

# STANTON ST JOHN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the **Stanton St John Annual Parish Meeting** held on Tuesday 22 April 2025 at 7.30 p.m. in the Village Hall.

**Present:** Parish Councillors: Andrew Clark (Chair), Dina Cooper (Vice-Chair), David Polgreen, David Elliott, Tim Bearder (District and County Councillor) clerk, Anita James and 22 members of the public.

**1. Apologies:** Cllr David Elliott, Alison Finch, Thames Valley Police.

## **2. Report from the Chair of the Parish Council**

In 2024 year the Parish Council co-opted two new councillors, and we welcomed Justin Worrall and David Polegreen whose expertise and experience have helped us move toward more efficient electronic working in addressing communications and activity.

Now, in the first instance I would like to thank my fellow Councillors and our Parish Clerk, Anita for their hard work, diligence, and integrity where they have undertaken tasks on behalf of the Council. Thank you, all of you for your hard work.

### **Council Activity.**

#### **Planning**

Our world never seems to stand still, and we have had several planning applications and one significant one "The Land North of Bayswater Brook", was sent before the Planning Committee at District in October, and twelve applications which were dealt with under delegated powers within the Planning department, of which one was refused.

Early in the year we had to contend with some major strategic issues in planning the future at the District and County levels. These were the SODC/Vale of the White Horse Local Plan, which is currently subject to examination starting on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Oxford City Council looking at its Plan to 2041, and the Oxfordshire County Council's Plan to 2050. Further to this we have had the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway (rail). The Arc plan (road) in abeyance, though not formally shelved, to contend with where central government had planned to build 1 million homes between Oxford and Cambridge with some 300,000 looking to be placed in Oxfordshire. We think that this plan has now been cancelled (hope)but private investors are still supporting it from the Cambridge end.

We have been part of local alliances to maintain awareness of the governments' strategies for this area and have been able to successfully defend ourselves against over-development with the 'Stop the Arc' group. However, the SODC Local Plan 2035 which was pushed through under legal threat from central government (Mr. Jenrick) meaning that locally we are faced with a major development in our Green Belt called 'Land North of Bayswater Brook'. This had an original provision of some 1100 houses which through the deceitfulness and impudence of Christ Church College is now crammed with 1570 houses pressed into the same area in Beckley and Elsfeld parishes, and the motive for this is likely to be money, and the SODC is noticeably weak on resisting this. My thanks for our local resistance group here, goes to Ginette Camps-Walsh from Beckley, and Lisa Buchan from Elsfeld, who have led our local group which includes Stanton St. John, Forest Hill, Barton and Sandhills local Councils. We made strong representations in respect of their impact at the Planning Committee Meetings at District in October and subsequently, however, the planning applications were approved

covering the whole development in outline, bridges and access in detail and the development of Wick Farm as a Listed Buildings application. A Grampian Condition was added regarding the Sewage infrastructure, but this has been appealed by Christ Church and the Developers. All 3 applications were strongly objected to by this Parish Council as they offer little or no mitigation to our villages from this imposition and we feel strongly that all the villages will suffer increased traffic on their roads and greater overrunning of the Green Belt land.

It was felt that the process of approval was poorly handled by the Planning Officers and formal complaints have been made by the Parish representatives, however, these have been swept aside, by the district and we have now petitioned the Ombudsman about the management of the process by the Planning Department.

I was exhausted at the end of our defence measures, and we await the deliberations of the Ombudsman, which may involve us further, before any development is undertaken.

The Plan put forward by the City recently with a consultation exercise was seen as a further attempt by the City to offload a further housing need of theirs onto the District Authorities. This was resisted by SODC and us and has been withdrawn. It was clear that the evidential statistics being used in it were inaccurate and structured to suit the City Council's development agenda requiring more development in the surrounding parishes, on Greenbelt land, which in our local view is unnecessary and unsustainable, due to the lack of supporting amenities.

#### Support Grants

The Parish Council have also been supporting several societies and charities which in turn have offered a service to this community these are: The Maple Tree Centre, CPRE, The Open Spaces Society, The Cricket Club, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Howe Trust, John The Baptist Church, and The Village Hall Committee. All these groups have supported local people and activities over the year.

