

Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 5 September 2023

PRESENT: Councillor J. Davies in the Chair, and
Councillors: J. Battrick, A. Best, L. Davies, K. Dawson, J. Hood, J. Metters, J. Powell
and R. Townsend

Officers: L. Trigg and T. Williams

ABSENT: Councillors: A. Burgess, I. Fordham, T. Kelt, B. Kenney, R. Kenney, P. Leason,
A. Mottershead, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft

At the start of the meeting the Town Mayor, Councillor J. Davies, was elected to take the chair (for the meeting) as neither the Committee Chairman nor Vice-Chairman were able to be present.

The meeting was opened, immediately adjourned and then reconvened after the Planning Consultative Committee meeting had taken place (to allow additional time for the Committee Chairman to arrive (after his commitment at a Borough Council meeting)).

GP24/075 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: A. Burgess, I. Fordham, T. Kelt, B. Kenney, R. Kenney, P. Leason, A. Mottershead, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft

Where a reason for absence is given, this reason was approved for the purposes of Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

GP24/076 Declarations of Interests

None

GP24/077 Requests for Dispensations

None

GP24/078 To receive the report of the County Councillors

County Councillor Jill Hood

The Chairman invited Councillor Hood to address the Committee.

Boundary Commission for England County Division Consultation

Councillor Hood emphasised the importance of this consultation and asked Councillors if they would contribute their opinions.

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that Sir Gavin Williamson, currently MP for South Staffordshire, had been adopted as the Conservative Party candidate for

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the new constituency of Stone, Penkridge and Great Wyrley for the next general election. Great Wyrley was already part of his South Staffordshire Constituency.

Highways

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that she had met with the Highways team to talk about the town including installation of yellow lines and the repair of potholes. She said that a further meeting with Highways officers had been arranged and the outcome of a discussion about the High Street would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee. Road closures on Sundays is one item that will be put forward.

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that traders had been invited to take part in a consultation on the times the High Street should close in the morning and open in the evening; the results of which would also be reported back to the Committee.

County Councillor I. Parry

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

GP24/079 To receive the report of Borough Councillors

The Chairman invited Borough Councillors to address the Committee.

Councillor Powell reported on an Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee meeting where the Borough Council's plan to address a backlog in the processing of planning applications was discussed.

GP24/080 Representations from Members of the Public

None

GP24/081 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 1 August 2023 (Minute Numbers GP24/057 – GP24/074) be approved as a correct record.

GP24/082 Minutes of Sub-Committees

RESOLVED:

- a) Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee held on 15 August 2023 (Minute Numbers TTP24/009 – TTP24/016), that the draft minutes be noted, and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number TTP24/016 be adopted.
- b) Environment Sub-Committee held on 15 August 2023 (Minutes Numbers ENV24/012 – ENV24/020), that the draft minutes be noted, and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number ENV24/020 be adopted.
- c) Estates Sub-Committee held on 15 August 2023 (Minutes Numbers

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EST24/008 – EST24/014), that the draft minutes be noted.

GP24/083 Engagement with Young People

The Committee considered the report* of the Engagement with Young People Working Group which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting.

The following documentation (first circulated in November 2021) was enclosed with the agenda for the meeting for the information of new Town Councillors: Councillor Dawson's Youth Council Research Summary, Councillor J. Davies' Youth Involvement Notes, Protocol for the Appointment of Student Advisors in Association with Ringwood School, and NALC publication 'whatever, yeah?'

The Chairman invited Councillor Dawson to address the Committee.

Councillor Dawson advised the Committee that her proposal to encourage engagement with young people had come about from her speaking to young people and identifying through research that they would like to contribute their views on local issues.

The Committee expressed its support for structured arrangements for young people to be involved in the work of Local Government and discussion on issues affecting the town. The programme would provide access to the views of this hard-to-reach demographic, promote involvement in voluntary projects, support self-development and channel proactive and good civic behaviour.

The Committee considered how the Town Council could develop the initiative, looking at whether engagement with the young should be integrated into the Town Councils existing structure, a parallel structure or other relationship sought.

The Chairman and Town Councillors congratulated Councillor Dawson on her report, appreciating the work she had done behind the scenes and her qualities to take the project forward.

RESOLVED: That the Engagement with Young people concept is supported in principle and that the Working Group is asked to develop a detailed scheme, incorporating consultation with local schools, before bringing back to the Committee a further report.

GP24/084 Review of Staffordshire County Council Divisions

The Committee considered a Local Government Boundary Commission for England consultation on the draft recommendations for new divisions, division boundaries and division names for Staffordshire.

A draft recommendation report, draft recommendations map and summary of the draft recommendations had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting. A link to the review documentation on the Boundary Commission's website had also been provided.

The Town Clerk reminded the Committee that the first stage of the review (the original consultation) had been considered on 7 March 2023 (Minute Number GP23/183) when the Committee resolved that the whole of Stone town should fall in one County division.

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The Town Clerk said the Commission had responded to the point (also made by other consultees) confirming that Stone Urban had too many electors for one councillor (and too few for two) if it was to have an acceptable level of electoral equality. The inclusion of the whole of Stone Town in one County Electoral division would create an imbalance that would lead to Stone's underrepresentation at County level.

The Committee agreed that moving Walton North back in to Stone Urban was a good thing but expressed disappointment that Aston Lodge (on the other side of the railway line) had been moved out as a result.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council responds to the Boundary Commission Review of Staffordshire County Divisions as follows:

The Town Council is grateful that Walton North has been brought back into Stone Urban, which is a positive and welcome step, but is disappointed that the area of Stone located beyond the railway line (including Aston Lodge) has been moved into Stafford, Trent Valley. Town Councillors understand the reasons for this move but ask that the matter is considered again at the next County Division review.

