

STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at Stonesfield Primary School on Wednesday 3rd September 2025 at 7.00pm

Attendees: Cllrs U Rice (Chair) C Renshaw (Vice Chair), L Bate, D Brown, P Lowe and S Powell.

Other present: The Parish Clerk. 7 members of public.

25/937 To receive and accept apologies for absence: Apologies received and accepted from Cllr S Warr.

25/938 Public Participation: There was none.

25/939 Declarations of interest: There was none.

25/940 To approve the minutes of the meeting 2nd July 2025: It was **RESOLVED** to approve and sign the minutes as a true record.

25/941 Actions Register: The register was reviewed and updates noted.

- It was noted that the new bin has been installed by the shop.
- Hedge cutting at the Village Hall was discussed - the Playing Fields Committee expressed interest in undertaking this work, but risk assessments and insurance cover will need to be confirmed. This will be added to the October agenda for further discussion.
- Grass cutting contracts will also be reviewed under 'Maintenance' in October.

25/942 Planning applications: Planning comments submitted under delegated authority in August 2025 were noted. No new planning applications had been received. Planning comments submitted under delegated authority in August were noted. **(Paper 1)**

25/943 To receive reports from County and District Councillors:

1. **OCC Cllr Andy Graham report:** Apologies sent.
2. **WODC Cllr Genny Early report:** Cllr Genny Early arrived later in the meeting, having attended the WODC Overview & Scrutiny Committee immediately beforehand. She gave a verbal update, noting a presentation by an officer on redevelopment and youth work. She thanked Cllr Claire Renshaw and Julie Curran for their support in delivering the recent Stonesfield Youth Activity Day, which had been very well attended. Cllr C Renshaw reported that both young people and parents had expressed enthusiasm for a new youth club, and she confirmed that discussions with WODC officers regarding next steps were ongoing. The following points were taken from Cllr Genny Early's written report:
 - **Mental Health Summit**
I attended a Mental Health Summit hosted by WODC in July, which showcased the support available from 13 mental health organisations in West Oxfordshire. This included talks by 'Tough to Talk' who work to reduce male suicide and break the silence surrounding men's crises and poor mental health. Our local mental health charity,

Bridewell Gardens, who provide social and therapeutic horticulture in a working garden were also there. Turning Point, who have a hub in Witney, provide support for people with drug/alcohol addictions and their families. The Community Wellbeing team at WODC can provide more details of the services available locally.

- **Evenlode Catchment Partnership**

I attended the July Combe meeting by the Evenlode Catchment Partnership, who are running a 6-month campaign to investigate the impact of Combe sewage treatment works (STW). In 2024, Combe STW discharged untreated sewage into the River Evenlode for over 2430 hours. The River Evenlode is designated by Thames Water as an 'ecological high priority site'! The sewage discharges increased by 486 hours from 2023, to win the ECP's second place in the 'Top of the Poops' awards. If you would like to get involved with the citizen science to measure the impact, please get in touch. This is a really important project, to shine a spotlight on the health of our much-loved River Evenlode.

- **Salt Cross Development: Net Zero Policy**

Salt Cross is a proposed garden village, consisting of 2,200 homes and employment space, and located north of the A40 across from Eynsham. The Net Zero policy for the Salt Cross Village development has been approved by the Planning Inspector after earlier legal challenge. The policy, which aims to ensure that all buildings at Salt Cross are Net Zero carbon in operation, has been found to comply with national policy and to be 'sound' in other respects, subject to several modifications. It marks a significant achievement for the Council and places Salt Cross among the UK's leading developments in sustainable place-making. The Salt Cross Village development will form a substantial part of the housing to be built in West Oxfordshire and sets high standards for new houses to be built and run.

- **Youth Needs Development**

The role of the Youth Development Officer at WODC was created following the publication of the YNA in 2023.

The concerns of young people identified the following priority issues:

- Activities – were too far away, too expensive and they didn't have someone to go with
- Mental Health - was identified by young people as the biggest area of need
- Climate crisis – young people identified that they were concerned about the Climate emergency
- Safety – many young people reported that they had experienced feeling unsafe in their community.
- Safety - Violence Against Women and Girls, followed by Crime and Drugs were identified as particular concerns
- Employment & Education and Advice/Support/Help – were also areas of concern for young people

James Edney, Youth Development Officer, started in Feb 2025. James mapped provision across the parishes of West Oxfordshire and identified 8 wards where there was little evidence found of positive activities being available for young people. The Stonesfield & Tackley is one of these wards.

