

STANSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on Monday 18th May 2020 via Zoom (due to Coronavirus restrictions)

Councillors present: Sarah Hopkins (Chairman), Ed Cardozo, Robert Dennis, Fay Gridley, John Underdown and Fran Brown

Also present: Joanne Kirk (Clerk), County and District Councillor Mary Evans and three members of the public

Open Forum

The following issues were raised during the open forum:

A statement was read out by a resident raising a number of issues:

- The possibility producing a Neighbourhood Plan in Stansfield as a collaborative project for all residents of the village.
- Queries about the Parish Council's response to West Suffolk Council about the SHELAA sites in Stansfield.
- How the Parish Council will gauge the views of residents about local planning issues.

1. Election of chairman

Sarah Hopkins was nominated and following a vote, it was resolved that Sarah Hopkins would be chairman.

Note: At the extraordinary meeting on 3rd June, Fran Brown said she did not believe that it was clear how people had voted when the Chairman and Vice-Chairman were elected at the last meeting and asked for a re-vote. This took place at the meeting on 3rd June 2020

2. Signing of Declaration of Acceptance of Office and agreement to abide by the Council's Code of Conduct by the chairman

The chairman agreed to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office after the current restrictions have been lifted.

3. To elect a vice chairman

Ed Cardozo and Robert Dennis were nominated and following a vote, it was resolved that they would share the role of vice-chairman.

See note above

4. Register of Members' Interests form.

Councillors reviewed their Register of Interest forms. No amendments were necessary.

5. Acceptance of apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Julie Ghirardani.

6. General Power of Competence

It was resolved that Stansfield Parish Council meets the criteria for the General Power of Competence as $\frac{2}{3}$ of the councillors were elected on 2nd May and the clerk meets the qualification criterion as she has completed the Certificate in Local Council Administration.

7. Declaration of Interest in items on the agenda and dispensation requests

No councillors declared an interest in any items on the agenda.

8. Approval of minutes of meeting held on Monday 20th January 2020

It was resolved that the minutes were correct. The chairman agreed to sign them after the current restrictions have been lifted.

9. County Councillor's report

Mary Evans had sent a written report prior to the meeting. The report will be uploaded onto the Annual Parish Meeting page of the Parish Council website.

10. District Councillor's report

Mary Evans had sent a written report prior to the meeting. She spoke about West Suffolk Council's Local Plan.

In the current Local Plan, Vision 2031, the classification sets villages such as Stansfield as infill villages allowing a very limited amount of new homes. However, the definition of infill set against the geography of Stansfield meant that since 2014 only one small site has met the requirements of infill – the land adjacent to Pump Cottage.

The draft proposals being looked at for the Issues and Options paper for the new Local Plan would redefine the settlement hierarchy from most to least sustainable as:

- Towns – locally Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill
- Key Service Centre – locally Clare
- Local Service Centre – locally Wickhambrook and Hundon
- Type A Villages locally Stradishall
- Type B villages – locally Stansfield and Hawkedon
- Countryside – locally Denston

A Type A village would have a limited range of facilities and services, but which can meet some of the day to day needs of their residents and/or lie within 2Km of a town with the opportunity for sustainable access. The opportunity for site allocations in these villages will be explored through the Local Plan.

A type B village would have very limited or no services and poor accessibility to public transport. These villages would have a settlement boundary, but NO sites would be allocated through the Local Plan.

Countryside would be small rural settlements with no settlement boundary and no sites would be allocated.

These proposals would be the subject of the Issues and Options consultation, which has been postponed until October due to Coronavirus, and depending on the responses would be incorporated into the Local Plan. For a type B village, the two routes to build new homes would be through the development of Neighbourhood Plan, which is a local project to bring housing growth into a community or through an application for an Exception Site for affordable homes.

The case officer for the Pippin Post Close application is now Gary Hancox. An amended application is likely to be submitted shortly.

A question was asked about the potential cost and timescale for a Local Plan. Mary Evans explained that a Neighbourhood Plan is a huge amount of work and can take up to three years to prepare.

11. Police issues

There have been incidences of vandalism and a burglary in the village.

12. Update on list of actions agreed at the last meeting

There were no urgent councillor actions.

13. Finance

a) Approval of any payments and signing of Schedule of Payments

It was resolved that the following payments would be approved:

- Stansfield Village Hall – donation as agreed in the budget – Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 s 19 - **£768.00**
- Cathy Whitaker – internal audit - LGA 1972, s111 - **£65.00**
- J P Kirk - expenses – LGA 1972, s111 – **£30.71**

John and Fran agreed to check and sign the Schedule of Payments and invoices after the meeting.

b) Approval of payments authorised between meetings

No payments were authorised between meetings

c) Receipts and Payments (including online payments) made since 1st April 2020

Receipts	Date	Description	Supplier	Total
Precept	27/04/2020	Precept payment	West Suffolk Council	£5,111.00
			Total	£5,111.00

Payments	Date	Minute	Description	Supplier	Total
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Emptying of dog bins	07/04/2020	124/8f	Emptying of dog bins	West Suffolk Council	£78.52
Pension costs	14/04/2020	119/7g	Pension payment	Risby Parish Council	
Salaries	30/04/2020	119/7f	Clerk's salary	Ms J Kirk	
					£325.64

It was resolved that the statement of receipts and payments would be approved.

d) Bank balance as of 6th May 2020

Barclays current account	£5,755.29
Barclays reserve account	£3,003.21
Total in Banks	£8,758.50

Fran Brown and John Underdown agreed to verify and sign the bank statements after the current restrictions have been lifted.

e) Signatory to complete the checklist of Internal Controls

Fran Brown and John Underdown agreed to complete and sign the checklist of internal controls after the current restrictions have been lifted.

f) Review of all regular payments including the clerk's salary and approval of payments relating to these services for 2020 – 2021

Payment	2019/20	2020/21	Notes
Community Action Suffolk - Insurance	£186	£186	
Subscriptions:			
Starboard Systems Ltd - Scribe accounting software	£47	£47	
Risby Parish Council - phone costs	£22	£22	
CAS Ltd - website hosting fee	£60	£60	
HMRC - PAYE			
Clerk's salary			
Fidelity Funds Network - contribution to clerk's workplace pension (this will be replaced by a monthly payment to Risby PC from February 2019)			
Strimming of chapel ground	£120	£120	Amount may vary depending on weather conditions and number of cuts
Stansfield Village Hall - rental for meetings	£180	£180	
ICO - data protection registration	£35	£35	
West Suffolk Council - fortnightly emptying of dog bins	£77	£77	

It was resolved that the regular payments for 2020/21 would be approved.

g) To check the PAYE details and tax code for the clerk's salary

It was resolved that Fran Brown and John Underdown would check the PAYE details and tax code for the clerk's salary after the meeting.

h) To review the income and expenditure for 2019/20 against the budget and discuss the level of reserves for general and earmarked expenditure

At year-end Stansfield Parish Council had a budget deficit of £1,143. This is due to the purchase of the defibrillator. This shortfall was covered by donations received in 2018/19.

Reserve as of 31/03/20: £3,973 which includes allocated funds of £1,558. The general reserve is within the guidelines of no more than one year's annual precept.

i) Review of the Council's fixed assets and insurance values

Two new assets were purchased in 2019/20 – the defibrillator and cabinet. It was resolved that no amendments were necessary.

j) Review of the Council's risk assessment

It was resolved that no changes would be made and that the risk assessment would be approved.

k) Review of the levels of liability insurance

The levels of liability cover under the new Parish Protect Policy are as follows:

Cover Package	All Risks/	Public Liability	Officers Indemnity	Fidelity Guarantee (Dishonesty)	Business Interruption	Personal Accident	Employers' Liability
1A	£5k	£10m	£1m	£25k	£5k	£25k	£10m

It was resolved that the levels of liability insurance were adequate.

l) To appoint an internal auditor to check the Council's accounts.

The internal auditor must be independent from the Parish Council. It was resolved that Cathy Whitaker, who carried out last year's internal audit, would be appointed again this year. Ideally the accounts would have been internally audited prior to being approved, but this was not possible due to the Coronavirus lockdown.

m) Review of the effectiveness of the internal audit

Councillors reviewed the effectiveness of the internal audit. It was resolved that the internal audit was effective and that audit regulations would be met for the following reasons:

- Does the internal audit sufficiently cover all aspects of the financial controls relevant to the council (for example risk management, detection of fraud, internal controls) and are terms of reference in place and approved? Yes, Financial Regulations. New Financial Regulations were introduced on 1st May 2014 to introduce procedures to detect fraud once electronic banking is introduced. A checklist of internal controls is completed by an account signatory at every meeting to verify payments on bank statements against actual payments as listed in the accounts to ensure that there are no discrepancies.
- Is the internal auditor independent (i.e. does not have any role within the Council)? Yes. The internal auditor does not have a role within the Council.
- Is the internal auditor competent to carry out their work ethically, with integrity and objectivity? Is there any evidence to suggest that this may not be the case? Yes, she is a parish council clerk and RFO for Newmarket Town Council. There is no evidence to suggest that she will not carry out the work ethically, with integrity and objectivity.
- Is the Responsible Officer consulted in the internal audit plan? Yes.
- Are the responsibilities of members of the Council understood and has the necessary training been undertaken? Yes
- Is there a plan in place for when the internal audit will be undertaken and does the plan properly take account of corporate risk? The internal auditor's report will be presented to the Parish Council at the July meeting and any issues raised by the internal auditor will be discussed at the meeting and an action plan produced.

n) Review the effectiveness of the Council's internal controls

The following internal controls are in place:

- At each meeting a councillor checks bank statements against the Parish Council's accounts to ensure that transactions correspond and that the bank reconciliation agrees with the bank statement
- Where possible payments are approved at meetings and a Schedule of Payments is prepared which is checked by two councillors. Corresponding invoices are checked and signed by two councillors at the same time.
- Regular payments are approved at the March meeting and the invoices paid when they are received. These invoices are checked and signed by two councillors at the next meeting after they have been paid.
- The chairman rules off and signs the Schedule of Payments so that no amendments can be made after the meeting.
- Cheques must be signed by two signatories along with the corresponding invoice.
- A record of online payments is kept and checked at each meeting.
- If a supplier changes their bank details, the supplier must supply a written hard copy notifying the change.