#### Projects and Facilities

A major piece of work being undertaken by the Parish Council is through its Traffic Working Party, where, with the support of our County Councillor Tim Bearder, we are planning to evaluate the 20mph speed limit in consultation with parishioners. There are some issues which need to be better detailed on the B4027, the Menmarsh Road and to confirm our position regarding the County Council's ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN, offering a cycle route to the city along the Shepherds Pit Road. Further work is planned by the TWP who still hope to offer areas for verge protection and pedestrian safety measures in Cox Lane, and on Pound Lane, subject to affordability and local consultation on the proposals which are derived from our traffic survey of 2020. However, since the survey is now five years old further consultation is planned with the parishioners through a public meeting to be held on May 22<sup>nd</sup> and possibly an updated survey to address changes and new issues which are arising. A detailed action completed is that we have moved the 30mph VAS sign formerly located near the Talkhouse to its new location at the top end of the Bayswater Roadhouses. The public meeting is noted on hand bills to be delivered to all parishioners, so please do come along.

At this point I would like to thank our Transport Representative, John Battye for his work regarding the buses and transport issues facing the Parish. Regaining a bus service to the city has been a service requirement of the Parish Council for some years, and with the help of our County Councillor, Tim Bearder, we now have a service. The service is being monitored, and the issue of bus stop locations has been put to the County Council who are aware of local concerns. We hope to hear from them soon on this matter.

### Other Projects.

With a request from the Village Hall Committee, the Parish Council have replaced the heating boiler here in the Village Hall. Thank you, Russell, for your management of the project.

The Parish Council has undertaken the re-ordering of the car park access by removing the bollards following requests from some residents and owners of the larger electric SUV's wishing to use the EV charging facilities. Please note that if needed they can be replaced.

With the help of Fullers Brewery and the permission of BT we have two new additional defibrillators installed on the Telephone Exchange building adjacent the entrance to the Pick Your Own at the top of Pound Lane, and in the old Red Telephone Box at the Talkhouse. (Please note that the Talk House defibrillator is not owned or maintained by the Parish Council) Training in the use of Defibrillators will be organised later in the year.

Many thanks to the Annual Litter Pick group who with the organisation by Mrs. Fariba Battye fulfilled a major operation in March, collecting over 40 bags of rubbish and debris from our verges. This was a major exercise, and our grateful thanks go to Mr & Mrs Battye for endeavouring to tidy up our roads and verges.

Larger dog waste bins have been installed to address the increased population of dogs in the village following the Pandemic, with a new one at Snows Lane allotment entrance.

### In the New Parish Council Year.

Last year the Parish Council restarted the process of forming a Neighbourhood Plan. With all the changes in planning and the issuing of several consecutive District, City and Joint Local Plans, along with the development proposals regarding the Land North of Bayswater Brook Planning Applications, we have struggled to make any progress. In the coming year the Parish Council will endeavour to restart the project and progress the formation of a Neighbourhood Plan for the Village and have invited two local parishes, Beckley and Wheatley, to speak to us at our coming Council meetings about their experience.

And finally, the Parish Councillors met recently to consider its approach to strategic matters facing the Parish in the future. These included emergency Planning, protecting biodiversity, Neighbourhood Development Plan, transport, communication, and amenities.

Finally on a positive note.... The trees that have been planted by the County Council on Middle Road have come into bloom, but, if as villagers you think that they need to be altered in their location, please let us know, and suggest places where they can be replanted. If there is sufficient concern, then the Parish Council will consider undertaking action in the right season.

## **3. Reports from Village Organisations**

### **3.1 Cairns Fudge Cricket Club**

2024 was another successful year for Cairns Fudge Cricket Club. The team finished fourth in division 5 of the Cherwell League and saw several new players joining the club.

We're looking forward to the 2025 season with our opening league match on 10<sup>th</sup> May.

We have continued our programme of improving the ground. At the end of last season, the club invested over £2k in having the square renovated by a professional team, something that we've done for the each of the last 5 years. By doing this we are steadily improving the playing surface which can only improve the standard of cricket being played.

Our main long-term concern continues to be the condition of the pavilion, which is in a poor state of structural repair. We do our best to keep it going, but at some point, it is going to need replacing if cricket is going to continue the ground.

Forest Hill Parish Council (of which I'm a councillor) have stated they would be happy to have the changing rooms on their recreation ground relocated to SSJ and repurposed, as it is no longer used. A group from the club and village will explore the practicalities and costs of this and hope to report back to both parish councils in the next 3 months.

Finally, the club would like to thank SSJPC and the village for continuing to support cricket in SSJ, and we hope the wider community will continue to use the ground for their own recreational enjoyment.

Jason Hobbins Chair, Cairns Fudge CC

### **3.2 Hillcroft Millennium Green Trust.**

This year the Millennium Green Trustees celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Trust and the Green at the culmination of a project to acquire the central space in the village from New College along with the freehold of the Village Hall, its Car Park, and the new Playground. The Trustees are very grateful for the help and support from the villagers and local trusts which have supported its upkeep over the years.

My grateful thanks go to the Trustees who have helped maintain the Green and those among them who have, voluntarily, kept up its appearance.

The Trustees thanks go to Nicola Mallows and the Gresswell Environment Trust who have again kindly sponsored the mowing of the top green area over the past year.

The field beyond the Green continues to be rented from us by farmer Jamie Clark (nephew of Ted our original tenant) from Aston Rowant, with grazing for his small mixed herd of cattle, and he is continuing currently, despite the continued reduction in the government support with farm payments following Brexit having been reduced by the removal of funding for natural habitat margins. How long this remains the situation will be clearer when the Brexit, diminishing grant, finally disappears in 2027.

Back in December the Millennium Green played host to our village winter celebration around our Christmas Tree. This was again a fun time of festive food and carols which we hope will continue as a regular annual village event.

To mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary the Trustees will be holding a Celebratory Quiz here in the Village Hall in September, as a fund-raising event, to sponsor a project of tree planting along the stream at the bottom of the field in a newly fenced area following the stream and stretching into the field, from the causeway at the southern corner of the field to the stile.

The Trust's accounts balance well, and as you would realize we have quite a small annual turnover. Our main income has been the rent from the farm tenancy supplemented by income from people mounting their events in the hall or church who have needed to use the top Millennium Green area for overflow parking.

Andrew Clark Chairman of Trustees

### **3.3 Stanton St John Film Club**

Stanton St. John's Film Club is a well-established group of 7-9 local people, who organise film nights in Stanton St. John's village hall. We would like to thank Michiel Stofferis who stepped down in June 2025 after 5 years as Film Club Coordinator. We welcomed 3 new committee members mid 2024: Steve Lovejoy became our new projectionist, and Ros and Simon Harrison are once again running the bar. Anneli Nilsson has taken on the role as Film Club Coordinator.

Our aim is to provide cinema closer to home and to enhance social cohesion in the village. Our evenings are held in a relaxed atmosphere, where one can enjoy the film with coffee, tea and home-made cakes or with a glass of wine. We show eight films per year from September to June on roughly a five-week interval.

During 2024 we showed eight films – A yak in my classroom, The great escaper, What's love got to do with it, Oppenheimer, Wicked little letter, My donkey, my lover and I, One life and The holdovers with between 33 and 41 people in attendance. We are pleased that our films attract audience members from the wider locality including Beckley, Forest Hill and Horton. We try to have a varied repertoire including some relatively recent films, to allow people to catch up with missed opportunities in an Oxford cinema and to screen at a gentler pace by allowing breaks in very long films.

Despite inflation we have maintained the film entrance fee of five pounds, to ensure a deliberately low financial threshold. At the end of 2024 our bank balance was £1513.81. Some of that balance is needed as a kitty for equipment repair. During the year we bought and donated more glasses for the village hall, and we purchased a Blu ray player for the film club.

