

# STOKE PARISH COUNCIL



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

## MINUTES

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Virtual Annual Parish Council Meeting ~ 8.00 pm

Attendees: Cllr B. Stone (Chairman) Cllr J. Wallace ~ Vice-chair  
Cllr G. Blackman Cllr R. Morrad  
Cllr K. Copping Mrs J. Allen ~ Clerk

Members of the public: Two (2)

### **PUBLIC SESSION ~ NOT PART OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING**

#### **Part A. Public Discussions**

A member of the public spoke to enquire if the Parish Council would consider making a donation towards the 'Big Lunch' event.

She also asked if the members would be willing to pay for a portable toilet, following a request to use the facilities at the school that had subsequently been denied.

Cllr J. Wallace spoke to enquire if the toilets at the Village Hall could be used, where concerns over its distance from the Button Drive recreation ground were raised.

Cllr B. Stone spoke to ask if prices for the portable toilet could be sourced in advance of the next meeting for a formal decision, where it was understood that the event had been scheduled to take place on Sunday 4th July.

#### **Part B. Public Discussions on any agenda items**

None.

Chairman, Cllr B. Stone, opened the meeting at 8.06pm and thanked both the Councillors and the two (2) members of the public for attending.

#### **1. To elect the Chair for the ensuing year**

Min 4019:21 Cllr G. Blackman spoke to propose that Cllr B. Stone be nominated as the Chair. This proposal was seconded by Cllr K. Copping and unanimously agreed.

Accordingly, Cllr B. Stone signed his declaration of office in front of the forum.

#### **2. Apologies for absence**

Min 4020:21 An apology for absence was received from Ward Cllr M. Pendergast and Cllr R. Bridge, who were both indisposed.

#### **3. To elect a Vice-Chair for the ensuing year**

Min 4021:21 Cllr J. Wallace spoke to nominate herself for the post of Vice- Chair.

Cllr K. Copping spoke in support and propose that Cllr J. Wallace be nominated, this proposal was seconded by Cllr G. Blackman and unanimously agreed.

Accordingly, Cllr J. Wallace signed her declaration of office in front of the forum.

#### **4. Disclosure of any other business**

Min 4022:21 None.

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5. **Declaration of any Pecuniary or Personal Interests**

Min 4023:21 None.

6. **To elect the Committee Portfolio Holders for the ensuing year**

Min 4024:21 It was recognised that the members had no current portfolios to allocate.

7. **To appoint Members of the Committees and representatives to other bodies**

Min 4025:21 The members collectively discussed the representatives, where the following members were appointed:

- KALC: Cllr G. Blackman
- Rural Liaison: Cllr J. Wallace

8. **Ward Councillor report**

**a). A report by Ward Councillor Mick Pendergast.**

Min 4026:21 Cllr J. Wallace read a letter on behalf of Ward Cllr Mick Pendergast concerning the merger of Stoke Primary Academy and Allhallows Primary Academy by the Leigh Academies Trust.

**Please see Annex A for a copy of this letter.**

She also advised the members that at the last Rural Liaison Committee meeting there had been a discussion concerning the use of chemical free pesticides in open spaces, where the committee had asked for this information to be passed onto all of its members, including a note of the products that were now being used by Medway Norse on Medway Council owned land.

9. **Minutes from previous Parish Council Meeting**

**a). To receive and approve the minutes of the meeting from Friday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021.**

Min 4027:21 The minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting, held on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021, as already circulated by the Clerk, were submitted.

It was proposed by Cllr K. Copping and seconded by the Vice-Chair Cllr J. Wallace, that they be approved as a correct record. This motion was unanimously agreed.

10. **Information arising from the minutes not on the agenda**

Min 4028:21 None.

11. **Vacancies**

**a). To discuss any applications received relating to the Parish Council's outstanding vacancies.**

Min 4029:21 The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen spoke to confirm that she had received no new applications since the last meeting, however she was aware that a gentleman who previously enquired, might still be interested.

In accordance with his instructions, she advised the members that she was in the process of speaking to Medway Council to determine if his personal address was able to be redacted from public view.

12. **Planning**

**a). Applications**

Min 4030:21 The members discussed in turn the two (2) new planning applications that had been received since the last meeting:

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- **MC/21/1065 – 1 Elm Tree Cottages**

The members confirmed that they had no objection to the property owner building a larger extension providing Medway Council took into serious consideration the points raised by the neighbouring properties.

Accordingly, the Clerk was asked to write to Medway Council to highlight that the Parish Council were aware of the concerns from neighbouring properties and to ask that these points be taken into serious consideration.

