



OVER STOWEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on
Wednesday 18th May 2022 at Over Stowey Village Hall**

Please note that these minutes are draft until approved
at the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting

Present:

Parish Councillor	P Tully (Chairman)
	K Barrow (Vice-Chair)
	R Curtis
	D Peaster
	G Goddard
	T Lindley
Somerset County Councillor	M Caswell
Somerset County Councillor	B Bolt

Members of the Public:

There were no members of the public in attendance

1. Welcome and Apologies

Cllr Tully welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Bartlett and Cllr Pay

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on April 28th 2021

Proposed: Cllr Barrow **Seconded:** Cllr Curtis

3. Chairman's Report:

Cllr Tully stated the following:

Following the meeting last week, when Cllr Barrow stepped down as the Chair of Over Stowey Parish Council, I would like to thank Cllr Barrow for all his hard work whilst undertaking the role over the last few years, which have been particularly difficult due to the pandemic. It will be good to have Cllr Barrow as the Vice-chair to support me in my new role.

Despite the pandemic, many things were achieved last year. It was still not the usual run of business as Covid-19 impacted in various ways on meetings and attendance, however this did not stop the work of the Parish Council.

Projects undertaken include:

- Signage at Quantock Lane installed following a request from a resident to ensure that post and other deliveries are delivered to the correct addresses
- The reinvention of the post box in Aley to a book and plant swap facility after a poll was taken to establish what residents would like it to become
- Removal of the sycamore tree at the cemetery as an inspection by three different tree surgeons confirmed that it will start to lose limbs in the near future. The work was undertaken by a local tree surgeon who worked swiftly and efficiently and replanted the area with laurel (to complement the existing hedging)
- Highways representatives had a site visit with the Clerk and a Councillor to establish what is needed with regards to road safety, speed limits and signage throughout the whole of the parish. This is ongoing and it will take time for Highways to undertake the processes necessary to move this forward
- Drainage issues reported to Highways and Forestry England have been scheduled for work to take place, but no dates have been confirmed to the Parish Council as to when this will happen
- The memorial bench at the cemetery was becoming unstable and needed repair. This has taken place, to a very high standard and the replacement bench is now back in the cemetery
- A new area has been agreed for the burial of ashes in the cemetery
- The archway at the cemetery has been cut back and tidied up
- The dog waste bins were installed - unfortunately, the supplier sent the wrong colour. Two have been replaced with the green bins (that were ordered by the Parish Council), however whilst waiting for the third green bin to be delivered, the remaining red bin has disappeared. Any information on what has happened to the bin will be gratefully received
- The annual daffodil bulb allocation was received and planted

We are looking ahead to the next year, with hopefully a greater level of normality than we have seen in recent times. The Parish Council have welcomed a new member - Cllr Lindley who is an excellent addition, having extensive knowledge and expertise in planning and additionally, has been a Parish Councillor previously whilst living elsewhere.

There are also several 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
- Supporting the Village Hall and Recreation Ground Committee with various projects

- Consideration of other projects within the parish which to benefit the community with the help of funds from the Downing Legacy. There are a few ideas which are being looked into and further details can be found within the minutes of the meetings

With regards to the Local Government Reorganisation and the Unitary Authority vesting day being April 1st 2023, the Parish Council are waiting for information on how the Local Community Networks will work and what services the Parish Council may consider taking on once details on how they will be devolved (and if there will be any funding) are made available.

We 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.

So, another busy year ahead and many changes will take place as from 2023/2024. I am confident we will adapt and hope that the new local government administration will allow us as a small parish to undertake more activities, more easily, to benefit all our residents.

4. Clerk's Report

As we started to come out of the main restrictions, meetings returned to being in-person and Parish Council business resumed in almost normal circumstances.

With regards to the precept, this again remained at the level agreed for the last six years and was set again at £7649 for 2021/2022, this was received in two stages, one payment in April and one in September. The reserves are looking healthy as they include the £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 were also VAT repayments totaling £582.70 received over the financial year.

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 additional tasks undertaken with regards to the new Unitary Authority, the election being brought forward by one year and a full review of policies and procedures.

Total expenditure for Over Stowey Parish Council for the year 2021/2022 was £9540.58 and total income was £9676.81.

The internal audit was completed in June 2021 for the financial year 2020/2021 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.

Looking forward to the year ahead, we will wait to see how 2022/2023 progresses and particularly with regards to the preparation for the change to a Unitary Authority in April 2023.

5. Reports from other groups

STOWEY GREEN SPACES GROUP

See Appendix (i)

6. Somerset County Council Report:

Cllr Caswell reported that the new authority has been formed and will take over formal control on April 1st 2023. County and District Councils will continue to operate until that date.

The elections were hard fought but now they are over, work will continue to benefit the county and local communities within that, with councillors attending Town and Parish Council meetings.

Committees are being formed at County Hall and training is being undertaken.

Cllr Caswell concluded by stating that he will continue to stand up for the community.

7. Sedgemoor District Council Report

The District Council AGM will have been held and much of the meeting will have covered levelling up (particularly for Bridgwater and Cheddar).

Many meetings are taking place.

More information is to follow regarding the formation of LCN's

The first council meeting will be held on May 25th and will result in the creation of more committees.

The meeting adjourned at 7.30pm and was followed by an Extraordinary General Meeting at 7.45pm

Amanda McMurren - Clerk to Over Stowey Parish Council

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Appendix (i)

STOWEY GREEN SPACES GROUP (SGSG) ANNUAL REPORT

THROUGHOUT 2021-2022 SGSG'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY HAVE INCLUDED STOWEY CASTLE MOUNT, NETHER STOWEY RECREATION GROUND AND SURROUNDS, NETHER STOWEY A39 BYPASS WOOD, STOWEY MILLENIUM WOOD AND DIAMOND JUBILEE EXTENSION AND STOWEY WOOD ITSELF, AS WELL AS LITTER PICKING IN AND AROUND BOTH VILLAGES EVERY THIRD SATURDAY OF THE MONTH.

SGSG DEPEND TOTALLY ON VOLUNTEERS, FROM OUR VILLAGES, THE AONB'S QUANTOCK COUNTRYSIDE VOLUNTEERS, THE TAUNTON MID-WEEK CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS AND FAMILY GROUPS AND DUKE OF EDINBURGH STUDENTS FROM THE FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL AT NETTLECOMBE COURT. WE HAVE REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE QUANTOCK HILLS AONB, NETHER STOWEY PARISH COUNCIL, SEDGEMOOR DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CLIMATE EMERGENCY TEAM, SOMERSET WILDLIFE TRUST'S "TEAM WILDER," QUANTOCK ECO AND FRIENDS OF QUANTOCK. WE ARE GRATEFUL TO EVERYONE FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND FOR ALL THE TIME AND ENERGY THEY PUT IN, WITH PARTICULAR THANKS TO QUANTOCK LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME (QLPS) NETHER STOWEY PARISH COUNCIL AND THE SOMERSET FUND FOR GRANTS RECEIVED.

ON CASTLE MOUNT THE FOCUS OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF SEASONS HAS BEEN ON FOOTPATHS AND FENCING, CLEARING BRACKEN AND CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR WILDFLOWERS TO FLOURISH. A NEW INTERPRETIVE PANEL HAS BEEN INSTALLED, DESIGNED BY TERENCE SACKETT WITH INPUT FROM NIGEL PHILLIPS AND WITH FUNDING GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY THE QUANTOCK LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME.

ON THE A39 BYPASS WOOD WE FINALLY SECURED RECOGNITION FROM THE COUNTY COUNCIL THAT THEY OWN THE LAND AND THAT THEY ARE HAPPY FOR US TO PLANT AND MAINTAIN SAPLINGS THERE. THERE ARE AROUND 70 NOW PLANTED AND DOING WELL.

AT THE ENTRANCES TO THE RECREATION GROUND, WE HAVE INSTALLED INTERPRETIVE PANELS, CARRIED OUT MAINTENANCE WORK, BUILT COMPOSTING STRUCTURES AND PLANTED WILDFLOWERS.

IN STOWEY MILLENNIUM/DIAMOND JUBILEE WOOD AND STOWEY WOOD WE HAVE INSTALLED INFORMATION PANELS. THE MILLENNIUM WOOD HAS RECEIVED LIMITED ATTENTION OVER THE PAST YEAR, APART FROM CLEARING SOME OF THE MULCH MATS AND PINS FROM SAPLINGS PLANTED IN 2012 – SOME OF WHICH ARE NOW 20 FEET TALL - AND INSTALLING BIRD NEST BOXES. IN STOWEY WOOD SGSG VOLUNTEERS HAVE INVESTED HUNDREDS OF HOURS OF WORK, HELPED BY VARIOUS VOLUNTEER GROUPS. IN RECENT YEARS WE HAVE PLANTED OVER 300 TREES, CHANGING WHAT WAS A DARK MONOCULTURE OF SITKA SPRUCE, PLANTED BACK IN 1970, INTO 28 DIFFERENT NATIVE SPECIES. BOTH STOWEY WOOD AND THE MILLENNIUM WOOD ARE LICENCED TO SGSG BY SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL TO BE MANAGED "FOR THE BENEFIT OF WILDLIFE AND THE COMMUNITY" - AND FAIR TO SAY THAT THE CIRCULAR WALK FROM THE RECREATION GROUND, VIA THE MILLENNIUM WOOD AND STOWEY WOOD HAS BEEN A GODSEND DURING COVID 19. A PATH WHICH WAS LITTLE KNOWN AND LITTLE USED IS NOW POPULAR.

IN OCTOBER 2021 SGSG ARRANGED FOR ANOTHER 50-ODD MATURE SITKA TO BE REMOVED, THIS TIME USING HORSES. WE WERE FORTUNATE TO RECEIVE A SUBSTANTIAL GRANT FOR THIS WORK

FROM THE GREEN RECOVERY CHALLENGE FUND, FACILITATED BY IAIN PORTER, DEVELOPMENT MANAGER AT THE AONB. PARTICULAR THANKS ARE DUE TO REMKE AND RICHARD PLOWRIGHT AT PLOWRIGHT ORGANIC FARM FOR ALL THEY DID TO PROVIDE ACCESS, GRAZING, FEED AND FACILITIES TO THE HORSE-LOGGING TEAM.

TWO OF THE THREE WEEKS WHEN THE HORSES WERE IN ACTION WERE WET, WHICH CAUSED A NARROW QUAGMIRE WHERE THE PEDESTRIAN FOOTBRIDGE STOOD. VOLUNTEERS FIRST FACED THE CHALLENGE OF REMOVING THE BRIDGE AND LATER THE BIGGER CHALLENGE OF TRYING TO PUT IT BACK, WITH MIXED RESULTS. BUT THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN STOWEY WOOD HAS BEEN BRAMBLE CONTROL, BOTH TO GIVE THE SAPLINGS A BETTER CHANCE OF SURVIVAL AND TO ENCOURAGE GROUND FLORA. WALKERS WILL BE IMPRESSED WITH THE WAY IN WHICH THE TREES ARE BURSTING WITH LIFE.

LITTER PICKING IS AN UNFORTUNATE NECESSITY. SGSG-RUN LITTER PICKS HAVE CONTINUED, EVEN DURING LOCKDOWN, COVERING THE AREA FROM THE COTTAGE INN, ALONG THE A39 FROM INWOOD TO THE STOGURSEY TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND STOGURSEY LANE AS WELL AS IN AND AROUND NETHER STOWEY AND OVER STOWEY. WE MEET AT STOWEY RECREATION GROUND PORTACABIN AT 10 AM ON EVERY THIRD SATURDAY OF THE MONTH. LITTER BAGS ARE COLLECTED BY RICHARD INCE AND TAKEN TO PARSONAGE FARM, OVER STOWEY, FROM WHERE THEY ARE COLLECTED BY SEDGEMOOR DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CLEAN SURROUNDING TEAM.

WHAT NEXT?

MORE OF THE SAME, ALTHOUGH WE CAN'T CONTINUE TO TAKE ON MORE - AT LEAST NOT WITHOUT MORE SUPPORT. THAT SAID:

- WE'LL CONTINUE WITH THE PERIODIC LITTER PICKS IN WHICH MANY HELPERS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED
- WE'LL CONTINUE TO DO WHAT WE CAN ON CASTLE MOUNT
- IN THE AUTUMN WE'LL LOOK AT THINNING STOWEY MILLENNIUM WOOD, WHERE NOT ONLY ARE TREES LOOKING STRAGGLY BUT THERE IS A LOT OF ASH, WHICH MAY BE SUFFERING FROM DIE-BACK. SOME WILL BE FELLED AND THE TIMBER SOLD
- THE TIMBER FELLED IN STOWEY WOOD HAS ALREADY BEEN EARMARKED FOR SALE
- WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE QLPS AND SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL'S RIGHTS OF WAY TEAM ABOUT HOW BEST TO IMPROVE THE PATH AND REPLACE THE FOOTBRIDGE IN STOWEY WOOD
- WE'RE HOPEFUL THAT THE COUNTY COUNCIL WILL AGREE THAT A SMALL PATCH OF LAND AT NEW STOWEY FARM CAN BE PLANTED IN THE AUTUMN TO COMMEMORATE THE QUEENS PLATINUM JUBILEE. ALTHOUGH NO DECISION HAS YET BEEN MADE, WE ARE IN POSITIVE TALKS WITH CHARLIE FIELD, SCC'S STRATEGIC MANAGER FOR CORPORATE PROPERTY
- OUR OVERALL VISION IS FOR A NATURE-FRIENDLY CORRIDOR STRETCHING FROM STOWEY ROCKS ORGANIC FARM FOR MUCH OF THE WAY TOWARDS OVER STOWEY AND THE QUANTOCK HILLS. DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THIS ARE TAKING PLACE BETWEEN THE COUNTY COUNCIL, AONB, FIPL, WOODLAND TRUST AND FARMERS ABOUT HOW BEST TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN. PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN PUT TO SCC AND SGSG AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES WILL BE INVITED TO PLAY THEIR PART WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT.