

MINUTES OF THE STAPLE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on **Wednesday 10th January 2024 at 7.30pm** in Staple Village Hall.

PRESENT: Cllrs Bartlett (Chairman), J Kirk(Vice-Chairman) Loukes, D Kirk, Davis-Marks, Martin and Ewart.

IN ATTENDANCE: There was 1 member of the public in attendance, Cllr S Chandler (KCC), Cllr M Porter(DDC), Kerry Coltham, Bryan Curtis and Hannah Biggs-Halles (clerk).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

none

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

none

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (paper copy available to view) –

3.1. The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 13th December 2023 were unanimously agreed as a true record.

3.2. To report and discuss any completed actions/matters arising therefrom not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

4. REPORT – Members of the A257 Group

The Chairman welcomed Kerry and Brian from the A257 group.

The Council received a detailed report, including the difficulties the group face.

The single aim of the group is to improve the quality of A257, in terms of safety, and lots has been achieved since the group was established.

The focus of the group, currently, is the stretch of the A257 which goes through Shatterling. There are lots of boundaries around what signage, motoring restrictions, markings etc. can be used and the guidelines change regularly, so the group work hard to keep abreast of all relevant legislation. Businesses on the stretch are very helpful in trying to make the road safer.

The group noted that that Shatterling sign, maintained by Staple Parish Council, is very low and hard to see, as well as being very overgrown. The council will look into raising the sign and clearing the overgrowth.

The group recently had a meeting with KCC's elected officer in charge of highways, Neil Baker.

The group presented two main hotspots for concern, showed the area and covered what the issues are and what solution there could be.

The group also discussed potential changes to the National Speed Limit, and the imbalance between most road safety improvements being paid for by Council Tax, whilst, in rural areas, this is paid for by parish precepts which is very limiting.

Moving forward, the group will be making the case to the police for mobile speed cameras and follow up on the yellow bus clearway markings, opposite Wingham Wildlife Park.

Cllr Loukes noted the implications of Operation Brock, over the next three years, which will bring an increase in traffic on the A257, and Cllr Ewart has requested a copy of the presentation from December's meeting with Cllr Baker.

It was also noted that the faded lines through Shatterling can be reported on KCC's Highway's Tool.

5. **PUBLIC SESSION** (Max. 15 minutes) Opportunity for members of public to make representations, answer questions and give evidence in respect of the business on the agenda. A member of the public shall not speak for more than 4 minutes and should direct comments to the chairman. Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wishes to speak, the chairman of the meeting shall direct the order of speaking. A question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given.

6. FINANCE

6.1. 5.1. Financial Statements for December 2023 to include income, expenditure and bank reconciliation as at 31st December 2023.

The clerk will produce a budget for the remainder of the year and circulate this as soon as possible.

6.2. Bills to be approved (to include those received after the agenda was printed)

6.2.1. Clerk's expenses (£87) & Salary (£292.50)

Bills were approved unanimously. It's agreed that, in future, the clerk's salary will just be noted rather than approved.

6.3. Bills to be ratified

none

6.4. To resolve the 2024 Budget and Precept Demand

There was lengthy discussion regarding the budget, precept and reserves. The council agreed unanimously to request a precept of £12,735 which would mean an increase of £9.67 per Band D property, less than 19p per week. It was noted that the precept hasn't been raised in 5 years and the council has a responsibility to practise excellent financial management, including holding a slightly bigger reserve. The Council are also keen to action items from a pending updated HIP, to improve safety on the Parish roads.

The Council discussed their assets, in particular the SIDs. It was agreed that the Clerk would look into insurance, as well as potential repairs for the damaged SIDs. It was raised that, if not in use, selling a SID may be an option. There was some frustration at the criteria set by KCC, regarding the location of SIDs and the poles they are mounted to. Cllr Chandler raised that we have been given permission by KCC to use our SIDs in Durlock Road, despite the fact that the site doesn't meet said criteria.

7. **CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED** To review correspondence received since the previous meeting which has not been included in the agenda

7.1. 8/12/23 – Email correspondence from a parishioner regarding the burning of plastic waste on local farm land

7.2. 19/12/23 – Road Closure Notice – Lower Road, 31/1-2/2/24 – Southern Water

7.3. 21/12/23 – Response from Cllr Chandler regarding closure of Mill Road

The road is closed due to flooding and the Drainage Team are aware. The Council queried with Cllr Chandler why notice wasn't posted but Cllr Chandler reports that the drainage team were dealing with a huge quantity of incidents. The Council were clear that the state of the road is safety critical, with collapsed areas of road and huge hidden potholes. The clerk will email Cllr Chandler again regarding the state of the road and Cllr Chandler will follow up with the Drainage Team

On the matter of flooding, the Chairman raised concerns regarding Chapel Lane and the residents who are unable to access their front doors due to flooding. This will be included in the new HIP, but KCC have reported that the drain isn't scheduled to be cleared until September. Cllr Chandler has agreed to follow up and reports that, with the new financial year, there will be a big push to fill potholes and catch up on routine maintenance.

7.4. 28/12/23 – DDC – Precept Demand Form

7.5. 31/12/23 – Email correspondence from a parishioner regarding speeding in the village.

8. **REPORTS** (to be provided in advance in writing where possible please)

8.1. **District Councillor** – Report received 31/12/23

Cllr Porter reports that at DDC's meeting on Monday 15th, there is a proposal being discussed to charge for use of the car park in the centre of Ash and other rural car parks, as well as increasing charges in other DDC car parks by 20p per hour. Charging will be RingGo only.

The Council agreed that the Clerk will write to Head of the Council, Vice-Chair and Portfolio Holder for Community and Corporate Property, strongly objecting to the charges due to their huge impact on parishioners, particularly those who commute and our elderly parishioners. The Council also agreed for the Clerk to post on Facebook, to alert parishioners to the changes and encourage them to contact DDC also.

Cllr Porter reported that we have a new Rural Police Officer, PC John Bowler. The final recruitment for this area will end in the week beginning 15th of January. There will be an officer assigned to Aylesham and then 2 more to cover Wingham, Ash and surrounding

villages. PC Bowler has been monitoring speeds on the A257 which is very positive and hopefully his presence will be a deterrent.

Cllr Porter also informed the Council of the current planning application for a very large Solar Farm on the Ash Level. The Council agreed that the Clerk will object on the Council's behalf and post on Facebook for members of the public to be able to do the same.

8.2. County Councillor -

Cllr Chandler reports that KCC have now published a revised budget, which is balanced. Through a variety of actions, including one-off actions and the use of reserves, but the current year will have an overspend.

KCC's medium term financial plan covers the next two years and details savings to be made in future years. KCC are not in immediate financial danger.

The local government settlement was confirmed before Christmas but was not positive, with reductions in some areas. Cllr Chandler reports the increased costs of Adult and Children's Social Care, with no increase in funding for Children's Services at all.

KCC had taken legal action against the Home Secretary regarding asylum seeking children and the judgement supported KCC's case. This now means that the Home Secretary is required to put in place an effective national transfer scheme.

The clerk asked the Chair's permission to ask Cllr Chandler a brief question regarding the state of Early Years Provision in KCC. Cllr Chandler recognised the current situation, with regards to closing settings and inadequate spaces but expressed that there is very little KCC can do without further funding and clarity from central government.

8.3. Village Hall and Recreation Grounds

The Village Hall Committee are still working on ideas to increase bookings.

8.4. Highways (SID, Speedwatch, HIP)

Our SIDs are still out of use, due to the theft of Woodnesborough's devices. The clerk will look into whether our SIDs are insured and how much it would cost to insure them

There are no Speedwatch dates planned until the end of January.

8.5. Footpaths

It was agreed at December's meeting that the confidential letter to a landowner within the parish would be sent. The Clerk was still waiting for the final copy from Cllr Loukes but it seems that issues with Cllr Loukes' PC email address are ongoing. He has provided all necessary printouts, to be enclosed with the letter, and will send the final draft again.

8.6. Planning

Applications 23/01394 and 23/01395, regarding Staple House, CT3 1LN, were unanimously supported by the Council.

9. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

9.1. To resolve a date for the SPC Annual Parish Meeting

Cllr Davis-Marks cannot attend May's meeting, so the Council discussed where to house the Annual Parish Meeting in either April or June. This will be decided in February.

The Council also discussed whether to invite a speaker to the event.

10. QUESTIONS, ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS To include items raised and noted at the meeting.

The Chairman noted that the paint on village gates needs updating.

The Chairman also raised the overgrown hedges on Lower Road and Durlock Road, both of which are blocking the road, potentially making the roads unsafe. The Clerk will contact the relevant landowners and request they be cut back.

The Council queried enforcement on the triangle on Mill Road. If the landowner doesn't comply, DDC will take them to court. The Chairman is unsure whether DDC has the power to seize the land.

The Council also raised the construction management plan for Summerfield and whether a Community Liaison Officer could be invited to a meeting.

The Clerk raised frustrations with her laptop, it is taking a huge amount of time just to load emails or documents. The Council agreed to the Clerk looking into alternatives.

There have been two queries from parishioners, the first querying whether a new entrance from the road to the community woodland would require planning permission. The Chairman confirmed that it would be required. The second query was regarding growing wildflowers on verges on the entrance to the village. The Council noted that KCC may be concerned regarding the safety of a member of the public managing a verge, but that it would be lovely to have wildflowers growing. The Chairman raised that it could be discussed with Cllr Chandler at February's meeting.

The meeting was closed at 21:24pm.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 14th February 2024

- The deadline for Agenda items to be included is the end of the day on the 6th of February 2024.