



## **Minutes of a meeting of the Town Council held on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023, 7pm at the Town Hall**

### **Present:**

Councillors: Councillors: Rachel Armstrong, John Callinan, Keith Creighton, Debbie Curtis, Mike Davis, Marcus Dixon, Neil Gibbs, Carol Kambites (Chair of Council) Gary Powell, Val Randell, Keith Terry, Wendy Thomson and Theresa Watt (Vice Chair of Council).

In Attendance: Town Clerk, Carlos Novoth and two representatives of 'The Door'

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***Attendees were reminded that the Proceedings of the meeting could be filmed photographed or recorded.***

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The Chair welcomed representatives of 'The Door'. The short presentation touched on the organisation's key local activities and the positive responses to their efforts from the young people of Stonehouse. Highlights included:

- A recent survey suggested the Pod was valued and young people attending felt safe and a sense of belonging.
- Maidenhill School better understood the value and were more welcoming of the Door in communicating with young people attending the school
- The Door regularly see 20 pupils at Breakfast club
- Attendees at the Pod were starting to feel confident in their surroundings and the way they were treated that has led to a growing confidence that will hopefully lead to suggestions on improvements they would like to see at the park
- Detached youthwork reaching young people remotely is working well in helping them interact with others
- Led by attendees, the Pod is getting a make-over

There were questions around issues such as membership (young people from Dursley, Stroud, Wycliffe, Stanleys, Great Oldbury, Ebley etc), balance between males and females (fairly even) and numbers of young people attending sessions (253 young people attending the Pod at least once with 144 attending more than once).

The Chair thanked the representatives for their update and congratulated them and their organisation for the really positive work they were doing.

- TC3134 To receive apologies**  
Apologies were received from Cllr Mark Edwards and Ward Cllr Mattie Ross
- TC3135 To receive declarations of interest**  
Declarations of interest were noted by Cllrs Carol Kambites and Theresa Watt in relation to Agenda Item TC3140
- TC3136 To approve the minutes of the Town Council meeting of 16<sup>th</sup> Oct '23**  
Council APPROVED the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting
- TC3137 To receive reports from Chair of Town Council and town councillors**  
**The Chair highlighted the following:**
- The first meeting of the Ship Inn site working group (Anchor Group) took place - the meeting was productive; there was discussion about the interim use of the site over the next 18 months - the second meeting is due on 29<sup>th</sup> November - the first meeting of a separate 'Project' group has also been set up to start the detailed work to develop the business case needed by the District council to secure the site for community use - the project group already has 12 members.
  - Sunday's Remembrance service went extremely well and was well attended considering the weather - thanks were given to those that helped with the event
  - Goodwill - more volunteers were needed for this major community event.
- Cllr Keith Creighton attended the recent Market Town's Forum - attendees commonly raised a concern with the number of empty shops in their towns - Stonehouse currently runs contrary to this trend  
Cllr Keith Terry attended a Trust meeting with the Stonehouse Community Association.  
Cllr Neil Gibbs to attend the Stagholt Allotment meeting in December  
Cllr Debbie Curtis attended the first of the community engagement canal project meeting - ToR were agreed. It was reported that this groups activities were to centre primarily on Stonehouse. It was suggested that Sarah Burgess from the Cotswold Canals Connected be invited to provide council with an overview of the groups work and activities over the coming months. Cllr Curtis also attend a meeting of the Stonehouse School Trustees.
- TC3138 To receive reports from County and District Councillors**  
Ward Cllr Mattie Ross provided Council with a written update.  
Town Councillor John Callinan commented on his interest in Cllr Ross's update in relation to the simulation walk for people suffering from some vision impairment; Stonehouse came out very positively in accommodating people with vision impairments. Mention was made of the report produced by Accessibility Gloucestershire (AG); the Clerk commented that a significant proportion of the comments made by AG

related to Highway matters and that these were being furthered by the council's Transport and Highways working group.

- TC3139 To receive RFO's budget report and bank reconciliation for Oct '23**  
Council NOTED the completed Bank reconciliation for October '23 with a closing balance of £60,713.48 and the budget report with an 'Actual Net expenditure of £234,002.93; Actual Net Income of £390,724.54 and Reserve Movements totalling £19,415.05.

Due to their declared interest in Agenda Item TC3140, Cllr Carol Kambites handed the Chair to Cllr Mike Davis and both Cllrs Kambites and Theresa Watt left the meeting (7.38pm)

- TC3140 To approve the latest payment list**  
The Clerk presented two additional payments to add to the payment list for authorisation at the meeting - these related to part payment of the Goodwill stalls and the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarterly payment to 'The Door'. Council APPROVED the payment lists totalling £17,553.29 - this total combines the initial payment list totalling £6,498.29 and the additional payment list totalling £11,055

Cllr Carol Kambites and Theresa Watt returned to the meeting at 7.42pm with Cllr Kambites taking back the Chair for the meeting

- TC3141 To receive an update on the budget setting process for the 2024/25 financial year**  
Cllr Keith Terry raised an inaccuracy within the Clerk's support papers for this agenda item - Cllr Terry had not been consulted on the first draft of the budget setting process.  
The Clerk presented an overview of discussions with the Chair and Vice Chair of Business Committee and the Chair of Environment Committee and comments generally from both committees. These were represented within a working document provided in supporting papers. Whilst there were further discussions to take place, the current budget proposal for the 2024/25 financial year provided for a 9.87% increase. This did not take into account a proposed reduction in the tax base due to the boundary changes with Great Oldbury and did not include the use of the council's financial Reserves. The Clerk also highlighted the fact that the current year's budget has been underwritten by the council's reserves to the tune of £17,000.  
Cllrs recommended that the Clerk provide details of the 2022/23 outturn and the estimated outturn for the current year 2023/24.  
Council NOTED the latest update

- TC3142 To discuss for approval the following motion put forward by Town Cllr John Callinan in relation to Verney Fields:**

- " In order to support the Council's attempt to obtain Town Green status for Verney Fields it is felt necessary to have

**sufficient funds available for securing legal advice. In the event of an inquiry being called it may be necessary for Council to be legally represented. We are requesting a sum of £10,000 be allocated in Earmarked Reserves for just such an eventuality. This request should be considered a contingency."**

There was widespread debate on this issue in light of events over the past year and the town council's ongoing support for the community in ensuring long term access across Verney Fields for the Stonehouse Community's continued enjoyment.

It was acknowledged that to date, the town council had applied for Verney Fields to be granted Town Green status providing over 118 Witness Statements; also the town council submitted five DMMO's supported by over 338 further witness statements from the community's residents. As a result of the many occasions that the community has voiced their opinions, it was felt that they will expect the full and continued support of the town council; it is envisaged that this will to some degree extend to providing financial assistance to any future legal challenges even though it is understood that a local pressure group will be looking to establish crowd funding for this. Both Glos County Council and the landowners must be made aware of the importance of this land to the community and the extent to which the town council will pursue its aim. Cllr Davis noted Nailsea was reaching a critical point with their Town Green application and that as soon as information is available it would be distributed to others.

Council APPROVED the following proposal:

**'To approve the creation of an earmarked reserve for an initial sum of £10,000, with the potential to increase this if necessary, in support of the case for Verney Fields to be granted Town Green status for the benefit of the Stonehouse Community'**

**TC3143 To receive the minutes of the Business Committee meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> October '23 and approve its recommendations:**

- Town council to approve a new earmarked reserve for the site headed 'Ship Inn site - Meanwhile Use' with a budget of £20,000.**

Cllrs felt it was important to demonstrate to Stroud District Council and the Stonehouse Community a firm commitment to the 'Ship Inn' site and its development for future community use. The newly formed 'Project' group felt that in order to encourage community awareness and use of the site, immediate funding should be provided. It was recognised that it had taken so long to reach this point and that with the District Council's willingness to work positively with the potential aim of placing the site into community use, a financial commitment was necessary.

There was a shared concern about the impact of providing a full £20,000 for the project especially in relation with other competing projects.

Cllr Theresa Watt proposed the amount was reduced to £10,000 with a view to increasing the amount, if necessary, once the town council's existing earmarked reserves were reviewed. The proposal in full (as follows):

**Town Council to approve a new earmarked reserve for the site headed 'SHIP Inn site - Meanwhile Use' with a budget of £10,000 with the view to increasing the amount, if necessary, once the town council's existing earmarked reserves were reviewed.**

was seconded by Cllr John Callinan. All voted in favour.

**TC3144 To receive the minutes of the Environment Committee meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> November '23 and approve its recommendations:**

- **To approve the return of a proportion of the local donation made to the town council for the development of Laburnum Playing Field**

Cllrs were very appreciative of the local donation made in 2021 towards the development of Laburnum Playing Field. 50% of the donation had either been spent or committed. It was agreed that the remaining £1,000 would be returned to the resident who had made the original donation.

Council **APPROVED** the return £1,000 to the local resident providing the donation.

**TC3145 To approve communications in support of the meeting's decisions**  
Council **APPROVED** the following communications:  
The Town Council's decisions in relation to Agenda Items TC3142 and TC3143 to be publicised on Social Media

The Chair requested that a late item be added to the agenda and in so doing put a motion to exclude the public from the meeting; All voted in favour.

The Chair requested the suspension of Standing Orders to allow the addition of the late HR item to be added to the agenda; All voted in favour

**TC3145A To approve salary increases to all staff in line with the 2023/24 National Pay Increase of £1,925 for each staff member backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.**  
Council **APPROVED** the salary increase of £1,925 per staff member backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023

**TC3146 Date of next meeting - Monday 11<sup>th</sup> December '23**

Council **NOTED** the date of the next meeting