

Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 3 October 2023

PRESENT: Councillor R. Kenney in the Chair, and
Councillors: A. Best, A. Burgess, I. Fordham, J. Davies, K. Dawson, J. Hood, T. Kelt,
B. Kenney, P. Leason, A. Mottershead, J. Powell, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft

Officers: L. Trigg and T. Williams

ABSENT: Councillors: J. Battrick, L. Davies, J. Metters and R. Townsend

GP24/094 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: J. Battrick, L. Davies, J. Metters and R. Townsend

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

GP24/095 Declarations of Interests

None

GP24/096 Requests for Dispensations

None

GP24/097 To receive the report of the County Councillors

County Councillor Jill Hood

The Chairman invited Councillor Hood to address the Committee.

Stone & District Swimming Club

Councillor Hood informed the Committee that on Saturday 23 September she had been delighted to present awards to the young swimmers at Stone and District Swimming Club's Awards Evening and felt very proud of the youngsters' achievements and enthusiasm.

Councillor Hood emphasised the importance of learning to swim and asked that Stone Town Council write to the Swimming Club in recognition of the adult volunteers who dedicate many hours of their time teaching the youngsters and getting their skills to a competent level. She also asked that the young members are congratulated for their achievements.

Highways

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that she had met with representatives of the Highways team and had expressed concern about vehicular parking in the High Street. She said the Civil Enforcement Team had apologised that the High Street

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had been omitted from their regular patrol areas list which had been rectified and future visits would be taking place and include Sundays. The Civil Enforcement Team confirmed that their last 25 visits to Stone High Street had resulted in 11 parking charge notices.

Walkway

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that she was looking into whose responsibility it was to maintain the walkway linking the A34 and Stone Business Park (near the Stone House Hotel) which was well used by cyclists and pedestrians. While waiting to find out whether it was a County or Borough Council responsibility, Lion Mike Ward had very kindly strimmed its entire length.

Walton Roundabout

Councillor Hood said she was pleased to advise the Committee that the Walton roundabout roadworks were almost finished and gave thanks to the men and women who had worked through the night in all weathers. She apologised for the disruption and thanked residents for their patience, especially in the Manor Rise area of Walton. Although not her division she had tried to help as much as possible, liaising with Highways and residents.

County Councillor I. Parry

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

GP24/098 To receive the report of Borough Councillors

The Chairman invited Borough Councillors to address the Committee.

Councillor Leason advised the Committee that he had attended the Borough Council's Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 5 September 2023.

A report had been given by Freedom Leisure on its various schemes and projects including plans to install solar panels at Stone Leisure Centre.

He said that a decision had not been taken about the venue to stage future Shakespeare productions, whether this be Stafford Castle or the Gatehouse Theatre.

A presentation had been given by Streetscene who were commended by Borough Councillors for the quality of their flower displays throughout the Borough.

A report was given on the disposal of waste food but there were no plans to start a collection scheme.

Councillor Leason advised the Committee that future charges would apply to the Westbridge Park car park which was going to become a pay and display.

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that food banks came within her communities portfolio and she would be chairing a Food Bank Forum on 11 October 2023. Having visited as many food banks as time would allow, she appealed to Councillors for donations as they were in desperate need of support with supplies.

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GP24/099 Representations from Members of the Public

None

GP24/100 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 5 September 2023 (Minute Numbers GP24/075 – GP24/093) be approved as a correct record.

GP24/101 Minutes of Sub-Committees

There were no minutes of sub-committees.

GP24/102 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 Chairman invited Councillor Dawson to address the Committee and she advised that significant detail had been added to the engagement with young people proposal.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that he and Councillor Dawson had discussed the detail of the scheme, seeking to anticipate some of the operational issues and how they may be dealt with to ensure the project was workable.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council:

- a. Adopt a Youth Ambassador scheme on the basis set out in the report.
- b. Approve a supplementary estimate of £2,500 to cover the initial setup costs of the scheme.
- c. Include an additional provision of £600 per annum in future budgets to cover the ongoing costs of the scheme.

GP24/103 Planning Application Validation Criteria Consultation

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

An email from Stafford Borough Council and a copy of the Local Validation Requirements had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting. A link to the Local Validation Requirements had also been provided.

