

Minutes of the Annual Open Parish Meeting of Staploe Parish Held at 7pm on Thursday 21st May 2020 on Skype

The meeting was held on Skype. Due to an oversight by the government no provision was made for Annual Parish Meetings to be held online in the Coronavirus Act 2020 Section 78: Local Authority Meetings. The bill made provision for Parish Council Meetings to be held online but not Annual Parish Meetings. The current legislation (Local Government Act 1972, Sch 12, para 14) states that Annual Parish Meetings must be held in person before the end of May. Clearly, this is not compatible with the lockdown rules for the Coronavirus and, therefore, we chose to hold the meeting online anyway.

Present:

J. Ibbett (Chairman)
V. Zwetsloot (Vice Chairman)
J. Thomson (from 7.18pm)
G. Meola
R. Squire

D. Smith
E. Meola
L. Crawford (Clerk)
Borough Cllr. T. Wootton from 7.30pm
One member of the public from 7.15pm

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2019

Having been previously circulated and published these were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Chairman's Report (J. Ibbett – Chairman of the Parish Council)

I would firstly like to thank all of the councillors for their hard work this year. I would particularly like to thank Lucy, our clerk, for all of her help and support in difficult circumstances. Lucy's resilience and resourcefulness is always a great support. Parish Council elections were held on 2nd May 2019 along with elections for Mayor and the Borough Council. There were seven nominations for seven positions on the Parish Council and so all seven Councillors were re-elected in an uncontested election. Borough Cllr. T. Wootton's ward fund generously donated £1331.50 for a defibrillator to be installed in Honeydon and £500 towards the new Parish Council's website. A new website was needed in order to comply with accessibility regulations for public bodies. The new website is now live and can be found at staploe-pc.gov.uk

A new, larger dog bin was purchased to replace the one at the end of Bridleway 27 in Woodhouse Lane and the existing smaller bin was moved to the end of the lane.

Broadband

The Parish Council continue to be frustrated by Openreach's continued delays in installing fibre to the premises in Honeydon. Deadlines are continuously missed and extended. The last commissioning date was reported to be end of April 2020 but since then they have been reluctant to give us a deadline. The Parish Council would like to thank Darren Edwards for all his hard work liaising with the Borough on this matter. Upper Staploe are not due to receive any improvements in their broadband in the foreseeable future. Joan Squire is coordinating research into other options.

Village Hall and Playing Field

The Parish Council continued to act as custodian and managing trustees for Duloe Village Hall until October 2019 when the Village Hall Management Committee reformed and have submitted a separate report.

The Parish Council are sole trustees of Duloe and Staploe Village Playing Field Charity. The Parish Council have agreed to cover all maintenance costs for the field on behalf of the charity.

Adam Tarran of Duloe kindly took on the weekly task of inspecting the Playing Field, Containers and Village Hall (from the doorway as it is closed for safety reasons).

Highways and speeding

There was much discussion about road names in the parish. This began because the Borough Council wanted a road name for the new houses at Chestnuts, Honeydon. They requested that all the roads in the parish be named. After numerous discussions with the Borough and consultations with parishioners the main roads through Duloe and Staploe have been named Duloe Lane and Staploe Lane respectively, existing road names have been signed (Shakers Way, Gypsy Lane, Cadbury Lane) and new road names have been introduced in Honeydon (Lower Honeydon Lane, Manor Farm Lane and Begwary Lane).

Residents of Honeydon have reported issues with HGV's trying to negotiate the bend at Dairy Farm particularly when Bushmead Road is closed. The Parish Council have held ongoing discussions with Bedford Borough Council Highways Department to try to resolve this.

Due to pressure from all four parishes connected to Bushmead Road the Bedford Borough Council Highways Department undertook major repairs in February 2020.

A resident generously donated funds to purchase a second mobile speed indicator device. One is to be permanently situated in Staploe and managed by Tom Tagg and the other will move between Honeydon and Duloe and will be managed by Mark Crawford. New volunteers for Community Speedwatch have come forward and received training. It is hoped that the team will arrange some sessions soon.

Speed limits were reviewed between Duloe and Staploe, in Staploe village and in Upper Staploe. The proposed new limits are undergoing public consultation and, if there are no objections, should be implemented shortly.

Coronavirus

The Coronavirus lockdown began just before our year end but we have managed to move our meetings online and have been inspired to see the generosity and kindness of so many volunteers in our community offering to help those unable to leave their homes.

It has been another busy year ending in very difficult circumstances and we hope for a safe and healthy year to come for all our parishioners.

3. Financial Report (L. Crawford – Parish Clerk)

Opening Position

We opened the financial year in April 2019 with £9,128 in earmarked reserves and £4,943 in available reserves making a total of £14,071.

