

Stratton Parish Council UNADOPTED DRAFT

Official Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
held on 21st July 2020 at the Stratton Village Hall

Present

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

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

Apologies

Cllr A. Wheeler and DC Cllr D. Taylor.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 14th May 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th May 2019 were accepted unanimously by the Council as a true record.

Matters Arising

No matters were arising from the meeting of the 14th May 2019.

Chairman's Report for 2019/2020

Stratton Parish Council could be said to have suffered a year of doom and gloom as for much of the year it has had to operate with only three Councillors out of its recommended quota of seven. In May 2019, there was opportunity for a new Council to be created as elections were held, but despite considerable efforts to generate interest and try to ensure that enough candidates were standing so that voting could take place, the Council returned only three councillors. 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.

At the same time the levels of local authorities in Dorset changed with the District Councils and Dorset County Council being abolished and the new Dorset Council becoming the single local authority. This means there is now no intermediate level of local government between the parish council and the new Dorset Council. The fact that only three Councillors put their names forward for re-election meant that the parish council had only the bare quorum to hold meetings if all councillors were present. Despite several requests to the people of the parish, no one came forward to be considered for co-option onto the parish council. However, right at the end of the fiscal year, one person did come forward, Mr Matthew Garner, who was successfully co-opted at the end of March.

So, three vacant councillor positions still need to be filled and the Council continues to encourage residents to step forward and be considered for co-option onto the parish council to help ensure that it can operate effectively for the benefit of everyone in the parish.

To make things more difficult, the Parish very sadly suffered the loss of its Parish Clerk, Mr Christopher Boulton, when he passed away in late August 2019. Chris had always been a fully focused and obliging person, willing to help, advise, organise and move parish matters forward in a positive and concise way, especially in some of the IT areas with which parish councils have to contend. To date, and despite several advertisements, no new parish clerk has been found, again placing a strain on the three remaining councillors and slowing matters down further and so the search for a new parish clerk continues.

To add to the misfortunes, in June 2019, our maintenance contractor had a serious accident meaning he was unable to work for the rest of the year. This left the parish council with additional work to find other contractors to undertake the scheduled work to keep the parish up to scratch. Most of the required work was undertaken by a replacement contractor although some tasks were not fully completed. Although this saved the parish council expenditure, it would have been preferable for all the work to have been done.

Extra work on tree care was carried out during the year with several trees in a potentially dangerous condition being felled around the playing field. A new fence was required at the entrance of the playing field as the old fence and posts had all but disappeared. This work was financed with funds from the CIL Neighbourhood payment received in 2017. Further matters

identified in the report commissioned on the playing field area and trees have yet to be completed.

Basic maintenance has continued to be a prime and ongoing concern and work on maintaining the village green and playing fields in as good a condition as possible has continued. Work was done on the younger children's rocking horse, repairs made to the play area fence, repairs to the older children's play equipment on the playing field, plus a new button seat for the zip wire being ordered. A new dispenser for dog waste bags was also installed at the entrance of the playing field and on the bus shelter next to the almshouses. The Parish Council continues to maintain the flower tubs at both entrances to the village with plenty of summer and early spring colour.

The bench by the almshouses was found to be rotten and was removed for safety. A replacement bench was ordered and delivered in March but because of the Coronavirus outbreak and movement restrictions it has yet to be installed. Equally, one of the main two noticeboards in the village was removed after its posts were found to be rotten. It has been fully repaired and up graded but again has yet to be re-installed as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak. The Millennium Village Map stand blew over following a storm, again a result of rotten wooden legs. Now removed, talks are underway with a local contractor for a new leg design to be made allowing the map stand to be repaired and reinstalled later in 2020.

Considerable time was spent, in conjunction with Stratton Youth Club, to arrange for a contractor to remove the old skateboard ramps on the playing field. The skateboard ramps, which were the property of the youth club, were starting to show signs of wear and tear and becoming dangerous. After much discussion, a contractor was found who agreed to remove the ramps at no cost to either the youth club or the parish council.

Discussions were also held with Dorset Wildlife Trust, with no apparent result to date, regarding investigations as to whether part of the playing field could be converted into a wildflower meadow. Soil tests to be carried out later in 2020 are awaited before any final decision can be made on such a project.

Following last year's election, councillors agreed a number of objectives to be undertaken over the five-year life of this council. During the past year, the existing Finance Policy was reviewed and a policy covering public use of the Wreath Railings was created and introduced, following discussions with local religious groups. The annual precept amount was reviewed on a 'zero based' budget principle last November, fitting expenditure to meet parish expectations and requirements.

The Parish Council continues to support local groups and others who help residents in the parish through distribution of Section 137 Grants, with five separate grants being made. A grant was also made to The Heart of Our Community for training events.

Work on the parish council website has continued which ensures 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 although, in general, we need to try and make sharing of information with residents more effective.

The parish council finances are in a good position, with good 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.

My final thanks go to all councillors and the parish clerk (who is sadly missed) for their dedication and hard work during the past year. Hopefully, the year 2020/21 will be a better year for the Parish Council, although with the full effects of the Coronavirus situation still to unfold, perhaps I am speaking too soon.

Financial Reports for 2019/2020

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

Questions from the Public

No specific questions relating to the Annual Report or Finances were raised.

Date of the next Annual Parish Meeting

Tuesday 11th May 2021 at 7pm

Meeting closed at 7.40 pm