Draft minutes of a meeting of Stretton-on-Fosse Parish Council held on 9 July 2024 at 7.30 p.m. in the village hall

**Present: Isobel hazelwood (Chair, IH), Penny White (PW), Chris Longleather (CL), Jon Holdback (JH), Sue Finlay (Clerk)**

**Public: Andy Rutley (AR), Helena ???**

***M24.39: Apologies:*** Jo Barker, Trevor Harvey, Richard Eedle

**M24.40: *Declaration of Interests*:**  None

***M24.41. Approval of minutes of last meeting:*** Approved

***M24.42: Matters arising:***

*Defibrillator: do we need another one?* PW had looked into the possibility of having one on the Church, but found it wasn’t feasible for various reasons. She had also looked at putting it in an old phone box; these cost about £2000 and there would be issues in siting it near an electric supply. She offered to have it attached to the supply at the Court House if the running costs weren’t too much. There would also be problems attaching it to the wall outside due to their age. IH said that the possibility of running a first aid course was being looked at again and it was hoped that a date could be arranged. Bleed packs are now on offer as well, and are free but a new defib costs several hundred pounds. IH suggested asking the village whether they felt there should be an extra defibrillator on the proposed questionnaire (see M24.46, AOB).

*Lockable noticeboard:* IH said the new lockable noticeboard was in place in the bus shelter, with a notice saying items for display should be left at 11 The Green.

*Bark for play area:* IH was having difficulty comparing quotes for the bark as all the companies used different measurements (i.e. litres/by weight/cubic metres).The company used previously has ceased selling bark and it was suggested that she ask them for recommendations. The last delivery had been 40 m3  she estimated that the next load would cost around £3000. IH said they needed to have a group of volunteers in place to spread it as soon as it was delivered. JH suggested the middle of the summer holidays. IH agreed to get a definite quote and circulate for approval.

***M24.43. Planning applications:***

24/01430/TREE, for Doswell Sedgwick, Stepping Stone, Stretton-on-Fosse, Moreton-in-Marsh, GL56 9SG. T1 (T6 in the report) - horse chestnut – Fell; T2 (T9 in the report) - common ash – Fell

24/01593/TREE, for Mrs Clayton, T1 – willow, repollarded to old points due to centre being removed for power company [26/07/2024].

It was agreed that the tree warden would be asked to go and look at these applications and report back to the council.

*Pitstop:* Michael Jones (agent) had left a full size set of plans for the council to look at. CL wanted to know more about what food outlets were planned, but otherwise the council had no comments.

*The Plough*: presentation by Andy Rutley. AR told the council that the shed had been removed already to allow sun to reach the beer garden, which had been smartened in anticipation of a summer. His main proposal is to replace the lean-to with a permanent, fully glazed structure, or possibly an Orangery, incorporating it by access to the main bars, providing a better flow around the ground floor. He provided a selection of two designs he was looking at but was hoping for advice on which would be acceptable to SDC. The council suggested he ask TH, and IH and the clerk agreed to liaise between AR and TH. Parking issues were discussed.

***M24.44: Finance:***

1. *Approval of expenditure since last meeting: Treasurers account*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Supplier** | **Item** | **In** | **Out** | **Balance** |
| 27/05/2024 | Sue Finlay | Clerks salary & exp |  | 244.58 | 921.32 |
| 31/05/2024 | Clive Lockton | Grass - May |  | 240.00 | 681.32 |
| 08/06/2024 | MML Marketing Ltd | Noticeboard |  | 174.76 | 506.56 |
| 08/06/2024 | From BSA | Top-up | 494.00 |  | 1000.56 |
| 20/06/2024 | Amazon | Laser printer via SF |  | 264.98 | 735.58 |
| 26/06/2024 | Sue Finlay | Clerks salary & exp. |  | 321.30 | 414.28 |
| 26/06/2024 | From BSA | Top-up | 600 |  | 1014.28 |
| 30/06/2024 | Clive Lockton | Grass - June |  | 240.00 | 774.28 |

