



OVER STOWEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 28th April 2021 on the Zoom platform

Please note that these minutes are draft until approved
at the 2022 Annual Parish Meeting

Present:	Parish Councillor	K Barrow (Chairman) P Tully (Vice-Chair) R Curtis B Bartlett D Peaster T Weeks
	District Councillor	J Pay

Members of the Public:

There were two members of the public in attendance – one to observe and a representative from Stowey Green Spaces

1. Welcome and Apologies

Cllr Barrow welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Caswell and Cllr Bartlett was unable to join until 7.15pm

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on May 29th 2019

Proposed: Cllr Curtis **Seconded:** Cllr Goddard

3. Chairman's Report:

Cllr Barrow started his report by thanking the Parish Council members for their input over the last two years and particularly over the last year with the pandemic impacting on all aspects of life.

When the pandemic hit, the Parish Council agreed initially to conduct Parish Council business under delegated responsibility and this worked well to ensure business continuity.

In-person meetings were held in June and July, September and October with all precautions being taken to ensure the health and safety of all. Remote meetings started in January 2021 and end after the meetings tonight as in-person meetings should be able to take place from May 17th 2021. There are calls for remote meetings to be able to continue in some way, but this is being consulted on, so we will await the Governments decision on this issue later in the year.

Cllr Curtis stepped down as the Vice-Chairman after many years of excellent service as the Chairman and then Vice-chair, in July 2020 - many thanks are extended to Cllr Curtis for all his work during his time in these roles and his continuing valued input as a member of the Parish Council.

The year was unusual to say the least and although not the normal run of business, there were many issues to deal with including numerous consultations and surveys, getting to grips with new protocols and procedures, embracing new technologies such as remote meetings, online banking and an online finance package, as well as dealing with all the usual parish business in difficult circumstances.

The Parish Council responded to the Government Planning Consultation, the new Code of Conduct consultation and discussions have been held re the bids for the upcoming change to a Unitary Authority (with either one or two authorities within that).

Projects undertaken include; the re-levelling of the land at Bincombe Green, which has been re-seeded with grass seed and wild flowers, the purchase of three dog waste bins - which have just been delivered after 15 months of waiting and the refurbishment of the old tennis court at the recreation ground to a MUGA.

There was very sad news for the parish as a whole when Cllr Morley Cavill died in September 2020. Morley was a very well-known, well-liked and very well-thought of councillor and resident of Over Stowey who is very much missed by all.

Looking ahead to the next year, with hopefully some level of normality, the Parish Council have recently welcomed a new member - Cllr Tammy Weeks who is an excellent addition, having extensive knowledge and expertise in many areas of local government and additionally, there are also a number of ideas in mind to enhance and improve the area and facilities within the parish, including;

- Work still to be undertaken at the cemetery - with the re-levelling of the ground and a tree inspection will also take place to ensure that any work that is required takes place as soon as possible
- The installation of the dog waste bins
- Looking at road safety with members of the local community (more on that in the monthly meeting)
- Considering other projects within the parish which may benefit the community with the help of funds from the Downing Legacy

With regards to the move to a Unitary Authority, the Parish Council are looking to work alongside other Parish Councils and this will develop further once decisions have been

made on how the Unitary Authority will operate and what impact this will have on Town and Parish Councils.

Cllr Barrow went on to say that he does have concerns over how the Parish Council is perceived and that comments that have been made about how the Parish Council operate have made him reflect on what has been achieved over the last 4 – 5 years. Cllr Barrow listed the following:

- Helped the Village Hall and Recreation Ground in the purchase of additional land for parking at the recreation ground
- Helped with the installation of the play area with grant applications and funds made available from the Downing Legacy and work undertaken by councillors
- New gates provided for the cemetery
- The path at the cemetery was re-tarmacked and the wall was repaired
- A defibrillator with outdoor case has been purchased and installed at the village hall
- A memorial bench was refurbished and has received very positive comments
- The village hall kitchen was refurbished to a high standard with help from funds from the Downing Legacy
- Donations requests are always carefully considered and in very many cases are awarded
- Plaques for the Downing Legacy projects have been purchased
- Annual planting by councillors of the daffodil bulbs which are made available from Sedgemoor Clean Surroundings takes place
- A grit bin and rock salt supplies were purchased for Hack Lane
- The issue of the damage to the leat wall which is owned by Somerset County Council has been highlighted to the Highways department. The wall is regularly monitored by the Parish Council for signs of further deterioration
- Arrangements for the fingerpost that was damaged (by a hedge cutter) to be repaired were made by councillors
- Work to re-level part of Bincombe Green to ensure the safety of all was undertaken
- Work to re-level the ground at the cemetery will take place in the autumn of (after delays caused by weather conditions and the pandemic)
- The creation of a Multi-Use Game Area (MUGA) at the site of the old tennis court took place in early 2021

Cllr Barrow considers that these achievements are something to be proud of and that areas that are out of the ultimate control of the Parish Council and where the Parish Council only has limited influence are when members of the public may feel that their voices are not being heard. One such area is planning.

Cllr Barrow suggested that; once the pandemic is at a more manageable and safer stage, that, if possible, an open meeting for members of the public to attend with a planning officer from Sedgemoor District Council would be a way to inform all of what a Parish Council can realistically do and more importantly how a decision on a planning application by the Planning Department at Sedgemoor is reached. This will be discussed at a future meeting to see what can be arranged.

4. Clerk's Report

As we all know the last year was not how anyone could have predicted. The pandemic has affected everyone in varying ways, both personally and professionally. In the case of the Parish Council members and the Clerks role, it provided an incredibly steep learning curve and a huge element of 'fire-fighting' with constant changes in guidance and procedures, the relentless bombardment of information, consultations, surveys, necessary protocols and last but not least the embracing of new technologies.

I would like to thank members of the Parish Council for their patience and understanding and for the support I have received.

However, we are still here and ready to move on as well as we can into whatever the next year holds.

The precept has not increased for the last five years and was set at £7649 for 2020/2021, this was received in two stages, one payment in April and one in September. The reserves are looking very healthy as they include £10748.17 remaining from the Downing Legacy. This will allow for various projects to be undertaken within the parish to benefit the community as a whole. There was also a VAT repayment of £316.82 received in October 2020.

All the usual expenditure was incurred on administration, insurance, grass cutting, hall rent (charged from the previous year and reduced due to the pandemic), annual SALC and SLCC subscriptions, annual ICO subscription, and training for the Clerk.

Expenditure increased on the Clerk's salary due to the increase in the hourly rate and workload with the additional tasks detailed above to ensure the business continuity of the Parish Council and the work undertaken to ensure compliance with new legislation regarding website accessibility.

Total expenditure for Over Stowey Parish Council for the year 2020/2021 was £5496.98 and total income was £8552.89

The internal audit was completed in June 2020 and no issues were identified. The Notice of Conclusion of Audit was published on the website and notice board as per the guidelines for timescales which were amended due to the pandemic to the end of November.

We will wait to see what 2021/2022 has in store – one thing is in no doubt, it will be a time of change for us all.

5. Reports from other groups

STOWEY GREEN SPACES GROUP

Formed in 2016 to maintain and care for Stowey's green spaces.

At first, efforts focused on the recreation ground and immediate surrounds, but then management of Stowey Millennium and Jubilee wood was licensed to SGSG by Somerset County Council.

We had earlier planted around 600 saplings as an extension to Stowey Millennium Wood with the help of Nether Stowey Primary School and the AONB's Quantock Countryside

Volunteers (QCV). We then turned our attention to Stowey Wood itself, an ancient wood which has probably existed in some form since 1700.

With a grant from the GQLDF and with saplings provided by the Woodland Trust we replaced sitka timber felled by Bridgwater and Taunton college students with around 500 mixed native saplings. SCC designated a new footpath through the wood which now makes a circular walk from Nether Stowey and has proved very popular during Covid-19 lockdown. We plan in the autumn of 2021 to remove about a third of the remaining sitka, hopefully using horses, to create glades and increase biodiversity by allowing light to reach the woodland floor. We plan to apply to the GQLDF for a grant to cover the cost of the work. Separately, we have secured a grant of £5,000 from the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme for interpretation panels which are now complete and should be installed by the summer of 2021.

We have been helped in management of the wood by QCV, Taunton Mid-week conservation volunteers and families and D of E students from the Field Studies Council at Nettlecombe Court. We have also been working on Stowey Mount, clearing bracken and bramble from around Stowey Castle to encourage wildflowers, removing dead and dying trees, and clearing the footpath to install a new fence.

Our most recent area of activity is in what is known as Stowey Bypass wood. That's the area immediately south of the A39, from Stogursey Lane crossroads as far as the Church Center. We have extended the existing woodland with the addition of about 50 saplings, cleared bramble and planted grass and wildflower seeds.

Although we have still not been given formal permission from SCC, as landowners, to manage the area on SCC's behalf, this has not affected our work.

SGSG also arranges a litter pick every third Saturday, covering the area from the Cottage Inn along to Halsey Cross, the verges of the A39 from Inwood as far as Stogursey Lane and in and around Nether Stowey and Over Stowey, working in liaison with SDC's Green Surroundings team. About 20 volunteers take part in the litter pick

6. Somerset County Council Report:

County/District Councillor Caswell was not able to attend the meeting

7. Sedgemoor District Council Report

It has been a challenging year for Sedgemoor District Council especially with Covid.

As meetings were being held either on Zoom or Teams a lot of training was given to ensure all councillors were able to attend meetings.

As I am chairman of Audit and Standards, I received additional training so that I could conduct the meeting efficiently and effectively.

Sedgemoor District Council along with 4 other District Councils have put a bid in for Stronger Somerset which means that there will be 2 unitary councils instead of one as proposed by Somerset County Council.

Most parishes have conducted meetings with zoom which I believe have been very effective. In my opinion this has been better especially over the winter months.

I think that during this pandemic the council has worked well as one unit and let's hope this continues.

The meeting adjourned at 7.30pm and was followed by the April monthly meeting at 8.00pm

Amanda McMurren - Clerk to Over Stowey Parish Council

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