



## OVER STOWEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on  
Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 at Over Stowey Village Hall**

Please note that these minutes are draft until approved  
at the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting

Present: Parish Councillor P Tully (Chair)  
K Barrow (Vice-chair)  
R Curtis  
D Peaster  
G Goddard  
T Lindley  
Somerset Council Councillor M Caswell

### 1. Welcome and Apologies

Cllr Tully welcomed everyone to the meeting.  
Apologies were received from Cllrs Bartlett and Bolt.  
No members of the public were in attendance.

### 2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Council meeting held on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2023

**Proposed:** Cllr Barrow      **Seconded:** Cllr Goddard

### 3. Chair's Report:

Cllr Tully stated the following:

- Despite changing and challenging times with the first year of Somerset Council as a unitary authority for the county, during which they declared a financial emergency, the Parish Council have continued to support the local community in various ways
- Highways issues have dominated agendas and although some actions have been taken by the Highways Department (with varying success) there are still many unresolved problems that are being followed up regularly. It is rather an unknown as to when or even if work will take place but updates will continue to be given at the monthly meetings
- The defibrillator was fully serviced during the last year and a new battery purchased to ensure the unit is in full working order in the event of an emergency
- The Commonwealth War Graves Commission contacted the Parish Council to arrange a sign to be placed at the cemetery, which was agreed and installed by them
- A handrail was requested for the cemetery steps and this was installed in February of this year

- A Coronation Tablet was commissioned and has been placed at Bincombe Green, and also a Coronation Plaque was arranged for the Recreation Ground and this is also in place
- In conjunction with the Over Stowey Village Hall and Recreation Ground Committee (OSVH&RGC), the Parish Council applied for a grant to replace the boundary fencing at the Recreation Ground – this was successful and work took place to install the fencing soon after the grant was awarded
- The OSVH&RGC have been working hard to upgrade the Village Hall to create a social place for the community to use and meet up at on a regular basis. A grant application was submitted to the Parish Council and was awarded with the funds coming from the Downing Legacy
- The resulting changes to the bar and social area have been received very well by local residents and beyond and the increase in footfall and how the Village Hall is used is incredibly positive for the community as a whole
- A small amount of funding became available from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The OSVH&RGC were looking to redecorate the bar and social club area and subsequently submitted a grant application. This was agreed and further improvements have since been made
- A new gov.uk website has been set up to ensure compliance with the relevant regulations
- Chair's Award - the Parish Council nominated Cllr Curtis who has been an active member of the Parish Council for many years. This was successful and Cllr Curtis attended the awards ceremony in October 2023

There are also several ideas in mind to enhance and improve the area and facilities within the parish, including:

- Continued support of the Village Hall and Recreation Ground Committee
- Consideration of other projects within the parish which may benefit the community with the remainder of the funds from the Downing Legacy
- A grant will be applied to clean and repair (where necessary) the fingerpost signs in the parish. If successful, the work should take place in the financial year 2024/2025

With the financial situation of Somerset Council as it is, there will be more changes to what is expected of Town and Parish Councils. Any services that the Parish Council might take on will need to be fully considered with regards to the capacity of the Parish Council to undertake any projects or ongoing works, risk, insurance, cost and the effect on the community.

This will take time and if there is something the Parish Council look to take on, this will be fully discussed at the monthly meetings and therefore open to all residents who may have thoughts and ideas about how they might be able to help.

Thank you again to everyone who works hard to improve the parish of Over Stowey. It is always very much appreciated.

#### **4. Clerk's Report:**

In our first year under the umbrella of Somerset Council, it is true to say that due to the declaration of a financial emergency by them, it has not been an easy time.

There have been many changes and there are many more to come. This has proven to be frustrating and challenging for all involved.

Parish and Town Councils have been asked to see what services they can take on and this has been received in varying ways. Anything that is taken on needs to be fully considered in all aspects.

With regards to the precept for 2023/2024, this was set at £8000 due to the rising costs of services and resources. This was received in one full payment in April 2023. The reserves are still looking healthy and include the amount of £2993 remaining from the Downing Legacy. This will allow for various projects to be undertaken within the parish to benefit the community as a whole. The cemetery account ended the year with a balance of £7419.20. There were also VAT repayments totaling £1324.92 received over the financial year.

All the usual expenditure was incurred on administration, insurance, grass cutting and grounds maintenance, phone contract, dog waste bin collection and provision of water to the cemetery, hall rent (charged from the previous year), donations and grants, defibrillator maintenance and annual subscriptions to SALC, SLCC, the ICO, Parish Online, Microsoft, Scribe and McAfee subscription. Other costs included the transfer to a gov.uk website, purchase of Coronation Tablet and Plaque, an A3 printer and the handrail at the cemetery.

Expenditure on the Clerk's salary was above budget by 8% due to the increased workload with Somerset Council and LCN meetings and subsequent action points and follow-ups.

Total expenditure for Over Stowey Parish Council for the year 2023/2024 was £10519 and total income was £14710.

The internal audit was completed in May 2023 and no issues were identified. The Notice of Conclusion of Audit was published on the website and notice board as per the guidelines for timescales.

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2024/2025, there is no doubt it will come with more challenges. But there are positives to come and where changes can be made, these will be undertaken as effectively and efficiently as possible to benefit the parish of Over Stowey.

