

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

DRAFT Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of the electors of Stoke Fleming Parish held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 2nd June at 7pm

Present Parish Councillors: Struan Coupar (Chairman), Marion Holmes (Vice Chairman), David Harris, Phil Elliott, John Belli, JoJo Szota, Jack Handley, District Councillor Helen Reeve and County Councillor Julian Brazil.
Parish Clerk: Louise Soothill-Ward (Remote attendance).

1. Apologies

Alison Shaw - St Peter's Church, David Humeniuk – Covid Response Team.

Invited - Paul Girardot - Stoke Fleming Primary School, Tina Graham - Dartmouth Academy.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Chairman advised that due to Covid-19 restrictions and the cancellation of the 2020 APM there were no May 2020 minutes. The last meeting to be held was in 2019 and reports from that meeting are available from the Clerk on request.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report – Struan Coupar

Parish Meetings

The Council's year began in May 2020 with its first remote monthly meeting using the now-ubiquitous Zoom system. We, like everyone else, quickly adapted to our new “surroundings” and work on council business proceeded more or less normally, except that planning site visits were more difficult to arrange as in most cases councillors had to conduct visits individually, and it took some time to make it possible for members of the public to attend. Until that happened any parishioners who wanted to raise an issue had to do so by email and their messages were read out and discussed under Public Question Time. The 2020 Annual Parish Meeting was postponed until this year and month, and today's is the first to be held in person at the Village Hall, though with restricted numbers and in the Main Hall rather than the Ron Harris Room.

Councillor Nick Wood

Sadly, in August our longest-serving councillor, Nick Wood, died after a long illness, having given many years of devoted service to the community. Despite having been released from Rowcroft Hospice only days earlier he attended that month's remote meeting, just two weeks before his death. Nick was primarily responsible as a member of the Dart Area Landscape Access Group for bringing to fruition the new footpath from Deer Park towards Swannaton, a policy in our Neighbourhood Plan and now known as Wood's Way in his honour.

The Bird Walk

During the summer the final pieces in the plan to carry out substantial improvements to the Bird Walk, another policy in the Neighbourhood Plan, were put in place. These involved widening the footpath along half its length, laying a new tarmac surface and installing replacement fencing along both sides with tree planting and surgery, and with the cooperation of the owners of Stoke Lodge Hotel and Farwell House, who arranged some of the work at their own expense. Funding was secured utilising Section 106 funds from the development at Windward on Dartmouth Road and with the assistance of DCC Public Rights of Way and support from County Councillor Brazil and District Councillor Helen Reeve. Work began on 30th November and was completed within three weeks.

Proposed new Car Park

Now that Covid restrictions have begun to ease work has re-started on the Neighbourhood Plan policy aimed at the creation of a new car park at Mill Lane to relieve an acute shortage of available parking in the southern, older, part of the village. This was first mooted in 2006 but abandoned in 2010 although detailed planning permission had been obtained. Talks with the landowner have recently re-started and a meeting with planners from SHDC was held this morning (June 2nd) in order to work towards resubmission of the earlier planning application. This will be an expensive project, and the effort to secure the necessary funding is also under way.

Providing parking facilities for those residents who currently lack it and have to compete for the limited number of parking bays on School Road and Rectory Lane, is the key aim, but a new car park would also make things easier for those who live elsewhere in the parish but want to come to the village to use its facilities, as well as visitors from other places.

Development at Cotton

Construction of the first 65 dwellings in the new Baker Estates development at Little Cotton began in September, though work was suspended for a while due to Covid. Thirty of the first phase in the development will be affordable homes. These are being bought by Legal and General, who have also agreed to buy some of the homes that are officially "open market" properties, making the affordable percentage more than 50 percent. There will be more than 400 new homes in the development by the time it has been completed, in addition to commercial development on what is known as Employment Land along the A3122.

The Council has developed a good working relationship with Baker Estates and its input has had a significant effect on the way in which the overall plan is developing. In particular we have a focus on an appropriate style of design and use of finishes for the properties on the southern fringe of the site, visible from the AONB, and along the east side of Venn Lane.

A planning application has just been submitted for the construction of a new 69-bed care home on at the entrance to the development, close to where the new health centre will be. This £13 million development should provide around 45 full-time equivalent jobs.

All of the new development is within Stoke Fleming parish. Despite planning permission having been granted in 2014, seven years later and after construction had begun certain elements in Dartmouth Town Council proposed having the boundary between the two parishes moved in order to include Little Cotton within Dartmouth. This was despite an agreement at the time that the boundary would not be altered. My own view is that we should be ready to welcome the residents at Little Cotton into the life of our community and give them the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate what Stoke Fleming has to offer. In the long run perhaps they should be the people who have the final say, not Dartmouth TC or ourselves. We will see.