Earmarked reserves were for Village Hall rebuilding (£8,404), election fund (£550) and other small reserves and deposits (£174).

During the previous financial year we were advised that we should be holding 6-12 months of expenditure in unearmarked reserves. Previously we had aimed for 3-6 months. Therefore, available reserves were at the lower end of this range during the year and ended marginally below 6 months (£10 below).

Receipts

Our precept was £10,500. In addition to this we received £1,832 of Ward Funding which was used to purchase a defibrillator (due to be installed shortly) and the development of a new website to meet accessibility regulations. Other significant receipts were: £8,700 community benefit payment for the solar farm, £2,443 donated by a parishioner for a second mobile speed sign, £1,390 for grass cutting, £1,689 in VAT refunded, and £493 raised from social events. Other small receipts and interest on our savings account gave total (real) receipts of £27,108. However, we also received two payments from Bedford Borough Council in error which amounted to £11,890 and were immediately refunded to them so our total reported receipts were £37,809.

Payments

We aim to meet our regular payments and regular transfers to reserve (eg. saving towards the village hall) out of precept. Our actual spending for the year was £1,163 less than budgeted after transferring £1,500 to the Village Hall rebuilding reserve as planned. We underspent on:

- General maintenance by £444 but this has been transferred to earmarked reserve as it is needed for installation of the defibrillator and maintenance of the noticeboards in the coming year

Staploe Annual Parish Meeting May 2020

- Contingency of £300 was not needed
- Play area works £150 was not required but has been transferred to earmarked reserve to use for future maintenance eg. a new swing seat may be needed
- Playing field maintenance £142 extra was added in case we needed extra grass cuts and to save towards future hedge cutting. This has been transferred to reserve as it may be needed in a future warm, wet season and for hedge cutting.
- Electricity for the CCTV and containers £132 was saved as these were disconnected
- Training costs of £110 were saved as no one attended training this year (website training was cancelled in March due to Covid).
- Other smaller underspends of £338 (newsletter, admin, hall hire, Clerk and Councillors expenses, insurance, e-mail subs and audit fees).

We exceeded our budget in the following areas:

- Large dog bin for Woodhouse Lane £182 (previous one overflowing)
- Tree survey on Duloe Common £170 (neighbouring landowner says they belong to the PC – ash dieback may be a concern).
- Clerk's salary and pension £98 (we assumed an increase of 2% to the national public sector pay award but the Clerk's salary point increased by a bit more than this).
- Other minor overspends of £3

The net result was an underspend vs our regular budget of £1,163.

In addition we spent £5,419 using grants, donations or earmarked reserves to:

- Purchase a second mobile speed sign (£2,443) using a donation
- Purchase a defibrillator (£1,321) and new website (£550) using ward funding
- Pay for the Village Hall's empty building insurance (£940) using earmarked reserves
- Pay for hall hire out of ticket sales for social events (£68)
- Make other smaller payments out of earmarked reserve (£98) software and elections

We also refunded £11,890 to the Borough which they had paid to us in error.

Closing Position

At the end of the financial year on 31st March we had £19,901 in earmarked reserves and £5,650 of available reserves. The available reserves are within the recommended range of 50-100% of precept ie. £5,200 to £10,500.

Budget for 2020-21

In 2020-21 our precept increased by £1,054 to £11,554 (+10%). This was largely due to including £900 towards a tree survey and works to the trees at the Playing Field and extra costs for our new website (previously provided free of charge by Bedford Borough Council).

4. Village Hall Report (Mark Crawford – Chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee)

Staploe and Duloe Village Hall remains closed for safety reasons.

The Parish Council took over as sole trustees from January 2019 to September 2019 as there were problems obtaining property owners insurance. The governing document for the charity was amended to allow for the Parish Council to become sole trustees in the event that it is not possible to form a management committee. After securing property owners insurance, the management committee reformed in September 2019 and resumed their role as managing (and charity) trustees.

The village hall currently holds funds of £725.

However, the Parish Council now have an earmarked reserve of £19,492 towards demolition and rebuilding of the hall and in 2019 paid for many of the costs of the unused hall.

We conducted a questionnaire in November to ask parishioners whether they would prefer to clear the site, rebuild the hall with the same footprint or with an enlarged footprint. Approximate costs were provided and implications for council tax if the Parish Council applied for a £50,000 loan to be funded from precept. 135 questionnaires were delivered to all the households in the parish and we obtained the following results:

Responses:	33	
Options	1 – Clear site	5 votes
	2 – Keep at current size	3 votes
	3 – Increased size	26 votes

Local residents also pledged £1,500 as gifts and many people offered a multitude of skills to help with the project – from builders, general labourers to skilled project management.