As a result, 'Have a Go' Days in Stonesfield and Hanborough have been developed in partnership with the YouMove team, as a launch activity from which to build more ongoing provision. The Stonesfield Day was held on 19th August, for families with young children in the morning, and 11-18 year olds in the afternoon. You Move ran 'Broken Bordz' (skating). Forest school, tennis, story-telling were some of the other village activities on offer. A big thank you to Claire Renshaw and Julie Curran for the organisation, posters and running of the day.

The Youth Development Officer will continue to provide support and guidance to local residents who are seeking to build on these events with ongoing activities for young people in these communities including offering support around how to engage with young people prior to the event.

- 3. WODC Cllr Tim Sumner report:** Cllr Tim Sumner reported that he had attended the youth activity day on 19th August, which was well attended and well received.

**25/944 To receive reports from Stonesfield PC working groups:
Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group: (Paper 2 – Cllr P Lowe report)**

- a) Revised Draft Plan & Residents' Feedback:** An update was provided on progress with the revised draft Neighbourhood Plan. Feedback from residents, statutory consultees and landowners has been incorporated. Councillors have had the opportunity to comment on the proposed revisions arising from the consultation and these comments have been incorporated. Key discussion points included:

- **Review process:** Agreed that the plan should be kept under review at the Parish Council's discretion, with a full review anticipated at 5 years and light-touch annual checks for changes such as compliance with legislation. The clause in the revised plan adequately covered the review process.
- **School:** Updated information from the 2024 Ofsted inspection is now incorporated, setting out the challenges currently faced by the school. Falling pupil numbers were noted as a concern but expected to improve under new leadership.
- **Airbnb/holiday lets:** Flagged as a potential issue for housing supply and will be monitored annually along with responses to the issue by local villages/towns that are more seriously impacted.
- **Aspirations:** Confirmed that while aspirations can be included, the plan is a statutory planning document rather than a wish list. Other aspirations will continue to be pursued by the Parish Council outside of the plan.

b) Local Green Spaces:

- Acknowledgement that some communication delays occurred, in part arising from inaccuracies in the Land Registry data. It was confirmed that no landowner had suffered a detrimental impact from any delay. Landowner correspondence has now been collated.
- A landowner was in attendance at the meeting and restated their objection to LGS designation. The Council restated its commitment to designating the land but agreed it should exclude the footprint of the barn in the corner of the field;

this adjustment will be actioned. A final decision will be in the hands of a Planning Inspector.

- Two sites will be removed from designation and one reduced in size for reasons set out by the NPSG.
- The Council discussed two specific sites where the NPSG had been unable to make a recommendation as there were arguments for and against. The landowners had objected to designation of both. After much debate, it was proposed that the two playing fields will be designated as Local Green Spaces in the revised draft Neighbourhood Plan, recognising their value as community facilities.

Proposer: Cllr U Rice **Seconded:** Cllr L Bate

(3 against and 3 in favour) The motion was carried by the Chair's casting vote in favour.

- It was agreed that the PC will confirm the final destinations and issue acknowledgement letters to landowners, as drafted by the NPSG.

c) Consultation & Basic Conditions Statements: These statutory documents are to be drafted by the NPSG. It was agreed to delegate approval of these documents to Cllrs D Brown and P Lowe for submission to WODC alongside the plan.

d) Timeline: The target timeline for submission to WODC (Reg 16) by end of October was confirmed.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group's revised draft Neighbourhood Plan with the amendments made above including the LGS revisions. The Chair thanked the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for their extensive and thorough work in preparing the revised draft plan. This was warmly received and Parish Council members and members of the public present gave a round of applause.