1. *BSA*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Destination** | **Reason** | **In** | **Out** | **Balance** |
| 08/06/2024 | Trs Treasurers | Top-up |  | 494 | 9863.16 |
| 10/06/2024 | Lloyds | Interest | 11.79 |  | 9874.95 |
| 26/06/2024 | Trs treasurers | Top-up |  | 600 | 9274.95 |
| 26/06/2024 | Trs play area | Annual amount |  | 700 | 8574.95 |

*(iii) Play Area*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 26/06/2024 | Trs from BSA | Annual amount | 700 |  | 4666.49 |

CL asked the clerk to provide a comparison of expenditure with budget at each meeting. It was agreed to transfer £1000 to the BSA from the Playground account to get interest. CLL asked that the balance against the forecasted spending for the current year should be noted – possibly just by an \* or + or - against the item which is more or less than expected between each meeting. Agreed by a majority.

***M24.45 Audit finance:***

Form submitted and acknowledged.

***M23:46. Any other urgent business:***

*Approval of latest Financial Regulations:* deferred until next meeting.

***M23:47. Councillor reports:***

*JB:*  JB reported that new bus timetable was available and that it was an improved service. IH said that there seemed to be one less service per day. She also pointed out that Pullmans had provided a very good service and had been willing to go above and beyond, so we would have to wait and see how well Stagecoach matched up.

*TH:* TH provided a report.

**Briefing re Stratford District Council, 9 July 2024**

*1. Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs)*

Two referenda were held on 30 May 2024 when residents cast their votes on proposed NDPs in Beaudesert & Henley-in-Arden and Hampton Lucy. Both were approved bringing the number of approved NDPs in the District to 32. In Beaudesert & Henley-in-Arden 834 of the 920 voters voted in favour with a turnout of 36.5% In Hampton Lucy the NDP was approved by 96 of the 108 residents who participated with a turnout of 26.7%.

*2. New Planning Practice Advice Note – Protect Public Houses*

SDC's Cabinet has approved a Public House Planning Practice Advice Note, strengthening redevelopment protection for public houses in the District. It will go to Council for approval on 8 July. The purpose of the Advice Note is to ensure that existing planning policies for redeveloping public houses are applied to their fullest extent. Those policies are also being reviewed as part of making a new South Warwickshire Local Plan. The Advice Note:

• Underlines the importance of pubs in the District, acknowledging its rural nature.

• Amplifies and reinforces the existing policy requirements, emphasising that developers must provide evidence that their plans clearly and rigorously meet the Core Strategy. It also draws where appropriate on best practice guidance from CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale).

• Briefly highlights the benefits of registering public houses as Assets of Community Value and provides a case study of a community-run pub.

• Sets out sources of further information and advice.

*3. Council Plan & Change Programme – Allocation of Resources*

The new Council Plan 2023-2027 was approved by SDC’s Council in December 2023. The objectives of the Plan are:

• Residents and Communities - act in the best interest of residents and communities throughout the District.

• Local Economy - create a larger, stronger, greener, and more inclusive economy.

• Climate Change - lead the fight against climate change.

• Housing - deliver affordable well built and maintained homes.

• Health and Wellbeing - put health and wellbeing at the heart of decisions.

• Delivery of Service - use money responsibly in delivering the best services possible.

A £2.2m budget was agreed to help fund the implementation of the Plan, as well as to provide resources to the on-going Change Programme. SDC's Cabinet has subsequently approved the allocation of £1.562m from the Council Plan and Change Programme budget towards a number of initiatives.

Two areas have already had funds committed to their delivery:

• Funding for a Head of Policy and Building Control, for a four-month period: £50k allocated.

• Funding for a HR advisor, for a two-year fixed term contract: £100k allocated.

Several other projects and initiatives have also been proposed within the £1.562m funding. The three largest allocations of funds approved were:

• £360k – To fund an Apprenticeship Scheme for three years to address shortage of trained staff in specific local government work.

• £228k – To deliver better integration of the Council’s ICT systems and platforms, including digital and spatial data.

• £175k – To review the Council’s appraisals of Conservation Areas which date from the mid-1990s.

There remains £638k to be considered for future projects and initiatives. The Cabinet will monitor the delivery of the Council Plan and the expenditure against the overall £2.2m budget.

*4. SDC Receives Positive Peer Review Feedback*

SDC has received extremely positive feedback following a recent independent peer review. The District Council participated in a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) with the aim of further improving the Council's work. The review, which is offered to all local authorities by the Local Government Association (LGA), took place in March 2024 and included a three-day site visit. The team who visited Stratford-on-Avon District were:

• Cllr Richard Keeling, Teignbridge DC,

• Donna Nolan, Chief Executive, Watford BC,

• Andrew Cummings, Strategic Director of Resources (Section 151), Stroud DC,

• Alex Kinch - Chief Officer - People and Policy, Lancaster CC

• Paula Maginnis - Service Director - Corporate Services, Epping Forest DC.

The independent CPC report found the District Council to be: 'well-run and recognises its challenges and is ambitious for the future of the District' and 'in a stable financial position and has used the recent budget to support its priority areas'. The peer team found that, overall, there had been a smooth transition to the new Liberal Democrat-led administration after the elections in May last year. The report noted that there are generally good relationships across the Council, having invested time and effort developing these productive relationships. The team were also impressed with what has been achieved in the waste service, demonstrating effective delivery; the transformation in the Land Charges service through a digitisation process and the impressive record on housing delivery, with 3000 new units being delivered between 2001 and 2023, with 1000 being affordable.

The feedback report contains ten recommendations as follows:

* *Recommendation 1:* Co-design a compelling and long-term place-based vision and narrative to define the District; use this to galvanise partners and improve the District's economic and cultural strength.
* *Recommendation 2:* Strengthen political and officer leadership of place roles - map your anchor institutions, partners, and stakeholders to bring focus, capacity, and capability for place transformation.
* *Recommendation 3:* The Council should prioritise publication of Draft Accounts in line with the statutory deadlines for doing so, and work closely with their new External Auditors to ensure these are audited in a timely fashion.
* *Recommendation 4:* Further define the Change Programme, with a clear strategy based on objectives and plans relating to budget, resource and governance. Ensure the Change Programme is communicated and understood throughout SDC.
* *Recommendation 5:* Strengthen the Citizens' Panel and develop a Parish Forum to engage more effectively with local people on a range of opportunities and challenges.
* *Recommendation 6:* Ensure the Audit and Standards Committee is effective and reviewed in line with CIPFA best practice guidance.
* *Recommendation 7:* Deliver the Staff Strategy and ensure that it places emphasis on the employee lifecycle and aligns with delivery of the Council Plan 2023-2027.
* *Recommendation 8:* Clarify how SDC's existing values will be further embedded with staff and define how they will help to achieve the Council Plan 2023-27 and its ambitions.
* *Recommendation 9:* Further develop the Member Development Programme, including the opportunities in the use of MS Teams and consideration of the timing of sessions given the constraints of Members with additional commitments e.g. working, and caring responsibilities.
* *Recommendation 10:* Continue the work on developing the internal/external communications strategy with stakeholders, and consider any external support, to amplify the voice of the Council.
* The District Council has drafted an action plan to address these recommendations which include:

• developing a compelling and long-term place-based narrative;

• continue to strengthen the Council's existing partnerships;

• delivering the Council Plan and Staff Strategy;

• improve community engagement; and

• develop a new communications strategy.

*5. Allocation of Grant Funding*

SDC's Cabinet has agreed to fund 49 projects across the District as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). The projects have been awarded a total of £1,162,900. A number of grants were approved to local councils within the District as follows:

*• Southam Town Council - £14,687*: To refresh street furniture with "lite" branding in Southam retail centre, for a more attractive visitor environment and sense of place.

*• Stratford-on-Avon District Council - £4999 capital, £20,000 revenue:* To install footfall counting cameras and associated "smart" data capabilities in order to measure visitor numbers to drive more footfall to the town centre to support healthy business vibrancy and avoid empty shops.

*• Studley Parish Council £24,500*: To install a PV Solar system including the panels, inverters, batteries, all to be fully integrated with the existing facilities.

*• Alcester Town Council - £25,757:* To fund a pilot scheme to encourage rural business diversity through collaborative innovation projects, peer to peer networking with businesses and around skills which benefit businesses and residents in and around Alcester.

*• Ilmington Parish Council - £4850:* To install a height restriction barrier to prevent unauthorized vehicles from accessing the village playing fields and car park.

*• Ettington Parish Council - £17,500:* Build of outside toilets for football field, users of MUGA and users of youth and play areas. Fencing of existing and creation of new football pitch.

*• Alcester Town Council - £20,750:* To kit out the Alcester Community Shed with the equipment, tools, and furniture necessary for it to open.

*6. Council Meeting – 8 July 2024 – Councillor Questions*

There are two opportunities for councillors to pose questions at a Council Meeting about any aspect of the services and activities for which the Council has responsibility.

The first is to submit a written question prior to the meeting which will receive a written reply that is made available to all councillors on the day of the meeting. A councillor who has been provided with a written reply has the further opportunity to ask a supplementary question orally at the meeting. Individual councillors may submit a maximum of two questions to a Council meeting.

The second opportunity is to hope to catch the Chairman’s eye during the half an hour allocated during the meeting to oral questions that can be posed to the Leader of the Council. The Leader will either provide an answer in response or will undertake to do so subsequently if that is more appropriate.

In relation to the forthcoming meeting I have submitted two written questions. These are attached for information in Appendix 1.

*Cllr Trevor Harvey,*

**Appendix 1: SDC Council Meeting 8 July 2024**

*Councillor Questions*

*Question 1*

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies has made clear, the commitment that the major political parties have all made to increasing public expenditure on areas such as the NHS and defence implies large cuts to ‘unprotected’ services, of which finance for local authorities is one. The IFS Report concluded that ‘The coming parliament will therefore be financially challenging for local government – although just how much so is not yet clear.’ On the other hand, Stratford District Council’s finances over the past 2 years have benefited from the windfall impact of higher interest rates. Income generated 2 years ago from interest in 2021/22, when bank rate was 0.75% in March of that year, was £158k. In contrast, in 2023-24, with base rate at 5.25% at the year end, interest generated was £4.85m, £3.3m in excess of the budgeted figure. (Source: The Cabinet, 1 July 2024, p. 119)

Investment income for 2024-25 is budgeted to be £2.9m, a figure that is highly likely to be exceeded, given the persistence of current bank rate during the first half of the current financial year. Although bank rate will reduce over time, the Bank of England still projects that by the time of the next local elections in May 2027, base rate will have gradually been reduced over time to 3.5%. There is every prospect, therefore, that SDC could continue to generate windfall investment income of the order of some £3.0m in each of the three years to March 2027.

Could the Leader tell councillors whether The Cabinet has had a discussion about the future financial strategy it intends to adopt, taking into account the pressure on central government referred to by the IFS to reduce the budgets of unprotected areas and the resultant need to add to and to protect the Council’s General Reserve on the one hand; set against the opportunity to use at least some of the windfall income generated for specific strategic purposes e.g. to contribute to a major infrastructure project within the District such as the Gateway Project.

If The Cabinet has had such a discussion, what conclusions did it reach? If The Cabinet has not had such a discussion, will the Leader undertake that in the near future it will and that it will report back to Council?

*Question 2*

At the outset of the previous Administration's period in office, a Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) for the period 2019-2035 was undertaken in June 2019. This identified the need for between 59 and 70 additional permanent pitches plus a further six plots for Travelling Show people. A call for sites was undertaken in 2021, which yielded no suitable locations. The need for additional sites has not gone away. Within the past 6 weeks we have seen the effective creation of another unauthorised site over a bank holiday weekend on land close to the M40 just over the boundary into Warwick District Council's area. More recently than that, travellers who set up camp with 15 caravans in Victoria Park, Leamington Spa have been the subject of police action.

In these circumstances, does the Leader take the view that the identification and provision of the required additional pitches within the District for gypsies, travellers, and show people is an intractable problem to which there is effectively no practical solution? Alternatively, if the Leader does not take that view, what plans and actions does her Administration have to locate and provide the additional pitches that are still so clearly needed?

*Trevor Harvey*

***M24.48. Date of next meeting:*** The next meeting was arranged for 10 September 2024 at 7.30 in the village hall.