We will now proceed with our planning application and hope to demolish during summer 2020 and raise funds and apply for grants for the rebuilding project.

We would like to thank Jane Thomson, Ged Meola and Jane Arnold and her family for all their hard work in raising money for the village hall at the recent curry night. They raised a fantastic £438 for the village hall rebuilding project.

I would also like to thank Duloe resident Adam Tarran for inspecting the hall weekly on our behalf.

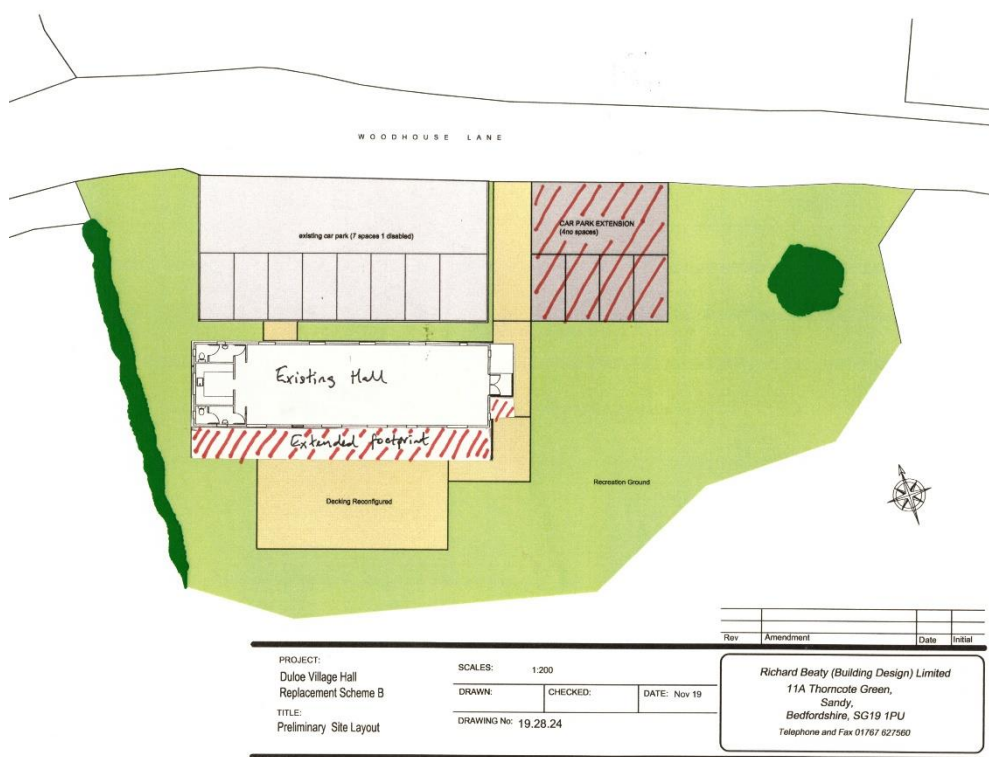
5. Playing Field Report (L. Crawford – Parish Clerk)

The playing field continues to be maintained by the Parish Council on behalf of the charity.

The only payment made from the playing field charity's bank account was £16.99 for a new combination padlock for the chain near the village hall.

The charity hold £13.26 in their bank account.

The trustees approved the transfer of the land hatched in red in the plan below from the playing field charity to Staploe and Duloe Village Hall Charity for the purpose of building an enlarged Village Hall and an extended car park. They also approved the removal of any trees that the Village Hall Committee deem necessary for the purpose of the rebuild and car park extension. They agreed that it was likely that at least one or more of the memorial trees to Sally Sheard and or the fallen of WW1 may need to be removed and that a replacement should be planted at a new location if this is the case.



6. Borough Councillor Wootton's Report

Bedford Borough Council have been given funding from the government to respond to the pandemic. In particular to assist rough sleepers off the streets and out of communal shelters during the pandemic, to enable them to continue to provide essential services and support to vulnerable people such as providing adult social care and children's services and deliver supplies to vulnerable people who are shielding and support for key workers.

The Local Plan is due to be updated and there will be another call for sites. Borough Cllr. T. Wootton is concerned that the Council have a very short time to plan for a lot of houses.

7. Eaton Socon Charity Report (Joan Squire)

Eaton Socon Charities had 11 applicants for grants and hampers at Christmas in 2019. One hamper and grant was donated to a Duloe resident. The charity also gave another 30 or so hampers throughout the whole parish (the ecclesiastical parish of Eaton Socon includes Staploe and Duloe), and one of these was donated to a Staploe resident. I resigned from my role as Clerk/Treasurer last autumn, and I am still waiting to handover these positions. So I am still doing the job until Tim Robb sorts out a replacement.

8. Open Forum

No questions were raised by members of the public.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm