



OVER STOWEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on
Wednesday 17th May 2023 at Over Stowey Village Hall**

Please note that these minutes are draft until approved
at the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting

Present: Parish Councillor P Tully (Chair)
R Curtis
D Peaster
B Bartlett (from 6.40pm)
G Goddard
T Lindley (from 6.55pm)

Somerset Council Cllr B Bolt

1. Welcome and Apologies

Cllr Tully welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Caswell.

There was one member of the public in attendance re item 5.

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on May 18th 2022

Proposed: Cllr Curtis

Seconded: Cllr Goddard

3. Chairman's Report:

Cllr Tully stated the following:

- Support given in securing grants from the National Lottery and Sedgemoor District Council (as was) for the Platinum Jubilee event which was organised by a group of local residents and in contributing to the day with the purchase of the memorial glasses. Thanks again to all involved in making such a memorable occasion for the parish
- Online banking is now in place
- Contribution towards the cost of providing an electricity supply at the recreation ground for maintenance and events purposes and also for the MUGA
- Re-leveling of the cemetery took place during this financial year
- In conjunction with the Over Stowey Village Hall and Recreation Ground Committee, a grant was obtained for the replacement of the Village Hall roof

- Chairmans Award - the Parish Council nominated a member of the community who has been an active member of the parish and throughout Somerset. This was successful and the nominee attended the awards ceremony in February with Cllr Lindley
- Successful application for remaining RLT2 funds for the OSVH&RC Committee to replace an existing piece of equipment that was no longer fit for purpose with a new climbing tower
- Green dog waste bins now all in place and collections are being made
- Noticeboard provided for the MUGA with link to YouTube clip re the tennis net
- Two grit bins provided for the parish - one at Bincombe Green and the other at the Marsh Mills crossroads
- Would like to express on behalf of the Parish Council, thanks to Cllr Goddard for the distribution around the parish of the small grit bags
- £500 donation request from the OSVH&RG Committee towards replacement fire extinguishers (as required by law) granted by the Parish Council
- Highways issues are still ongoing and a follow up visit has been made - it is hoped that this financial year will see at least some of the suggestions for improving safety being implemented by the Highways Department
- The blocked drains at Water Lane are scheduled to be cleared within the next 3-4 months. Currently no work is scheduled to clear the blocked drains at the bottom of Hack Lane. This is being followed up regularly
- The annual daffodil bulb allocation was received and planted at Bincombe Green – thank you to Cllrs Barrow, Curtis and Lindley for this

There are also several ideas in mind to enhance and improve the area and facilities within the parish, including:

- Continued support of the Village Hall and Recreation Ground Committee with various projects
- Consideration of other projects within the parish which may benefit the community with the help of funds from the Downing Legacy
- Plans are in place to see if the possibility of taking over the verge cutting service is something that the new Local Community Networks will be able to support. The Parish Council will ask for this to be an agenda item at the first meeting - date to be confirmed

With the new Unitary Authority now in place, there will be changes, but these are likely to take time. The Parish Council are hoping that the new local government administration will allow us as a small parish to undertake more activities, more easily, to benefit all our residents.

Thank you again to all those who work so hard in whichever way for the parish. It really is very much appreciated.

4. Clerk's Report

In our first 'business as usual' year since the pandemic, it was good to meet under normal circumstances without having to adhere to any restrictions. This made life a lot easier for everyone.

With regards to the precept for 2022/2023 this remained at the level agreed for the last seven years and was set at £7649 for 2022/2023, this was received in two stages, one payment in April and one in September. The reserves are still looking healthy as they include the £7993 remaining from the Downing Legacy. This will allow for various projects to be undertaken within the parish to benefit the community as a whole. The cemetery account ended the year with a balance of £7025.64. There were also VAT repayments totaling £509.14 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), donations and grant, annual SALC and SLCC subscriptions, annual ICO subscription, and training for the Clerk. Other costs included the purchase of two grit bins for the parish and the dog waste bin collection service.

Expenditure increased on the Clerk's salary due to the increase in the hourly rate and workload with additional meetings undertaken regarding the new Unitary Authority. Total expenditure for Over Stowey Parish Council for the year 2022/2023 was £16674 and total income was £12564

The internal audit was completed in June 2022 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.

With the new Unitary Authority – Somerset Council now in place, it is hoped that positive changes will be made and initiatives that the Parish Council wish to take on can be progressed. Further updates will of course be made at the monthly meetings.

5. Reports from other groups

STOWEY GREEN SPACES GROUP

SGSG AGM CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023

Another successful year for Stowey Green Spaces Group. I thought last year that it would be hard to match our achievements in the previous year, but I believe that we have done so.

Activities:

What do we do? We carry out tasks in and around the Stoweys, roughly every second Tuesday afternoon. We litter pick every third Saturday of the month (see summary report). We hold a very informal meeting once a month to take stock of where we are

and where we're going. We carry out management work at Stowey Castle Mount, around the recreation ground, along the Bypass Wood, in Plot 173 (Secret Garden), in Stowey Wood, Stowey Millennium Wood and various extensions, including the new Platinum Jubilee wood, and on some of the footpaths.

We couldn't do what we do without our volunteers, whose willingness to turn up even in the most inclement weather never ceases to amaze. We have had invaluable support from the QLPS, the AONB and Parish Council.

What have we done since our first AGM, in May 2022? We have installed new interpretive panels at Castle Mount, the recreation ground and at the entrances to Stowey Wood and Millennium Wood, thanks to a grant from the QLPS and Terry Sackett's superb design work. Our work to remove bramble and bracken from Castle Mount contributed to Nether Stowey Castle being removed from English Heritage's "At Risk" register.

In July we cleared Stowey brook, from the fire station to the cemetery entrance. The brook had become clogged with vegetation and posed a flood risk. We were thanked for our efforts by Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue. We hadn't seen many wasps until then but came across three nests in the stream bank (Martin Trout discovered the biggest one and was stung 9 times)! Volunteering sometimes comes with risks! In August we removed the plastic tree guards and canes from the hedge alongside Over Stowey playing field.

On 4 October we cleared nettle and bramble from alongside the cemetery wall and planted primroses.

In November we cut back encroaching holly on the footpath from New Stowey farm to South Lane.

On 26 November we invited the community to bring saplings to plant in a new Platinum Jubilee extension to Stowey Millennium Wood. Almost 50 people turned up. Some planted trees to mark special occasions or memories. There are now 120 mixed saplings, almost all coming into leaf. We had previously done a lot of work to tidy the site, but the only cost associated with creation of the new wood was £80.00, kindly paid by NSPC, to "top" the paddock in advance. Meanwhile volunteers cleared the site of all sorts of things, arranging for bits of agricultural machinery to be removed, selling abandoned batteries and fencing wire, taking away bags of rubbish and burning an old and dilapidated chicken shed!

We litter-picked after Party in the Park, purchased and planted an oak tree on Nether Stowey school playing field and planted three crab apple trees in the Secret Garden. Taunton's Mid-Week Conservation volunteers have helped us with bracken clearance on

the Mount, with bramble clearance on the Bypass Wood and with removal of a fence which separated the new Platinum Jubilee Wood from Millennium Wood.

After the success of the Platinum Jubilee planting our attention turned to the adjacent quarry area at the entrance to New Stowey farm. The QLPS offered us 200 mixed native saplings and the AONB were able to provide guards and support stakes so we decided to go for “guerrilla” planting in the quarry area too. The site was a mix of bare mud and clay, brick and building rubble, but on 17 January we planted almost 300 saplings there, helped by QLPS – funded “Young Somerset” apprentices. On 9-10 February the same apprentices began “thinning” the Millennium wood to allow more light to the woodland floor. I’m sure that you will have seen the results, which are uplifting.

I should mention litter-picking. Paul Brierley, our Vice-Chairman, has done a wonderful job of matching routes with pickers (see report).

We have taken on responsibility for some footpath work (after the retirement of Colin Falla), have replaced rotten steps on the path leading to Castle Mount and maintained the paths through Stowey Wood.

Our thanks to Nether Stowey Parish Council for agreeing to our bid for portacabin hire and public liability insurance.

Looking ahead. We expect to spend more time on footpaths. Somerset CC inform us that the burnt-out barn at New Stowey farm will be demolished and a new “shed” (?) erected in its place. This is currently in the hands of contractors, so the time frame isn’t known. Meanwhile a management plan for land at New Stowey farm is about to be submitted to the new Council. There is expected to be scope for SGSG involvement in turning the plan into reality on the ground. A new “Tree Strategy” for Somerset (with only 8% tree cover, we are well below the 13% national average) will be presented to the Council by the end of June.

Litter picking report for the Stowey Green Spaces AGM on Thursday 27th April 2023

I have been organising the Litter Pick of both Stoweys for the past year and believe we have achieved very satisfactory results.

We now have 37 separate routes in Nether Stowey with 20 pickers, and 13 separate routes in Over Stowey with 10 pickers.

Arrangements changed during the COVID pandemic as litter picking in groups was not possible. Our pickers began to pick their routes individually and as this was largely more convenient than assembling on the 3rd Saturday of the month to collect litter, arrangements have not changed since the end of the pandemic. Apart from those who pick on the A39 where I would be unhappy for lone working to take place, individuals now pick along routes which cover the entire built-up area of the Parish of Nether

Stowey, and most of the roads, lanes and footpaths in settlements of Over Stowey and Friarn as well as some of the adjacent Common.

Picking still takes place over the third weekend of each month and I am generally present at the Portacabin in the recreation ground either at 10:00 AM or at 12 noon to provide replacement rubbish bags, hoops, pickers, gloves and high viz jackets to anyone who needs them.

Many pickers now recycle the collections that they make in their domestic refuse but we still have the option of collecting in the bright blue bags provided by Sedgemoor clean surroundings which can be left at the Portacabin at 12 noon on Saturday where I will then take them to Parsonage Farm where Richard Ince kindly makes space available for Sedgemoor to collect them on Mondays.

The best or possibly the worst, haul was 1 month ago when we recovered 7 full bags of rubbish which were collected by Sedgemoor clean surroundings although the number can vary and the weekend following the Easter holidays resulted in just one bag being left for disposal.

Our pickers are very conscientious and indeed the main problem I have in organising the routes is where more than one person wants to cover a particular route or even worse we find that one person turns out to collect along a particular route and finds that someone else has already covered it!

I am grateful to all the pickers who turn out to keep the surroundings of our parishes clean and find myself astonished when I visit other areas and find litter in the streets and wonder how other areas can tolerate unpicked litter literally at their feet. I do ask myself why no one else is as organised as we are here.

Long may this continue!

6. Somerset County Council Report:

Cllr Bolt reported that following the change to a Unitary Authority on April 1st 2023, structures are still being arranged and there are processes that still need to be put in place.

It is anticipated that there will be a 'settling down period' of 8 – 12 months.

Regarding staffing, although some departments are operating with previous staff, not everyone is in post in all areas at this point. This is being worked on.

The meeting adjourned at 7.00pm and was followed by the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

Amanda McMurren - Clerk to Over Stowey Parish Council

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