

MINUTES FROM THE ORDINARY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING ON 14.3.24

Present: Cllr Mrs Hurdle (Chair), Cllr Coote (Vice Chair), Cllr Mrs Alder, Cllr Byrne, Cllr Mrs Finney, Cllr Mrs Harnett, and Cllr Rayson plus four members of the public. Invited guests were:

Victor Kelly and Mike Allen from the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association. (SPCA)

49/24 To receive apologies for absence and to approve reasons for absence: Borough Councillor Cllr Mrs Aspen sent her apologies because she had another meeting. Her apology was accepted

50/24 To receive Declarations of Interest on any item on the agenda: there were no Declarations

51/24 To receive Applications for Dispensations under the Localism Act 2011: there were no applications.

52/24 To adjourn the meeting for public participation:

Resident 1 questioned why the parish council is not updating the parish plan and wondered what was happening about the Neighbourhood Plan. He also said that he was worried that, because there was an item which read: "To consider what to do about the fact that a member of the public thinks that it is okay to come to a parish council meeting to discuss salaries" that the council is not going to make it clear what the Clerk's salary is. At this point Victor Kelly of the SPCA said that no-one is obliged to reveal their salary if it is below £50,000 N.B. The Clerk's salary is below £50,000 per year.

Resident 2 thanked Cllr Rayson for organising the clearance of the overgrown pavement outside The Old School House. She also mentioned the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

N.B. The Clerk was responsible for getting the overgrown pavement outside the parish council field, cleared.

53/24 To agree the minutes from the ordinary council meeting on the 10th January 2024 and from the extraordinary council meeting on the 15th January 2024: it was RESOLVED to accept both sets of minutes. PROPOSED by Cllr Byrne. SECONDED by Cllr Harnett.

54/24 To consider earmarking some reserves going into 2024/25: The Clerk explained why a surplus of funds has arisen and the parish council debated the merits or otherwise of earmarking some reserves according to the Clerk's suggestions. The following reserves were earmarked:

£200	For the erection of ROSPA-approved signage on the field particularly concerning the play area and the area where there are a lot of rabbit holes, after each area has been delineated
£4,000	For traffic –calming devices i.e. a speed indicator device plus paying a lengthsman to move it around. Also discussed was the possibility of erecting entrance gates on the parish boundaries which welcomed people but also mentioned the appropriate speed limits. The Clerk to research costs and liaise with Hixon and Weston
£1,000	For community engagement

Other factors emerged from the discussion:

- There is a fund that County Councillor John Francis could use towards traffic-related projects
- We could have a look at the UK Share Prosperity Fund also. (recommended by Victor Kelly)
- Apart from a speed indicator device and entrance gates, the parish council should also be looking at a review of Stowe Lane. Cllr Rayson could approach Cllr Francis of the SBC after the parish council has composed a letter to him first. For this the pc needs to liaise with Hixon Parish Council. The letter should request a Traffic Review of Stowe Lane and Station Road and that part of Drointon Lane which is within the village.

55/24 To discuss arrangements for the next parish council newsletter which needs to be created and delivered BEFORE the Annual Meeting of the Parish on Wednesday 29th May because some of its contents are time-critical: the Clerk advised that the two items that are time-critical are two pull-outs – one concerning a scarecrow competition and the other concerning residents nominating Local Heroes.

N.B. The deadline for articles to go to the Clerk is Wednesday 24th April

56/24 To consider updates on past parish council decisions / resolutions and to consider deferred items:

24/24 To consider adopting the “Agenda Item Request Form”: it was thought that the form as it exists at the moment is too complex. It was RESOLVED to hand it over to the Employment Committee to discuss it and simplify it. PROPOSED by Cllr Mrs Hurdle. SECONDED by Cllr Coote.

57/24 To discuss detailed arrangements for the Annual Meeting of the Parish on Wednesday 29th May 2024: The Chair made it quite clear that everyone should be invited and the Clerk said that unless specific invitations went out AS WELL, it would make it difficult from the catering point of view. We intend to have a cheese and wine evening. If we want to invite certain groups to speak, for example representatives of Hazeldene House Surgery, they have to receive a specific invitation so that we know that they are coming.

After discussion it was agreed that this is the Chair’s meeting and that she can organise it as she wishes. N.B. There has been a conversation between the Chair and the Clerk after the meeting in which it was established that certain groups would have to receive a personal invitation and the Clerk will work on the names that should appear on that list.

58/24 To ratify the council’s Financial Risk Assessment: The Clerk took everyone through the financial aspects of the parish council risk assessment which was last ratified during the Annual Meeting of the council in 2023. Subsequently, the Risk Assessment was ratified by a unanimous vote

59/24 To discuss the appointment of an Internal Auditor for the financial year 24/25: It was RESOLVED to appoint Toplis Associates. PROPOSED by Cllr Mrs Hurdle. SECONDED by Cllr Mrs Harnett.

60/24 To discuss what to do about the fact that a member of the public thinks that it is okay to come to a parish council meeting to discuss salaries: it was decided that if the said member of the

public does this again he/she will be classified as a Vexatious Complainant which means that various measures will be put into place according to the adopted parish council Vexatious Complainant Policy.

61/24 To consider going on to full online banking: There was a unanimous decision to go onto full online banking. PROPOSED by Cllr Mrs Finney. SECONDED by Cllr Mrs Hurdle. The following Cllrs put themselves forward as signatories on our online account: Cllr Mrs Alder, Cllr Mrs Hurdle, Cllr Byrne, Cllr Mrs Harnett, Cllr Mrs Finney and Cllr Coote.

62/24 To consider whether the parish council wishes to have “live” news features which go on the web site under “News”: This item was deferred until the next ordinary meeting of the council on the 7th May 2024

63/24 To receive an update on the Staffordshire Rural Crime Forum: Cllr Mrs Finney said that this meeting was due to take place the next day. There are going to be a lot of speakers. Rural crime needs to be highlighted. Cllr Mrs Finney requested that the parish clerk, Mrs Sylvia Gibson, could be asked to take the minutes of the crime forum. It was RESOLVED to agree to this request. PROPOSED by Cllr Mrs Finney. SECONDED by Cllr Mrs Hurdle.

64/24 Councillor Mrs Harnett and the Clerk to report back on the all-day SLCC webinar on Community Engagement: as the time was already 9.45 p.m. by this point, it was suggested that Cllrs could read the report already submitted.

65/24 To receive a report by the Employment Committee: Cllr Coote read out the report which said that it had been thought that this report should be confidential but since no names were mentioned, it was decided to read it out in the open meeting. However, as a response to the report one councillor acknowledged that the Councillor who had had a complaint against him/her must be herself. (This is a complaint that the Clerk has brought against the conduct of one Councillor towards her). She then went on to try to defend herself twice and was stopped by the Chair on the grounds that previous opportunities had been given to her to bring forward evidence in order to defend herself and she had failed to do so.

Since the parish council had been unable to solve this complaint due to a lack of evidence submitted from the afore-mentioned Councillor, it was RESOLVED to refer this whole matter to the Monitoring Officer. PROPOSED by Cllr Mrs Finney. SECONDED by Cllr Coote. The vote for this was unanimous.

At this point Victor Kelly from the SPCA responded to what he had heard and he mentioned the sanctions that can be used if a complaint against a Councillor is upheld. This is why he had attended the meeting – to make these sanctions clear and also to talk about the role of a Councillor in public office. He mentioned that a council has a duty of care towards its employee(s). The only way that a Cllr can be barred from serving on a parish council is because of his / her behaviour.

The complaint that the Clerk has made about the behaviour of one Councillor is now going to be escalated into a grievance so must be submitted to the Monitoring officer (MO). If the MO finds that the Clerk’s complaint can be upheld then sanctions can be brought against the Councillor concerned. If those sanctions are not adhered to then the Councillor can be banned for six months after which time he / she will no longer be deemed to be a Councillor.

66/24 To note the correspondence which has come in:

Various communications from a resident about his relationship with his neighbours	A communication from Richard Turner who is the developer who has put in an application for a solar farm at Lower Farm. He wants to talk to the parish council
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In response to Richard Turner's letter one Cllr said that this parish council has already made its mind up concerning the application. It was RESOLVED that we simply do not want developers to come and talk to the parish council. PROPOSED by Cllr Mrs Finney. SECONDED by Cllr Mrs Harnett.

67/24 To note the latest Financial Statement: since this item was simply to note the statement and since it was late, the Clerk recommended that Cllrs go away and read it and come back to her if there is anything that they do not understand.

68/24 To revisit the following item from the 28th February agenda:

44/24 To make a decision as to whether Stowe-by-Chartley Parish Council will take part in the Best Kept Village "Community" Competition(BKVC) and, in more general terms, have a greater community involvement: on the 28th February 2024 it was decided that the parish council would submit the application for the competition. It was RESOLVED to overturn that decision, even though the parish council support the BKVC '24 group.

N.B.1 It was possible to overturn this resolution because four Councillors had signed a proposal to revisit this item in view of fresh information that had come to light. There is a facility to do this under the Standing Orders of the Council

N.B.2 A BKVC '24 working group has been formed and there are three parish councillors in that group – one of whom is the group leader. The Clerk wishes to state that no less than six out of the seven Councillors have been and continue to be involved in the work of this group, plus the Clerk.

69/24 To approve this month's payments: It was RESOLVED to accept the payments. To see the payments please consult the agenda for the 14th March which can be found on the parish council web site: <https://stowe-by-chartley-pc.gov.uk>

70/24 To note the date of the next meetings and events:

15.3.24	Rural Crime Forum, Amerton Farm	7.5.24 Annual Meeting of the council at 7.00 pm
27.3.24	Cllr training on working in the cloud	7.5.24 ordinary mtg of the council at 7.30p m
24.4.24	Deadline for articles to the Clerk	29.5.24 Annual Meeting of the Parish Cheese and Wine from 6.00 p.m. All are welcome

The meeting finished at 10.15 p.m.