

STAGSDEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting of the Parish Council

Held Monday 21 September 2020
in the Village Hall at 7:30pm

PRESENT: Joanne Hodson, Esther Dickson, Peter Brown, Trisha Walker,
James Taylor, Cllr Jim Weir, Julie Betts (Clerk)

APOLOGIES: Jim Watson, Ashley Kenlock

ABSENT:

This Parish Council meeting was held via Zoom online because of the implications of Coronavirus (Covid-19). The Government's advice was for vulnerable people to self-isolate and for all other people to socially distance themselves. Stagsden Parish Council should not, therefore, be meeting formally or encouraging Councillors and members of the public to attend meetings. The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 enables Parish Council to hold their meetings remotely.

Action/Power

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Neil Burdett, Solar Farm Proposal, Stagsden/Astwood

The proposal is 75 hectares, equal to 2 Milton Keynes Stadiums, 100 Football pitches. Stagsden is 14 hectares. Plan is for 100,000 solar panels, there will be 3 ½ miles of security fencing, a 2 mile cable to Kempston. Mr Burdett said visually the proposal will look like a long stay carpark at Luton Airport and will be visible in the whole of the parish of Stagsden.

The Public
Bodies
(Admission to
Meetings) Act
1960 as
amended by
s100, LGA
1972

The promoters say the proposal will be visually discreet but it is highly unlikely, hedgerow and planting will take years to mature and be of a size to shield the site.

Quality of land: currently the land is used for cereal crops. Bedford Borough Council Local Plan specifies that Solar farm proposals should be on poor grade agricultural land. (3a Valuable, 3B poorer quality).

Environment: Proposal says Development will increase Biodiversity. No mention of deer and birds.

Other notes: All Equipment will be imported from China. Batteries contain carcinogens, Fire Risks, No information on recycling at the end of the cycle.

Cllr Dickson asked about Aviation Risk. Mr Burdett said a glint and glare assessment would be carried out as part of the planning application.

Cllr Watson to speak with Astwood Parish Council.

34/20 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence was received Ashley Kenlock.

LGA 1972,
Sch 12 para
40

35/20 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The meeting acknowledged that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 20 July 2020 were a correct record.

LGA 1972,
Sch 12, para
41

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting, held on 20 July 2020, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

36/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

As previously declared and as recorded in the minutes.

37/20 **REPORTS**

(a) **Borough Councillor's Report, Cllr Jim Weir**

1. Coronavirus in Bedford Borough

As of 2nd September there have been 1447 cases of Coronavirus in Bedford Borough with 26,823 individual tests. This is a positive test rate of 5.4%. In the preceding 7 days there had been 26 new cases of Coronavirus in the Borough, up from 21 cases the previous week.

The Borough has now been taken off the Government's "Area of Concern" list, but the advice to follow the guidance on handwashing, face masks and social distancing remains in place.

There is a new walk-in testing centre in Bedford for residents showing symptoms of Coronavirus. The testing site is located at Prebend Street Car Park, Bedford. While you can just walk in and queue for a test, it's preferable to book an appointment. The drive through testing centre at Borough Hall remains open seven days a week.

Updated advice from the Borough Council is available here:

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/coronavirus/>

2. Planning Applications

A new system is in place for people to register interest in

Planning Applications and receive updates. This will allow people to register for ward-wide details or just for a specific application and receive updates.

I have registered, but am yet to see how this new system will play out or whether it will be an improvement. I have consistently criticised the Borough's Planning portal as a minefield of maps and data that is difficult to negotiate.

We can send a link on how to register for this service via a separate email to Parish Councillors and other key stakeholders.

3. Waste collections

Green waste collections have now returned to normal, with fortnightly collections resuming from 17th August.

4. Borough leisure services facilities - Fusion

Other than Mowsbury Golf Course, Fusion Lifestyle has still not opened any of the swimming pools or leisure centres that it operates on behalf of the Borough Council, despite permission being given nationally from 25 July for leisure centres to re-open. The situation remains unclear, with the Borough and Fusion saying talks will continue, but regular users of the facilities still not knowing when they can expect classes to resume.

We have recommended that the Borough cuts Fusion loose and looks to operate leisure centres under an 'arms-length' company that can get the same tax advantages as Fusion, so not to cost Council-taxpayers more money.

