

STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



50 Pepys Way, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3LL

DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday 1st May 2024

**Annual Parish Meeting ~ 7.00 pm
Stoke Village Hall**

Attendees:	Cllr J. Wallace (Chair)	Cllr P. Dumke (Vice-chair)
	Cllr N. Blown	Cllr K. Mansell
	Cllr S. Back	Cllr S. Hall
	Cllr T. Hall	Mrs J. Allen ~ Clerk

Members of the public: Ten (10)

The meeting commenced at 7.02 pm.

1. Welcome by the Chairman

The Chairman, Cllr J Wallace, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting 2023

To receive the last minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting, held on Wednesday 24th May 2023.

The minutes from the Annual Parish meeting, held on Wednesday, 24th May 2023, were submitted.

The document was carefully studied, where it was proposed by the Vice-Chair Cllr P. Dumke, seconded by Cllr K. Mansell and unanimously agreed that the minutes were a true record of the meeting.

3. The Parish Council

To receive a report from the Parish Chairman on the events and activities of the Parish Council during the last year.

The Chairman, Cllr J. Wallace, spoke and provided the following report :

This is my first report for the Parish Council so I am hoping I have included everything.

Firstly, I want to say a big thank you to all of the Parish Council for their support and faith in me this past year. I had big shoes to fill and a lot to learn as Brian had done this for so many years and his wealth of local knowledge was so comprehensive. However, together, we have pooled our thoughts and ideas with varying knowledge to get where we are today. Each member has their own expertise in various fields and, now having a full complement for the committee, we are in a much better position to achieve our goals for the forthcoming year, or at least some of them!

This has been a trying year for us in many ways and we have pulled together to get through it. This has resulted in a very strong team alliance and one we will continue.

As everyone knows, Parish Councillors are effectively volunteers, we receive no recompense for our commitment, and we give up our time freely. To follow in the footsteps of my predecessor, I know we sadly have no magic wand that we can wave to improve the situation with the roads, electricity supply, flooding and parking issues which plague our village. However, whilst this list of things we have no powers over seems endless, we do our upmost to help support the village by contacting the relevant parties to pass on your concerns and ensuring these points are chased on a regular basis.

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The team and I carefully reviewed the precept costs this year, and whilst we tried keep the rate as low as possible, owing to the current economic climate, we felt there was no alternative but to raise it in accordance with the anticipated extra costs for the coming year.

One item in particular which cropped up several times, was the need for a Street Cleaner/Litter picker. Owing to increasing pressure to assist Medway Council in helping to keep the village clean, we are currently advertising for a Street Cleaner on a four hours per week basis but, as we all know with the need to recruit an extra member of staff, often comes the need for additional associated costs.

One of our main priorities is to try to improve the playparks and due to the financial restraints, we plan to start on the Heron Road playpark first as we understand this is the most used and clearly needs an update. However, as the pot of money we still hold is low, we may not be able to immediately fix everything at once, so please bear with us.

Last year the Coronation Party in May was held in the main car park. Plans were already underway with the road closure in place and entertainments arranged by the Stoke Community Project. It was great to see the bunting up and all the hard efforts that went into making this day a success and for the Village to enjoy. The clean up afterwards was also well orchestrated and the car park was returned to its original purpose as soon as the festivities had ceased. Once again, I wish to pass the Parish Council's upmost thanks onto everyone who was involved in this event and for making it a day to remember.

This year saw the worst rainfall for over 200 years (so I was told) and the constant deluges caused all sorts of flooding issues around the villages. The worst area was in Middle Stoke and our very own Flood Warden – Cllr Shane Back - was straight out battling the elements. Alongside support from other residents, he was able to report various issues to the Environment agency, so these matters could be addressed quickly to help protect our village. I would therefore like to pass on my most sincere thanks to Cllr Shane Back and the gentlemen from Stoke Airfield, for their rapid response, which also included the removal of various debris.

In fact, following Shane's hard work, he was rewarded with an article in the Village Voices publication highlighting his role as the Flood Warden for the Peninsula and calling for more volunteers to come forward.

In addition to a Flood Warden we are now lucky enough to have a team of three Snow Wardens living in our village. This team have been trained and are ready to assist in the event of any severe bouts of snow. We hope we will not need to rely on their services now until next winter. As part of their role, they are responsible for making sure any areas, deemed unsafe owing to ice and snow, are gritted to prevent any accidents. So again, on behalf of the Parish Council, we wish to pass on our most sincere gratitude onto this new team for stepping forward and offering their expertise. To mark the arrival of Christmas 2023, we purchased a large Christmas tree, along with several sets of battery-operated lights for the Lower Stoke car park. With a small gathering and with the assistance of the Stoke Community Project, who kindly provided refreshments, we organised a 'Christmas Tree light switch on' event in early December. It was lovely to see the bottom of the High Street looking festive and we hope to continue this tradition this coming year, with a bigger and better event planned to mark the start of the festivities.

Last financial year a steering group was formed to help develop a Neighbourhood Plan. This committee, being led by Peter Egan (a previous Parish Councillor, who stepped down at the Local Elections in May 2023), is now busy organising various meetings for different audiences. We

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encourage all residents to attend these meetings, relevant to their interest, to understand how this plan will help shape the future of our village and benefit the next generation.

Stoke Village Hall committee saw changes this year too, with Mr Brian Stone resigning from his position as Chair. Alongside the election of a new Chair, the committee welcomed several new members. Councillor Karen Mansell, who originally joined as a representative of the Parish Council, took over the role as Treasure, owing to the resignation of her predecessor. In conjunction with this new team, she has worked tirelessly to uplift the hall, including the introduction of various wall decals whilst the committee hold various fundraising events to help boost their funds in order to carry out essential repairs and redecorate the hall throughout. They still wait, however, for further news on the future of the Doctors surgery. We would therefore like to thank all the Stoke Village Hall Committee team for all their hard work and efforts in helping to keep this vital village amenity open.