## 5. Reports from other groups

### **STOWEY GREEN SPACES GROUP**

#### SGSG AGM CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024

Stowey Green Spaces Group noted at the end of our 2023 report that, having had busy years in 2021 and 2022, we looked forward to continuing and consolidating our work in 2023. Our activities focus on Nether Stowey Castle Mount; on and around the recreation ground; on the A39 Bypass Wood and in Stowey Millennium and Platinum jubilee Wood, as well as in Stowey Wood itself. We hold work sessions every first and third Tuesday afternoon of the month throughout the year, interspersed with relaxed meetings, once a month, when we reflect on what we have achieved and plan forthcoming activities. We continue to litter pick roads in and around Nether Stowey and Over Stowey every third Saturday of the month.

On 26 November 2022 we planted 120 saplings in Platinum Jubilee Wood and on 17 January 2023 almost 300 saplings in the old quarry, which first had to be cleared of twisted metal, plastic, building rubble and general rubbish. (We have only scratched the surface. What lies beneath is anyone's guess)! The QLPS kindly provided the trees and the AONB, now the Quantock Hills National Landscape, the tree guards and supports, while the Young Somerset apprentices helped with the planting.

We have Licensing agreements with Somerset Council to manage Stowey Millennium and Diamond Jubilee Wood and Stowey Wood, but not for the Platinum Jubilee Wood. We were told in April 2023 that this still needed to be formalized and that we would be contacted about this in due course.

Everything we do is done on a voluntary basis, so our community volunteers, in whatever capacity and for however long they can spare, are vital. Although we remain a relatively small group we are slowly growing, with five new volunteers having joined us in recent months. We are fortunate to be able to draw on support from several organizations. These include the QLPS, the Quantock Hills National Landscape, Taunton Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers, the Field Studies Council at Nettlecombe Court, Somerset Council's Clean Surroundings team and our Rights of Way warden, as well as the Parish Councils. We also liaise with Somerset Wildlife Trust and Somerset Council, where our Chairperson is a member of SEEN, the Somerset Environmental and Ecological Network. We really appreciate all the help we get, whether it be support from other voluntary groups, grants from the QLPS or Parish Councils or the donation of trees from the Woodland Trust or from Friends of the Meads in Bridgwater.

In terms of events, Judith Greig and I attended a Wild Worship in a marquee at Spaxton on 30 July last year (after initially misreading Wild Worship for Wild Workshop)! I mentioned in my report last year that a new Tree Strategy for Somerset was being prepared for approval by the Unitary Authority. Stowey Green Spaces were invited to give a presentation on our work at the launch of the Strategy at Monks Yard, Ilminster on 8 September. Other

presentations were made by the Woodland Trust, “Re-imagining the Levels” and “Green Ilminster:” – it felt a bit like non-League players sharing a pitch with teams from the Premier League! I gave a talk on our work at the Thomas Poole Library on 13 September. We gave a presentation also at Somerset Wildlife Trust’s “Wilder Somerset” conference at the Canalside conference Centre in Bridgwater on 14 October and attended SWT’s AGM on 18 November. Our table display and banner featured prominently at all these events.

One aim of the Council Tree Strategy is to plant 240 hectares of new woodland in Somerset over each of the next ten years. The strategy team visited the Millennium and Stowey Woods, as did Bridgwater’s Deputy Mayor, Councillor and guests.

In May 2023 the submission of a new management plan for New Stowey farm to the new Unitary Authority appeared imminent. It looked as though there would be scope for SGSG to help with implementation of the Plan on the ground. Negotiations took longer than expected, but on 12 March 2024 a Partnership Agreement was signed whereby National Landscapes will manage the land at New Stowey farm. This is an exciting development, which fits well with the Council’s declaration of a Climate Emergency, and SGSG look forward to supporting the Quantock Hills National Landscape team in any way we can. So far in 2024 our efforts have focused on managing the newly planted woodland at the entrance to New Stowey farm, clearing bramble from the A39 Bypass Wood and preparing some areas to seed with wildflowers and hedge-laying alongside the recreation ground. A new pedestrian footbridge has been installed in Stowey Wood and the footpath partially re-profiled (with help from the Taunton Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers) to enable walkers to avoid a particularly muddy section. Efforts are being made to control the spread of Himalayan balsam. A tawny owl nest box has been purchased and installed in Stowey Wood. A new pedestrian gate has been installed at the lower entrance to the Platinum Jubilee wood and signage in Millenium Wood has been made more secure following unwelcome acts of vandalism

## **6. Somerset County Council Report:**

Cllr Caswell reported that following the change to a Unitary Authority on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2023, structures are being re-arranged and there are processes that still need to be put in place. Due to the declaration of a Financial Emergency, redundancies are necessary and the voluntary redundancy process is currently being undertaken. Consultation regarding compulsory redundancies will take place in the autumn of 2024, to take effect by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

Planning is currently an issue for the council and there have been changes to the process.

LCN’s are continuing and the AGM’s will be starting within the next few weeks. Cllr Caswell confirmed that he will be stepping down as the Chair of the Dowsborough LCN at the June AGM.

**The meeting adjourned at 6.55pm and was followed by the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council**

Amanda McMurren - Clerk to Over Stowey Parish Council

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