

**Minutes of the Meeting of Stiffkey Parish Council held on  
Friday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 at 7.30pm at Stiffkey Village Hall**

**Present:** Alexandra Hooper (Chairman)  
David Clifton  
Ian Curtis  
Philip Harrison  
David Smallridge  
Martin Williams  
Catherine Moore, Parish Clerk

**Also present:** Duncan Baker MP and Paul Forecast (National Trust) and 16 members of the public.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Hannah Darby. County Councillor Michael Dalby and District Councillor Victoria Holliday had also sent their apologies.

**2. Replacement of Stiffkey Marshes Bridge**

Paul Forecast gave an overview of the current situation on behalf of the National Trust. The bridge had been removed in 2022 and the replacement situation was complex. It was expected that the replacement cost would be around £250,000, which was significant for a charity. Other factors such as the changing nature of the marshes were considered. A decision to replace had been made, and a project manager appointed with a view to proposing a design to go forward to planning. It was hoped that this would be submitted in June 2023. There were civil engineering complexities, as well as planning procedures to go through. The charity would need to fund raise to restore the bridge. Paul thanked the community for their feedback on the bridge and needs, so that access could continue.

Duncan Baker addressed the meeting, noting that there was a great deal of concern within the community, and that initially it appeared that it would be replaced, which then in the autumn 2022 appeared to be suggesting that this would not be planned. Duncan visited at Christmas time and was concerned about what he had seen. He felt that the National Trust had made the right decision to replace the bridge, as safety was the paramount concern with the quick filling of the creeks at high tides. The community wanted a solid commitment to the bridge being replaced and an understanding of the costs and timescales, and did not want to see promises with no action, and wanted reassuring timescales for delivery. In response, Paul Forecast stated that June was the target date for the planning documents to be submitted, and that permissions were required from multiple statutory agencies as well as Crown Estate. Some parts of the planning permission process could be slow, and Paul noted that both the MP and the Parish Council could lend support. Duncan Baker assured the meeting that he would ensure that the MMO looked at the application in a timely manner.

Duncan asked for reassurance that the fundraising would be done in a timely manner, and Paul replied that a couple of funding sources had been identified and that the charity was well used to making funding applications. Duncan offered to lend letters of support wherever needed.

The Chairman asked for a list of the agencies that the National Trust required permission from so that the Parish Council could lend their support to the National Trust's requests.

**ACTION: PF**

A member of the public noted that he recalled the original bridge being built and was interested in the heritage of the bridge which was used for sheep farming as well as mussel cultivation. He noted that safety was a great concern, as visitors didn't know the tides would come in from two directions and would cut people off on the marsh. The creeks were 10ft deep at the deepest points. He asked what the District Council's position was on the planning situation. In response Paul noted that generally he was finding that agencies were supportive however the administration was slow. Pre-application conversations always took place to ensure that any proposed submission had the best chance. The member of the public noted that the marsh would recover, and should be available for people to visit safely.

The Chairman read an email from the Wells-next-the-Sea RNLi who had significant concerns about people being cut off from the tide. The email noted that people did not act rationally when cut off by the tide and became an urgent emergency. It was 7 miles from this creek to the Lifeboat Station and it was difficult to access, and clear signage needed to be displayed including what action to take if someone was cut off by the tide, which was currently missing. Paul Forecast noted that he had been speaking with the RNLi regularly, but acknowledged that the 'what to do' safety information should be improved.

**ACTION: PF**

A member of the public reported that she had seen some harrowing actions by people wading through water or along the pipe to get to safety. She reported that both herself and her husband had helped people off the marsh, and was frightened by what she had seen.

A member of the public asked for information regarding funding, understanding that funding was not currently available or budgeted. She asked whether emergency funding should be used as this was an urgent matter, and asked whether there could be reputational risk to the National Trust. The reputational risk of someone being cut off by the tide and killed or significantly injured could result in a negligence claim. In response Paul noted that the Trust's priority was health and safety, and if external funding could not be found then funds would be diverted from elsewhere. Paul was confident that external funding would be found.