Finally, we were deeply saddened to learn of the recent passing of our former colleague Richard Bridge, following a brief battle with cancer. We will be holding a minute's silence for him at our Annual Parish Council meeting, following this meeting.

The Festival One event, organised by Mr Juan Van Niekerk, appears to be a great opportunity to get together and raise some money for cancer research. We understand this event was being co-organised by Richard and Juan, prior to Richard's passing and we would actively encourage residents to purchase tickets and help support their fundraising efforts.

4. **Financial Situation**

To receive a report from the Stoke Parish Council Chairman on the Parish Council's Financial situation

The Chairman, Cllr J. Wallace, advised that the precept for the financial year 2023/2024 had been increased to £30,000, where the parish councillors had planned to use the additional funds towards the installation of a new defibrillator for Middle Stoke and employing a street cleaner to litter-pick all areas of the village.

Cllr J. Wallace spoke further to confirm that the Parish Council's reserves currently stood at £46,2930, where the Parish Council still had ringfenced a proportion of these funds for improvements to Heron Way playpark, which had been identified as the most used recreation ground.

5. **Community Reports**

To receive reports from community groups in Stoke.

The following five (5) community reports were read.

Rivermead Inclusive Trust

Mr P. Dadson from the Rivermead Inclusive Trust spoke to confirm that the new school had now finally been given the green light to go ahead by Medway Council following initial delays regarding concerns over parking and the possible build-up of traffic in the local vicinity where, in response to these points, it had been agreed to increase the capacity for parking on site.

The school's original planning application to build a 2-storey extension to the rear had been refused by the unitary authority based on concerns that the extension would be visible from the fields behind; however, a larger single-storey extension had been approved in its place.

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Mr P. Dadson closed his report by confirming that the school were still hoping to receive their first intake of Year 7 students in September 2025 and were massively committed to completing the project.

The Peninsula Methodist Church

Little has changed over the year with regard to the chapel and its activities within the community. It is obvious from snippets of information gleaned via conversations or on social media that people just expect it to always be there for when they might have a need.

We are pleased and very grateful for Digger's Gardening Service and to Rob for his huge efforts in the graveyard. We really do hope and pray that our funds allow us to be able to continue to have him long term. I would however issue a plea to people who remind him the grass is getting long again that this is Rob's livelihood and he and the chapel are aware of what can be afforded and whilst not ideal it is what it is.

That said again - sterling job and we are grateful for all his efforts as well as those who have tried to help us manage it this past year.

The Peninsula Mens' Shed meet every Tuesday and they enjoy the company of each other whilst being productive. It is a real joy to see these gentlemen come together each week and support each other whilst participating in makes that they individually enjoy. They have become a strong group who lift each other up when necessary and they are in no way exclusive, they truly would like to see and meet and share with new people and would welcome anyone new into their Shed family.

We still have the weekly drop in on a Wednesday morning which is valued by those who come to drink tea or coffee, eat biscuits (occasionally bacon rolls) and have a good old chat.

We have during some of the school holidays in collaboration with The Mens' Shed had projects for the children to assemble and take home. Their past makes were bird houses, bug hotels and more recently they assembled their own planters and then the following week they planted some seeds in their planters. We look forward to seeing the fruits of their labours.

We have an evening fellowship / service on the second Sunday evening of the month and we would love to see more people come along and join with us.

It was a real joy and a privilege to be able to erect the Memory Tree at the chapel over Christmas and huge thanks to all who helped make it possible. The subsequent service in early January to dedicate the ribbons and to remember those loved ones whilst not large in number in attendance it was really appreciated and the intention is to have another tree this year with a service of dedication and remembering early in January 2025.

It really was quite lovely coming through the village and the tree in the car park and then at the Chapel as well as all of the houses beautifully lit, it made it very welcoming and warm.

We continue as always to pray for our community and would like them to know that we would love for them to join us at some point. If the lights are on and the door is open please do come in - a warm welcome will await you.

Men in Sheds

Report to follow.

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Kent Police

PC Richard Jones from Kent Police spoke to introduce himself and to confirm that he had recently been confined to office duties for a period of five (5) months owing to injury. He advised that over this time he and his colleagues had been carrying out road checks and working alongside the DVLA to seize untaxed vehicles.

PC Jones spoke further to confirm that, in line with the different types of terrain encountered across the peninsula, his team had requested an all-wheel-drive vehicle to help patrol the villages.

He spoke of a PSPO (Public Spaces Protection Order) that had been put in place to target the nuisance vehicles and anti-social behaviour caused by racing cars and spoke of incidents of hay fires, mud rescues and call-outs for the firearms team, dog warden and traffic officers, to name a few. He closed his report by promoting the 'My Community Voice' webpage and mentioning numerous complaints Kent Police had received regarding dog fouling and the safe passing of horses.

Stoke Community Project

A member from the Stoke Community Project spoke to inform the meeting that the team had been busy this past year organising their 'Senior Afternoon Tea event, providing support to the Parish Council at their 'Christmas Lights Switch On' event and participating in their annual Santa Run.

It was understood that plans for the forthcoming year were already in motion and included a new 'Children's Christmas Party' event, which would be held in place of their annual 'Santa Run'.

The village learnt that the Stoke Community Project were regrettably not going to be able to hold their 'Big Lunch' event this coming year owing to the lack of toilet facilities available at the Button Drive Recreation Ground; however, it was hoped that once the school building was up and running, the team might be able to come to an agreement with the Rivermead Inclusive Trust to utilise their facilities.

6. Conclusion

The Chairman, Cllr J. Wallace, thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.