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Stratton Parish Council

Official Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
held on 14th May 2019 at the Stratton Village Hall

Present

Cllrs A Aylott, C. Hobbs, A. Wheeler, and one member of the public.

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

Apologies

Cllr G Hollinshead and Clerk Mr C Boulton.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 15th May 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th May 2018 were accepted unanimously by the Council as a true record.

Matters Arising

No matters were arising from the meeting of the 15th May 2018.

Chairman's Report for 2018/2019

Stratton Parish Council has been busy over the past year, with four Councillors trying to deal with the workload of the quota of seven. A new councillor, Gillian Hollinshead, came forward in the middle of the year and was co-opted onto the council. But, more disappointedly, no other persons stepped forward to help fill the remaining two gaps. This meant, once again, that the parish council was not able to cover matters as promptly as it would have wished, and delays inevitably occurred.

In May 2019 a new parish council is to be elected which will last for five years. To encourage more volunteers to come forward to serve on the council, Stratton lead the way, working with Bradford Peverell, Frampton and Sydling St Nicholas Parish Councils, to try to generate interest in becoming a councillor. This included an article in the Chalk Stream, articles on the Stratton Parish website and information via the Stratton Active circulation list. An open session was arranged at Stratton Village Hall, with an invitation to anyone interested in becoming a councillor to come along and find out what the parish council's responsibilities are and to ask any questions. It is a great shame that all this hard work by existing councillors has fallen on deaf ears and residents in the parish have shown a total apathy not only towards the work done by the parish council but also any interest in participating as a councillor. This is most concerning, for with the amalgamation of all the district council's and the county council, there is now no intermediate level of local government between the parish council and the new Dorset Council. The fact that only three Councillors have put their names forward for re-election means that the parish council now has the bare minimum required to form a quorum to hold meetings. Three people cannot be expected to deal efficiently with all the duties the parish council has to cover. Delays will inevitably occur, and the wishes of residents will not happen with any great urgency.

Four vacant councillor positions need to be filled, and we encourage and urge residents to step forward and be co-opted onto the parish council to help ensure that we continue to operate effectively for the benefit of everyone in the parish.

The past year appears to have been the 'Year of the Tree' with various concerns being expressed about trees and their position or condition. This has involved councillors with a considerable amount of time and work, which will continue into the next year. After long debate, three trees were removed from the village green and two new trees planted. The trees being removed primarily because the council had been informed that they were contravening Highway law by overhanging a public right of way. Considerable cost has also been incurred on trees around the playing field after comments received from residents. This area which has always been treated as a natural wild-life area has now been reviewed by a professional tree surgeon. A report was commissioned to establish whether the trees were in a safe condition and that no health and safety issues existed which could cause danger to users of the playing field. Following this report, work has been carried out but has not yet been completed.

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Last year the parish council carried out a project to provide a wreath railing at the war memorial in the village. This was part of the 100th year ceremony to commemorate the end of the First World War. The railings, which were suggested by an unknown villager, were completed and installed close to the cenotaph, attracting a grant from the Chairman's Fund of West Dorset District Council. Thanks, must be given to Wrackleford Estates for their permission and assistance to hold a ceremonial bonfire on Grimstone Down as part of the national remembrance of the same 100th year ceremony.

Basic maintenance has been a prime concern of the parish council and work on maintaining the village green and playing fields in as good a condition as possible has continued. Work on hedges, ditches and flood channels have now been successfully incorporated into an annual maintenance contract. Much praise was received from residents on the condition of the village green, despite the long, hot and dry summer. Other maintenance works around the parish has been done by individual councillors to try and stretch our small maintenance budget as far as it would go. I specifically thank Councillor Peter Hallett for his work and help in getting maintenance work carried out. Despite our best efforts, however, there have been times when some matters have not been dealt with as quickly as desired, and this 'do-it-ourselves' approach will need to be reviewed. It was good to note that the long hot summer ensured that the two tubs at the entrances to the village remained in full bloom for a long period. The western tub, being more hidden in the shade, however, was not quite so colourful as the eastern one.

We have continued to talk with neighbouring parishes to see where and in what way we can work together or share services. With new electoral wards for Dorset Council coming into being, we will, in future, need to contact and talk to several new parishes to agree joint interests. We continue to be active within the D.A.T.P.C. and ensure that we are aware of what is occurring at a county level and national level.

Work on the parish council website has continued, with additional information and details being incorporated, this ensured we remain fully compliant with the Transparency Regulations for Smaller Authorities. Hard work by Councillor Cheryl Hobbs and Parish Clerk, Chris Boulton, has ensured that the website has remained active and informative throughout the year and increased the sharing of information with many residents.

Last year, considerable time was taken in agreeing objectives, setting in place and carrying out works to spend the CIL Neighbourhood Proportion payment passed to us late in 2017/18 by West Dorset District Council. Some, eleven different projects were started and completed, including a large donation to the Heart of Stratton defibrillator group. Further ideas will need to be considered, evaluated and put in place during the coming year.

The parish council finances are in a good position, with strong review and budget control processes in place. This ensures that decision making can be carried out and that expenditure is directed to areas where it is required, in line with the Finance Policy. Section 137 grants were made by the parish council and supported seven local and parish groups, including the Youth Club, Children's Xmas Party and Stratton Allotment Society.

My final thanks go to all councillors and the parish clerk for their dedication and hard work over the past year, and indeed to all of the councillors who have served over the past four years of this particular council, ensuring that the people of the parish have benefitted from the many matters with which we have been involved.

Financial Reports for 2018/2019

The annual income and expenditure statements, together with balance sheet and supporting statement are attached as Appendix A.

Questions from the Public

- 1) A vote of thanks was given to councillors for all their hard work over the past years.
- 2) It is to be hoped that new councillors do come forward and are elected shortly.
- 3) It is hoped that the new councillor representing Stratton on the Dorset Council will attend future meetings. Chairman confirmed that the new councillor had been invited to this meeting and would be invited to all future meetings.

Date of the next Annual Parish Meeting

Tuesday 12th May 2020 at 7pm

Meeting closed at 7.30 pm

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