



# Stoke by Clare

## Parish Council

### Minutes of a Meeting of Stoke by Clare Parish Council held at 7.30pm on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at The Barn, Ashen Lane, Stoke by Clare

#### Present

##### Parish Councillors:

J Blake James (Vice Chairman, in the Chair))

J Kiddy

R McKenny

E Smith

P Vincent

##### Also present:

Councillor N Clarke

Councillor M Rushbrook

One Parish resident

Judith Dignum

West Suffolk Council

West Suffolk Council

Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

**Apologies for absence:** Cllrs G Dadd and K Nichols (Stoke by Clare Parish Council), Cllr B Bennett (Suffolk County Council) and Cllr K Richardson (West Suffolk Council)

#### 1. Chairman's Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed those present and apologies for absence were received.

#### Suspension of Standing Orders (7.32pm)

Upon the motion of the Chairman, duly carried, Standing Orders were suspended to allow public questions and the receipt of reports.

#### 2. Receipt of Reports and Consideration of Issues Raised by Members of the Public

##### Reports

The Council received with thanks reports from Cllr Bobby Bennett and from Cllrs Nick Clarke, Karen Richardson and Marion Rushbrook.

The following issues arose:

- West Suffolk Council had not yet invited Parish Councils to engage with its ongoing review of grass cutting. Parish Councillors expressed concern at the standard of some of the work being carried out, particularly in relation to the churchyard and the number and quality of cuts to the playing field. It was agreed that the Council would contact West Suffolk expressing a desire to contribute to the review and asking for a likely timescale.
- There was a discussion concerning potential use of week killer by the grounds maintenance contractor. This was already on the agenda and is minuted at the point where it appeared (minute 9 below refers).

### **Issues raised by members of the public – Stoke by Clare Allotments**

The Parish resident in attendance highlighted concerns in connection with the allotments and sought assistance from the Council in resolving them. Members acknowledged the matters raised and noted that maintaining ongoing commitment from tenants could be challenging. Plans for a forthcoming end-of-season clean-up at the site were welcomed.

The following actions were agreed as a priority:

- Distribute invoices and tenancy agreements.
- Progress expressions of interest from potential tenants.
- Cllr Kiddy to encourage councillors to attend a forthcoming end of season clean-up and future gatherings on site.

### **Standing Orders re-applied (8.05pm)**

#### **3. Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **4. Minutes: 4 and 29 September 2023**

##### **Resolved:**

That the minutes of the Parish Council meetings held on 4 and 29 September 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **5. Finance and Audit**

The Cashbook was available for inspection.

##### **i. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)**

The Clerk updated the Council on progress towards completing the actions arising from the Internal Audit report for 2022/23, noting that reports on several issues would be presented at the December meeting. It was agreed that the Clerk would inform members when the AGAR had been submitted to the external auditors.

##### **ii. 2023/24 Financial Overview as at the Half-year Stage**

The Council considered a report by the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) which set out the current and forecast financial position of the Council as at the half-year stage of the 2023/24 financial year.

While forecast income was in line with expectations, Members were concerned to note a forecast overspend of £8680 at year end. This had occurred mainly due to the Council's decision to clear arrears associated with the grounds maintenance contract (minute 5iv below refers), which was a one-off cost. In addition, unbudgeted expenditure of £162.00 had been incurred due to the Council's assumption of responsibility for the defibrillator annual support contract, for which provision would be made in future years. The RFO confirmed that the overspend as currently forecast could be funded from within the General Reserve.

In considering the level of the reserves, the Council noted that action would be needed to replenish the Play Area Restricted Fund for 2024/25 as funds had been exhausted by recent expenditure on repairs to the roundabout.

Finally, it was noted that a meeting of the Finance Committee would be held soon to begin work on the draft budget for 2024/25.

The report was **noted**.

**iii. Bank Reconciliation**

The Bank Reconciliation for the period 1 to 29 August inclusive (date of the latest bank statement), indicating a net bank balance of £41,057.26 was noted by the Council and signed by Cllr Blake James as Vice Chairman of the Council. Cllr Blake James also signed the associated bank statement.

**iv. Accounts for Payment**

Accounts for payment in the sum of £8,560.95 were authorised (as set out in an appendix to these minutes), and cheques signed as appropriate.

Regarding the grounds maintenance contractor's invoice for the provision of services in 2023, the Clerk reminded Members that this was the second such invoice for payment during the current financial year. This was consistent with the Council's decision on 24 July 2023 to clear arrears accumulated over several years linked to a change in invoice timing. Payment of the first invoice (for 2022) had been agreed late in 2022/23 but presented at the bank in May 2023. Funds for this second payment would be taken from the General Reserve.

Also in relation to the 2023 invoice for grounds maintenance, the Council agreed payment in principle subject to confirmation that the number of cuts to the playing field was correctly stated (Cllr Smith to liaise with the contractor). Final settlement of the invoice would be agreed in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council and reported to the following meeting.

Noting that the printer provided by the Parish Council for the Clerk's use was out of action, the Council authorised the Clerk to research acquisition of a replacement if it proved irreparable. Any purchase would proceed subject to consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and report to the following meeting.

**6. Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

A consultation received from West Suffolk Council seeking views on a review of polling districts and polling places would be circulated to all members of the Council. Views would be combined into a single Parish Council response for submission by the deadline of 10 November.

**7. Minutes of the Bowls Club AGM**

Deferred until the next meeting in the absence of Cllr Nichols.

**8. War Memorial Maintenance**

Cllr Kiddy updated the Council on her work to identify a suitable contractor to undertake cleaning work to the War Memorial. Advising that Kedington and Hundon Parish Councils had recently undertaken similar work, Cllr Marion Richardson undertook to provide the respective clerks' contact details to Cllr Kiddy. It was agreed that Cllr Kiddy would email councillors regarding the outcome.

Members noted that work to reduce the height of the hedge to the rear of the Memorial was complete.

**9. Weed Killing**

The Council considered a proposal from the Grounds Maintenance contractor to implement the future use of weedkiller in areas which were sensitive to strimming, such

as listed structures and ancient gravestones. The aim was to improve the appearance of the cemetery. Members were generally supportive but noted that some residents may be concerned. It was therefore agreed that the proposal should be approved on a trial basis and reviewed after 12 months.

With reference to a recent incidence of excessive weedkiller use adjacent to a historic wall, Members noted the grounds maintenance contractor's comment that they were not responsible.

### **10. Village Parking**

A local resident had contacted the Council raising health and safety concerns linked to inconsiderate road and pavement parking on the A1092. The Council expressed their support for the comments, whilst acknowledging challenges due to the lack of available off-road parking. Members commented that the situation may have become more acute recently due to the success of the newly reopened pub, and news of an early-stage proposal to provide additional on-site parking there was welcomed.

Councillors agreed the following actions to address the issue:

- Production of a flyer reminding people to park considerately, for delivery to properties along the A1092 (Clerk to design)
- Seek support from the landlords of The Lion public house to encourage considerate and responsible parking (Cllr Smith)
- Contact individual residents (Cllr Blake-James)
- Submit an item for publication in the next edition of The Record

### **11. Correspondence**

**Village Sign:** Cllr McKenny updated members on progress towards completion of work to install the restored Village Sign.

### **12. Date of Next Meeting**

Agreed that the next meeting of the Council would take place at 7.30pm on **Wednesday 13 December 2023** at The Barn, Ashen Lane, Stoke by Clare, CO10 8JA: This replaces the previously agreed date of Monday 11 December.

Cllr Blake James undertook to ascertain whether it may be helpful for the Council to make a permanent move away from meeting on Mondays as this would allow The Barn to accept a new regular booking. If necessary, this would be considered at the next meeting.

### **13. Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Signed.....

**Chairman**  
**13 December 2023**

Appendix

**Stoke by Clare Parish Council  
Accounts for Payment Authorisation, 19 October 2023**

**AUTHORISED**

|    | <b>Cheque No</b> | <b>To Whom</b>  | <b>Amount £</b>  | <b>Authorised</b> |
|----|------------------|---|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | 600              | Street Cleaner - salary September 2023  | 116.28           | 19/10/23          |
| 2. | 601              | Clerk – salary September 2023   | 273.50           | “                 |
| 3. | 602              | HMRC Employer NI Contribution Q2  | 292.40           | “                 |
| 4. | 603              | SALC – payroll service, 6 months to 30/09/23                                      | 82.80            | “                 |
| 5. | 604              | Cllr G Dadd reimbursement (web hosting costs)                                     | 60.00            | “                 |
| 6. | 605              | Post Office Ltd (for Suffolk CC, Grounds Maintenance contract 2023, inv. 1246782) | 7725.97          | “                 |
| 7. | 606              | Hon A Loch Trustees – Allotment Field rent  | 10.00            | “                 |
|    |                  | <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>£8,560.95</b> |                   |

\* Approved in principle, subject to confirmation of final sum. Final payment to be agreed in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council and reported to the next meeting.