5. Bedford Borough Local Plan

The consultation on the Borough Council's "Issues & Options" for the next Local Plan closed on 4th Sept. The Conservative Group made a submission with some ward councillors making specific comments relevant to their ward.

6. Borough ward boundary review

The deadline for public responses to the review was 20 July and the Boundary Commission are now considering proposals. They expect to produce a first draft of their recommendations on 29th September. These will then be subject to a further period of consultation.

7. Government Consultation on verge parking

The Government is currently undertaking a public consultation on verge parking, with one option being a nationwide ban. Some people park dangerously and inconsiderately with others churning up grass verges without a thought. Whilst we are generally not into banning things, the inability of some people to park responsibly means tougher measures should be considered.

Details of the consultation can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-pavement-parking/pavement-parking-options-for-change>

8. The executive meets on Wednesday 16th September, we will see the first impact on the Borough finances of Covid. To see the publicly available information, follow the link: [Agenda details on public web site](#)

Policing priorities, June to Sept 20, 6 crimes 2 of which theft from motor vehicle,

38/20 **UPDATES ON CURRENT ISSUES**

(a) Vicar of St Leonards

Defer to next meeting.

(b) Village Hall

The Village Hall has been opened up for weekday bookings. Increased cleaning has been put in place. The Committee were thankful to Bedford Borough Council for the grant they received during the Coronavirus lockdown.

(c) Allotments

Peter Brown declared an interest in the Allotments.

The allotments committee had held a few socially distanced meetings.

One work party had been held to trim plum trees.

All events had been cancelled until further notice.

Allotment Lease

It had been agreed that a new 5 year lease with the addition of a 2 year notice period on both sides be renewed.

RESOLVED

To instruct Cowley DiGiorgio Solicitors to carry out the lease work.

(d) Management of Roadside Verges

Mr D Thompson had asked Parish Council to consider an alternative to the current way of managing roadside verges. Mr Thompson had submitted a report for Parish Councillors to consider, See Appendix A.

PC agreed to the idea of offering Stagsden as a trial area to experiment with more wildflower friendly verge management regimes. Mr Thompson and Cllr Weir to approach Bedford Borough Council Highways with the assistance of staff from Plantlife and the local Wildlife Trust.

The principle concern expressed by Councillors was that changes did not impact on the safety of vehicle users and pedestrians.

RESOLVED

That Bedford Borough Council be approached to consider a wildflower friendly verge management approach that did not impact on the safety of vehicles users and pedestrians.

(e) Royal George

Item deferred to next meeting.

39/20 **PLANNING**

(a) Report of Planning Applications

Bedford Borough Council approved:

The Grove, Turvey Road
The Roost, Wick End

(b) To Consider Planning Applications

Town &
Country
Planning Act
1990

20/02102/FUL 2 Bury End Cottages, 1 & 2 side and rear extension

RESOLVED

No Objections

- (c) Provision of renewable Energy Scheme, Land near Astwood

See Public Question Time.

Councillors noted comments in respect of the proposed Solar Farm and agreed no action could be taken until a planning application was received.

40/20 **FINANCE**

- (a) Schedule of Receipts and Payments – Aug/Sept 2020, Appendix C

The Council received the schedule of receipts and payments made during Aug/Sept 2020.

LGA 1972,
s150 (6)

Prop: Joanne Hodson, Sec: Esther Dickson, All in favour

RESOLVED

That the schedule of receipts and payments made during August/Sept 2020, and as circulated, be approved.

- (b) Audit year ended 31 March 2020

The External Audit Report had been received from the Auditors.

No issues identified.

- (c) Nalc salary award

The Clerk reported that NALC had awarded an increase in Salary with immediate effect and backdated until 1 April 2020.

41/20 **Amenities**

- (a) Play Areas

Play Areas had been opened by BPHA.

Proposed new equipment would not be installed until the current COVID situation had changed.

- (b) Rights of Way/Footpaths

The new gate onto the A422 had been installed as agreed.

Cllr Hodson asked why the Bedford Borough Council refuse collectors were taking out the dog bags from the general waste bins. Parish Council had previously been informed that this waste could be disposed of in this way. Cllr Weir agreed to investigate.

RESOLVED

To install two further dog bag dispensers, 1 for Oakcroft and 1 for Wick End.

(c) Highways

No business.

42/20 **NEW MATTERS FROM COUNCILLORS FOR DISCUSSION AT NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING**

None

43/20 **CORRESPONDENCE, APPENDIX D**

See Correspondence List attached.

44/20 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Meeting closed at 8.45pm.

The next meeting will be held on **Monday 16 November 2020 (7.30pm).**

MINUTES AGREED: _____

Date: _____ **2020**

PROPOSED CHANGERS TO MANAGEMENT REGIMES FOR STAGSDEN ROAD VERGES**Background**

Following a discussion at the July 2020 Stagsden Parish Council meeting, I was invited to submit a set of proposals to the September meeting focused on how road verges within the parish could be managed to improve biodiversity while not affecting other road users.

Current management

As far as I can establish, Bedford Borough has let a single four year contract for verge cutting based on the following four types of cuts.

1. Visibility cuts are focused on providing adequate lines of sight at road junctions (3 cuts per growing season)
2. Swath cuts are made along all adopted roads including the most minor (cuts 1 & 2 are to 1.2 m width and cut 3 is of the whole verge).
3. Short/Urban grass including all verges within 30 mph zones (6 cuts per growing season)
4. Environment cuts apply to designated Roadside Nature Reserves (1 at end of growing season)

We are currently, I think, in year 3 of the four year contract.

Impacts

Cutting vegetation between April and August prevents plants from flowering and/or setting seed and has further impacts on insect life. The failure to remove cuttings leads to a steady increase in nutrient levels which encourages the growth of vigorous grass species and a steady loss of diversity. Stagsden has some beautiful, flower and insect-rich road verges which we will lose if current management regimes are not modified. They represent the last sanctuary for many of the species that live along these verges. We owe it to our children and grand children to do what we can to ensure that these species-rich habitats are there for their future enjoyment.

Proposals

I have surveyed the general plant diversity of road verges within the parish and would like to propose the following:

1 A New Roadside Nature Reserve

The low bank on the northern side of the A422 just west of Dropshort Farm (red on Figure 1) has a rich chalkland flora including the rare parasitic Common Broomrape. **Proposal** - that this is designated as a Roadside Nature Reserve and managed accordingly with one late autumn complete cut with the arisings removed.

2. Swath cutting on flower-rich road verges

Three stretches of road verge have diverse plant communities (pink in Figure 1). These are:

- The northern end of Turvey Road up to the A428
- The upper half of Common Hill
- Common Hill Road from the A422 down to Firs Farm

Proposal - that **a)** swath cutting is reduced to twice a year – February/March and late August with no cuts between April and Mid-August inclusive, **b)** that the entire verge cut in made in August, and **c)** that all arisings are removed, particularly from the whole verge cut.

3 Swath cuts that offer little if any advantage

Swath cutting on the remaining stretches of unrestricted road (orange/red in Figure 1) would benefit from a similar cutting regime to that above. **Proposal** - that these verges are cut twice per year in February/March and then in late August. These roads are:

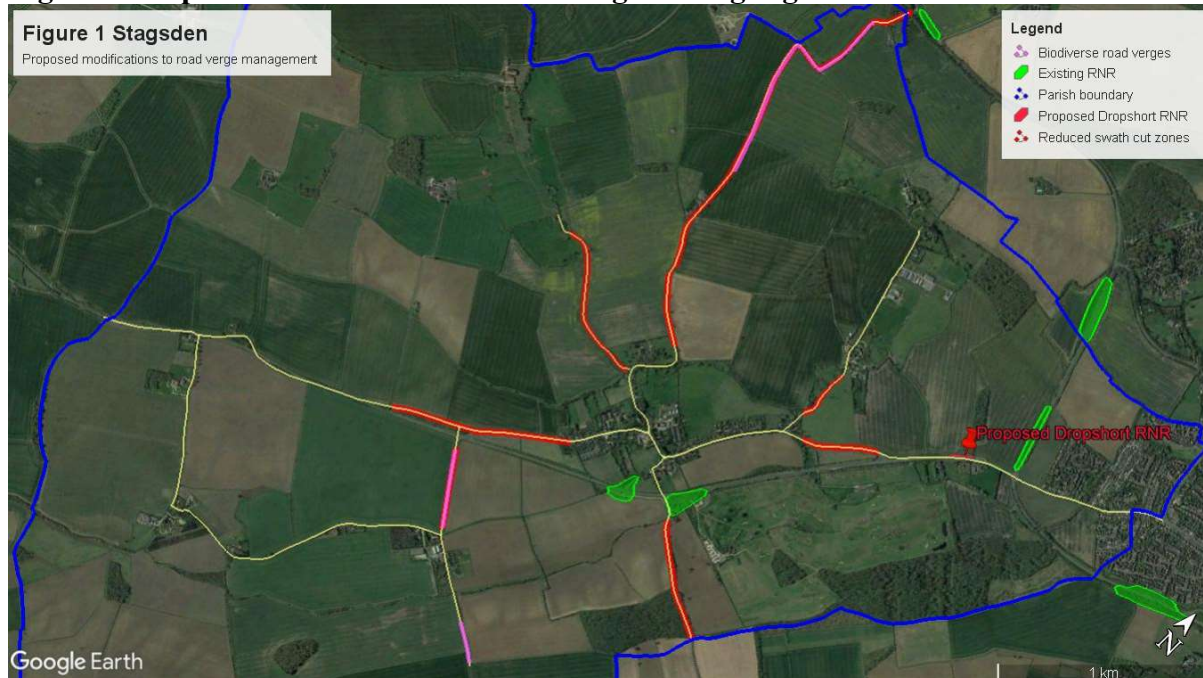
- Newport Pagnell Road from the village gates up to Grange Farm Road
- The southern half of Turvey Road
- The eastern end of Bedford Road
- North End Road
- Wick End Road where there is no effective verge to cut anyway
- Spring Lane from the Golf Club entrance up to the parish boundary.

The Turvey Road and Bedford Road verges are needed by pedestrians and the impact of losing the mid summer cut on grass height should be reviewed in the first year of implementation.

4. Verge cutting within the 30 mph village zone.

The only area with any significant verge is the southern side of Bedford Road. There is a reasonable number of flowering plants at the back of this verge. **Proposal** - that the back of the verge outside of the 1.2 m swath, is only cut twice – February/March and late August in order to encourage greater diversity of habitat. All arisings will need to be removed from these cuts.

Figure 1 Proposed modifications to road verge cutting regimes



How Stagsden Parish Council can help

Obviously SPC has no current control or influence on verge management within the parish. There are two options available to the PC.

1. Lobbying – The PC with the assistance of the Borough Councilor, can lobby the Mayor and the Highways Team for changes to the management of our verges. I am in contact with both the local Naturalist Trust (who are working on RNRs for the Borough) and Plantlife's National Road Verge Campaigner in the hope that we can collectively encourage the Highways Team to review their current management regime. The more voices the better.
2. Take on verge management – The PC could elect to take over management of verge cutting within the parish. With the four year contract coming to an end shortly, the time is right for such a move.

I look forward to your thoughts on the above proposals.

Dick Thompson

28th August 2020

RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2020

	40.00	251	Ashley Kenlock	Community Telephone
0.20		250	Nat West	interest
	230.04	250	Bedford Borough Council	salaries July
	230.04	251	Bedford Borough Council	salaries Aug
	230.04		Bedford Borough Council	salaries sept
0.19		251	Nat West	interest
		143.88	Julie Betts/Zoom	Upgrade to pro Zoom

Balance £23719.67

APPENDIX C**CORRESPONDENCE LIST**

Received	Type	From	Subject
4.9.20	email	Louise Ashmore BATPC	National Salary Award
4.9.20	post	BBC Consultation	Draft Housing Strategy
4.9.20	email	BBC Consultation	Local Plan Review
4.9.20	email	BBC Consultation	Splitting the Council's self-build and custom housebuilding register
4.9.20	email	Cllr Weir	objection to proposed Solar Farm
21.9.20	email	Lesley Mackness	photo of plot?
21.9.20	email	Resident	Orange Sacks
21.9.20	email	BBC	Due to Covid orange sacks will not be supplied
21.9.20	email	BBC Cara Umney	COVID 19 Champions
21.9.20	email	Beds Police	policing priorities
21.9.20	email	BBC Mr Simpkins	Next Local Plan