

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of Stoke Hammond Parish Council held by video conference on Tuesday 16th March 2021 at 7.30pm

Present: Cllr Greg Noble (Chair), Cllr Karl Johnson, Cllr Geoff Lane, Cllr Stephen McNally, Cllr Malcolm Newing, Cllr Mike Robinson, Cllr David Venn, Joanna Simonds, Clerk and RFO, and 10 members of the public.

1. Apologies for absence

Phil Gomm conveyed apologies from Cllr Ben Everitt MP

2. Declarations of interest

None

3. Public Participation Session

The Chairman opened the floor to members of the public to raise any items they may have, kindly requesting that any matters be raised now rather than interrupting the meeting later on.

Hazel Turner said she'd like to raise two points (i) at the recent Parochial Church Council meeting, members were asked if permission could be considered for a sign to be erected at the bottom of Old School Lane directing people to St Luke's Church, and (ii) the Kessler family were apparently under the impression that the Bragenham Side land would be used for recreational use for the junior football teams and they were quite disappointed to learn that when originally discussed, the PC were planning a village hall. She added that she personally would very much like to see the area opened up as an interim measure, whilst any long terms plans are considered.

In answer to Hazel's first point, the Clerk confirmed she had already seen this request from Hazel through Facebook Messenger and would be making enquiries with Highways, and if necessary, make it a forthcoming agenda item. **Action Clerk**

Ann Payne commented that although a member of the Community Association (CA) committee, her comment here was of a personal opinion and she was not representing the CA. She said she would like to know why this meeting had been called and why the CA were not consulted in advance. The Chairman confirmed that this meeting had been called at the request of two Councillors, which they are entitled to do. He suggested we hear what they have to say and pick up from there.

Sheralee Johnson asked why the PC had not shared the Bragenham Side land feasibility study and said she wanted to see it in its entirety. The Chairman confirmed there was no reason why the document could not be shared on our website now, however, Sheralee would know from previous meetings that Cllr Newing was finalising a full background overview document which would hit doorsteps in early April, along with the next SH News. This document has the backing of all Cllrs and is intended to fully communicate to parishioners how the PC have reached the point they are at today. The PC's view was that this helpful and sensible approach would negate the need for interested parishioners to sift through a 54 page document. Sheralee said she still wanted to see the document now and why couldn't it be shared this evening.

Cllr Newing cut in saying that Sheralee would be aware that the Broadbase document was only recently circulated to Cllrs, but he agreed with the Chairman there was no reason why this could not be uploaded to our website. The Clerk said she would action this. **Action Clerk**

Cllr McNally said he was confused by all the negativity here, saying that the opening up of this land should be seen as a positive. He wondered why when the PC were trying to do something for the good of the village, it was receiving such hostility.



Ann said she was not against opening up the land but wanted to know why the meeting had been called without consulting the CA. She then asked if as a next step, a meeting could be called between the PC and the CA. She added that it seemed to her that the PC would need another right of way. Cllr Newing queried why we would need a right of way to walk across community land on to land that the PC own. This is land that any member of the community can and does walk on because they walk over it to use the equipment and walk around the field. He said he couldn't understand why this needed to be such an issue, and whilst he thought it absolutely made sense to have a meeting with the CA, surely like the PC, the CA is there for the residents.

Cllr Johnson stated as he has done previously, that he was the only professional person sitting on PC and that people were not listening to him. He said the reason the PC need a wayleave rather than an easement to go across the land is because irrespective as to whether people use it now or in the future, we are changing the use to this piece of land. This piece of land we own is landlocked because the CC own the piece of land in front and if we don't have an agreement, then this is an unauthorised right of way, which is against both planning and statutory law.

Cllr Newing expressed irritation at the constant "the three new Cllrs don't know the background" remarks and asked Cllr Johnson to please list his issues. That list can then be addressed and issues mitigated, by carrying out a thorough risk assessment. Cllr Johnson said that the proposal in front of us has a series of problems, as follows:

- You need permission to go across the land; that is the law. If you don't do that you have an unauthorised right of way which means your insurance is null and void because you are committing an offence.
- Nobody has given due consideration to the safeguarding issue of the school and, if they put a fence up, that fence is likely to be on the boundary.
- Dogs are not allowed on this piece of land, whether on or off a lead.
- There are large potholes that need filling and there are parking issues.
- Maintenance and upkeep of the hedge and fences around the land needs consideration as currently you can run off that field straight onto the land and into a tractor or a horse.

Ann asked why the PC couldn't access the field from Bragenham Side. Cllr Johnson said there were planning issues with it and Cllr Lane said that someone came down from AVDC Highways in the early days and told the PC categorically they would never get access via Bragenham Side.

Cllr Johnson said the solution is to go into the CC and turn right across the playground, walking parallel to the road, and put the entrance in there. If the CC are willing to negotiate the easement to move it further south towards Bragenham Side, that could be the solution. That would negate the safeguarding issues and minimise the amount of area that the dogs walk on. He said that being accountable, and living in an environment where people sue, we need to do things properly.

Cllr Newing asked if that meant Cllr Johnson was supportive of us opening the field up. Cllr Johnson said if it is done properly, then yes. Cllr Newing confirmed that nobody would want to not do it properly and so this was a positive step.

The Chairman reminded members we were still officially in the public session and that he was going to close that item now.

4. Bragenham Side Land

To discuss and vote on opening up the land for recreational use.

Phil Gomm asked to speak, also as a "qualified person". He said he was struggling to understand why an access way as required could not come off Bragenham Side. He said it's been mentioned that previous people from planning have said this and that but that is here say. Would it not be worth investigating that and asking for a report which would only cost £80. If that was said a few years ago, things might have changed. Phil said it was sad listening to how the discussions were going and said he would like to suggest reinvestigating the fields own independent access way off Bragenham Side. The Chairman thanked Phil for his input and confirmed this was another possible option.

Cllr McNally said just getting back to the basics of this proposal, people are talking this evening about cars and travelling down Bragenham Side. We're not opening a theme park, we're not going to have a massive influx of vehicles, people are walking down there for a little exercise with their

dogs and a football kick about with the kids so there won't be a massive increase in vehicles going down that road. He asked that in the 20 years that the CA has had their land, how many issues have there been with people walking round the back? How many slips and falls have we had? Nobody commented.

Cllr McNally continued that it just seems to him that whether this proposal is the right way forward or not, this constant "the three new Cllrs don't know about the history here" keeps getting raised and we should be drawing a line under comments like that. He and Cllr Venn walked the entire field with fresh eyes and believe this to be a viable option.

Cllr Newing said we are supposed to be discussing a proposal here that was put forward by two Cllrs to open up the hedge and give access. Clearly there are at least two Cllrs who are not happy and wouldn't want to vote that through so he suggested that as Cllrs are all in agreement that we do want parishioners to have access to that field, but in a way that is agreeable to all Cllrs, we: (i) get a meeting with the CA about access across their land at the back of the CA, (ii) do a risk assessment of all of the things that Cllrs Johnson and Lane have raised here this evening, (iii) investigate Karl's suggested route in at the front of the CA, and (iv) let Phil reinvestigate his suggestion of coming in off Bragenham Side. Then, having got that further information, compare the three access options and chose the one that seems to be the best going forward. Cllrs agreed this was a sensible approach but Cllr Johnson did want it noting that he is still not in favour of the agenda item option proposed here this evening.

Cllr McNally suggested that in any case we go ahead with the contamination survey as that is something we would want to get ticked off anyway. Cllr Johnson said this was not a good idea.

Cllr Venn having tried to speak for sometime said he wanted it noted that the reason he and Cllr McNally called this meeting was the fact that this land has been sitting idle for the last 3½ years. The idea of opening it up to parishioners for recreational use just seemed to make sense and has already received positivity from a number of parishioners. However, all we have heard this evening is nothing but negativity. He also referred to all the glass on the land which Cllr Johnson has referred to on a number of occasions, and confirmed that he and Cllr McNally had walked the entire field and there was absolutely no trace of any glass on the land.

Cllr Lane said he agreed with Cllr Newing's suggested approach but would still like a professional to be brought in to give us some honest and balanced views on the best of the three options and a costing for each of those options. Cllr Newing said in his view this was completely overkill and an unnecessary expense. We're not talking about major development; we're talking about giving people simple recreational access with the PC's support.

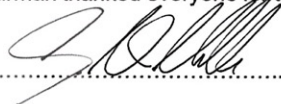
Having discussed this item at great length, the Chairman said he'd like to bring matters to a conclusion and re-summarised next steps as follows:

- (i) reach out to the CA for a meeting about access across their land at the back of the CA
- (ii) do a risk assessment of all of the things that Cllrs Johnson and Lane have raised against the current proposal to mitigate those issues
- (iii) investigate Cllr Johnson's suggested route in at the front of the CA
- (iv) allow Phil Gomm the opportunity to reinvestigate coming in off Bragenham Side
- (v) present whatever findings are available at the 6th April meeting

Proposed: Cllr Newing
Seconded: Cllr Robinson
Agreed unanimously by ALL Councillors

5. Re-confirm date of the next meeting - Tuesday 6th April 2021 at 7.30pm

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contribution and declared the meeting closed at 8.42pm.

Chair:  Date: 06/04/21