

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CLERKS REPORT 2019/October

Clerks report to support the Parish Council Meeting held on Wednesday 10th October 2019 in Stonesfield Village Hall.

1. Parish Matters

None

2. Trees

The clerk asks for a map of all the hedgerows and trees belonging to the SPC. It is essential that all maintenance of these is monitored as we have had two fallen trees in recent months and are now heading for wintery months.

A recent Court of Appeal ruling means it is time for councils to re-examine their tree inspection regimes and it now means that SPC needs risk assessments on ALL trees that are managed by the council. The clerk also needs confirmation that risk assessments of trees around the playing field etc. (if not SPC management) have also been risk assessed.

Any trees showing as high priority for needing work will need urgent tree maintenance. An independent paid survey is a necessity and many local companies offer this including local authorities (which are often cheapest) however to do this we need to map the trees urgently.

Councils and property owners with responsibility for a substantial number of trees should be fully re-examining their tree inspection regimes (in particular for roadside trees) taking into account the size, type and location of each and every tree and the risk to both people and property in the event of a failure. Any regime that simply involves treating tree stock as a whole, essentially a “one size fits all” inspection policy with no regard to specific risk is likely to be considered insufficient.

It is worth bearing in mind that when looking at the adequacy of an inspection regime the fact that a tree appears healthy is largely irrelevant – of greater consideration is whether it is in a high-risk location. Recommendations are that inspection takes place every one to two years. Good record keeping of the reports for each tree and taking account of advices given is essential (also for insurance).

Insurers for their part may, in the light of the outcome of this claim, seek greater detail as to the inspection regime being adopted when providing cover to landowners; generally, but also with a special focus on roadside trees.

3. SAFER Working Group – Report from Cllr M Heduan

Community Speed Watch (CSW) Surveys

Surveys continue in Stonesfield all of which have been well supported by the SAFER team. Whilst no vehicles have been recorded travelling at 36 MPH or above residents have shown overwhelming support for what SAFER is doing. The sight of the SAFER team in their Hi-Viz jackets seems to have a beneficial calming effect on Stonesfield traffic.

Six CSW surveys were completed since the last PC meeting 2 will take place on 7th and 11th October. We also spent a morning observing the Charlbury team us 2 speed monitoring devices in tandem. See item 2 below on moving towards a better device.

CSW Equipment Problems

Since purchasing the recommended speed enforcement device from Traffic Technology (TT) the unit has repeatedly failed to operate in accordance the company's marketing claims. TT

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

spent 6 weeks trying to repair our unit but it was no better. SAFER has been using a loaned unit from TT on surveys but not a session goes by without the loan device falling over, doing multiple counts or losing its WiFi settings. SAFER have been offered a full refund from TT. We have also looked at an alternative product used successfully by the Charlbury CSW Team. We are looking into the costs of a more reliable alternative that meets TVP requirements for data capture. (See attached quotation from Morelock for a Speed Indicating Device)

Breakdown of costs to move from Traffic Technology Unit to Morelock SID

TT Refund = £1,995.0

Morelock SID £3,147

Windows PC or Android Tablet £200

Total Costs (inc VAT) £3,314

Additional budget required = £1,352

A44 junction with B4437

A meeting took place at the Duke of Marlborough pub on the 25th September.

Present were Ian Hudspeth, Linda Bull, Patrick Willmore, Lindsey Thornton and Mick Heduan. The concerns of Stonefield Residents were explained to IH and examples of the anecdotal comments from NextDoor were used. IH made an early statement that OCC did not have any budget for transformational schemes at the junction. PW produced a schematic illustrating some of the risks and a discussion took place on pragmatic options. IH was asked if he could produce a copy of the Risk Assessment produced to support changing the junction in 2012. He was also asked if the OCC Highways team could look at the junction today with fresh eyes and undertake a new risk assessment. IH said he would look into this but again could not promise huge changes to the layout, lighting or markings off the junction.

The meeting was considered successful in that the Stonesfield representatives raised concerns with IH who agreed to the actions referred to above. Linda Bull was thanked for arranging the meeting and getting the concerns of residents in from of the leader of OCC. Linda has subsequently provided a summary of the meeting and outcomes on NextDoor.

