

# **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 22<sup>nd</sup> APRIL 2021 – COUNCILLORS REPORTS**

## **Parish Council Chair's Report – 2021 Parish Meeting**

This is the first AGM meeting/report since 2019. Who would have thought back then that the world would have to face the fallout from the likes of the COVID pandemic.

Stoke Holy Cross, Upper Stoke and Dunston has demonstrated amazing neighbourliness, showing concern in practical, heart-warming ways with people who had previously never spoken to each other coming together to help those in need, as demonstrated through the setting up of WhatsApp groups where volunteers from every road in the community gave up their time to fetch shopping/ medicines for those not able to leave their homes. At one point there were around 86 residents involved in this group. Residents also contributed to the local emergency food bank run by Rob and Cathryn from the Mill Road Vicarage.

As a result of the lockdowns it's also been a time of isolation and residents have embraced online means of keeping in touch with each other. The local residents face book group increased its' membership from a few dozen to currently around a thousand members.

The first lockdown saw the temporary closure off of the play equipment in our parks which was hard and the PC is grateful for those that showed understanding and remained away during that difficult period. As more was learned about Covid and the importance of balancing the mental health needs particularly of the young, the play equipment remained in use during the more recent lockdown with people maintaining safe social distancing.

During this hugely challenging period, the Stoke Parish Council has adapted to the restrictions and continued to meet on a regular basis but remotely via zoom meetings. Unfortunately, a casualty of COVID early in the first lockdown was the 2020 Annual Parish Meeting which was not able to take place. Thankfully now as COVID numbers continue to reduce we are hoping that such meetings can once more return to a face-to-face basis at the Pavilion from June 21st.

During the last year people have continued to give up their time to work on; the New Pavilion Working Group, the Playing field Committee, the Planning Committee and the Traffic Working Group amongst others and I'd like to thank those involved in such activities.

You will shortly receive updates from each of these groups.

2020/2021 has also been a time where we've said good bye to fellow Councillor - Ron Wright who over a number of years gave up many hours of his time and served the village well. Ron's departure from the Parish Council created a vacancy which to date has not yet been filled. Please contact our clerk - Anita Rose if you are interested in applying for this role.

We also saw the departure of our caretaker Bill Taylor, this last year and would like to thank Bill for his work carried out over the years. Despite advertising for a replacement caretaker, no one has come forward so as an interim 5 of our Parish Councillors have been volunteering their time to empty the 15 waste bins around the village on a weekly basis.

The PC would like to thank Lee Cozens who has taken on the role of tree warden in the village, Lee also has a keen interest in promoting habitats for insects and bees and has been working with the PC to agree areas around the park that can be left to grow grasses/wild flowers, signs are being put up around these areas.

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You may or may not know that Stoke Parish Council has two salaried positions; the caretaker role mentioned above and the Parish Clerk. Quite simply the PC would not function if it weren't for the dedication of our Clerk - Anita Rose and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Anita for the phenomenal job she does for us as Parish Councillors and also on behalf of the village.

Finally I would like to thank everyone who has given up their time for the benefit of the village and its residents over the last year.

Hoping you all remain safe and well.

Sandy Collins  
Chair of Stoke Holy Cross Parish Council.

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## **Planning Committee Chair's Report – 2021 Parish Meeting**

The planning committee is advised of planning applications by South Norfolk Council. They are checked by the Chairman of the subcommittee and the details circulated to all Councillors for comment. The Chairman gives additional information from personal Knowledge to help members form an opinion.

For applications that involve new builds it would under normal circumstances be discussed at a public meeting before the whole council takes a decision.

We as a Parish Council do not determine planning application. We are consulted the discuss and form an opinion and that opinion is passed on to South Norfolk Council. We have 3 weeks normally to respond. All applications are included in the agenda for the next PC meeting.

This year we have only had extensions to deal with.

Charles Bussey  
Chair of Stoke Holy Cross Planning Committee

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## **Playing Field Committee Chair's Report – 2021 Parish Meeting**

We are so lucky to have a green space in the middle of the village at long lane and we also have a small play area at Carol Close in upper Stoke.

**Increasing biodiversity** - the Parish Council is actively encouraging the village to be a place which provides bee and butterfly zones and hedge and trees which support insects and food for birds. So, you may see unmown borders, hedges which are uncut, this approach allows hedges, borders and trees to support as much biodiversity as possible. We had to remove some poplar trees earlier in the year which have been replaced by native blossom trees kindly sourced and planted by Lee Cozens our Tree warden. The grass contractors have been asked to cut hedges and borders at specific times during the year to

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allow for increased biodiversity. If you would like to be involved in the project to plant more wildflowers along the Long Lane and Carol close site, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

**Play areas** – we know that our play equipment is dated and the play experience for young people and children needs to be updated. We are starting with the older children's area and are seeking to install a pump park and concrete skate park – this project is at the very early stages of fund raising and planning. We have contacted some companies to quote for installing the equipment. Loddon Parish council have recently installed a concrete skate park and we have contacted them for some advice. we need a fundraising group to help fund the project so do get in touch so we can have a really great place for youngsters to enjoy. Once the new Pavilion building is confirmed we will look to improve and update the younger children's play equipment.

The Play equipment is regularly inspected and inspected by a ROSPA approved Inspector once a year. At the last 2020 inspection it was recommended that the two basket swings were replaced at Carole Close these have been replaced by a local firm Norfolk Play and Garden Frames.

**Football pitch** – Stoke Holy Cross football club have been successful in securing a grant of £30,000 to improve the quality of the grass pitch, this is a 5-year project involving significant ground work in re seeding the football pitch. The second-year work is due to start on 19<sup>th</sup> April which will mean the football pitch is fenced off to allow the new grass seed to grow, there will be a border area to walk round the outside of the seeded area as last year.

Friends of the Long Lane playing field site – we would like to have a friend of the Long Lane site to really get the area looking great and being involved in ideas and how to make the best of the site. Please contact us to be part of the group

Biodiversity in the village – Lee Cozens

Fundraising for Play areas – Gill Jinkerson

Friends of Long Lane site - Gill Jinkerson

## **Dogs on the Long lane playing field site**

Dog fouling – thank you to the dog owners who do clear up after their dogs, however there is a significant dog fouling problem which is a health hazard for children playing and a disgusting nuisance to everyone. We have invested in some new signs which we hope will help educate those dog owners who do not clear up after their dogs. However, if dog fouling continues to be such a problem the Parish Council will have to explore other options.

Dogs off leads - Dogs need to be under strict control if your dog is not reliable in terms of recall /not approaching other dogs or people uninvited please keep your dog on a lead. The Long lane playing field site is a shared site and we hope to help everyone feel safe and enjoy the area.

## **Pathway from Harrold Place to Long Lane**

Recently I'm sure some of you may have noticed that we have had a new tarmac surfacing laid on the pathway from Harrold Place to Long Lane.

Gill Jinkerson  
Chair of Stoke Holy Cross Playing Field Committee

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## **Traffic Working Group Chair's Report – 2021 Parish Meeting**

The Traffic Working Group was formed in the last quarter of 2020 to look at driving issues around the village, mostly to do with speeding, which had been causing local residents a lot of concern. Since then, we have become very pro-active with the SAM2 machine (a portable speed monitoring apparatus) which we move around the village on a weekly or two weekly basis with the purpose of deterring drivers from speeding. This has been very effective and when we analyse the data from the machine it tells us that 80-90% of drivers are behaving responsibly, with a small but persistent minority exceeding the limit by an average of about 3-4 mph. This may not seem like a major issue but unfortunately the difference in braking distance when driving even a small amount over the limit is considerable and could be the difference between life and death. There are regularly a very small number of drivers who seriously exceed the limit and it is to be hoped that our second measure will help to combat that.

As a further measure to combat speeding we are about to relaunch the Community Speed watch Team, a group of 12 volunteers from around the village whose activity will be highly visible from about the end of April and whom, it is hoped, will reduce speeding even further and will help to combat the number of serious speeders. The Team will be out two or three times a week in different locations and will be liaising with the local Police in an effort to remind drivers of the need to observe the speed limits. When conducting these activities, the Team will take details of cars which exceed the limit and the drivers of these vehicles will be sent letters by the local Police reminding them of their transgressions and the need to take more care. If drivers receive two or more of these warnings, they may well find themselves subjected to prosecution and in this way, it is hoped the Team will become an effective deterrent for speeding within our village.

Finally, we have been granted some funding to purchase and install some Gateway signs at the entrance points to our village which have proved to be highly effective elsewhere. They define the village in a way that an ordinary speed sign can't, and we hope that they will prove to be an additional feature which will help with speed awareness.

There is a need, as with every other measure which is aimed at improving the quality of life in the village, for us to work with the community and we would merely ask local residents to cooperate with us and spread the word as much as possible that **speed kills**; it's as simple as that.

Stewart Hull  
Chair of Stoke Holy Cross Traffic Working Group

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## **Report by New Pavilion Working Group (NPWG) to Parish Council AGM – 22 April 2021**

The NPWG is a group established by the Parish Council in 2016 to investigate and pursue the replacement of the existing pavilion on the village playing fields playing fields, with a new up-to-date community hall. The existing pavilion was opened in 1982 when the number of households in the village was significantly smaller than today. It still houses the village pre-school but is now too small to meet the expanded needs of the village. No other activities

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can be undertaken currently when the pre-school is in session, and the pre-school itself now has insufficient space to accommodate all the children in the village who would like to attend it.

Planning permission was granted in 2019 for a replacement hall, which will be big enough to allow other activities to take place when the pre-school is in session. It will also be sited to allow the pre-school to continue operating in the old hall, until the new one is completed. Invitations have recently been sent to a number of local construction firms to submit tenders for the construction of the new hall. This has provided the Parish Council with a realistic estimate of the likely cost of a replacement hall, and the likely time it would take to build it.

There still is the question of finding the money to build the new hall. The Parish Council has accumulated approximately half the estimated cost of a new hall from development related funding over the last few years. However, it still needs to find additional funding to be able to complete the project. This is not straightforward in the current economic climate, and there is a danger that some of the existing funding will disappear, if a start is not made on the new hall in the next 2 years.

The NPWG has therefore been investigating potential sources of further funding and is hopeful that additional finance may be forthcoming in the foreseeable future from further development related contributions, as well as from other potential grant aid sources.

The NPWG will therefore be preparing a detailed business plan in the forthcoming months, to support its search for additional funding opportunities. The business plan will be an essential tool to guide the development of the new hall project including its anticipated management structure, its day-to-day operation, identification of potential uses, and likely income and costs.

The group is hopeful that a start on the new hall could be made in 2022, with a possible opening date later that year or in early 2023.

May I take the opportunity to thank all members of the NPWG for their efforts over the last 12 months, particularly given the communication problems arising from the Covid pandemic. May I particularly mention the considerable help given by Charles Bussey, whose input has been instrumental in keeping the project on track during these trying times!

Glyn Davies – Chairman NPWG