



Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held at Stoneleigh Community Hall

Wednesday 4th March 2020

Village Hall, Hannah's Lane, WSM

Present Sue Isherwood, Chair
Ros Wyke, Councillor
Jo Tucker, Councillor
Sue Reece, Councillor
Peter Bright, Councillor
Guy Timson, Councillor

In attendance Chris Harris, Clerk

Before the meeting proper commenced, four members of the public, including the applicants plus their representative, presented further details and information regarding planning application 2020/0364/OTA new build, 'The Quarry', Top Road. Councillors thanked them for their input.

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Graham Noel, Somerset County Councillor.

2. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

2a Declarations of interest from Councillors on items on the agenda

Cllr Wyke, as a Member involved in the consideration and determination of planning applications by Mendip District Council, declares that the views expressed by her at Parish Council meetings on any particular proposal are based on the evidence available to her at the time, and is provisional only. Cllr Wyke will not be bound by any recommendation made by the Parish Council on any proposal, and will consider any matter afresh in connection with any application which comes before her in her capacity as a Member of Mendip District Council, taking all further evidence into account.

No other declarations or written requests were received.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 17th February 2020

The minutes of the meeting were reviewed; after two minor typographical errors were amended, the minutes were agreed and signed as a correct record.

To expedite matters relating to planning application 2020/0364/OTA, the Chair considered it appropriate to alter the agenda accordingly.

Cllr Wyke's declaration of interests regarding planning application considerations is recorded and the Councillor was absented from the discussion.

6c Planning Applications to be considered:

2020/0364/OTA	New build, 'The Quarry', Top Road (outline application)
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Councillors discussed this application in considerable detail. It was noted that there had been little time to review papers prior to the meeting which was unfortunate but unavoidable in the circumstances. It was also noted that the presentation by the applicant's agent was somewhat presumptive and unhelpful. Clarity on some details of the plan regarding building height and sight lines had been requested by a member of the community present at the meeting; the applicants had earlier noted that build height should be addressed by sufficient digging out, but further clarity on this point is needed.

The main issues Councillors considered were that 1) the site is outside the village development boundary and as such remains subject to the existing Local Plan Part I not the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, although Councillors recognised that a lack of in-depth understanding of the criteria for each policy had the potential to hinder clarity of decision-making in this instance. 2) The site is also within the boundary of the AONB: the applicants' agent's argument that it is 'only just' inside the boundary and thus should be open to more lenient consideration was therefore considered frivolous. Advice from the local AONB Officer had been sought but had not been forthcoming by the time of the meeting. These points aside, some Councillors appreciated the sympathetic and unobtrusive design outline, although the amount of glass remains a concern in what is a designated 'Dark Skies' village. Considerable discussion followed over the merits and demerits of this application and it was decided to put it to vote, which resulted in a 3:2 vote to **approve** the application. However, because of the unusualness of the site as a small disused quarry, it must be stressed that this decision should in no way be considered as a precedent to further development outside the village development boundary, nor within the AONB as it applies to the village, and that the Parish Council will support any decision made by MDC which takes these issues fully into consideration with proper knowledge of applicable policies, etc.

Cllr Wyke was invited back into the hall and rejoined the committee.

4. Reports from the Somerset County Councillor and Mendip District Councillor

4a A written report was received from the Somerset County Councillor, main points as follows:

- SCC Councillors have approved a £338m budget to include spending on a variety of projects such as 20mph zones outside schools; infrastructure projects; a safeguarding project to protect vulnerable children; increased provision for adult social care and improvements in bus services in West Somerset.
- The creation of a £1m climate change fund allowing councils to bid for funding for green initiatives with the aim of making Somerset carbon neutral by 2030.
- SCC' health and care services are monitoring the current Covid-19 situation and are as prepared as can be. Everyone is urged to follow government advice and guidance on the prevention of spread: www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public
- SCC leader David Fothergill has written to Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State, presenting the case for One Somerset – a unitary council for the county. This follows an independent report commissioned by SCC and all four District councils which was published earlier this year.
- A digital helping hand 'Brain in Hand' is about to be trialled in Somerset to provide tailored support for people with mental health issues or learning disabilities. Brain in Hand is a personalised app that links the user with their carers and support teams.
- Two new teams are being deployed to improve children's mental health as part of SCC's programme of support for children and schools. The initiative received £400,000 in Government funding through the Fit for my Future partnership and will commence in the Taunton and Mendip areas. They will offer direct support to children and young people with mild to moderate mental health issues, with the possibility of roll out across the county later in the year.
- Verizon UK Ltd and Western Power Distribution have received significant fines after pleading guilty to roadwork's offences. Somerset County Council brought action against both companies as part of its commitment to minimising disruption and keeping the public safe. Verizon UK Ltd were fined £30,000 with £1,841 in costs. Western Power Distribution were fined £20,000 and ordered to pay £1,730 in costs.
- Connecting Devon and Somerset: Working with the Building Digital UK (BDUK) agency, CDS has launched a fresh procurement to find new contractors to roll-out superfast broadband across the two counties.

4b The Mendip District Councillor updated members on various developments currently in progress.

- Discussions continue regarding the case for a unitary council for Somerset. Concerns that it is being driven by the leader of Somerset Council with no plans for a referendum or consultation with the relevant district councils remain high. There is already a considerable amount of service sharing and/or combination which is creating savings, and evidence from the Dorset unification indicates that, far from saving money, the unification process will in fact cost considerably more. This has the potential to put further strain on local services such as libraries, preventable homelessness projects, road repairs, sign painting, etc, as has been the evidence from Wiltshire. This process will be ongoing for some time to come.

- The Mendip Climate Emergency Plan is currently in development and should be available by the summer. In the meantime, various roadshows are taking place across the district and members of the public are encouraged to attend.
- Councillors are once again encouraged to attend the Parish Forums which are proving to be both popular and useful training sessions.
- Council Tax bills, previously payable over 10 months, will now be payable over 12 months, which may be of some relief to residents.

Councillors thanked the District Councillor for her report.

5. Clerk's Report

5a Actions from previous meetings

- Mendip Local Plan Part II: Sites and Policies Consultation response – agenda item.
- Neighbourhood Plan Working Group Update – agenda item.
- Budget 2020/21 – agenda item.
- Dog waste bins survey update: a further response had been received subsequent to the last meeting which again voiced strong objections to having bins in the village.
- Grit bin for Stoneleigh update: no response from SCC Highways regarding the origin of the bin. Cllr Reece noted that local residents were happy with the facility rather than none so this matter will not be pursued further.

5b Other ongoing matters

- Report on condition of Westbury Cross: still no response from SW Heritage.
- Website JISC registration: a mail had been received from the Digital Cabinet Office regarding the PC website's JISC registration. Mark Smith (new website manager – see Item 10 below) has kindly agreed to liaise with Tickbox on this.

6. Planning

6a Mendip Local Plan Part II: Sites and Policies Consultation

Councillors noted the response sent to MDC, which raised a number of issues with the Plan Part II including:

- no consideration being given to the unique nature of the Mendip landscape, its geology, archaeology, agriculture, history and wildlife;
- no consideration being given to the special features of the village including its status as a 'Dark Skies' village nor its nationally important glow worm and bat populations;
- the assumption of the existence of county-wide Neighbourhood Plans without sufficient evidence;
- fundamental lack of protection for Green Spaces and hence their potential vulnerability to unwarranted development;
- the potential for irreparable loss of character and the enforcement of bland residential homogeneity on a rich and integrated heritage landscape.

6b Neighbourhood Plan Working Group Update

The Clerk confirmed that a meeting of the steering group with a presentation by Cllr Harvey of Burnham and Highbridge Town Council has been scheduled for Wednesday 15th April 2020 @ 7.00 p.m. in Stoneleigh Community Hall. All are welcome.

6c Planning Applications to be considered:

2020/0400/TCA	Tree Works, Apple Rock, Old Ditch
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Councillors had no issues with these tree works and unanimously resolved to **approve** this application.

6d Mendip District Council Decisions:

The following decision was noted:

2020/0001/TCA	Tree Works, Westbury House	Objection (Provisional TPO applied: over-management of tree stock and loss of amenity)
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6e For general consideration/monitoring:

i) Land at Lynchcombe Lane, unauthorised occupancy

Councillors noted the Case Officer's confirmation that a planning enforcement notice was served 03.02.2020 and that the land is to be vacated by 05.09.2020, as reported in the minutes of 17/02/20.