GP24/085 Nominations for SPCA Executive and AGM arrangements

The Committee considered an invitation to nominate a representative to stand for election to Staffordshire Parish Councils Association's Executive. It was noted that the election will take place at the Association's AGM on the evening of Monday 30 October 2023 (with a closing date of Friday 29 September 2023 for nominations).

RESOLVED: To nominate Councillor Tom Kelt to stand for election as a representative to the SPCA Executive Committee, subject to his agreement (as he was not present at the meeting).

GP24/086 Heritage Centre

The Committee considered an update from the Town Clerk on the Heritage Centre project.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the building work was complete apart from one or two minor points including noise in the ventilation system.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that a Heritage Centre Manager had been appointed and the postholder had been given a provisional start date of Monday 9 October 2023.

GP24/087 Members' Motion under Standing Order 4

Councillor Jill Hood

I ask the Council to consider the enclosed report and:*

a. Ticket Office Issues

I propose that the Council send a letter to Network Rail decrying the ticket office closures and reduction in service and ask the company to look at all current uses and users of ticket offices and explain how they will deal with

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each instance when the office and staff are no longer available.

b. Reduction in Service

I ask the Council to consider the reduction in service identified in the attached note and propose that the Council engage the support of the member of parliament in sending a letter to the train operating company (TOC) asking for the previous route to Birmingham without the diversion be reinstated and retained.

If that is not possible the TOC must ensure that there is a seamless transfer to connecting services at Stafford, i.e., no delays and no platform changes.

The Committee agreed that ticket offices were an invaluable resource, particularly to people unfamiliar with digital applications, and that train services should be accessible to all and not just those who are computer literate. Network Rail say staff will be on hand on the platforms, but objectors believe they will not be equipped to provide the same quality of assistance as ticket office staff.

The view was emphasised that many people moved to Stone because of its public transport links which needed to be enhanced and not depleted to the detriment of the local economy. Direct services to Wolverhampton and Birmingham New Street should not be withdrawn as a means of managing issues caused by their popularity, and the service provider should be asked to have a rethink and if necessary, consider extending the platform at Stone.

The Committee expressed concern that the Town Council was not consulted on these important issues and removing direct services due to overcrowding was seen as a very poor reason for stopping a service.

The Committee suggested writing to Transport Members of Parliament to ask that pressure be put on the railway company to keep ticket offices open and to take action to extend and improve well used services, not remove them.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk is asked to write to The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP, Secretary of State for Transport, and Huw Merriman MP, Minister of State at the Department for Transport, to ask:

- that the ticket offices remain open.
- that direct train services to the commuter town of Stone, situated in the middle of the country, are reinstated.

GP24/088 Town Council Payments

RESOLVED: To note the list* of Town Council payments made during the period 1 to 31 July 2023.

GP24/089 Update from Working Groups:

Stone Heritage Centre Steering Group

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that he had given a report earlier in the meeting (under Minute Number GP24/086) and that the subgroup of the Steering Group responsible for the town's heritage collection had a meeting coming up in about a fortnight.

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Engagement with Young People

Councillor Dawson confirmed that the work of the Engagement with Young People Working Group had been covered earlier in the meeting (under Minute Number GP24/083).

50th Anniversary of Stone Town Council

The Chairman advised the Committee that he had written to members of the 50th Anniversary of Stone Town Council Working Group with suggestions of ideas that could be considered including working in alignment with the Heritage Centre Working Group and Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee. He said that a lot of the work of the group could be done online.

GP24/090 To receive reports from Town Councillors on attendance at meetings of local organisations and outside bodies as a representative of the Town Council

Stone Area Parish Liaison Group

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that a meeting of the Liaison Group would be held on Wednesday 1 November (face to face) at which Highways representatives would be in attendance to talk about highway repairs and maintenance. He said that Town Councillors were welcome to attend.

Stone ATC

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that a meeting of Stone ATC had been scheduled to take place on Tuesday 11 September and he would report back in October.

Age Concern Stone & District

Councillor Davies confirmed that he had attended a meeting of Age Concern Stone & District last week and was continually impressed with the good work undertaken which was appreciated by people living inside and outside of the town.

Stafford & Stone Access Group

Councillor Kelt was unavailable to give a report.

Stone Common Plot Trustees

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that the Trustees had not met.

Stone Community Hub Liaison Group

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

SPCA Executive Committee

Mr M. Green was not available to give a report.

Stone Traders Group Directors' Meeting

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place.

GP24/091 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.

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

GP24/092 Confidential Minutes and recommendations of the undermentioned Sub-Committees:

- a) Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee Meeting held on 15 August 2023, Minute Numbers: TTP24/009 and TTP24/016.

RESOLVED: To note the minutes and approve the recommendations contained in Minute Number TTP24/016.

- b) Environment Sub-Committee Meeting held on 15 August 2023, Minute Numbers: ENV24/012 and ENV24/020.

RESOLVED: To note the minutes and approve the recommendations contained in Minute Number ENV24/020.

- c) Estates Sub-Committee Meeting held on 15 August 2023, Minute Numbers: EST24/008, EST24/013 and EST24/014.

RESOLVED: To note the minutes.

GP24/093 To consider the provision of High Street Christmas trees

The Committee considered the option to purchase artificial Christmas trees, to replace the annually purchased real Christmas trees, following the recommendation of the Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee (Minute Number TTP24/016 c).

The Town Clerk's confidential report, circulated to the Tourism and Town Promotion Sub-Committee on 15 August 2023, was enclosed with the confidential part of the agenda for the meeting.

The Committee agreed that the status quo be maintained in 2023 with the purchase of real Christmas trees that were installed by Stone in Bloom and Town Council volunteers.

The Committee agreed that the provision of Christmas trees be reviewed again in 2024.

CHAIRMAN