additional amendments agreed.

#### **GP22/111 Engaging with Young People**

The Committee considered the membership of an 'Engagement with Young People Working Group' which had been recommended by the Management Sub-Committee (Minute Number MAN22/014).

The following documents had been attached to the agenda:

- Councillor Mrs Dawson's Youth Council Research Summary
- Councillor J. Davies' Youth Involvement Notes

A copy of the Protocol for the Appointment of Student Advisors in Association with Ringwood School, and NALC publication 'Whatever, yeah?' Had been attached to the electronic version of the agenda.

RESOLVED: That the following Members be appointed to the Engagement with Young People Working Group:

Councillors: Mrs L. Davies, Mrs K. Dawson and ex-officio members of the Council.

**The Committee resolved to suspend standing order 4.25 to allow the meeting to continue beyond the one and a half hour time limit.**

#### **GP22/112 Stone Heroes Awards**

The Committee considered the report\* of the Town Clerk setting out the Town Mayor's proposal regarding the Stone Heroes Awards Scheme.

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

The Chairman invited the Town Mayor to address the Committee.

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The Town Mayor advised the Committee that the report was straight forward and outlined in detail the Heroes Awards idea and how it would be executed, with costs.

RESOLVED: That the Committee supports the Stone Heroes Awards Scheme.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agrees a supplementary estimate of £600 for the current year, with an addition of £1,300 per annum added to the budget for future years.

**GP22/113 Town Council Payments**

RESOLVED: To note the list\* of Town Council payments made during the period 1 to 30 September 2021.

**GP22/114 Update from Working Groups:**

**Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that no meeting of the Steering Group had taken place.

**Stone Area Parish Liaison Group**

Councillor J. Davies informed the Committee that the Stone Area Parish Liaison Group met on 27 October 2021 and representatives had attended from Eccleshall, Barlaston, Swynnerton, Stone Rural, Chebsey, Standon, Sandon, Hilderstone and Yarnfield. He thanked the Town Clerk for his input which everyone benefits from. The Group discussed the First Access Group and various matters including transport for the over 16's attending school in rural areas; the only one of two education areas in England who are not facilitating the filling of empty seats on buses.

An update was given on the Heritage Centre and planning and the Borough Council's disregard for Neighbourhood Plans.

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Liaison Group was a very useful forum that enabled discussion on a range of common issues.

**Heritage Centre Steering Committee**

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that a meeting for Council members of the Steering Committee was in the process of being arranged for next week. They have five designs for the Heritage Centre to discuss and costs will go to the full steering committee and the General Purposes Committee.

**GP22/115 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 the Annual General Meeting of Stone ATC would be held on 9 November 2021.

**Age Concern Stone & District**

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that there had been no meeting.

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### **Stafford & Stone Access Group**

Councillor Kelt advised the Committee that there had been no meeting.

### **Stone Common Plot Trustees**

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that he had attended a meeting with Councillor Davies and there was discussion on repairs that were needed to the lock keepers house.

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

Councillor Mrs Hood and Councillor Mrs Davies had attended a meeting of the Stone Community Hub.

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that lots of changes had taken place and the Hub had reported on its healthy financial state. It is in the process of electing a chairman and a treasurer. Things are ticking along nicely.

### **SPCA Executive Committee**

Councillor Green was not available to provide a report.

**The meeting was adjourned and then reconvened after the open session of the Planning Consultative Committee meeting and the confidential section of the Town Council meeting had taken place.**

### **GP22/116 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 items of business.

### **GP22/117 Confidential Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Confidential Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 5 October 2021 (Minute Numbers GP22/079 and GP22/100), be approved as a correct record.

**CHAIRMAN**