

**Minutes of a Meeting of Stanford Dingley Parish Council held on
Tuesday 21st November 2023 at 7.30pm in the Club Room, Stanford Dingley.**

Present: Cllr. E. Hanrahan (Chairman); Cllr. A. Bucknell; Cllr. H. Fullerton; Cllr. S. Logan; Cllr. T. Rudd; Mrs. H. Pratt (Clerk).

Twenty-eight members of the public for the Public Session.

1 Public Session.

During the Public Session the Landlords of both The Bull and The Boot presented their plans and the challenges for their establishments.

1.1 The Bull (Dominic and Annastasia).

Dominic and Annastasia took over The Bull in September 2023. Previously they had been working abroad, but have a background in hospitality.

They had hoped to take over earlier in the year and benefit from summer business. Since taking over they have run a Halloween and October Fest event, but neither were particularly successful. The financial situation has made it necessary for Dominic to have work elsewhere in addition to the pub.

They are not aiming to make significant changes, but do need to streamline. They see themselves as a integral part of the Village and want to work with locals. If anyone has any issues, they are keen to advertise an open-door policy.

New meals have been introduced and Wednesdays will be themed; currently they are Italian based. The pub is now open seven days a week, serving drinks on a Monday from 3pm until 9pm only. They are also offering a meals take-a-way service.

All staff have been kept on and they are keen to focus on what is known to work well.

Over the Christmas holidays it is hoped to be open every day with a New Years Eve Party from 6.30pm until 12.30am at £25 per ticket to include a buffet and fireworks.

Traditionally the pub has been closed for the first week of January so that the staff can have a week off, however it is planned that whilst staff have a break, Dominic and Annastasia will provide a “drinks only” service every day and normal service will resume in the second week of January.

Work is going on to determine whether the paddock could be used for parking and weddings. It is hoped to make it more family friendly. They view the pub as belonging to the community.

Suggestions were made that the opening times be advertised on the website. Traditionally the Carol Service at St. Denys has been followed by mulled wine and mince pies at The Bull.

Currently, there are five rooms available for rent at The Bull which have approximately 80% occupancy rate. Any locals interested in the rooms for guests were encouraged to contact The Bull directly.

Financial figures for this year are noticeably down on the same period last year. This is thought to be partly due to the economic climate, but has not been helped by the road closures in Stanford Dingley.

Dominic was thanked by Cllr. Hanrahan for his update.

1.2 The Boot (Andrea and Bex).

Unfortunately, Bex and Andrea feel that after the last six years of upwards struggle, they have reached the end of the line and are looking for someone to purchase the lease of The Boot. Following COVID and BREXIT, wage increases, the increase in cost of utilities and the economic climate, there has been a huge drop in footfall.

Historically, summer takings have provided a financial buffer to take the business through the winter, but this year there is no buffer. In addition to running the business, the terms of the lease include costly maintenance of a listed building. Bex and Andrea feel they have no more to give and that the business is no longer financially viable for them. There

are a further nine years to run on the lease. Currently approximately half of the turnover is being spent on salaries without running a full kitchen. Income is down approximately £70,000 on last year. Themed evenings have been tried, but the problem appears to be industry wide.

Over the six years they have employed over 85 people and given over £40,000 to charity. Bex and Andrea have done a huge amount for the Village and it was questioned what the Village could now do for them.

There are three clear options for The Boot going forwards:

1. Sale of the lease.
2. Sale of the freehold.
3. Change of use to residential.

If the lease is sold, if it fails during the remainder of the lease it returns to Bex and Andrea.

The freeholder is looking at a change of use to residential, again, and is unlikely to want to sale the freehold unless it has been granted a change of use.

There was a view expressed that it is likely that one of the two pubs will close in the next year and the community must be careful not to lose both pubs.

It was noted that The Boot is no longer an Asset of Community Value (assets registered as Assets of Community Value only hold that status for five years).

Bex and Andrea were thanked for their honesty on the future of The Boot.

Seven members of the public remained for the main part of the meeting.

2 Apologies.

Apologies of absence were received from District Cllr. Read.

3 Declaration of Interests.

3.1 Updates to the Register of Interests.

There were no updates to the Register of Interests.

3.2 Declarations of Interest in Agenda Items.

There were no declarations of interest in any agenda items.

4 Approval of minutes of the last SDPC meeting.

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting of SDPC held on Tuesday 26th September 2023 were an accurate record of the meeting and they were signed by Cllr. Hanrahan.

5 Planning.

5.1 Planning Applications.

No planning applications have been received from WBC for consultation and no decisions have been made on applications waiting for determination.

5.2 Village Design Statement.

The Village Design Statement has been finalised and is currently with WBC awaiting a final consultation in the spring (2024).

6 District Councillors Report.

District Cllr. Read submitted a report prior to the meeting.

Cllr. Rudd will attend the Rural Issues Forum on the 5th December.

WBC is advertising for nominations for Community Champions of the Year (there are various categories). Cllr. Hanrahan will submit an application on behalf of SDPC.

The WBC budget for FY24/25 will require more savings and there is a consultation on those areas which will affect the public most.

Activities for Carers Rights Day will take place on 23rd November.

7 Community Resilience.

7.1 Update on the Generator.

Whilst the generator was delivered some months ago, there was a delay with installation because a manhole was found in the area where the concrete base was to be laid. As a result, the shed has been moved in a reorganisation of the space behind the Club Room.

EH

It is hoped to put the shuttering in and pour the concrete for the base this week. Work will probably then be needed on the path before the generator can be moved into position. A shelter needs to be built around the generator and the electrics connected before the project is complete, which is not expected to be until after Christmas.

7.2 How to support the Vulnerable in the parish.

There was a discussion on this subject after it came to light that a parishioner had been managing without any heating provision since August.

8 Flooding – lining of the sewer.

The sewer, between St. Denys and the pumping station, has been lined and the body of each manhole sealed to prevent seepage of sewage into the ground. However, sewer flooding occurred on the 1st and 2nd November which was reported to the Environment Agency, Thames Water (TW), Laura Farris MP and the Pang Valley Flood Forum. Cllr. Logan has received a response from Laura Farris MP and TW, although they don't believe it is their fault but are continuing to investigate the causes in the direction of Frilsham.

Julie Molton (TW) has sent letters to the five properties who have gutters directly feeding into the sewer, but has only managed to make contact with one. Cllr. Logan has written to TW pointing out that the sewer flooding is their responsibility and not to use the gutter flows as an excuse.

A one-to-one meeting has been requested with TW, but they will only do this once the data for this calendar year has been finalised, which is expected to be in April/May 2024.

9 The Club Room.

9.1 Replacement Door.

Cllr. Bucknell obtained a number of quotes for a new external composite door for the Club Room. The current door swells when it gets wet and becomes virtually unusable. There was a discussion about the suitability of a composite door in a conservation area, when the Village Design Statement states that wood doors are preferred.

It was agreed that Cllr. Bucknell would obtain a quote for a solid wood door, with a warranty.

10 Reports.

10.1 Events Committee.

Barry Potier has taken over responsibility for chairing the Events team. He thanked Hilary Dent for doing a great job.

Since the Coronation Event and the Village walk in May, a Casino Night and a Race Night regrettably had to be cancelled due to low interest.

There is to be an Adult's Christmas party on the 1st December, a Children's Christmas party on the 3rd December and a Christmas Walk on the 28th December (to be announced). In 2024, there will be a wine tasting, talk and quiz event on the 2nd February and a return of the Party in the Paddock on Saturday 8th June. Other events in 2024 are being discussed.

A regular pub night is also being organised, however there appears to be some publicity issues.

10.2 Flood Warden Report.

The Flood Warden is in the process of gathering and collating data from all the recent storms and subsequent rainfall incursions into the sewer resulting in the flooding at the centre of the Village including: Storm Agnes (25th September 2023), Storm Babet (18th to 21st October), Storm Ciaran (1st and 2nd November) and Storm Debi (13th to 14th November) as well as the sewer lining which took place from the 2nd to the 27th October. At the Pang Valley Flood Forum (PVFF) meeting on the 15th November, there were only two of the five TW representatives present. TW were asked to prioritise Stanford

AB

Dingley's case given the history. They have agreed to have a one-to-one once all data has been captured.

Gathered data has been looked at alongside the PVFF data and TW data which shows that Stanford Dingley is the worst affected village in terms of ground water and rainfall.

Additionally, the data suggests infiltration following rainfall events.

Given the current situation, a meeting is being setup with the Co-Flood Warden and the Dredge Gang to prioritise actions to keep storm drains clear and therefore alleviate ground water and sewage from gathering in the centre of the village; regrettably this will mean polluting the River Pang.

The grips (trenches) along Back Lane need to be dug out to reduce the risk of flooding from high ground water. The camber of Back Lane at the dip closest to the Cock Lane T-junction needs to be fixed so that it doesn't collect floodwater.

The WBC Highways representative has confirmed that the Stanford Dingley Flood Alleviation scheme, taking flood water to the River Pang via the overflow channel in Burcher's Piece was unlikely to be funded in deference to the flood works in Thatcham.

10.3 Dredge Gang.

The Dredge Gang is working on how it can be more proactive. Current regular tasks include gathering the autumn leaf fall and clearing drains. Clearance of the grips on Back Lane to prevent flooding needs to be included.

11 Clerk's Report.

11.1 Reinstatement of the dog bin.

It was agreed to accept the quote of £108 to reinstate the dog bin and post.

11.2 Finances

To receive the financial statement dated 21st November 2023.

The Clerk reported that the following payments have been made since the last meeting:

Triangle Management Company Ltd	£84.24	Bin emptying for Oct, Nov & Dec '23.
---------------------------------	--------	--------------------------------------

Foxes Tree Services & Son Ltd.	£3,096.00	Felling of the leylandii behind the Club Room.
--------------------------------	-----------	--

Social Rebel Limited	£730.52	Web site (for two years).
----------------------	---------	---------------------------

Expenses	£36.00	Club Room window cleaning.
----------	--------	----------------------------

Once all transactions have cleared the balance in the account will be £8,923.69. This reconciles to the bank statement dated the 31st October 2023 which showed a balance of £13,354.38. The Business Instant account contained a balance of £6,529.63 on the last statement dated the 31st October 2023, giving an overall total of £19,884.01. The sum of £2,409.16 is ring fenced for community resilience, prior to reclaiming any VAT.

11.3 Correspondence.

District Parish Conference – 30th January 2.00pm – 4.30pm.

Pang Valley Flood Forum Exhibition – 20th January in Hampstead Norreys.

Emergency Plans request – WBC – this will be on the agenda for the January 2024 meeting.

12 There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.25pm.

13 Date of next meetings:

SDPC: Tuesday 23rd January 2024 at 7.30pm in the Club Room.

Signed:

Date: