

STONE TOWN COUNCIL

Town Clerk
Les Trigg

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5 April 2018

A meeting of the **STONE TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING** will be held at **ST MICHAEL'S SUITE AT THE FRANK JORDAN CENTRE, LICHFIELD STREET, STONE** on **TUESDAY 17 APRIL, 2018** at **7.00pm** when the following business will be transacted.

I trust you will be able to attend.

Les Trigg
Town Clerk

AGENDA

1. **To receive apologies for absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the Annual Public Meeting held on Tuesday 25 April 2017 (copy attached)**
4. **To receive the Annual Report of Stone Town Council from the Town Mayor, Councillor Jim Davies**
5. **To receive any other relevant reports from Town, County and Borough Councillors and other organisations**
6. **To consider any questions or matters of interest raised by residents**

Stone Town Council – Annual Public Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held in the Stone Station Community Centre on Tuesday 25 April, 2017

PRESENT: Councillor J Davies in the Chair and
Councillors I Fordham, Mrs K Green, M Green, Mrs J Hood, T Jackson, R Kenney,
Mrs E Mowatt, A Osgathorpe, Mrs J Piggott and M Shaw
Also present six members of public.

ABSENT: Councillors Mrs C Collier, G Collier, Mrs J Farnham, Mrs M Goodall, P Leason,
G Neagus and M Williamson

C17/097 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs C Collier, G Collier, Mrs J Farnham,
Mrs M Goodall and M Williamson

C17/098 **Declarations of Interest**

None received.

C17/099 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

- a) that the Minutes of the Annual Public Meeting held on the 28th April, 2016,
copies having been circulated to the members, be signed by the Chairman
as a correct record.

C17/100 **Annual Report of Stone Town Council**

The Annual Report of Stone Town Council was presented by the Town Mayor.
(Appendix 1)

C17/101 **Reports from Town, County, Borough Councillors and Members of Other
Organisations**

County Councillor P Jones reported that Staffordshire County Council and Stafford
Borough Council are working together to improve Stone High Street. Stone MP, Sir
Bill Cash, is also interested in being involved.

He also reported that he is investigating a health centre facility being located in the
Co-op after it closes later this year. This idea is in its early stages at the moment.

C17/102 **Questions or Matters Raised by Residents**

A member of the public was concerned about traffic flow in the Town and suggested that the splinter island at the bottom of Christchurch Way be removed. This would also enable the Festival Carnival Parade to pass through the High Street rather than Christchurch Way.

Town Mayor

Annual Public Meeting 2018

Town Mayor's Report

INTRODUCTION

Over the last year Stone has continued to be a town with a wonderful sense of community with a great variety and number of very effective, voluntary community groups and excellent schools. As Town Mayor it has been a privilege to visit many of those groups and schools, to see them in action and to thank them on behalf of the Town. Furthermore, the Town has continued to be the location of many very successful enterprises and businesses

That sense of community has helped Stone to meet the challenges that that all towns of a similar size are having to face such as an increasing population but no enhancement in services, and the closure of high street shops and banks (particularly the loss of the Co-op supermarket and the collocated Post Office). Happily, there are encouraging signs for the future. The long-planned and controversial Marks & Spencer convenience store will open shortly and the Town must seek to exploit any opportunities that brings to increase footfall in the High St. We look forward particularly to the Crown Wharf development getting started and there are some credible rumours regarding a new venue for the Post Office.

MAJOR ISSUES AND EVENTS

A number of major issues and events have dominated the past year and most will continue to dominate in 18/19:

- **Neighbourhood Plan.** After some frustrating delays the Neighbourhood Plan is close to finalisation. Its adoption will help ensure that the future development of Stone will better reflect the wishes, aspirations and vision of its inhabitants and businesses.
- **Westbridge Park.** The new Marks and Spencer building has arrived, the new Guide HQ is in place and work has started on the new leisure centre. However, there are still serious concerns. Space has to be found for the long-promised children's play park, the skate park, and the multi-use games area. In addition, many are unconvinced that the new road access to the park has been planned adequately.
- **HS2.** The image of HS2 looms on the horizon. Its construction will not physically take place within the town boundary but its impact will be huge on local traffic during its years of construction. That impact will be severely exacerbated if the HS2 project is allowed to build its planned maintenance depot at Yarnfield rather than at the better location suggested by the action group and supported by the Town Council. Moreover, the upgrade of the M6 between junctions 13 and 15 is about to start which will only add to the disruption. It continues to be felt that even after construction HS2 will provide little or no direct long-term benefit to the local area and many fear the worst.

- **High Street.** Changes to the patterns of shopping and leisure continue to be reflected in the High Street. The biggest loss has been the Co-op and its collocated Post Office but it has been encouraging that the many smaller shop premises that have been vacated have been quickly re-occupied and there indications that we may have better news in the year to come. Furthermore, the establishment of the Stone Traders Group has been a positive development and it is working with increasing effectiveness.
- **Crown Wharf.** The one piece of unquestionably good news has been the successful completion of negotiations which have led to the purchase of the Crown Wharf site from the Canal and River Trust by the new Joules Brewery based in Market Drayton. Joules Brewery will be returning to its 'spiritual home' with a new-build pub and restaurant plus micro-brewery associated with a community theatre and a heritage centre. This will provide a 'destination' in its own right and attract more visitors from a wide area with a knock-on increase in footfall and, hence, opportunities for local traders.
- **Frank Jordan Centre** – The refurbishment of the major part of the Frank Jordan Centre was completed very successfully and under budget, and now provides an excellent community facility. That refurbishment has also enabled the Town Council to make use of the St Michael's Suite as an interim meeting venue pending the finding of a practical and affordable solution to providing access to the Council Chamber for those councillors and the public with mobility problems.