Blenheim Estate Transport Hub

I have written to Roger File regarding a meeting to better understand the so called 'Transport Hub' for the Blenheim Estate. After a week I rang Roger and spoke to him about our concerns regarding delivery traffic to Blenheim using Stonesfield as a delivery route. Roger explained that whilst he attended the SPC meeting recently he is not responsible for transport operations. He said he would forward my email to Alan Poole. As at 4th October I have still not been contacted by Mr Poole so I have resent my email and cc'd SPC Clerk. I will keep chasing until I have secured a meeting and can explain to SPC what this 'Hub' is all about. Key aspects I aim to cover include a) does Blenheim have agreed designation routes for deliveries that avoid Stonesfield, and b) what sustainability measures have they included in the contracts of their

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

supply chains to address road safety.

Since commencing this report Roger File has been in touch to confirm Alan Poole will contact me as soon as he returns from leave.

4. **SCT**

No update in advance of the meeting.

5. **Village Hall**

The village hall has been reminded to keep the building maintained. The clerk has asked for the village hall to confirm their maintenance plan.

6. **Children's Playground**

The clerk asks who maintains and manages the playground. Is this definitely the Playing Field Association? As a parish council we need evidence of the regular risk assessments and maintenance plan and confirmation of insurance.

7. **Playing Field Association**

The playing field committee have requested some help. They believe most other associations are funded by their parish councils. They have tried to increase revenues but are unable to cover all costs. The Parish Council is asked to discuss this. The clerk has requested a copy of the lease as the terms to understand this and until this is seen it will be difficult to make a decision on.

The clerk has looked locally for guidance and the playing fields and children's playgrounds are usually owned by the Parish Council but are leased and therefore administered and maintained by the Playing Fields Associations. The Parish council provides some funding (to be agreed in lease) and leases the facilities to the association but the maintenance, administration and fund raising is all down to a small group of local villagers.

8. **Sustainable Stonesfield / CALA Appeal**

Our solicitor explained that the process for the appeal is that a single judge in the High Court looks at the papers and acts as a sifting mechanism. It is confirmed that he has rejected the grounds of appeal. It is open to CALA to serve notice that they wish nonetheless to go to the full court to argue the matter in open court.

It is expected that they will as they have invested so much money in the project so far. CALA in turn will increase their own risk of liability for the costs of the District Council and the Secretary of State but it unlikely to be a concern to them

They have seven days in which to serve notice that they wish to proceed to the full court and our solicitor will advise of any updates.

9. **Village Tidy Up Working Group**

No update ahead of the meeting.

10. **Planning**

Applications received from WODC for this parish:

None

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

David Brown advised that there are calls for the AONB to be a National Park however an MP wants the AONB to be reviewed as he feels it's too big a meaning for the AONB. No confirmed updates but something to continue monitoring.

11. Allotments

The clerk has obtained a full up to date list of those who have an allotment and will proceed to invoice them.

12. Financial Matters:

Bank reconciliation to be circulated.

The following payments require cheque signatories and approval in the October full council meeting:

C No 102167	Castle Water	£4.21	Inv 2129509
C No 102168	David Brown expenses	£40.70	Sept exp
C No 102169	Clerk expenses	£tbc	Sept expenses
C No 102170	Clerk PAYE current	£confidential	PAYE
C No 102171	HMRC / PAYE / NI	£confidential	PAYE

The £confidential relates to PAYE. Councillors see these figures for approval during the meeting. There may be further cheques to add.

The clerk will meet with Cllr P McArdell when he is available in October to run over budgets so the accounting system Scribe can work to its full benefits. The clerk now has the budget spreadsheet.

The clerk requests that the finance committee meets in November (in a closed meeting) to plan for budget only for the precept setting. The precept needs to be signed off in January meeting at the latest and submitted to WODC.

The external auditors have queried some points on last year's audit relating to expenditure and increase on precept which the clerk is working on resolving.

Grants

The clerk is continuing to look in to updating the grant policy and hopes to bring to a meeting soon for approval in time for the next financial year. It seems that the maximum limit for any grant should not exceed £2,000 as SPC are a small local council.

Most parishes of SPC size grant £200-£500 maximum.

The clerk is attending a CiLCA training course on 8th October and grants are covered so more information will follow.

General Grant Policy Guidance

Under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Parish Council has discretionary powers to award grants to local groups or organisations for the purposes of bringing a direct benefit to the parish or its residents. To be considered for an award, applicants must apply for a grant using an application form and provide the necessary information.

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

(Grant levels are awarded in line with sized – for a parish of SPC grants would be up to £1000 usually).

Grant Considerations: Section 137 states that if the grant application will only benefit, say 10% of the residents, then only 10% of the total budgeted Section 137 monies can be granted. Grants considered will normally be 20% of the total cost of the work or project. It is expected that groups and organisations will look at accessing different sources of funding for their project alongside any application to the Parish Council Grants Fund.

To be eligible for the award of a grant under Section 137 an organisation must:

- be established for charitable, benevolent, social, cultural, recreational or philanthropic purposes.
- have a constitution, or set of rules, which defines its aims, objectives and operational procedures.
- be able to provide a copy of its latest annual accounts and/or most recent bank statement. Its accounts are to be checked and signed by a person independent of the group.
- have a bank account operated by a minimum of at least two joint signatories.

NB: Should there not be sufficient suitable applications to use up the grant fund then only the amount approved to applicants will be added to the Parish Council budget and therefore the precept. Any balance should not be carried forward to future years. Similarly, should there not be enough suitable ad hoc applications to use up the budgeted, any balance will remain unallocated and will not be carried forward.

What can be funded?

- the project should be something that makes the local community a better place in which to live, work or visit.
- it should benefit people who live in the parish.
- there must be clearly presented evidence that local people support the project and are involved in carrying it out.
- applications do not have to be from groups that already exist.
- each group may only make one application per financial year (1 April to 31 March).

Not eligible

- Support for individuals or private business projects.
- Projects that are the prime responsibility of other statutory authorities
- Projects that improve or benefit privately owned land or property
- Projects that have already been completed or will have been by the time the grant is made.

Conditions of support

The council may make the award of any grant subject to all or some of the following conditions.

Required conditions will be at the discretion of the council and take into account the organisation's individual circumstances.

The application must be made using the official application form.

Details must be provided of the extent to which funding has been sought or secured from other sources or own fund-raising activities.

Funding must only be used for the purpose agreed with the parish council and if all the monies are not spent on the items agreed, the balance must be returned.

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Funding must be spent within the financial year awarded and cannot be added wholly or partly to the organisation's reserves.

If project costs are more than anticipated on application, any shortfall must be met by the group. In order to fully understand your project or activity, parish councillors may wish to visit the project or activity prior to the project or activity commencing. They may also wish to conduct a site visit once the funded project is underway.

As a minimum, the group will write to confirm receipt of the cheque for audit purposes, or as the cheque is handed over a representative of the group will sign a form or receipt at the same time.

The need to provide evidence of expenditure (receipted invoices) to the Clerk to the Council on completion of project will be discretionary – based on the amount given and the purposes given. (If required, this evidence of expenditure should be equal to, or more than, the total of the amount of the grant detailed on application.)

Any unused funds at the end of the financial year in which the grant is paid out must be returned to Council.

You must acknowledge the Parish Council's support in all publications, publicity and annual reports.

You should show the funding awarded separately in your published financial accounts and the Parish Council should have access to your financial records, on request, where appropriate.

A representative of your organisation should give a report at the Annual Parish Meeting (held on an evening between March and May each year) on how the group spent the money and, if appropriate, how the group or project is progressing.

This is a competitive process against other bids and the quality of each bid is important.

All groups will be treated equally. If an organisation has had a grant previously, they are not guaranteed to receive financial support again but are not excluded from applying again. A fresh application will be required each time.

Whilst ad-hoc requests can be made at any time, there is no guarantee that funds will remain available.

Pension

The clerk is working with the pensions team to enrol into the pension scheme. This has progressed and we are now registered with LGPS. The clerk has a link to a pensions system and plans to do the training next week.

13. Register of Members Interests

If any Councillors are still to complete these forms and have not passed to the clerk or sent direct to West Oxon Council please do so urgently.

14. Stonesfield Playing Fields Association

The playing fields association is trying to track down a copy of the wayleave agreement with BT which the SPC signed as custodians. The clerk is trying to locate it and Gill Hill (previous clerk) has advised she has it. The clerk is awaiting this in the post still.

15. WODC Arts / Stonesfield common

The clerk has met with WODC, the current SPC plans don't seem to meet. We need to focus more on art and it has to be sustainable. The clerk will ask the sustainable art group to meet and discuss. Information plaques do not really meet 'art' in criteria. Other examples on such a small grant budget have had one individual sculpture, a sculpted bench, a mosaic created by the local school where an artist works with the children. It is an important part of the criteria that

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

the art is created by a 'professional' – an artist or sculptor who does the work as a job. People can work with them (i.e. school children, local groups) but it must be led by art and that is the focus.

16. Correspondence

The clerk has been contacted by the social club who has raised the following queries:

The hedge that runs around the small car park, Ben from the SC has trimmed up the road side as parts were 4feet into the road. People are still parking up late at night in the small car park. The hedge needs a serious cut back, the part of the hedge that backs onto the garages is very high now and is at risk on toppling over, Bens father in-law has constant problems with it pushing onto his shed and ripping the felt.

The clerk queries who this hedge belongs to? Is it the village hall? If this is not Parish Council the cost for reducing this hedge should be (needs to be) applied elsewhere.

Ben from the SC also queried:

Some of you will know Ben as the steward of the sports and social club, he is also a trustee of the playing field Association. Some years ago the parish council had a youth shelter installed on the far side of the playing field, over the last few months Ben has been concerned about the amount of youths using the shelter as a place to meet in the late hours of the day, they are meeting to drink and use recreational drugs, he has seen groups turn up in cars, not villagers, also Stonesfield and Combe youth use it for the same reasons. Ben has talked to some local kids before writing to us about what was going on as a lad from Combe was stoned outside the club. Ben has warned them to stop doing it and has advised that he will inform the police as to what is going on. Ben feels with this activity going on it reflects badly on the social club, as does the SC committee.

Ben is asking for this shelter to be removed as it's the only solution to stopping the problem, a problem caused by this shelter being there.

The clerk queries the parish councillors – does the shelter belong to the PC or the Playing Field Association? Thoughts on removal?

17. Councillor Training

The clerk strongly recommends that Councillors attend training with Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils. This not only refreshes (or gives training for new Councillors) but it keeps you up to date with Council requirements and protocol. It also allows networking with other neighbouring councils which is equally important.

OALC have a Parish Meetings course on 30th January at Woodgreen Offices, WODC, Witney – its £25 plus VAT per attendee. Its starts at 10am and is usually a full day.

Charitable Trusts and Parish Councils may be good for those involved with SUSTO / Common etc. This is on 12th Feb and is in Didcot at Didcot Civic Hall. £90 per attendee.

Roles and responsibilities for Councillors – aimed at new but I think is good for all. I have been on this 18th March – Didcot Civic Hall - £90 plus VAT.

There will be more courses including a specific Chairman's course which I would strongly recommend both the Chair and Vice Chair attend as it contains the latest important information. The date 15th July is the likely date. A little way off but worth adding to the diary.

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

SPC is a member of OALC and these courses are at a significantly reduced rate due to this.

I have ordered each Councillor a copy of 'the Good Councillor guide' which I am waiting for and will give out to you all on receipt.

18. Clerk Training

The clerk advises the council that she is undertaking CiLCA which is a recognised accredited clerk training course equivalent to an A-level. This is being funded elsewhere but will benefit this council. It is a qualification for local council officers and others working with local councils. It's a Certificate in Local Council Administration awarded at Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It can take up to a year to complete and the clerk commenced this in September 2019. The next full day training is on 8th October with a further full day course in November and December as part of the accreditation.

There are five units within the course covering the five themes:

- Core Roles in Local Council Administration
- Law & Procedure for Local Councils
- Finance for Local Councils
- Management for Local Councils
- Community Engagement

CiLCA helps awareness of the law and procedures for local councils and helps working with the planning system. It checks that management of the council's activities, its finances and community engagement. In England, a CiLCA-qualified clerk helps the council gain the general power of competence and a Quality or Quality Gold Award. CiLCA helps your council achieve standards of good practice and builds the reputation of local councils in a fast-changing world.

19. Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 13th November – 7.30pm

Calendar

Council Meetings – Stonesfield Village Hall – Wednesdays 7.30pm

11th December 2019

8th January 2020

Karen East, Clerk to the Parish Council
Email: stonesfieldpc@gmail.com