The Committee concluded that it would not be appropriate to revisit the Borough Council's disappointing decision some years ago to decline Town and Parish Councils the opportunity to be represented in Planning Committee meetings.

The Committee acknowledged that the Planning Application Validation Criteria was based on a national template and aimed to speed up the validation process

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and reduce the number of refusals. The criteria were more clearly documented and should be welcomed.

The view was expressed that the presentation of existing and proposed diagrams/plans should be standardised, so they are displayed side by side to enable comparison.

The view was also expressed that the Planning Department were not always successful in working with applicants to make good weaknesses in applications as there were examples where applications have lapsed because the Planning Department had taken a long time to respond.

GP24/104 **Heritage Centre**

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

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the new Heritage Centre Manager, Paul Castrey, was very enthusiastic about starting his role on Monday 9 October 2023. Paul will be based in the office initially and be attending all future Heritage Centre Steering Group meetings.

He also advised the Committee that the formal handover from the builder to the Council was expected to take place next week, subject to the availability of both architect and contractor. When handover had taken place Town Councillors would be invited to visit the Centre to see the work done.

The Town Clerk reminded the Committee of its agreement (on 1 August 2023, Minute Number GP24/066) to submit an Expression of Interest for a Rural England Prosperity Fund Grant of £40 000 to support the fit-out of the Heritage Centre.

Since that time, the Town Council had been invited by Stafford Borough Council to make a full grant submission and, following on from that submission, several queries related to the application had been received.

One of those queries was related to the Town Council's commitment to still put the same amount of its own funds into the project if the grant was awarded.

In order to provide assurance to the Borough Council for purposes of assessing the Town Council's grant application, the Town Clerk asked the Committee to re-affirm its commitment to spending the current £35,000 Centre fit-out budget at the Centre regardless of any grant received. This would mean, for example, that if the full £40,000 grant requested was awarded, the fit-out budget would change to £75,000 (£35,000 existing budget plus £40,000 grant) or if the grant was reduced to (say) £35,000, the fit-out budget would change to £70,000 (£35,000 existing budget plus £35,000 grant).

RESOLVED: To re-affirm the Committee's commitment to spending the existing £35,000 fit-out budget at the Heritage Centre regardless of the level of any grant received from the Rural England Prosperity Fund, with any grant awarded added to the existing budget in full.

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GP24/105 Town Council Payments

The Committee raised a question about payments relating to gas services/supply at the Heritage Centre. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Sage report picks up payments but not income and a credit note had been received.

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

GP24/106 Update from Working Groups:

Stone Heritage Centre Steering Group

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that the Steering Group had not met.

Engagement with Young People

Councillor Dawson confirmed that following consideration of the Working Group's report earlier in the meeting (Minute Number GP24/102) her next port of call was to get in touch with the schools.

50th Anniversary of Stone Town Council

Councillor Davies informed the Committee that he had spoken to a past member of Stone Rural District Council who had cast doubt about whether the Town Council was formerly created on 1 April 1974 which was something that needed to be investigated.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the Town Council could be considered to have been formed in 1973 because there was a shadow council in existence prior to the creation of the actual Council on 1 April 1974.

GP24/107 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 taken place on 12 September 2023. The organisation was doing extremely well with a waiting list of new cadets eager to join.

Age Concern Stone & District

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that Age Concern Stone & District had not met.

Stafford & Stone Access Group

Councillor Kelt informed the Committee that a meeting took place last week where the main points of discussion included access to various retail units in Stafford which had changed. There was also a discussion about replacing the theatre seating in the side theatre which is a health and safety issue.

A toilet competition has been proposed involving a review of all toilets in the

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Borough and a prize awarded to the best one.

Stone Common Plot Trustees

Councillor Burgess advised the Committee that the Trustees had a meeting scheduled to take place next week.

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.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that new members would be elected to the Executive Committee at the SPCA AGM on 30 October 2023.

Stone Traders Group Directors' Meeting

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that meetings were programmed every six weeks, but he had no meeting date to share.

The meeting was temporarily suspended and then reconvened after the Planning Consultative Committee meeting and confidential section of the Town Council meeting had taken place.

GP24/108 **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.

GP24/109 **Confidential Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the Confidential Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 5 September 2023, Minute Numbers GP24/075, GP24/092 and GP24/093 be approved.

CHAIRMAN

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