It was resolved that these controls are adequate and are working well.

o) Appointment of a councillor to inspect the Council's property for damage or defects and complete the inspection checklist.

Fran Brown agreed to inspect the Council's property. Sarah Hopkins said that the village sign was checked by a builder after the last inspection and remedial action taken.

p) To approve the Council's accounts for the financial year 2019 – 2020

It was resolved that the accounts would be approved. The chairman agreed to sign them after the current restrictions have been lifted.

q) To complete and sign section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20 - the Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

Councillors completed section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20 - the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020. The Chairman and RFO agreed to sign them after the current restrictions have been lifted.

r) To complete and sign section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20 - the Accounting Statements 2019/20

Councillors completed section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20 - the Accounting Statement 2019/20. The Chairman and RFO agreed to sign them after the current restrictions have been lifted.

s) To decide whether Stansfield PC should submit a Certificate of Exemption from an external audit

It was resolved that Stansfield Parish Council would submit a Certificate of Exemption from an external audit as its income in 2019/20 was £6,674 and its expenditure was £8,128 which is below the £25,000 threshold for an external audit. The Chairman and RFO agreed to sign the Certificate of Exemption after the current restrictions have been lifted.

t) To confirm the dates for the notice of the period for the exercise of public rights

It was resolved that the dates for the notice of the period for the exercise of public rights would be from 1st – 30th September 2020.

u) To approve the Financial Report which the Council needs to publish as part of the Transparency Code 2015

It was resolved that the financial report would be approved.

v) Precept information for 2020/21

West Suffolk Council has approved the precept request made by Stansfield Parish Council. A payment of £5,111 was received on 27th April 2020.

14. Planning

a) Email from a resident requesting that the Parish Council carries out a Neighbourhood Plan

Sarah Hopkins updated councillors about a meeting she attended with Anne Marie Howell from West Suffolk Council, Mary Evans and Joanne Kirk to discuss what is involved in producing a Neighbourhood Plan.

A Neighbourhood Plan is usually carried out where existing local planning policy is insufficiently robust and/or not relevant to a village. It should promote sustainable development, have regard to national planning policy and conform with adopted strategic local planning policy.

It should not be used to control development.

A Neighbourhood Plan is initiated by the Parish Council with a separate committee set up to develop and progress the plan. Members of the Parish Council should sit on the committee along with other members of the community. All steps must be approved by the Parish Council. It should be community-led and represent a range of wants and needs in the local area, this should be backed up by evidence. Before being adopted, it will be subject to a local referendum.

Advantages

It allows the community to help shape the future development of their area.

Disadvantages

There are considerable time and financial constraints.

Time: a typical NP takes 18-24 months to complete with many hours of work. Some of this can be carried out by consultants, however this increases the cost.

Cost: a typical NP costs between £10,000 to £20,000. There is a grant of £9,000 available from West Suffolk Council, but this would leave a shortfall. The Parish Council would need to consider how this would be financed and whether Stansfield residents would be prepared to accept a substantial increase in the precept to fund it.

Alternatives

1. Parish plan – this would be cheaper but is not a statutory document.
2. Exception sites for affordable housing adjacent to the housing settlement boundary
3. Consultations (on local plan and individual planning proposals)

It was resolved that:

- The clerk would circulate West Suffolk Council's PowerPoint presentation about Neighbourhood Plans to councillors and upload it onto the Parish Council website
- The Parish Council will produce a questionnaire for residents once West Suffolk Council has produced its Issues and Options consultation focusing on issues in the document which are relevant to Stansfield. The questionnaire would need to be concise and well thought through. An online version could be produced as well.
- The letter from two residents in Stansfield would be discussed at the next meeting on 20th July along with the possibility of producing a Neighbourhood Plan.
- The clerk would contact the resident who made the statement at the start of the meeting to ask questions about their motivation for a Neighbourhood Plan.

John Underdown asked if the Neighbourhood Plan would continue to be taken into account if West Suffolk Council produced a new Local Plan. Mary Evans confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan would be taken into account in the Local Plan. Robbie Dennis said that whichever document is second (NP or Local Plan) would take precedence.

15. Highways/Rights of Way issues/tree/transport issues

There has been some vandalism of information signs around the village. A lot of people are walking away from footpaths and removing signs which are there for their safety.

It was resolved that the clerk would include something on the village Facebook page explaining why the signs are there and that Fran Brown would provide a link to a free app showing footpaths in the area. A map of the footpaths in the Parish will also be uploaded.

16. To confirm the dates of meetings in 2020/21

- Monday 20th July 2020
- Monday 21st September 2020
- Monday 16th November 2020
- Monday 18th January 2021

- Monday 15th March 2021

17. Correspondence

- a) **Email from the Boundary Commission about a delay in the implementation date of new electoral arrangements for Suffolk County Council from 2021 to 2025 due to the difficulty in carrying out a proper consultation during the COVID 19 outbreak – for information only**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.18pm.

Signed (Chairman) Dated