

Stonesfield Parish Council

Minutes of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING meeting held at Stonesfield Primary School on Wednesday 10th May 2023 at 7.30pm

Meeting commenced at 7.30pm

Councillors present: Cllr Simon Warr, Cllr Eleanor Bailey, Cllr Mick Heduan, Cllr Simon Powell, Cllr Jim O'Brien, Cllr Phil McArdell, Cllr Matthew Parkinson (DC), Cllr Tim Sumner (DC), Cllr Andy Graham (OCC & DC)

Others present: 6 members of public from Stonesfield parish and the clerk for the council attended.

23/01 Apologies for absence: Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr David Brown Stonesfield Gardening Club and Scouts also sent apologies but sent written reports.

23/02 Declarations of interest: None

23/03 Introduction of councillors: The Chair introduced the parish councillors to the members of public. There are currently 7 parish councillors following the May 2023 elections.

23/04 Chairman's Report: The Chairman thanked the current councillors for signing up for a further term of years for the council which is noted as a voluntary role. The Chair also thanked outgoing councillors Wendy Gould and Geraldine Lawrence for their many years of service.

Financially we have had a healthy year and have given numerous grants including grants to the Stonesfield tree planting group, Citizens advice, Neighbourhood plan group, Scouts, Chrissies Owls, Stonesfield Voluntary Network and Playing Fields Association

We have secured a grant for the Neighbourhood planning working group and superb progress has been made, thanks to all those involved in NP.

Thanks to the SAFER working group and all of their hard work particularly to Cllr Mick Heduan.

23/05 To confirm the minutes of the previous Annual Parish meeting on 18th May 2022.

The minutes of the meeting on 18th May 2022 were approved with no matters arising.

23/06 Matters arising from the minutes held on 18th May 2022 and Matters Arising.

None

23/07 Accounts for the year end 31st March 2023.

The accounts for the year end to 31st March 2023 were summarised. Details of income and expenditure and audit will be available on the parish website.

23/08 To receive reports from our District and County Councillors

Cllr Matthew Parkinson – introduced Tim Sumner who is newly elected to the district.

District working closely with Thames Water to stop pollution into the rivers.

Refurbishment of the council chamber is coming up. It will become a multi-purpose space for the community as well as for councils.

Cllr Andy Graham – contract with contractor who looks after potholes is up for review, there will be a tender process for this. It is noted there are issues with the potholes generally and the weather is not helping. Quality of repair is also noted as not being good enough. The government only provides 50% of the costs to pay for road repairs. There is a big gap in funding circa 15 million GBP so there will always be a prioritisation process for potholes.

White horse pub, Cllr A Graham does support this and commits a third of his £15,000 councillor priority fund to support the cause (£5,000) if this goes through as this community pub has worked hard, over several years. The clerk can send the form on to the pub group if they get this over the line and manage to secure the purchase for the community.

23/09 To receive reports from representatives of groups in the village who wish to report

School (Harry) – recruitment of Head Teacher has taken place this year, this has not been easy, three rounds of recruitment. In the interim for Autumn term, we had a shared headteacher and an experienced permanent head teacher has now been appointed. OFSTED section 8 inspection has taken place (very soon after the headteacher was appointed). The report is overall very positive and there are links to the report on the school website. There will be a full section 5 inspection with OFSTED within 2 years. Noted that Harry is standing down as governor after 25 years – an incredible term.

Scouts (written statement)

The Scouts remain part of the core of the Stonesfield Community. We have been running for 75 years and we are determined to be here for the next 75! Below are a few (edited) highlights for you.

- We have around 66 young people in all the sections, and a healthy waiting list. We have a good supply of willing volunteers to help with sessions, but we are running short on people willing to lead sessions. This takes some training to get to this stage, but it is more about people willing to commit to be there week in and week out. This year we had a full group camp at Youlbury in the summer and the scouts have been there again in the spring. The Cubs have been learning skills from how to mend bike tyres to how to folk dance! Beavers are outside as much as they can be learning new outdoor skills.
- The Hut remains our main focus and we are hoping work will start in the next 2-3 weeks! We have raised £129,500 at the last count, and are now pushing for the final £45k from local businesses, grants, Bingos and Duck Races. Your support has been invaluable to us, and we thank you for all you have done.
- We hope to build a hut that fits the site down our lane and makes better use of our land. We have had to clear a few trees, but this has opened up a wide areas that we hope to use for scouting activities once the hut is built. We are making every effort to keep access as open as we can while building, but are putting in contingencies to keep the public safe. As for the rest of the land, we look to repair the steps and address the 'ski slope' access to the field soon. We have asked Ian Hedges to do some work for us in preparation for the site, and we hope he may do a bit more going forward.
- Looking forward, we are having another Duck Race, a Ceilidh, a Tea tent at the BeerFest, and another Bingo. There is lots going on, and you can see all our activities on our website, Facebook or Instagram.
- I'd like to formally record my thanks to everyone who gives their time to support us, and we will all invite you to a drink in the new hut!

Stonesfield Gardening Club (written report)

We are friendly locally based club with the membership mainly from Stonesfield, we currently have a membership of 76 members. We welcome new members, and also visitors to our talks.

Membership is open to anybody who has an interest in gardening/horticulture.

We have 10 meetings a year, in the St James Centre, including a garden visit, this year it is Sezincote House and we hold a Plant sale.

We try to offer a wide and variety of talks, topics such as

“Gardening in a Changing Climate”,

“No-Dig Gardening”

“British vineyards and Wine Tasting”.

Last year the club donated £1100 to local charities.

The annual membership is £8, for an individual and £15 for a couple at the same address.

Members also receive a 10% discount on many products at Yarnton home & garden centre, Charlbury garden centre, and Freeland nursery, and are eligible for a discount card at Burford Garden Centre.

Neighbourhood Plan: report to PC AGM 10 May 2023 (Richard Morris)

- To remind people, the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Area was only designated in November 2021
- Stonesfield PC formally approved the setting up of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group as a sub-group of the PC responsible for developing an NP on behalf of the PC early 2022.
- The Steering Group meets monthly and the minutes of the meetings are available on Stonesfield online, and a report is given to the PC each month via one of its representatives. Thank you Wendy Gould for the last year.
- There is an update almost every month in the *Slate*. Archived Slates are available to view on Stonesfield online.
- At the end of March we held a public meeting in the Village Hall.
- In May we had a stand at the village fete to promote the Neighbourhood Plan.
- In the summer a group of volunteers was formed to carry out a Character Assessment of the built village. Their work is ongoing using a standard CA template.
- We have contacted three independent consultants to produce a Landscape Assessment of the whole parish in 2023, and have commissioned WH Landscape who produced the LA for the successful Cala campaign.
- The PC applied for and was successful in securing a grant of £5,696. £4,000 to fund the Landscape Assessment. £1,600 allocated to printing the survey and other material. £96 grant for hire of St James Centre towards monthly meetings.
- Throughout last year a major focus for the volunteers has been to develop a village survey to provide the evidence for the policies we will develop for the final Plan.

- In March '23, the final Household and Individual survey was delivered to every house in the village in paper form, with the hope that the majority of residents would complete it online – which they did.
- The high response rate compared to average surveys of this type (20%) was due to a well-designed promotional campaign delivered throughout March.
- 469 people completed the Household survey, approximately 60% of the total number of houses in the village.
- 699 people completed the Individual survey which represents about 52% of eligible population.
- The results are still being analysed. A hard copy will shortly be made available in the village Library and also online.
- We have organised a village meeting for June 19 to present the results of the survey and outline the next steps to residents and answer questions.
- We will meet with WODC representatives shortly to keep them informed of progress.

Voluntary Transport Scheme (Viv Kendall) – The scheme was started 15 years ago. We have 15 drivers at this time. 50-60 lifts are given per year. This is approx. 1000 miles a year but this does seem to have increased. Mostly trips are to dentists, GPs, and medical appointments at hospitals. We have managed to tap into a priority parking scheme at the hospitals. Approx. 50% of lifts are to hospitals.

As well as lifts we interact with groups at local and county level (good neighbour schemes, community first Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire community and voluntary action, participate in surveys on the need for community transport and also with National Association for banking for charities). We also take training on responsibilities of treasurers and trustees. Thanks to the parish council for the grant support.

Stonesfield Common report 2022/23 (Richard Morris)

Six willow trees along the river bank were pollarded in June last year. There are two or three more to be pollarded either this year or next. Any future pollarding needs to have better control of the waste than happened in 2022. The felled material on the meander has resulted in damage to other trees and means that it is now almost impossible to manage that area.

