The MINUTES of the Stoughton Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 10th January 2023 at 7.00pm

at Stoughton Village Hall

**Present:** Cllr Bob Battey (BB) (Chair)

Cllr Tom Richardson (TR) (Vice Chair)

Cllr Tracey Mee (TM)

 Cllr June Sparrow (JS)

 Cllr Paul Cresswell (PC)

 District Cllr Peter Elliott (PE)

 District Cllr Simon Galton (SG)

 Clerk Victoria Webster (VW)

**124/22 Welcome, Introductions and Chairs opening remarks**

BB welcomed all to the meeting, fellow Councillors and District Councillor. Wished a Happy New Year to all.

**125/22** **Apologies for absence**

No apologies of absence were received.

**126/22** **Declarations of Members Interests**

No declarations of interest were declared.

**127/22 Parishioners Comments**

There were no parishioners present.

**128/22 Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting held on 08.11.2022**

The minutes were approved and agreed.

**129/22 To review any actions from the minutes of the meeting on 08.11.2022**

No items for discussion.

**130/22 Update on the Laurel Hedge at the Side of White House Opposite the Church**

TM confirmed the hedge had now been cut. The issue has been resolved.

**131/22** **Adopt the new Code of Conduct**

All agreed and the Code of Conduct was adopted.

**132/22** **Update on 23 Gaulby Lane**

BB confirmed an update has been received from Christine Zacharia which was brief and explained she had tried to contact the owner and there has been no response. She has given him a deadline of the 16th January to respond. BB responded, thanked Christine for her response, asked once again if this matter has been put to the environmental officer and what will happen after the 16th January if the owner hasn’t responded.

BB raised his concerns with the District Councillors that there should legally be a monitoring officer within the local council and understands there currently isn’t. The district councillors confirmed there isn’t a legal officer within the council, but the council employ an Intern who is similar a consultant from an external company.

**Action: DC Galton to find out more details as to who this person is and inform BB.**

DC Galton raised the subject of the requested compulsory purchase and outlined that Christine wouldn’t have the authority to approve this. She would have to take a report to the planning committee to seek approval. The owner could attempt block the compulsory purchase in court, so it is imperative the council follow all requirements fully and in order. The key thing before compulsory purchase can go ahead is to carry out an inspection of the property and produce a report in case, the council are challenged at a later date to show the condition of the property. The issue with this request is how the authority would pay for the property initially.

JS put it to the DC’s that as it has been 15 years since the property was purchased and it effects those living either side, doesn’t this give the Parish Council a good case.

DC Elliott asked if the neighbours had complained to the authority. The Parish Council confirmed they both had.

BB asked the DC’s about Parish Councillors being present during the inspection of the property as Christine has previously said they are not permitted to be present, even outside.

The DC’s confirmed Parish Councillors could stand outside the property during the inspection.

BB asked why this case has been referred to the environmental department.

DC Galton explained as the issue falls under planning initially the complaint would be addressed by Christine and then because of damp and habitation is part of the issue, this does not fall under Christine which is why it has been referred to environmental.

DC Galton explained that when entering a property without permission, prior notice would have to be served and an external firm would have to be employed to facilitate access and to make the property secure again following entry. The owner would have to be given a length of time to respond prior to the gaining entry notice being utilised.

BB expressed that the Parish Council now need to refer the matter to the monitoring officer.

DC Galton explained that that the Parish Council don’t have to go to the monitoring officer first if we want to go to the ombudsman.

BB previously spoke to the owner who agreed to either sell the building or complete the work. BB suggests phoning the owner again and ask for an update.

BB suggested bringing the matter to the attention of the monitoring officer within Harborough.

Councillors felt the Parish Council should wait until after the 16th January and give Christine the opportunity to carry out what she has said. Suggested it is referred to the next meeting.

**Resolved:** give the opportunity for the owner to either reply to Christine by the 16th January. The Parish Council will write to the owner to request an update on their intentions.

Proposed by bb and seconded by JS.

BB asked what will happen if the owner is none responsive.

The council could issue and improvement order and if the owner fails to carry the work out the council can employ a company to carry the work out and then bill the owner for the work. There are official timescales that have to be followed and if they are not and the owner appeals the works order could be dismissed if timescales haven’t been followed.

BB asked if the planning department is suitable staffed.

DC Galton confirmed the council can’t afford to employ a conservation officer and they have around half the number of staff now as this time last year. It is quite a difficult situation within the department. There are issues with recruiting and a shortage of planning consultants.

BB asked if there is monitoring of planning officers.

DC Galton explained there is an external audit due to take place on the planning department but is unsure if this will be made public.

BB thanked both DC Galton and DC Elliott for attending and very much appreciate their efforts with this cause.

**133/22** **Does the Parish Council want to receive the bank reconciliations electronically or paper based**

All Councillors are happy to receive the reconciliations electronically.

**134/22 Fireworks and times these are allowed to be set off**

The village has issues with fireworks being set off now and again and often late at night. BB received a complaint about this one night. The general rules are any time between 7am until 11pm any day of the week, bonfire night until 12am and Chinese New Year until 1am.

TM already planned to include an article in the next newsletter about fireworks and the general rules that accompany the setting off them and to highlight about issues relating to animals.