Martin Williams expressed surprise that the unrestricted funds in excess of the policy reserve could not be used for the urgent replacement of the bridge, given that the unrestricted available funds were so high. In response Paul stated that these were accounts from 2021, and that approx. £5M in emergency funds was available, and the £200M surplus funds had been allocated across the charity. Civil engineering project costs were rising rapidly. Paul noted that some of the Trusts own funds would be used, and that external funding would always be sought. Finances were restricted and ringfenced, often by the donor.

Paul noted that if planning permission had been granted and external funding had not been agreed, funding would be reprioritised for the bridge.

A member of the public noted that as delays continued, costs would rise quickly, and suggested that funds could be raised through eg charging for car parking.

The Chairman asked whether unrestricted funds could be used to deliver the project, while fund raising to replace it continued. Paul replied that it would mean rediverting service delivery from other areas but that this could be used to get the project going.

Duncan asked whether the bridge would begin to be built as soon as planning permission was granted. In reply Paul stated that if funding applications were still in process and close to response, they would wait for that decision. If the funding application was declined, the National Trust would use their own funds to replace the bridge. It was not known what the timescales were on funding, however it was understood that some were short timescales for decision. The Trust would not wait a long time for decision making.

A member of the public noted that previous communication with the local manager had not been satisfactory. The mission statements of the National Trust were highlighted, and the speaker felt that trust needed to be reinstated between the community and the charity. He felt that the engineering survey report leading to the removal of the bridge should be disclosed, and that the National Trust should support the application to register the public right of way north of the bridge. He thanked Paul for attending the meeting as a senior representative of the National Trust. He noted that the Trust originally promised replacement in summer 2022, and that the damage to the marsh was concerning.

In response to the footpath public right of way Paul confirmed that the National Trust was supporting this application.

The Chairman asked what the plan was to mitigate the erosion and scarring to the east of the bridge, this was just off the SSSI but did mean that dogs entered the SSSI, asking what the plan was to restore this. In response Paul replied that the funding application would also include reinstatement in the marshes.

A member of the public asked how long it would take to build the bridge. Paul noted that the specification would be sent out, then designs would be drawn so that planning permission could be applied for. The rough estimate of £250,000 was based on previous experience. It was expected that a tender exercise would take place in June 2023, a specification was going out shortly after which technical drawings would be pulled together. It was expected that firmer timescales would be available in June 2023.

Ian Curtis asked how the National Trust would keep in touch with the Parish Council and the community? Paul replied that when project meetings took place, feedback would be sent to the Parish Council and put onto the website, and when a substantive update was available the local manager would attend the meeting to discuss this. It was noted that links to the generic public updates were not good enough, and that the Parish Council should receive more information as a key stakeholder. It was suggested that a monthly substantive update for the Parish Council should be sent by the National Trust.

**ACTION: PF**

David Smallridge asked why the type of bridge was being changed and whether it was more expensive? It was confirmed that the bridge would be 1.2M wide to allow as much access as possible and that this was not impacting heavily on the cost. It was noted that this was a 20M span bridge which was quite large, and the engineering costs of ensuring it was solid in the ground and did not damage the SSSI.

David Smallridge asked for confirmation that the 11 key stakeholders were being consulted at the same time, which was confirmed. An estimated timescale for completion was requested, and the reply was that this could not be quantified due to planning permission timescales and mobilising contractors. It was hoped that the bridge could be replaced in time for the 2024 summer season, which was felt to be realistic given the difficult constraints of the site. Tight windows of opportunity for construction were also an issue.

In summary Alex noted the key action points:

- List of stakeholders to be sent by the Trust to the Parish Council
- Duncan Baker to exert pressure where possible through personal contacts
- Planning permission submission target of June 2023
- Key stakeholders were being engaged now
- Fundraising was being applied for now
- Signage would be improved to include how to exit the marshes
- National Trust would support the Public Right of Way application to the north of the bridge
- Trust would aim for installation for the 2024 main visitor season
- Mitigation would be planned for east side of bridge
- Communications strategy to be sent to Parish Council

The Chairman confirmed that the Parish Council would offer support wherever needed and thanked everyone for attending, noting that she felt more reassured having heard directly from the National Trust.

### **3. Public Forum**

a) Public  
None.

b) County Councillor  
Michael Dalby's report had been circulated.

c) District Councillor  
Victoria Holliday had sent her apologies, and a report had been circulated a few weeks previously.

**4. Declaration of Interest for items on the agenda**  
None.

**5. Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023**  
The minutes of the meeting were **agreed**, proposed by David Smallridge, seconded by Ian Curtis, all in favour, and were signed by the Chairman.

### **6. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

a) SAM2 Device  
The SAM2 device had been collected from the repairers and was deployed. The sign was effective as it was picking up speeding again, which had reduced since it had been put up.

## 7. Planning

### a) New Applications

None.

### b) Applications considered between meetings

PF/23/0095 The Saltings, 68 Wells Road: Erection of single storey rear extension to dwelling to form new sunroom, insertion of 3no dormer windows, replacement of 2no roof lights with 2no terrace lights, single storey extension to garage and conversion of existing disused windmill incorporating external staircase and glazed balustrading to form private ancillary seating area (revisions). **WITHDRAWN**

PF/23/0335 Highfield, 60 Wells Road: Erection of new Padel Court and enclosure in garden (previously approved as tennis court). **NO COMMENTS**

### c) Decision

PF/22/2807 Great Yard House, 10-12 Bridge Street: Proposed Cart Shed. **COMMENTS SUBMITTED**

LA/22/2808 Great Yard House, 10-12 Bridge Street: Proposed Cart Shed (Listed Building Consent). **COMMENTS SUBMITTED**

LA/22/2812 Great Yard House, 10-12 Bridge Street: Proposed new screen / door to outbuilding (Listed Building Consent). **COMMENTS SUBMITTED**

## 8. Finance

### a) Finances 2022/23 To 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

The draft finances to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 were **noted**.

### b) Review of Internal Controls

The internal controls were adopted as presented, proposed by Alexandra Hooper, seconded by Phil Harrison, all in favour.

### c) Payments

It was **agreed** to pay the following, proposed by David Smallridge, seconded by Phil Harrison, all in favour:-

C Moore	Salary & Expenses Feb & Mar 23	£436.94
HMRC	PAYE Feb & Mar 23	£109.40
SSE	Streetlight Electric January 2023	£49.62
SSE	Streetlight Electric February 2023	£33.58
Westcotec	SAM2 Repair	£168.84
Fakenham CFR	Donation	£240.67
North Norfolk DC	Camping Hill Licence 2023/24	£100.00

## 9. Correspondence

### a) A149 Speed Reduction Scheme

It was noted that some sections would be reduced to 40mph which felt slow for some sections and could lead to more overtaking and safety concerns. The Clerk was asked to feed back that the proposed 40mph seemed excessive in some areas, and the focus should be on enforcement of the 20mph in the village, or putting in place measures which enforced the speed limit. Alex to draft a response for submission.

**ACTION: AH / Clerk**

- b) General Correspondence  
None.

**10. Other Matters**

- a) Parish Council Elections

The Clerk reminded everyone that nominations to the Parish Council would close at 4pm on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

- b) Review of Risk Assessments

It was **agreed** to approve with no changes, proposed by Alex Hooper, seconded by David Smallridge, all in favour.

**ACTION: Clerk**

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023 7pm Annual Parish Meeting, followed by Parish Council Meeting, Stiffkey Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

**CHAIRMAN**