

**Minutes of STANFORD IN THE VALE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held in Stanford in the
Vale Village Hall on Wednesday 4th May, 2022**

Present: Cllr. Middleton (Chair) Cllr. Williams-Cuss Cllr. Dabek
Cllr. Warren Cllr. Dixon Cllr. Isaacs Cllr. Jenkins
Cllr. Lewis Cllr. Boyd (VWHDC)
0 members of the public

01/APM/22 To receive apologies and reason (if offered)

Cllr. Bailey (vacation)

Cllr. Howes (medical leave)

02/APM/22 Welcome to the meeting by Chairman of Parish Council

03/APM/22 To receive the Chairman's annual report

- This is an overview of the last 12 months, focussing on some of the highlights. Like most overviews, this one is incomplete, and my apologies to those that I will inevitably miss out in a short summary like this.
- In May 2021, we began to emerge from lockdown with meetings held remotely until September, when we returned to the Village Hall. It was a difficult balancing act to know when it was safe to return to in-person meetings with the decision delegated by council to me, Cllr Lewis and Cllr Isaacs. We were conscious of the need to balance the health of Cllrs and the public against the need to remain accountable and transparent through public meetings. We moved back to in-person meetings in Sept. Emergence of the Omicron variant then necessitated two more remote meetings in Jan and Feb. But from March I'm pleased to say that we have been back in the Village Hall. My thanks to Mark and Peter for their support and advice in decision making and to all Cllrs for their flexibility in accommodating a variety of meeting formats.
- I've certainly found in-person meetings have allowed for a more free flowing and inclusive discussion amongst councillors but the past few years have shown that remote meetings also have a place. Currently we are continuing to hold sub-committee meetings online as they seem to work well with that format. Ongoing feedback on meeting formats is always welcome.
- In May Cllr Lewis stood down after a number of years as chair of the council. I know from experience that this involves quite a bit of additional work and I've been particularly grateful for his continuing advice and sound judgement as deputy chair throughout the last year.
- May also saw the co-option of Cllr Mike Dixon who has thrown himself into the role and has already made a marked difference to the community through his championing of our speed indicator project, which I'll say more about later.
- Council has been pursuing a number of longer-term projects in addition to its day-to-day business.

- The most significant of these is the QEII Recreation Field. Having submitted the planning application in the early part of 2021, we had hoped to be further on than we are now. Convincing the planning officers of the evident community value and need for this new facility has been something of an uphill struggle and we do not yet have planning permission. In May we commissioned the infiltration drainage testing that enabled us to gain approval for the drainage aspects, overcoming one of the major remaining hurdles. However, we were then faced with the prospect of an extensive archaeological survey. After negotiation with the planning officers, we were able to carry out a reduced survey, which has been completed. Some sticking points still remain around preserving the archaeological integrity of the site during construction, the landscaping and the ecology. A lot of work has been going on behind the scenes, to overcome these objections, assisted by the support of our county and district councillors, and we hope to see planning approval granted shortly.
- Alongside this, council has been planning for the upkeep and maintenance of our other play and recreation areas. After considerable searching Cllr Lewis was able to identify an option for repairing the skate park equipment that provided both excellent value for money and a relatively quick turnaround compared to the options for full replacement. With an order now in progress, funded by the Public Purposes Charity, we are looking forward to having the facility back up in full working order in the next few months.
- Maintenance and upkeep of the play area is an ongoing activity. It has been particularly pleasing to see the repaired swings and the new basket swing being enjoyed by children just a few days after its installation and my thanks to Cllr Lewis for organising this.
- There are further plans for improvement of the play area that the recreation and leisure sub-committee will be taking forward this year and my thanks to Cllr Williams-Cuss for chairing it this past year. We'd like to see some further upgrading and improvement of the facilities this year.
- Our plans for development of the community orchard have continued under the guidance of Cllr Bailey and we now have a further batch of fruit trees awaiting planting later this year.
- September saw Mike Dew resign as clerk after many years of service. Sad as we were to see him go, in January we were delighted to appoint Claire Lewis as our new clerk. In the short time she has been with us, we have already seen a move to embrace the efficiencies offered by modern IT systems, more streamlined communication with councillors, better availability of meeting papers and planning documents and improved responsiveness to parishioners' enquiries. All of this is vital in the smooth running of the council and in allowing councillors to concentrate on discharging their own responsibilities to the community. My thanks to Cllrs Lewis, Isaacs and Howes for their advice and support during our recruitment process.
- We've been supported in this transition by Cllr Lewis who has retained the post of RFO while Claire is accustomed herself to the job. I'm grateful to Peter for his

continuation in this vital role, which is so important for ensuring, as custodians of public money, that the council runs on a sound and efficient financial basis

- September also saw us adopt a new set of financial regulations based on the NALC model regulations. This is not a very glamorous activity but important in controlling financial risks and for transparency.
- March saw the installation of two new Speed Indicator Devices in the village, largely thanks to tenacious work by Cllr Dixon in pushing the project forwards. This has gone from an idea first discussed in our meeting last May to full realisation in under a year, funded in part by the Public Purposes Charity.
- We are actively looking at other road safety improvements within the village, including ideas for a 20mph zone, for which we have a working party set up.
- Councillors have also continued to act as trustees for the Millennium Green. My thanks to Cllr Jenkins for chairing the trust again last year. Plans are moving forward for new seating in the green which we hope to see come to fruition later this year.
- Several of the projects I have mentioned have been funded, wholly or in part, by the Stanford in the Vale Public Purposes Charity. Their funding for capital projects such as the speed indicator devices, the skate park refurbishment and development of our QEII Field plans has been instrumental in enabling us to improve the village environment and quality of life for residents.
- January saw the resignation of Cllr Williams. We were pleased however to welcome Cllr Dabek as our newest co-opted councillor last month, bringing with her a set of skills that I'm sure will be of benefit to the council and community.
- Our day-to-day work has involved, as always, dealing with a constant flow of planning applications all of which, from the smallest to the largest, have required our consideration. I'm continually impressed by council's knowledge of the planning system and, while we can't always get the result we might feel is best for the village, making sure our unique, local perspective as a parish council is heard is an important part of the job. In particular, we have continued to push for improvements to the design and sustainability of the strategic site developments west of the A417. We'll be looking to build on this in the coming year to see what pressure we can exert, working with our district councillor, on the LPA around sustainability given their declaration of a climate emergency.
- The winter and early spring saw a number of storms that brought trees down unexpectedly. As ever, Darren Rolls was on-hand to respond rapidly and make things safe and my thanks to Darren for this and all the work he does to keep our public spaces maintained
- Finally we are looking forward to the jubilee celebrations in June, which are being steered on behalf of the parish council by Cllr Warren

Finance

- The draft financial position at the end of the year was presented at our April meeting and a further update will be presented in our May council meeting, following on from this annual parish meeting.
- Our total income for the year was £39.64k with expenditure of £48.53k, giving a loss for the year of £8.89k.
- Our net assets at the end of the financial year were £17.9k.

- Some points of note:
 - These figures are provisional
 - Our new clerk has been employed on different terms and salary. Several months without a clerk meant that the clerk's wages were lower than expected
 - Although we made a loss, this is in fact a relatively healthy position when a number of factors are accounted for:
 - This year included an item of elections expenditure from 20/21 of £1.8k. Although we were only required to pay 50% of the count costs, after raising the costing basis with VWHDC.
 - This includes £18.8 k of expenditure legal and professional fees, mostly for the QEII Project, and relating to landscaping/drainage design, surveys and planning documents required for the planning application.
 - Running costs were significantly higher this year, partly due to topping of the QEII field and dealing with tree storm damage.
 - Having said that, precept went up by 3.275% and inflation (CPI) currently at 5.5%, so in real terms this represents a 2.225% cut in the precept proportion of our income.

Finally my thanks to all of our parish councillors and to our district and county councillors for all their work this year representing our community, helping to deliver local services and working to improve quality of life for all residents.

04/APM/22 Questions/comments from Parishioners

None received