Ed Noble brought five cows to the Common in early October. They stayed until early January. No adverse comments from the public for having stock on the Common, and very beneficial to the grazing. There's been a significant increase in cowslips this year.

Tor grass and blackthorn continue to be the main problems on the Common, both being invasive and detrimental to the overall quality and biodiversity of the Common. Volunteers Alan Kendal, Steve Moss, Dale Morris and myself have continued to reduce the blackthorn at the bottom of the bank. We then concentrated on brush cutting most of the bank through the winter.

This spring we have had a concerted effort to reduce the new hawthorn and blackthorn saplings coming up on the top of the Common. This hasn't been our focus to date, but they needed to be controlled.

Of the 15 alder trees planted last year we have lost half a dozen, mostly due to deer and cattle. When the ground gets drier we need stock proof fencing around these trees.

Digging a drainage channel to drain the rain water that runs down the road away from the gates still needs to be completed

It has been requested that the log could be replaced at the top of the bank. The clerk will ask Blenheim.

Big Help Out (Viv) – Held an excellent event in May in the village in which there was representation from 21 of the voluntary groups in the village.

Village website (written report from Paul Bates)

Report on Village website: www.stonesfield.online

In 2023 the village website was revised to make navigation of the site easier, using drop-down menus. At the same time additional pages were created for Arts & Music, Historic Views and the Tree Planting Group.

I update the website posts at least once a week with news, events and parish meetings/information (provided by the clerk). The village diary is updated when I am receiving information and The Slate is posted monthly. Occasionally a resident or a group will send me information asking me to put it on the website. Unfortunately, this is all too rare and most of the time I have to seek out the information for the website. Some of this comes easily from articles sent into the Slate.

To ensure the information remains relevant, I remove events once they have happened but everything else remains permanently on the website.

If I feel that something very important (e.g. Neighbourhood Plan) has been posted and needs a wider audience I flag it on NextDoor with a website link.

Also, on website are several links to downloadable information pages. I check these pages periodically and update them when I find new information e.g. change of Parish Councillors.

It is possible to subscribe to receive an email update when a new post is made. To avoid bombarding subscribers these are sent out weekly with a maximum of three per week (news, events and parish meetings). 170 people continue to subscribe for this service.

I try to ensure information is up to date but welcome any corrections, there is a 'contact us' page on the website for this.

The council would like to express additional thanks to Paul Bates for his continued support with the website, keeping our information published plays a huge part in ensuring the council is compliant, transparent and able to reach out to the parish.

23/10 Resolutions / Questions: To consider any resolutions or questions (of which written notice has been given in advance)

None

23/11 Public participation

Ann & Richard - Representatives from the Stop Botley West (Solar Farm) campaign group attended to discuss the proposal. There has been a lot of discussion and news about this.

The kind of things being questioned are:

Claim about carbon coming out the atmosphere does not include offset figures in creating the solar farm. The panels will be coming from China. There are some suggestions it can take 25 years before there any offset.

At the moment only 10% solar panels are recycled so there is an issue of waste at end of use.

Local issues (impact) fields covered in solar panels. There is impact on biodiversity and the land underneath the panels. There is also issues tapping these solar sites into National Grid as there is not substation capacity. This park would need its own substation.

The big issue is the panels are going on 3500 acres of agricultural land. Is this the right time to give up agricultural land when it could be done differently – they could go on business roofs, houses etc, plenty of space for them to go elsewhere.

If it goes ahead this farm will be, by far, the largest in Europe.

There are other options to solar. Solar is very inefficient in the UK. Less than 25% efficiency. Nuclear and wind farm is more efficient. It also does not work all the time so there will still have to be a reliable back up.

Stop Botley West is not saying don't do solar it is questioning doing it on this scale, in this place, at this time.

Blenheim are contributing 80% of the land for this development and Merton College are contributing a small amount plus two farming companies.

Decisions on this will not be made local. The hearings will take place over a period of 12 months, it is a huge legal process. The planning decision and recommendation will go to the secretary of state and is the decision of one person at that level. The Stop Botley West group are trying to make as much noise as possible to stop this before that level.

The parish council and individual residents are asked to respond to the consultation – volume counts. We also ask residents to keep close to the County and District councils and to write to our MPs. *(Stonesfield Parish Councillors are also keeping up to date with news on this proposed solar development)*

23/12 Any other matters – for information only

None

Meeting ends 21:00