- **MC/21/1053 – 1 Malmaynes Hall Farm**

The members discussed the application in detail where it was determined that the application was solely related to dust emissions.

Cllr G. Blackman spoke to raise concerns in regards to the noise levels, where it was determined that none of the other Councillors had any further comments.

## **b). Decisions**

**Min 4031:21** The members confirmed receipt of one (1) new planning decision, that had been agreed since the last meeting subject to conditions:

- **MC/21/0569 – Grove House**

## **c). Appeals and Other Matters.**

**Min 4032:21** None.

## **13. Finance**

**a). To agree financial performance against the budget for April 2021**

**b). Update of account(s) for 2021/22 including payments received.**

**c). Accounts paid since the last meeting to be ratified.**

**d). Accounts for payment.**

**e). Payment requests to be discussed for approval and payment.**

**g). Authorisation for the purchase of both goods and services.**

**Min 4034:21** Cllr R. Morrad spoke to advise that subject to the correct minute numbers being keyed for the invoices listed, that he was happy to propose that points a,b,c,d & e be approved en bloc, this proposal was seconded by Cllr G. Blackman and unanimously agreed.

Payee	Reference	Payment Method	Amount	Notes
Mrs J. Allen	Min 1436:18	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£496.28	April 2021 Wages
Mrs J. Allen	Min 1436:18	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£35.00	Use of home office – April 2021
Vodafone Telephone & Broadband	Min 1451:18	DIRECT DEBIT	£43.49	Broadband & Telephone line rental for April 2021
Came & Company	Min 1571:19	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£993.87	Insurance Renewal 2021/2022 INV: 6684479
Rialtas	Min 1829:20	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£206.40	Annual Support & Maintenance INV: SM23274

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Colin Davis	Min 1992:20	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£168.00	April 2021 Payment Inspections & Cleaning INV: 3188
Colin Davis	Min 3035:21	TO BE PAID BY BACS	£158.08	Graffiti Removal & New Swing INV: 3189
The People's Pension	Min 1775:20	DIRECT DEBIT	£42.43	Both Employer & Employee Contributions for April 2021
'SNOWBEYTECH' Tablet World	Min 2007:20	MISSED FROM JAN 2021 ACCOUNTS	£211.98	2 x Members' Tablets INV: 59651044808
'SNOWBEYTECH' Tablet World	Min 2007:20	MISSED FROM JAN 2021 ACCOUNTS	£529.95	5 x Members' Tablets INV: 40981043552
Ebay O*06-0	Min 2007:20	MISSED FROM JAN 2021 ACCOUNTS	£75.39	7 x Bluetooth tablet keyboards INV: 06-06431-13444
Cartridge People	Min 1451:18	MISSED FROM JAN 2021 ACCOUNTS	£344.90	4 x Toner Ink Cartridges INV: <b>GB210117-LA3867581</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>£3,305.77</b>	
High Halstow Parish Council	-	Credit - BACS	£19.10	50% contribution from High Hal- stow PC towards the Vodafone Communications package
Medway Council	-	Credit – BACS	£25,801.00	2021/2022 Precept & Grants
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>£25,820.10</b>	

## f). Update on the progress of the Internal Auditor for the year ending 2020/2021

**Min 4035:21** The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen, spoke to confirm that she speaking with Mr L. Robbins concerning the internal audit, where she was also trying to arrange for access to the village hall, once it had re-opened.

## 14. Management of the Council's land and property

### a). Playparks

#### i Allhallows Road Playpark

#### ii Heron Way Playpark

#### iii Upper Stoke Playpark

**Min 4036:21** The Play Park inspections from the month of April were accepted. The report received confirmed that the play equipment in all three parks appeared to be in good order and that all the touch points were being regularly disinfected. It was also noted that the contractor had found various empty alcohol containers in all of the parks.

**Min 4037:21** Cllr K. Copping spoke to advise that he had noted the Parish Council's contact telephone number, as displayed on the notices in the Playparks, was out of date. He asked the Clerk to arrange for some vinyl stickers with the correct details to place over the old telephone number, where he agreed to correspond directly with her in regards to how many stickers were needed and their sizes etc.

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**Min 4038:21** Cllr B. Stone also spoke to raise his concerns in regards to the amount of litter he had spotted in and around the Upper Stoke Play Park. He asked the Clerk, Mrs J Allen, to ensure this matter was addressed with the contractor in time for the next litter pick.

**b). To discuss possible replacement apparatus, following the removal of the toddler tunnels at Button Drive & Heron Way**

**Min 4039:21** The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen, advised that she spoken to the contractor in regards to the members' budget, where she understood the suppliers were now sourcing prices for new equipment and the configuration options (to ensure the new equipment fitted in the existing footprint). She advised that once the details had been finalised, she would forward the correspondence onto the members before placing the order.

**c). Update the purchase of a new baby/cradle swing for the Heron Way Playpark**

**Min 4040:21** The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen, spoke to advise that following concerns raised by the members at the last meeting, that she had spoken to the manufactures in relation to the length of the chains on a cradle seat.

She advised that she understood it was possible to order a seat with longer chains, where she had instructed Colin Davis of Colyn Property Services to measure the height of the shackles from the ground to determine if the members could source a suitable seat.

**d). Tree surgeon quotes for the removal of limbs overhanging the property adjacent to the Heron Way Park**

**Min 4041:21** The members considered the three quotes sourced to remove the overhanging limbs that were extending into the adjacent property's boundary at the Heron Way play park.

After careful consideration the members decided to proceed with the quote from 'LumberZac' that equated to £220 + VAT to 'remove all of the overhanging limbs, to clear all the overhanging branches from the telephone cables and to remove all the waste'.

The Clerk was asked to instruct the contractor to carry out the works as soon as possible, upon receipt of the following correspondence:

- A copy of his insurance cover (with public liability insurance cover for at least five million pounds),
- A copy of his risk assessment
- A copy of his health & safety standards policy.

**Min 4042:21** Cllr B. Stone also spoke to update the members on the investigation work he had carried out alongside Cllr K. Copping, following concerns of flooding to the rear of Kasmira House, ref: **Min 4015:21** .

He advised that having met up with Cllr K. Copping that they had identified the drain that extended across the playpark and that they due to its angle, they recommended a specialised drain contractor be instructed to check its condition.

**Min 4043:21** Finally, a discussion ensued in relation to the closure of the Heron Way Park after sunset each evening, ref **Min 3097:21** , where it was confirmed that the Parish Council would only need to invest in some heavy-duty padlocks instead of chains and padlocks.

Following an email sent by the Clerk, the members agreed that a combination padlock instead of a key lock was more sensible.

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The Vice Chair, Cllr J. Wallace, spoke to advise that she understood the resident who had initially volunteered to help was having second thoughts. She confirmed that she would speak to the Parishioner again to confirm if the offer of help still stood and report back to the members as soon as she was able.

Owing to concerns of confrontation the members agreed that the park should only be locked in the evening if the recreation ground was empty, if not then the members were happy for the park to remain open.

## **e). Notice board in Lower Stoke**

**Min 4044:21** The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen, spoke to advise the members that she had not raised the relocation of the notice board with Medway Council, owing to the fact that she was still waiting for a hard copy of the new lease to arrive.

She confirmed that once this documentation had come through then she would ask Medway Council for permission to move its location.

## **15. Highways & Transportation**

### **a). Footpaths**

**Min 4045:21** No report.

### **b). Lighting**

**Min 4046:21** No report.

### **c). Highways and verges**

**Min 4047:21** No report.

### **d). Pot holes**

**Min 4048:21** The Chairman, Cllr B. Stone, advised the Clerk that the large pothole located opposite the garage in Lower Stoke had not been repaired, ref **Min 4002:21**. The Clerk spoke in response to confirm that she had reported the pot hole and that Medway Council had even rang her to advise it would be filled as a matter of urgency.

### **e). Fly tipping**

**Min 4049:21** No report.

### **f). School Warning Signs**

**Min 4050:21** The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen, advised that there was no change from her last report and that she had not chased the third school warning sign as she understood the pupils had temporarily been transferred to Allhallows school.

## **16. Communication**

### **a). Update on the Parish Council's new webpage and associated email addresses**

#### **b). Parish Council owned tablets**

**Min 4051:21** Cllr J. Wallace spoke to inform the members that after a lot of back and forth the Parish Council's webpage and their associated email addresses were finally secure.

She confirmed that she was yet to test Stoke Parish Council emails but that she would be doing so imminently, where she would also generate a new email address for Cllr K. Copping.

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## 17. Lower Stoke Car Park Lease

### a). To discuss the proposed conditions for the new Medway Council Lower Stoke Car Park lease

**Min 4052:21** The Clerk, Mrs J. Allen, spoke to inform the members that she had requested a hard copy of the 'new' Lower Stoke car park lease, which confirmed the amendments already made. She advised the members that she understood from Mr Ntekim that he had referred this matter to the Legal Department at Medway Council, who had agreed to produce the new lease and send the details over as soon as possible.

**Min 4053:21** Cllr K. Copping spoke to advise that following on from various emails he had received surrounding the concerns Cllr R. Bridge had raised with the lease that he had carried out a full review of these points, where he addressed each in turn.

Cllr K. Copping spoke to advise that he understood it had been identified that the members were responsible for the tree and the grassed area in the car park, where suggestions had been made to cut down the tree and to tarmac over the area. He advised having conducted a brief survey of the car park, spanning over the last month. that he had not seen the car park full to the point that additional parking spaces were required. He also disagreed in cutting down the tree as he felt the members should be proactively preserving nature.

He acknowledged that the address on the Lower Stoke car park lease was incorrect, however he failed to see how this would prevent the members from signing the document, providing the details were updated.

He spoke further to address concerns over any potential non-payment charges of the lease, where it had been identified that Medway Council reserved the right to charge interest at a financial rate of 4% above NatWest base rate. He advised that having looked further into this matter that he felt their proposed interest rate seemed very reasonable in comparison to the percentage rates charged by other companies.

Cllr K. Copping spoke of the title guarantee, where he acknowledged that Medway Council had already stated that they failed to see why the members were asking for this. He concurred with their response and confirmed that he too could not understand what the benefits the Parish Council could gain from this.

He spoke to advise that Cllr R. Bridge had identified breaches in their maintenance responsibilities, where he felt this point should not be highlighted to Medway Council.

He advised that he disagreed with the concerns raised of cars being abandoned in the car park, where having checked with both the Chairman and the Clerk there had only been two abandoned cars reported, spanning over the course of the past 15 years.

Cllr K. Copping addressed the clause which prevented the use of notices in disabled parking bays, where he confirmed that the existing markings in the car park were not clear and that the Parish Council, as the tenant were in fact responsible for their markings.

He spoke further of the clause where the issue of vans being able to park in the car park had been addressed. He advised that he understood road traffic legislation included light vans in the term motor cars.

He addressed the 6-month break clause, where concerns were addressed by Cllr R. Bridge that Stoke Parish Council could be asked to leave with little to no notice. He reminded the members that

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this clause would also work in reverse, where if for any reason the members wanted to terminate their contract that they were able to without being liable for the full 5-year rental payments.

Finally, he advised the members that he did not think Medway Council would agree to many of the proposed terms put forward by Cllr R. Bridge and that he felt that if the members instructed a solicitor that it would be an inappropriate use of the public funds.

He confirmed that he did not agree in engaging with a solicitor as he felt it would reflect badly on the Parish Council, especially bearing in mind the length of time this matter had taken so far.

He closed his report in advising that if the Parish Council continued to drag out the renewal that they could run the risk of the car park being put up for lease to someone else and in doing so they could lose the use of the facility if a new tenant was found.

Cllr K. Copping proposed that the members signed the new contract lease, once received, providing there had been no further changes (apart from those already agreed). This proposal was seconded by Cllr J. Wallace and unanimously agreed.

## 18. External Contractors

### a). J R Brickwork

Min 4054:21 None.

### b). Eastborough Landscapes

Min 4055:21 None.

### c). Colyn Property Services

Min 4056:21 None.

## 19. Sponsorship for The Big Lunch in Stoke

### a). To discuss potential sponsorship towards 'The Big Lunch in Stoke' hosted by the Methodist Church.

Min 4057:21 With permission from the Chairman a member of the public was invited to speak, where the representative from the Stoke Methodist Church asked the Parish Council to consider providing a grant of £200 towards the 'Big Lunch' event, plus additional funding to cover the costs of hiring a portable toilet.

A discussion ensued, where Cllr K. Copping spoke to advise that he would be in support of sponsorship.

The Chairman Cllr B. Stone also spoke to enquire in regards to the costs of hiring a portable toilet and to ask how many units would be required.

It was acknowledged that because the event was not scheduled to take place until July that it was still too early to confirm the exact number of residents in attendance and precisely how many portable toilets would be required. The committee presentative advised however that she should be able to confirm these details to present to the members at the next Parish Council meeting.

## 20. Christmas Celebrations

### a). To receive an update on the installation of a Christmas Tree and Christmas lights in Lower Stoke for the month of December 2021.

Min 4058:21 Cllr J. Wallace spoke to advise that she had looked further into the installation of Christmas lights in Lower Stoke, where she understood that there was an application on the



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Medway Council website. She also advised that she had received intelligence that the Highways Services were responsible for the main street lighting.

She closed her report in confirming that she had sourced a supplier for the Christmas tree.

## 21. Village Voice Publication

Min 4059:21 The Chairman, Cllr B. Stone asked the Clerk to write a report surrounding the Annual Parish Meeting that had taken place earlier that evening.