Stagecoach

From the time the Cotton development was approved it was clear that Stagecoach would have to move from the depot it had there, yet it did nothing to prepare for that day. So, after hastily camping out in the overflow car park at the park-and-ride the depot popped up in a field west of Venn Lane, outside the agreed settlement boundary proposed in the Joint Local Plan, and submitted a retrospective application for planning approval. As Stoke Fleming had already accepted that the settlement boundary should be moved to the east side of Venn Lane, which had become the new dividing line between town and country the Parish Council objected. At the SHDC planning meeting I presented our case, and Councillors Bastone and Foss spoke in support. The outcome was that by a clear majority permission was refused.

Changing Faces

With Councillors Gascoigne and Martin standing down during the course of the year, and the death of

Councillor Wood in October we welcomed John Belli, Jack Handley and Jojo Szota as replacements, all of whom have made a significant contribution to the council's work.

Deputy Chairman Hazel Smith has left Stoke Fleming to return to her original home in the West Midlands, replaced by Councillor Marion Holmes, and Ruth Adams has also retired, so we once again have two vacancies.

Our Clerk, Judy Talbot left towards the end of the year in order to concentrate on the growing demands of her other role with Sherford Community Land Trust. Judy kindly stayed on to assist new Clerk Lou Soothill-Ward settle down in the role. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen family circumstances Lou has in the past week advised us that she feels she must step down in order to have the necessary time to deal with those matters. We will be sorry to lose her.

Other Issues

Speeding along the A372 within the village and on Venn Lane where it enters the village, have long been a contentious issue, one that was made a Community Project in the Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council has now received permission to buy and install vehicle-activated speed signs that we hope will substantially reduce the problem.

A new Emergency Policy has been created by Councillors Belli and Szota, and adopted by the full Council. They are also leading work to create a community-based climate change group.

Councillor Handley, who holds the Roads and Transport portfolio, is looking at the possibility of introducing Road Warden and Snow Warden schemes.

Although Gigaclear pulled out their contract to bring full fibre broadband to the rural areas of the parish the Council pressed for an alternative contractor to be engaged. That has now been done and the contract awarded to Airband Ltd.

Overseeing planning applications remains an important element of council work. Construction of new homes on School Road by Blue Cedar Ltd was halted as a result of Covid and the company has now sold its interest to Strongvox Ltd, with whom we had a recent site meeting and have established contact. During the year the council intervened in a number of cases, including one for the demolition of an existing building at Overseas and its replacement by one of modern design. After some debate the council supported the application by six votes to two with one abstention. There was controversy also over an application to construct what was described as an annex to an existing cottage at Bugford, which councillors felt was actually a completely additional three-bedroomed home. The application was subsequently withdrawn and a new application is under consideration. The council also supported residents at Ash who objected to the conversion of an existing barn into six residential units. Again, that application was withdrawn and replaced by an application for a single dwelling, which has been approved.

5. Financial Statement

The chairman advised this was not available for the meeting and this would be circulated and published on the website in due course.

6. Neighbourhood Plan

The Chairman reported that following discussions with the partner of the late Cllr Nick Wood he and Cllrs Smith and Holmes had concluded that it would perhaps be appropriate to mark his long service on the parish council and to the community in some way. They felt that an appropriate way would be the installation of a marker at the start of the footpath known as Wood's way and the PC agreed this suggestion.

7. County Councillor's Report - Julian Brazil

Cllr Brazil reported that it had been an exceptional year with the County Council unable to meet because of the pandemic. DCC's main role had been in co-ordinating resources to support communities.

A new Head of Children's Services had been appointed after the county had twice failed in Ofsted inspections. The new person comes from an area that has had outstanding Ofsted reports.

In relation to the prolonged problems with an enforcement issue at Bay View estate, the officer dealing with that case having left the council Martine Hall has now taken over responsibility and will work to bring about a satisfactory conclusion.

8. District Councillor's Report – Helen Reeve

Cllr Reeve reported that it had been an exceptional year for everyone as Covid 19 completely turned everyone's lives upside down.

The council has managed to carry on without too much disruption to their services with many of the staff working from home. Extra pressure on their workload has been dealing with the thousands of grant applications. Many businesses in the South Hams have been able to survive thanks to these grants from the government but they did take up a lot of council time. The council has supported Fusion Leisure Centres across the area as it was felt this was very important for residents well being. The council has also been very sympathetic with those struggling to pay any council related bills by supporting these residents and working with them through this difficult time.

The summer of 2020 will not be forgotten with the extra visitors coming into the area. This caused problems with wild camping, a lot of rubbish and generally high maintenance trying to keep the South Hams as we know it. To help the hospitality trade outdoor seating was allowed for cafés and restaurants and pop up campsites were allowed for up to 56 days. Learning by last year and moving forwards a motorhomes policy has been formed (on trial) and extra locality officers have been employed to help with this influx of holiday guests which may last for several years.