We also joined 'Cinema for All, a national organisation for the development and support of the community cinema movement in the UK which supported us when we were setting up the film club. 'Cinema for All' have a library of films that can be hired for screening so will enable us to show an even wider selection of films. For example, in 2025 we were able to show 'Wilding', which attracted a very large audience and promoted interesting discussion following the film.

In summary, the Stanton St John Film Club continues to be run by a committee of film lovers from Stanton St John. The club is in good financial order; screenings are popular, and community cinema is flourishing in the parish.

Sue Baker

### **3.4 The Stanton St John Village Hall Management Committee**

The Stanton St John Village Hall Management Committee's main responsibilities are managing the bookings for the Village Hall, the maintenance requirements of the hall and contents, health and safety procedures and the management of policies and procedures relevant to the Charity mandate.

The committee also facilitate Event management when these involve the Village Hall as a venue or as a part of a wider Stanton St John event planning team.

### Village Hall Bookings

Judy Nesbit continues to operate the management of the bookings in respect of the hall and sincere thanks, are again given to Judy for her excellent work in this respect.

This activity has generated a further increase in the hire of the hall generating £8,162, including £300 from SODC for election day usage, against £5,996 in the previous year.

Further funds of £240 were received from the WI as a donation and a share of the proceeds from the Christmas lights of £292 was also gratefully received.

Regular lettings of the Hall continue for Tai Chi and the Film club, which had 9 showings in the year all very well attended. The Wi, Art Club, C21 Group, RSPB continue to use the hall and regular users Baird and Baggio have topped the users list throughout the year with monthly bookings.

The Hall has again been used for celebration of Indian family events with great feedback given on the facilities and location.

### Energy costs

The village hall has faced challenges against the increasing energy costs, and contracts in place with SSE

and British Gas. The EV project was launched as an initial step in supporting a more environmentally friendly approach by providing the means to charge electric cars for residents, Church and Village Hall visitors and anyone wishing to visit Stanton St John to enjoy its undoubted benefits.

Pod Point were commissioned as the commercial partners and an additional MPAN capability was required, with SSE chosen as the Energy supplier with the village hall receiving compensation for the use of the charge from PodPoint.

### New Boiler

During the year the existing boiler in the Village Hall, having been the subject of regular maintenance, finally ceased to work after a period of 15 years. Inevitably the timing coincided with the lengthy cold snap requiring use of the electrical heating facilities in the hall until the replacement boiler could be installed.

Based on a formal proposal regarding the options available the Parish Council voted to take on the project and agreed to the fitting of a new the Worcester Bosch Boiler 8000 as this larger boiler will be more efficient over the long term given the requirement to maintain ambient temperature to a bigger area with a lower water heating requirement.

A review of the increased cost structures of both SSE and British Gas initiated a review of more competitive alternatives within a longer-term fixed rate and more competitive standing charge rates. Based on this review a decision was made to transfer the electricity energy supply to alternative supplier Octopus Energy to Positive energy for the supply of gas.

### EV Charger Project

The agreement with PodPoint required the installation of a new energy MPAN account, and SSE used for the energy supply based on the existence of the existing account with SSE.

The usage of the EV charger has steadily increased following its installation and higher growth from

August to March which was clearly reflected in the energy costs of the associated SSE account. The level of increasing costs, including the standing charges operated by SSE, required action to be taken to seek alternative energy supplier partners. This was completed in March with Octopus Energy chosen as the replacement for SSE and Positive Energy replacing British Gas. The original business model had been based on achieving a break-even position with the PodPoint agreement enabling payments to the Village Hall for hosting the charger. This has not been possible with the growth in SSE costs and administration issues experienced with Podpoint who not proven to be an easy partner to work with. With no dedicated account manager on the account there are lengthy delays in administration of the process required to enable payment of monies due under the hosting agreement. In the case of the payment for the 3 months to November 2024 the payment was finally received in March. The payment for the 3 months to February remains outstanding, despite several reminders. This will now be the subject of a review of the Project to consider the options moving forward with a separate presentation to be made.

#### Maintenance and improvements

External cleaners are now being used for the cleaning of the Hall. This has contributed to the overall improvement and experience of the Hall. General maintenance and works required have included maintenance of the boiler before its replacement and renewal of the taps in the kitchen.

#### Gigaclear Wifi connection

The Village Hall now supplies wifi and this has proven to be a good benefit to users of the Hall and enabling a wider range of activities and Parties which can take advantage of the wifi access.

#### Summary

It was anticipated that the supply of heating and electricity would represent a key issue for 2024/2025 particularly following the removal of Government support to increasing energy prices.

The failure of the boiler coinciding with the lengthy period of cold weather further contributed to the challenges for the year.

The Village Hall has made a small surplus for 2024/2025 despite the increasing costs and the associated cashflow issues arising from the administration issues which have taken place with Podpoint who have announced difficulties arising from their experience of general slow-down of activity due to the economic climate.

Despite these challenges the demand for the use of the Hall continues to increase and with appropriate adjustments now implemented in the choice of new energy suppliers and the installation of a new boiler the Hall continues to offer good value for money for any users with the stunning location of Stanton St John always an added benefit.

The EV project is undergoing a formal review with a separate presentation to be made regarding the current state and the decisions to be made moving forward in respect of the EV installation specifically and related further projects generally.

Russell Warner

Chairman Stanton St John Village Hall Management Committee

### **3.5 Stanton St John Charities**

The Charity consists of a group of endowments which provide income to help parishioners with winter heating costs. The Trustees consist of an Ex-officio Trustee who is the Vicar, the Rev. Anthea Beresford, two nominated Trustees appointed by the Parish Council for a period of four years, Susan Baker and Caroline Clark, and two co-opted Trustees appointed for a five-year period by the Trust, currently David Pullen and Richard Ebbs. Applications are invited annually from individuals or families who would benefit from extra help with heating costs. In the past this was by the direct delivery of coal but with modern heating systems applicants currently receive a cheque or a BACS transfer to their Bank or Building Society account. All financial transactions are verified by the signatures of two of the three eligible Trustees mandated by the Bank. Notices are placed in the Village Shop and in the Parish Newsletter in October, previous recipients are reminded personally by letter. Any person within the parish may apply but help is usually restricted to those who are dependent on the State Pension or Benefits or of restricted income. It is also helpful if neighbours or friends of infirm or housebound parishioners could inform the Trustees of deserving cases. The income from the endowments is distributed between the applicants. The income for 2024 was £756 and six applicants received a total payment of £1050 The Trust maintains a small surplus on account to deal with variations in demand and the closing balance at Dec31st 2024 was £4010 Members of the public can access details of the Stanton St John Charities by searching the Charity Commission website and entering the CC no: 202853.

Richard Ebbs. Acting Chair of Trustees.

### **3.6 Dame Elizabeth Holford's Charity**

The Charity continues to fund local young people successfully. We have had applications from all four of the parishes, including quite a few from Stanton St John. The funding has been provided for residential courses, sporting equipment and club fees, music lessons, funding towards Masters degrees, tools for apprentices. We advertise the Charity through the Four Parishes Newsletter and also on the Forest Hill and Stanton St John Facebook page. We have made grants of over £15,000 this year. Our accounts are in good order and have been audited and sent to the Charity Commission. The Aunties are leaving the Holford Centre in August, and we are currently looking for potential future tenants, we will be using an agency to do this. Russell Warner has been appointed a Trustee representing Stanton St John. I will be standing down as chair of the Trustees this year, after serving for more than twenty years. It has been a real privilege to have been a position to enable young people to fulfil their educational goals.

Alison Finch

Chair of the Trustees, Dame Elizabeth Holford's Charity

### **3.7 SSJ WI**

We have had a total of nine speakers and three trips between this year. We have a total of 27 members and an average of 19 people attending our meetings. This equates to a 70% attendance rate.

WW reported that we have had a very busy and productive year. We have heard presentations from a range of speakers including The Forensic Experience by Haley Scott, The River Thame and the Struggle for Recovery by Doug Kennedy and Emma Teasdale spoke to us about Reducing the Risk, a local Domestic Abuse Charity. Our own Lyn Ebbs gave a very interesting talk on the Otmoor Riots and how locals reacted when agricultural revolution came to Otmoor. This was our most attended evening.

We have enjoyed trips to the Cotswold Lavender Farm to see the lavender fields and enjoy the lovely area. In July, a group of 12 of us went to see Oxford Operatic Society's Funny Girl and in August a group of 20 attended a lovely garden party at Albury Garden. We had a fabulous day walking around the garden and having tea and cake.

All in all, it's been a very good year. We have welcomed new members and enjoyed new experiences.

Sadly, we have also said goodbye to Olive. Olive was a long-standing member of Stanton St John WI and will be very much missed by us all.

Wendy Walker

### **3.8 Transport Representative, John Battye**

SSJ lost its 108-bus service in 2016 but after much effort by myself, and with the help of those who signed the petition I raised, we finally got it re-instated in November 2023. However, as previously, OCC had to heavily subsidise it.

In their efforts to try and reduce costs OCC have, since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025, awarded the contract for providing the service to the bus company 'Red Rose'.

Because of good patronage of the 108 service since 2023, the new contractor, Red Rose, are providing slightly larger buses than were used by the previous contractor. A consequence of this is that they cannot safely visit the centre of our village (Middle Road). Hence for safety reasons Red Rose are using the 'old' bus stops on the B4027 that were used before our loss of the 108 service in 2016. This is approved and agreed to by OCC.

As regards the area in and around SSJ the route that Red Rose is following, for the journey from Oxford to Bicester, is slightly different to what was followed by the previous contractor. On leaving the Green Road Roundabout the bus travels directly up Bayswater Road before turning along the B4027 towards Stanton St John (SSJ) and Forest Hill (FH). Those getting off the bus in SSJ can do so at the old stop (which has long been marked) at the top of Cox Lane or the stop opposite the stone-built bus shelter just beyond the 'Talk House' pub.

The bus then turns round in Milton Crescent and returns along the B4027 towards Islip and so Bicester, to stop, if requested at the usual stops on the B4027 at FH stops, SSJ stops and the 'Beckley' stop near where the Bayswater Road meets the B4027 (at what some used to call, 'The White House'.)

This means that the timetable around SSJ and FH, as so far published is very slightly wrong (by about 5 minutes) as regards timings so patrons need to be aware of this and make the appropriate allowances. The timetable published to date is also wrong to suggesting that the bus does not stop in SSJ at the stone bus shelter. It does stop at the stone bus shelter on the B4027 if requested to do so.

The fact is that if a patron is standing at any of the old, designated stops, as were before the loss of the service in 2016 the bus driver will stop to pick them up. Likewise, if they are travelling in the bus and indicate to the driver that they wish to be dropped off at any of the old, designated bus stops, it will stop for them.

In addition, I point out that although unmarked there is a stop on Bayswater Road opposite the Crematorium. The best place to stand waiting for the bus is by Bayswater Road on the level, semi-hard standing leading to the field gate.

Of course, as before with the 108 service, OAP's can use their bus pass and alight at any stop on the OCC network which the bus passes.

Note that the bus drivers are under instruction to hold their schedule as best they can. Our bus stops do not have dynamic/electronic indicator boards and there are no plans to include them. If they were installed and maintained, they would only add to the cost of the already much subsidised 108 service which would again put pressure for its discontinuation.

Please use the 108-bus service as much as you can. Its patronage is the best way to promote its continuation. Let's hope that the UK's general financial woes looking forward don't again result in us losing the service.

#### **4. Report from Tim Bearder, County and District Councillor**

No formal report received, talked about local democracy in action, mentioning the reintroduction of the 108-bus service, the road problems caused by potholes and flooding issues, especially in Mill Street.

#### **5. Open Session of suggestions and Proposals from the floor**

A resident mentioned the fly tipping problems and another the traffic issues, including speed of cars especially by the Talk House on the B4027.

The Chair thanked people for coming and the meeting closed at 9.30pm.