FINANCES

Every year the Council reviews its plans, determines what income would be required to meet them, and then makes adjustments to achieve an acceptable balance. Most of the income for the Town Council comes from the precept (that part of the Council Tax which is set by Stone Town Council and which is included in total Council Tax payments) and it is crucial that the precept is kept at a justifiable and affordable level. It should be noted that elected members of the Council do not receive any remuneration, expenses or allowances.

Major items of expenditure are staff (salaries etc), estates (principally the Railway Station Community Centre and the Frank Jordan Centre), town promotion (events such as the Christmas Lights switch-on) and environment (grounds maintenance and the like).

The total budget for the year 17/18 was £351,400 and the expected outturn is £348,170. For the year 18/19 the total budget is £303,800 which includes £25,000 towards the set-up and staffing of the prospective heritage centre. Full details of the budget and the outturn against budget are published in the public minutes of council meetings.

The standard yardstick for comparing Council Tax is to use that for a band 'D' property. For the year 17/18 the precept for Stone Town was £44.70. For 18/19 it has been set at £49.55, principally to make adequate provision for the Heritage Centre. Despite this increase Stone Town's precept remains lower than that of a number of comparable nearby towns.

BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY

Town councils have the same limited statutory powers as parish councils and, as such, their value is best considered in the context of the benefits they bring to the community they represent. In the case of Stone those benefits are enjoyed not only by the town itself but also by the various surrounding parishes which look to Stone as their local centre and which comprise the 'hinterland' of the town.

Those benefits include: enhancing the profile of the town and its area, fostering community cohesion and mutual support, encouraging civic pride and confidence, and promoting commercial activity. During 17/18, in addition to the major issues listed above, Stone Town Council has been involved with a large number of activities and initiatives. Those included over 110 separate events attended by the Town Mayor. The following are particularly noteworthy:

- The Town Council has kept expenditure within the 17/18 budget target.
- Grants totalling £8,152 have been made by the Town Council to local voluntary organisations in the town and at least £1,200 will have been raised in the town for the Mayor's charities.
- Full support was given to the Stone Festival which brought many people from far and wide into the town. Highlights included the raft race, the Soapbox Derby and the Saturday Carnival.
- An extremely successful Music Festival was held in the town during the summer featuring the many talented musicians that are in the Stone area and entertaining the crowds that were attracted into the High Street.
- The liaison group that the Town Council facilitates with interested surrounding parish councils has continued to meet on a quarterly basis. It has proved to be a useful forum to share information, to discuss matters of mutual interest and to agree a common approach on such matters to external agencies.
- The Town Council continued to work closely with Stone in Bloom to help ensure that the attractiveness of the town was kept at its best.
- Christmas trading and celebrations were boosted by the Christmas lights in the town centre, particularly the evening of the switch-on of the lights. This year the honour went to winners of the Town Mayor's Christmas Card competition held among the schools.
- In addition to the successful late night shopping associated with the Christmas Lights, some popular summer shopping evenings were organised by the Town Council.
- A number of official visitors were again welcomed to the Council Chamber and were invited to sign the new visitors' book which is becoming an interesting historic record.
- In its second year the annual appointment of two Mayor's Cadets, one from the Army Cadets and the other from the Air Training Corps, has continued to be an

important link between the Town Council and the youth of the Town. The two cadets act as orderlies to the Town Mayor on appropriate occasions and one of the previous year's cadets was subsequently appointed as a Lord Lieutenant's Cadet.

- To continue the re-invigorated wartime link with the USA, and particularly with the City of Carthage in Texas, the Texas State Flag has been flown on 29 Dec (the anniversary of the admission of Texas to the Union in 1845) and on 3 Mar (to mark the anniversary of Texas gaining its independence from Mexico in 1836. The Mayor also sent Carthage a message of sympathy and support during the serious flooding in Texas in August 2017, a message that was much appreciated by our sister city.
- The Town held several very successful formal events to celebrate the town and its history. Those events included Civic Sunday, the Trafalgar Dinner and the Civic Dinner.
- The year 2018 sees the centenary of two major world events: the creation of the world's first independent air service, the Royal Air Force, on 1 Apr 1918, and the end of the Great War on 11 Nov 1918. The first event to celebrate the 100th birthday of the RAF was held on 7 Apr 2018 and there will be a number of further events during the year ahead associated with both anniversaries.

WORK IN PROGRESS AND IN PROSPECT

Significant ongoing and prospective matters include:

- Return of a Post Office in the Town.
- Completion of the refurbishment of the Frank Jordan Centre.
- Provide disabled access to the Council Chamber and the Council Offices.
- Liaison with Joules Brewery and the Stone Revellers regarding the development of Crown Wharf, particularly the Heritage Centre.
- The finalisation and approval by referendum of the Neighbourhood Plan, which is keenly awaited.
- The impact of house building and the ever-increasing demand on local services such as doctors and dentists.
- The further development of Westbridge Park (as considered earlier).
- The developing picture regarding HS2, the HS2 railhead, plus the M6 upgrade and their impact on the people and the businesses of Town particularly during the extended periods of concurrent work and the effect thereafter.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

The work of the Town Council would be impossible without the professional support of the Town Clerk and his staff to whom grateful thanks are recorded. Thanks are also due to those elected members who give of their time beyond attendance at council meetings. And, finally, as Town Mayor I have pleasure in recording my heartfelt thanks for the support, encouragement of the Mayoress throughout the year.