Proposer: Cllr U Rice

Seconded: Cllr C Renshaw

All in favour

25/945 Finance:

a) Payments: It was **RESOLVED** to approve the ratification of payments

Gross Amount (£)	VAT Value (£)	Payee	Details
385.92	64.32	Microshade VSM	July & August 25 hosting & IT
96.52		HMRC	July PAYE/NI
330.36		OCC pensions	July LGPS
300.00		C Carruthers	RFO Aug & Sept 2025
145.00		DS Jones	Reinstallation of Mirror
200.00		Blenheim (Vanbrugh Trust)	Allotment Rent Annual
378.00	63.00	Moore Stephens	External Audit
22.04	3.67	Vision ICT	July Emails and closing acc
13.80		Stonesfield Village Hall	NP meeting June 2025
<i>Confidential</i>		<i>K Linnington</i>	<i>Clerks Salary</i>
65.00		K Linnington	Clerks Monthly Expenses

- b) **Multipay Card:** It was **RESOLVED** to approve to apply for a Multipay Card through Unity Trust Bank in order to enable payments via PayPal in line with the Clerks delegated authority to spend on the Financial Regulations.
- c) **Clerk's Salary:** The PC noted that the Clerk's salary, NI and tax were paid in August when no meeting was held.

Proposer: Cllr U Rice

Seconded: Cllr C Renshaw

All in favour

25/946 External Audit: The PC noted recommendations/comments.

- a) Section 3 External Auditors Report
- b) Covering letter to Clerk

The external auditor reviewed the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2024–25 and gave a limited assurance opinion, which is normal for small councils. They found no major issues, but highlighted a few things we need to improve:

Website Publication: The wrong document was published under the heading “Notice of Conclusion of Audit.” It should be a separate notice, not just the auditor's report.

► **Action:** Next year, we must ensure the correct notice is uploaded alongside the signed audit report and AGAR.

Other Notes for Improvement

Internal Auditor's Report:

The internal auditor marked “Yes” for publishing documents, but since the correct notice wasn't posted, this should have been “No.”

They also marked “No” for keeping proper accounting records because the March 2025 bank statement wasn't available due to account closure.

Meeting Minutes:

We approved Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR correctly but used the same minute reference for both.

► **Best Practice:** Use separate minute references for each section to make the order of approval clearer.

Petty Cash:

We do not use petty cash, but it was still referenced in the bank reconciliation.

► **Action:** Remove petty cash from future reconciliations if it's not used.

25/947 Staff: The PC noted that all employees on a contract are contractually entitled to the new agreed pay scales following the NJC settlement of a 3.2% pay rise with effect from the 1 April 2025, backdated to 1 April 2025, without any need for a Council decision.

25/948 Clerks Report: The PC noted the Clerks report

- **Parish Councillor Resignation:** Cllr J Huband had resigned from the PC. The Chair thanked her for her time and service as a Parish Councillor.

25/949 Items to be added to a future agenda:

- **OCC Delegated Agreement Model:** To discuss concerns from a resident regarding the current state of vegetation and maintenance around the village. Gutters, verges, and areas such as Longore, Laughton Hill, Woodstock Road, and the area around the Evenlode bench.

- Biodiversity Plan/Policy: To discuss and approve the draft plan.
- Working Groups Membership and Representatives to Outside Bodies: revisit the IT policy. Review and approve a new Representative to Outside Bodies policy.
- PC Website: To receive quotes.
- Policies: IT Policy – To review and approve any changes. To review and approve the new Reps to Outside Bodies Policy.
- Maintenance: Advertise for a new operative (self-employed). Review and approve the maintenance schedule/list.
- Clerks Delegated Authority to Spend: List of expenses made using the Clerks delegated emergency spending authority for ratification.
- To consider the purchase of a 360° video and audio-conferencing device, in partnership with local village groups, to enable the Clerk to attend meetings remotely in the event of illness or adverse weather.
- Village Hall: Hedge cutting.
- Grass cutting: Contracts for tender.

25/950 Staffing: It was **RESOLVED** to approve that in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item owing to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted (staffing matters).

Proposer: Cllr U Rice

Seconders: Cllr C Renshaw

All in favour

The Clerk and the public left the meeting at this point.

- a) The Council considered the minutes (with the confidential supporting paper) of the HR Committee meeting held on 26th August 2025 and to:
- Approve the end of the Clerk's probationary period and the associated salary increment.
 - Confirm the formal combination of the Clerk and RFO roles following completion of the Neighbourhood Plan, with the increase in hours to be discussed and approved.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the end of the Clerk's probation period with a salary increase of one increment and to discuss combining the roles of Clerk with RFO after the completion of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Proposer: Cllr U Rice

Seconders: Cllr D Brown

All in favour

The PC also recorded its thanks to the Clerk for her hard work and support so far.

25/951 Date of the next Full Council Meeting: The date of the next full Parish Council meeting is Wednesday 1st October 2025 at 7.00 pm.

Meeting closed at 9.05 pm

SNP Steering Group 1 September 2025.

Covered 3 main agenda items

1. Parish Councillors' comments on our proposed amendments and responses to these
2. Local Green Spaces
3. the Consultation Statement and the Basic Conditions Statement.

Review of Parish Councillors' comments:

This took on board, the comments entered by Councillors in the Word document, questions raised on the PC Teams call and comments raised by email. Almost all of the comments have been taken on board and the Plan duly amended. So discussion focused on a few areas, as follows:

- a. When should the Plan be reviewed? JA had looked in to the legal requirement which is available on the Government website. There is no requirement for a review clause to go in the document. We concluded it would make sense that review was left to the PC's discretion and it would be quite reasonable for the PC to continually monitor the Plan and to keep the Plan under review, especially say, every five years, not least because of the lifespan of the HNA. Annually, it would be worth checking it hasn't been superseded by anything eg new national or local policies or anything major in the Village.
- b. Implication of any future changes to the Plan depend on what changes they are. So if it was reflecting say a change to the NPPF or WODC LP, it has higher authority and would be straightforward. A change to a particular aspect might require consultation and inspection, but only on that issue not the whole Plan, and depending on whether it is a *material* change. We therefore thought the current para in the plan on review arrangements was adequate, but as part of its business, the PC might want to schedule in an annual check and five year review. Unless all the policies are changed at five years, which hasn't been common elsewhere, the cost impact should be small, but worth building a budgetary provision in.
- c. The School. We have the benefit of a governor on the SG and it was noted that the school was experiencing a freak drop in pupil numbers, related to performance of the School, and numbers are falling county-wide. We should avoid taking a knee jerk reaction to this as improvement performance is expected and likely to see a reversal of numbers. Viv reported that she had revised the section on the school, which had been pointed out was out of date; she has used the latest Ofsted 2024 report, which took account of the

lower performance and the school's plans to rectify that by appointment of a new executive head and head of school.

- d. We discussed the issue of an increase in AirBnb properties. This was flagged in the HNA as a risk and whilst not a current major problem, a clause stating the need to keep this under review was already in the Plan. It would be also useful to see what other Parishes and the District might do on this in future.
- e. Aspirations. This had been dealt with at the July PC meeting where the Plan's scope was reconfirmed. JA reminded us that the main purpose of the plan is to form a part of the District's LP not to act as a Village wish list. Responding to aspirations to improve things is part of the day to day business of the PC eg through grant applications to help; the NP is not there to do that, albeit we included some big ticket items flagged by the Village.
- f. We were reminded that 72% of consultation responses said they were satisfied with the draft Plan. It was felt that the SG had done everything asked of it in preparing a revised Plan, having listened and taken on board the many comments on the draft.

Update of Local Green Spaces

- g. It had been challenging pulling all the documentation together in one place, however, there is now a repository that sets out which landowners were informed and when, what their responses were and what our proposed decision is as a result. There is a summary report for the PC setting this out with some land proposed to be removed or re-scoped and 2 pieces of land for PC discussion.

4. The Consultation Statement and the Basic Conditions Statement.

- a. Pete Smyth is going to lead on this and Viv has agreed to help. They are aiming to write both documents by mid-October.
- b. These documents have to be submitted with the draft Plan to WODC.
- c. It would be helpful if the PC delegated sign off of these statements eg to PL/DB as they are very straightforward factual documents and shouldn't need to take up time on a PC Agenda.

Finally, PC should acknowledge the work of the SG to get us to here, particularly to Richard, Jim and Viv for largely giving up their summer to deal with this. I apologise for cracking the whip so hard and the countless meetings and emails in the last 3 months.