## 21. Correspondence

### a). **Email from resident concerning a large tree located in the recreation ground at Button Drive and close to her property.**

Min 4060:21 The members discussed an email from a resident who lived adjacent to the Button Drive recreation ground, asking for the Parish Council to consider cutting back a large tree located in the park which was in close proximity to her property.

A discussion ensued where it acknowledged that the tree was far too big to be situated so close to her and other resident's properties, and that this tree and another, needed to be cut back as much as possible.

It was accepted that although the trees did not have any preservation orders on them that previous attempts to remove them had failed where Medway Council had only permitted the removal of their crowns.

Cllr K. Copping spoke to propose that the members allocated a budget of £1,000 to pollard both trees, which was seconded by Cllr R. Morrad and unanimously agreed.

The Clerk was instructed to get in touch with the tree surgeon who was assisting with the overhanging branches at Heron Way to ask if he would be able to assist as soon as possible.

## 22. Reports and Circulars

Min 4061:21 None.

## 23. Date of next meeting

Min 4062:21 The Chairman, Cllr B. Stone, spoke to inform the members that the next meeting would take place in the Village Hall on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June.

It was agreed that the members would meet in the large hall to allow for social distancing measured and that only a limited number of residents would be able to attend in order to abide with COVID-19 regulations.

## 24. Close of meeting

Min 4063:21 The Chairman, Cllr B. Stone, closed the meeting at 10.08pm and thanked everyone for attending.

**The next Parish Council meeting will be held on:**

<b>Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021</b>	<b>7.00pm</b>	<b>Village Hall</b>
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## **Annex A**

### **8. Ward Councillor report** Min 4026:21

#### **a). A report by Ward Councillor Mick Pendergast.**

Medway Council notes the consultation to amalgamate Stoke and Allhallows Primary Academies. The Council is committed to keeping rural and village schools open for the benefit of the local communities so far as its powers allow.

Our preference therefore is that the school remains open, however, it is accepted that the situation at Stoke in 2021 is different from the situation in 2019. With numbers at the school significantly reduced, below 30 pupils in total, and applications for places in September 2021 are extremely low at 9 pupils, the educational and financial viability of the school is at risk. The Council's pupil place forecasts indicate that the position with regard to pupil numbers in the vicinity is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future or unless significant housing is created in Stoke, which is not currently included within the local plan.

However, we note the Trust has actively encouraged, and indeed facilitated, the transfer of children at Stoke to the roll at Allhallows. Whilst we acknowledge the educational benefits of single age group classes, the strategy of the Trust has led to significantly reduced numbers at Stoke Primary School. However, although the Trust actively pursued the transfer of children we do accept its parents who ultimately make the decision and a majority have made the choice to take their child off roll at Stoke and onto the roll at Allhallows. Therefore, we understand why the Trust is making the recommendation for the merger.

Medway Council does have some significant concerns regarding the transportation of pupils from Stoke to Allhallows. We are content that the Trust has, in the main, addressed the transport matter, and has committed to provide free transport to any child as follows:

- Below the age of 8 that resides beyond 2 miles for whom Stoke Primary Academy is the closest suitable school;
- Over the age of 8 that resides beyond 3 miles for whom Stoke Primary Academy is the closest suitable school. This will be met through the provision of an annual bus pass in line with Medway's current methodology.

The definition used to determine a suitable school will be as outlined in the statutory guidance for school travel and transport.

For those pupils living less than 2 miles, for whom Stoke Primary Academy is their nearest suitable school, and their walking route is not deemed to be safe:

The Trust will provide minibus transport, in line with that which currently operates daily between Stoke Primary Academy to Allhallows Primary Academy. This will be redetermined annually, based on need and use. Should an alternative means to fulfil this commitment be more appropriate, this will be met through the provision of an annual bus pass in line with Medway's current methodology.

This commitment will:

- i) Exclude any eligibility for a child residing in new housing, single dwelling or larger development, not currently outlined in Medway's local plan (2021);
- ii) Cease on 31st August 2033, with all school travel obligations returning to the local authority.

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The Council does not consider that the bus pass option is an acceptable solution and expects the Trust to reconsider the point in bold above, regarding redetermining the minibus provision annually, and commit to providing supervised transport throughout the period up until 2033 for the families living in walking distance to Stoke Primary Academy who require it.

We also welcome the Trust's commitment to consider operating a nursery from the Stoke site should the merger be approved. This could also provide a place for the children using the transport to wait before / after being picked up and dropped off in the morning and afternoon.

Yours sincerely

Chris Kiernan