Councillors also noted that the Clerk had received further comment from a member of the community on the continued occupancy of the site.

ii) Units 17 & 18 Lodge Hill Industrial Estate

Councillors noted the Case Officer's comments regarding recent complaints that he has no powers under the Town and County Planning Act, 1990, to intervene regarding the detail of said complaints and that he is 'in dialogue' with the site owner over the continuing breach of trading conditions. Due to GDPR requirements he is unable to provide further information at this time but will do so as soon as he is able. Local residents should continue to complain as circumstances dictate, but need to be aware that it is likely little will change while current issues are in train.

iii) Shamrock Stables

Councillors noted that a new date for Planning Board consideration has not yet been notified.

The Clerk had received an email from a member of Shamrock Stables which provided further information regarding technical details for the septic tank and a number of points regarding the housing of dogs. This had been prompted by the visit from Cllrs Wyke and Bright as reported in the minutes of the meeting held on 17/02/20. Councillors discussed the content in detail but felt that, as the case was still under consideration by MDC's Planning Board, it would be inappropriate to respond to the comments in detail at this time.

Cllr Reece raised the issue of an article about Shamrock Stables which had been published in the Wells Journal, dated 27/02/20. The article named several members of the community and there was some concern that the Data Protection Act 2018 had been breached. The Clerk to investigate.

Update: The information in the article (which is also available on the SomersetLive website) appears to have been taken verbatim from the MDC planning portal and as such DPA restrictions are unlikely to apply. However, publishing individuals' names without their permission where there is no evidence that it is in the public's interest is a breach of the Editor's Code of Practice and affected individuals should contact IPSO for further advice.

7. Finance

7a 2020/21 Precept and Budget

Councillors discussed the budget figures in detail. It was unanimously resolved to **approve** the 2020/21 budget as presented.

7b Payments to Note

Councillors noted that the SLCC subscription for this year is £83.00, not £92.00 as previously stated.

7c Councillors agreed to approve the following:

- Bullguard Internet Security (annual renewal) £89.99

Tickbox had yet to complete the website accessibility work, thus approval of payment will be carried over to the next meeting in April.

7d Councillors noted the account balances as at 04/03/20:

- Treasurer's Account £500.00
- Business Bank Account ££19,059.79

8. Co-option for Parish Council Vacancy

The Chair confirmed that she had approached a member of the community who had agreed to join the Council as a co-opted Member. He will be asked to make a short, informal introduction before the next meeting. Councillors thanked the Chair for her efforts and look forward to welcoming the new Member.

9. Parish Clerk Vacancy

The Clerk has decided to step down and Councillors considered the procedure and various documentation for recruiting a replacement. It was agreed to increase the hours to 7 per week, with an option to invoice for extra hours if needs be (subject to Council approval). The Clerk to progress on advertising, etc.

Action: Clerk

10. Website Matters

Councillors noted with enthusiasm that Mark Smith had agreed to be the Council's Website Manager and agreed his terms and conditions. Mr Smith will regularly update the website and offer training sessions, as well as liaising directly with Tickbox on technical matters.

11. 2020-21 Project Proposals

Due to lack of time, this will be carried forward to the next meeting. Initial suggestions included allotments, tree planting and speed limit indicators. Other suggestions are welcome.

12. Somerset Village of the Year 2020

Councillors discussed the requirements needed for this competition and decided not to enter this year.

13. Great Weston Ride Cycling Event, July 2020

Councillors discussed this event: unlike the previous cycling event which was subsequently postponed, the variety of cycling options are unlikely to have any significant impact on the village in terms of accessibility, and Council were supportive of its charity fund-raising focus.

14. Notices

No notices were received.

15. Any Other Business/ Items for Next Agenda

Updates from the Emergency Planning Group and of Covid-19 information from the government to be added to the next meeting agenda.

16. Date of next meeting – currently scheduled for Wednesday 1st April 2020 @ 7.30 p.m. in the Village Hall.