**135/22** **Civility & Respect Project. Does the Parish Council want to sign up to the project**

BB feels this Parish Council has always been civil and polite to all but felt there was no disadvantage to signing up.

**Action: VW to action the pledge.**

**136/22** **Boundary Changes**

These changes relate to parliamentary boundaries only. A new constituency is now going to be formed with Rutland, Stamford and this section of Harborough.

TM asked what the rationale is behind this decision.

DC Galton explained that a lot of objections had been received to the previous boundary change suggestion, so this new constituency was formed. The most important thing is that each constituency can’t have a bigger difference than 10% of numbers which is why we see some strange boundary lines. This boundary change suggestion still needs to be approved by parliament and will be decided by the next general election. Nothing will change for the local government boundaries, including district boundaries.

BB asked for an update on the unitary authority.

The DC’s confirmed it isn’t looking likely that this will go ahead.

**137/22** **Traffic calming hump on Church Lane. No update has been received, what are the next steps**

This is still outstanding, and no reply has been received to our correspondence.

TM wonders if the solution is to start the process of reporting it again and ask the council to come and measure the hump or write again explaining the hump is essential to prevent accidents and originally grant money was awarded to install the hump which means it must have been approved that the hump was required.

DC Galton asked how long it been wrong.

It has been around 2 years since it has been measured and within 3 months of the measurement, work was commissioned and carried out. The same man who stated it was a risk 2 years ago is the same man who now states nothing more needs to be done and there is no risk.

The dragons’ teeth on Gaulby Lane are also still missing. Resurfacing work was carried out by a contractor on the road, this was inadequate, this is therefore required to be done again. The road is on the list for this to be done and then once this has been done the dragons teeth can then by painted back on.

Proposal for action: Write again stating there is now no hump, there was a need for a hump previously and we want this replaced. We have previously communicated but no response has been received. This needs reviewing urgently. It should also be included about the missing dragons’ teeth at the junction of Charity Farm, Gaulby Lane.

**Resolved:** Agreed by all that a letter should be sent.

TM asked the DC’s whose responsibility it is review if signage can be implemented on the corner of Thurnby Lane as accidents keep happening.

The DC’s confirmed it is LCC’s responsibility, but they may well ask the Parish Council to pay/contribute towards such signs as they have such limited funds.

Proposal: Put a letter together, outlining our concerns and giving dates of accidents and explaining it was felt some kind of warning is needed prior to the bend. It is a safety issue. Accidents have required the attention of the air ambulance in the past.

**Resolved:** All agreed this letter should be sent.

**138/22 Pathway at the top of Thurnby Lane**

The hedge is dramatically encroaching on the path which is causing it to reduce in size. This has previously been reported to Michael Thornton at LCC, but it still hasn’t been done.

Proposal: Tracey to report on Fix My Street.

**Action:** Tracy to report this issue on Fix My Street.

**139/22 Dragons teeth at the top end of the village**

Discussed above.

**140/22** **Update on Obtaining Tree Preservation Orders on the Trees Lining Stoughton Lane**

TM and TR carried out a survey of the trees and drew up quite an extensive list. It was suggested it could be easier to include Stoughton Lane in the conservation area as it also has several houses that date back many years and are of historical value/interest.

Proposal: Submit a request for Stoughton Lane to become a conservation area. All agreed to this.

**Resolved:** TM/TR to submit an application for Stoughton Lane to be included in the conservation area.

**141/22** **Purchase of the recreation field. Update following the recent auction**

This was sold for £3900 and was purchased by a villager.

**142/22 Playground Inspection Report. Discuss**

The report has highlighted some small issues but nothing of major concern. The rotten item has already been repaired. There is nothing essential. The equipment is wearing but it is getting old.

**143/22 Financial Matters**

1. To approve payments due

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| **PAYEE** | **DETAILS** | **NET** | **VAT** | **GROSS** |
| T. Richardson | Expenses for Community Garden | £ | £ | £207.68 |
| Inside + Out | Replace and recharge batteries in speed camera | £ | £ | £100 |
| Inside + Out | Repair broken gate post | £ | £ | £75.00 |
| Astley Computers | Annual Cloud Back-up | £ | £ | £140 |
| V. Webster | November & December Salary & Expenses | £ | £ | £674.98 |
| M&BG | Grounds Maintenance | £183.76 | £36.75 | £220.51 |
| Waterplus | Community Garden Water | £9.82 | £1.64 | £9.82 |
| V. Webster | Printer Ink Cartridges | £ | £ | £33.90 |
| M. Ellis | Repair platform on playground | £ | £ | £25.00 |
| T. Richardson | Post & concreate for gate repair | £54.00 | £10.80 | £64.80 |

All payments were approved.

1. To approve Bank Reconciliation

BB cross checked the bank reconciliation and bank statements and confirmed they match. These were approved.

TR asked for approved to purchase another gallon of herbicide. Costs approx. £50 for gallon. The purchase was approved up to £100.

BB reminded Councillors it is an election year. It was suggested that an advertisement be placed in the village flyer about becoming a councillor.

Date of next meeting: 7th March 2023

**Meeting Closed at 8.26pm.**