The refuse collection has had problems. It was needed to change the route of the lorries in preparation for the new recycling system. Unfortunately, this did cause problems with some waste collections being missed. The new system too also has had problems. The council has been criticized for not telling the public sooner or apologising to residents over the state of the waste collection. This couldn't have happened until stern meetings had taken place between officers, executives and FCC to resolve the problems and make a plan forward. Experienced waste members of the council have stepped in to assist FCC and all stops are being pulled out to collect all waste now. There has been a hold put on delivering the remainder of new recycling boxes to households until the current problem is sorted. Change is hard but the whole idea of the new recycling was to have all of Devon with the same system and to provide more efficient recycling. In the long run it will be a much greener service helping towards climate change.

Enforcement cases have increased by 20% in 2020 which will explain the frustration of cases not being solved. More attention is being put to enforcements so we should see a better service there.

As we move out of lockdown monies are becoming available to help towns and villages recover from the pandemic and district councillors are also being allocated £3000 each to put towards worthy climate change and biodiversity projects within their ward.

Although the council has managed to survive covid and thanks to it's excellent financial team kept sound financially and kept services up, it is the parishioners who have been the real heroes in the last 12 months.

They have all pulled the stops out to help one another. Village shops, pubs, community groups and residents have gone beyond their duty to look out for those needing help.

It was mentioned at a council meeting what plan could be formed to address a situation like this again. We soon realised you don't need a plan because human nature kicks in, goodness spills out and everyone naturally does all they can to help each other. The council thanks residents for their terrific efforts. We now look forward to better times ahead.

Stoke Fleming Parish Church – Reverend Alison Shaw

It has been a very strange and challenging year- and- a- bit.

No one imagined as the clock struck midnight heralding in 2020, the enormity of the global pandemic, the loss of loved ones, of livelihoods and of the personal freedoms we so take for granted.

But it was a year too of a renewed sense of community , a sharp learning curve for many reasons - for example technology- who'd ever heard of ZOOM in 2019 !

Whilst we have deeply missed worshipping together in our church building for much of the time, our lives of prayer and worship continued. We prayed for you, this community, for ourselves - and - thanking God, that we have been very fortunate in the West Country , thinking about the horrific and tragic impact of the virus across this country and the world.

Church and Community together have worked hard to make life a bit brighter for people in our village - shopping, Easter eggs, deliveries, our wonderful Shop and Post Office, our lovely hotel, pub and restaurant, emergency transport, friendly phone calls, Christmas treats and presents for our children.

I think everyone within the Stoke Fleming parish should reflect positively on everything to which they've contributed and feel pleased that this is where they live.

Coronavirus Response Stoke Fleming - David Humeniuk

CRSF was established immediately prior to the initial lock-down in March last year, by a core team of five parishioners Our starting point was a Facebook group, which has functioned as a hub of information sharing and peer support. In the early stages of the pandemic it was used a great deal and was evidently valued highly, as our community adjusted to life under social distancing measures. It enabled us to identify and support individuals who were struggling with anxiety. In those early stages we shaped the ground rules of the group to ensure that it remained as inclusive and accessible as possible.

As soon as we went into the first lockdown we recruited volunteers to support parishioners who were self-isolating, shielding or stringently social distancing. All volunteers were provided with guidance on carrying out their role safely, which included appropriate use of PPE and safeguarding awareness. Postcards bearing contact details for volunteer coordinators were delivered to every home in the parish and those details have been included in every subsequent parish magazine. This will continue until we can say that the pandemic is at an end. When the roll-out of vaccinations began in Buckfastleigh we identified those volunteers who were able to offer lifts to parishioners without their own transport.

Whilst requests for volunteer support were received several times a day in the early months of the pandemic we now receive them only very infrequently.

We anticipated that Christmas 2020 would be a challenging time for many people in the parish and we wanted to respond to that. The CRSF team coordinated the village advent calendar, with a different house putting on a festive display for each day of December leading up to 25th The CRSF core team joined forces with the

Community Kitchen team to provide a practical response to those in need. Under the banner of Christmas Together we launched a fundraising campaign. The CRSF team focused upon those households facing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic and were able to buy presents and provide supermarket vouchers for families in need. The success of our fundraising was such that we have a surplus, which the CRSF and Community Kitchen teams have agreed will be used as the starting point of a parish charitable fund.

The pandemic has been a challenging experience for us all. The 'same storm, different boats' analogy has been apt, as the experience of the pandemic has been widely varied for each of us, according to our personal circumstances. The privilege of being involved with CRSF has been in witnessing how Stoke Fleming is a community in which so many individuals have been willing to lash their boats together, ready to give, to share and to support one another.

The meeting was closed at 7.25pm.