

Stinsford Parish Council Annual Report

Sarah Pattison

May 2023

1. Introduction

Sarah Jane Pattison was elected as Chair of the council and took the post up in May 2022. Work carried out from the previous year reached completion such as the restoration of the Bockhampton Cross finger post signage. The Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan also carried over into its closing stages in 2022/3 when it was adopted following the examiner's report and returned to Dorset Council for their decision on final adoption.

2. Councillors

Cllr George Armstrong
Cllr Michael Clarke
Cllr Liz Crocker (until July 2022)
Cllr Sue Escott
Cllr Sarah Pattison

The Council ran with four councillors and the very capable support of the parish clerk, Kirsty Riglar, from July onwards. This followed the resignation of Cllr. Crocker in July as a result of paid work pressures and changing personal circumstances. The same month the council adopted the use of non-gendered pronouns moving to the description of Cllr. Pattison as 'chair' rather than 'chairman'. The council has continued to encourage residents to come forward as potential councillors or volunteers throughout this period and will continue to do so. It is to be hoped that progress will be made in this objective before the next round of elections in May 2024. Although the council has provision to hold full council meeting bimonthly and planning committee in the alternate months, as required, it was felt necessary to hold a full council meeting every month because of the volume of work. The only exception was August 2022 when councillors met informally to ensure that work streams were progressing as necessary and April 2023. Ever keen to keep costs at an acceptable level for local residents in January a precept was set that maintained the present level without any percentage rise above the previous year's precept rise. The council would like to thank Kingston Maurward College for use of their premises to accommodate council meetings and events.

3. Planning Applications

As a statutory consultee the parish council has taken a position on planning applications over the year. In the early part of the period the council received relatively large numbers of applications although the numbers declined over the winter period. Possibly there was a catch up impact from the impacts of Covid in 2021/22. Over the year 2022/23 we have responded to 11 planning applications by providing a statutory consultee response to Dorset Council.

4. Neighbourhood Issues

1) Highways – this has proven to be an ongoing theme through 2022/3. We have attempted to take forward residents' concerns through calling a joint meeting between the Highways Agency, Dorset

Council Highways, Dorset Police and the parish council. Regardless of our persistence so far this has not been possible. The main issues relate to redirected traffic via Cuckoo Lane to the south and Slyers Lane to the north of the A35.

2) Speed Restrictions: We have also looked at the possibility of speed restrictions in several parts of the parish and two councillors attended a session on possible funding but found that the available scheme was not appropriate for small parishes. Speed is a particular concern on Hollow Hill, Cuckoo Lane and Slyers Lane. There are also issues on London Road and the Stinsford Hill Roundabout. We have managed to get signage repaired at the A35 junction on Cuckoo Lane and on Slyers Lane.

3) Higher Bockhampton grit bin – this is progressing and will hopefully be in place by Winter 2023.

4) Lower Bockhampton Play Area - work is progressing with the repair of the wall in Lower Bockhampton. This is a particular concern because the wall is a 19th Century feature of the conservation area. We are keen that it be properly conserved using appropriate mortar and removing unsuitable historical repairs to return it to its original form. Consultation has taken place with Dorset Council's conservation officer on the project.

5) Riverside Path - repairs have been carried out on the Riverside footpath at Lower Bockhampton and we are seeking further repairs to the riverside path near Stinsford that has suffered damage as a result of high river levels over the winter.

6) Stinsford village environment - At present we are trying to resolve residents' issues concerning use of the College boundaries at Stinsford village in the context of the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan policy on maintaining the tranquillity of the area and pleasing access for the many visitors that make the pilgrimage to Hardy's grave and St Michael's Church.

It is only possible to list a small selection of local issues that have been addressed over the year in this section. It is to be hoped that the above provides a flavour of what the council was engaged in rather than a comprehensive list.

5. Stinsford Neighbourhood Planning

2022 saw the final acts in the delivery of the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan. Dorset Council's Cabinet met on 21st June 2022. They reached a decision to adopt the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan and concluded that the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan should be adopted as part of the statutory development plan for the Stinsford Neighbourhood area. It was felt that this was a big achievement for such a small parish and that no small thanks should go to the residents involved in the neighbourhood planning team who worked so hard over recent years on developing the plan.

6. DOR13

The policy in the Draft Dorset Council Local Plan known as DOR13 or the North Dorchester Garden Community and referred to by many as North Dorchester, even though it would be better described as West Stinsford, continued to run throughout the year. Proposals to develop 4,000 houses North of the Frome water meadows in the parish existed for many years and were incorporated the Local Plan review in July 2018. West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Council applied for Garden Community Funding in November 2018. It was announced that the bid was successful in July 2019. In part because of consultations for the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan

Stinsford Parish Council was fully aware of resident opposition to the proposals and opposed the development option from the very beginning.

In June Stinsford Parish Council decided to progress a case against Dorset Council for continuing to endorse the position taken by the former West Dorset and Weymouth and Portland Councils before the establishment of the Dorset Unitary Authority. An important part of the bidding process is that a Garden Community should have the support of all local authorities in the area and local residents. The Stinsford Parish Council alleged that Council had misrepresented Stinsford Parish Council in the Garden Communities funding bid application by informing government that Stinsford Parish Council supported the bid when it did not and that Dorset Council had continued with this claim after the formation of the unitary authority. A formal complaint was submitted to Dorset Council. This was eventually submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman only to be rejected on grounds that one local authority is not allowed by the rules to take a case against another.

Stinsford Parish Council received representation from Turner Associates in June. They presented a different masterplanning option to Hyas Associates, the official consultants working on the garden community programme. After extensive discussion at the council's July meeting it was decided that the Turner Associates proposals were not sufficiently different and would potentially act to open a greater area up to development.

Councillors discussed at length sending representation to the so-called Community Board facilitated by Hyas Associates. It was felt that because the garden communities programme gives value to community participation, attendance would give legitimacy to their actions. This was especially so because the rules of attendance clearly stated that the meetings were to positively discuss master planning details and not the suitability of the site. Later in the year councillors discussed the possibility of sending an observer rather than a representative. It was decided that this was still a dangerous option but that the council would do such however no more meetings were called by Hyas.

Stinsford Parish Council took a decision to assist STAND (Save the Area North of Dorchester) in their campaign. After a presentation to STAND's committee in Charminster Village Hall alongside Chris Loder MP and representation from Charminster Parish Council and Dorchester Town Council it was decided to offer assistance when required. The Chair of Stinsford Parish Council attended a meeting with a delegation from the group 'Dorset Deserves Better' and the Dorset Council planning portfolio holder to consider the possibility of revising the draft local plan. Representatives of STAND also attended this meeting. In a meeting with Chris Loder MP in January, Stinsford Parish Councillors also discussed issues concerning the DOR13 development.

In February the Chair met again with lead STAND activists and offered professional planning advice to substantiate their allegation that Dorset Council had predetermined the allocation of the DOR13 site. Whilst STAND organised a public meeting on 25th March at which Dorchester Town Councillors were invited to speak about the site, even though 95% of it being in Stinsford's administrative boundaries, Stinsford Parish Council was expressly refused a speaker at the event. The Chair concluded that it was no longer possible for her to work with STAND because of their attitude towards the parish council. It was decided that other Stinsford Parish Councillors will continue to follow STAND's progress.

DOR13 is without doubt the largest single issue facing Stinsford Parish Council. 4,000 new residential properties will potentially add 12,000 population to the existing Stinsford Parish population of approximately 321. We know from the Neighbourhood Plan consultation that residents do not want to see large tracts of countryside in the parish built over with this proposal and the parish council continue to oppose the development and will continue to oppose it.

7. Stinsford Parish Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy

The Stinsford Parish Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy was developed in 2021/22 and completed in draft by May 2022. The council decided to do a final revision of the documents in August 2022 with the view that they should be adopted as working documents. The Strategy involves three documents, a summary, the strategy itself and an action plan. The action plan is designed to embrace a wide range of possibilities from which a selection can be extracted on a basis of resident interest. The council did however wish to identify priorities and carried out a simple exercise of locating those proposals that fit within the remit of Neighbourhood Plan policies for priority status. The Strategy was adopted by the council in July. Part of the revision involved how to prioritise actions.

The strategy was greatly influenced by the approach taken by Kingston Maurward College and it therefore seemed appropriate to arrange a launch event for residents at the College's new eco-friendly University Business Hub building, The Stinsford Centre. In early February a launch event took place on a dark winter's evening. Residents listened to presentations by the Principal of the College and the Chair of the parish council who introduced the strategy. This was followed by a wide-ranging discussion engaging residents ideas on what from the action plan, besides other ideas, they believe would be best taken forward.

It is important to avoid large scale industrial renewables and indeed the council became aware of an unsolicited and methodologically questionable survey to promote large wind turbines again on Waterston Ridge in July. The council's strategy provides for large and exciting alternatives such as exploring the potentials of going off-grid with the use of collective ground source heat pumps without the need to destroy the countryside and valuable farming land through industrialisation. At the same time the strategy also offers many other small potentials such as a community orchard, highways improvements and the reinstatement of a parish bounds walk due to be arranged for late May / early June.

8. Stinsford Parish Council Communications Strategy

In June 2022 the parish council considered the need to develop a 'communications strategy' and adopted a final version September 22. This was placed on the Parish Council web site in December. The document reviewed a range of possibilities. These included the promotion of existing provisions and gradually introducing new approaches. Existing provision such as 'public participation time' at council meetings is to be encouraged. The parish magazine, The Pilot, should carry a specific Parish Council article that should be relaxed and avoid formalities in its style. So far a monthly article has appeared in print. The plan was to further develop electronic communications. Much more material was posted on the Parish Council website. A Facebook page was launched but it has proven difficult to attract residents to sign up to this to become a meaningful way of disseminating information. It is to be hoped that more and improved options for electronic communication will be introduced over the next year.

9. Consultation Responses

Stinsford Parish Council responded to a range of consultations over the year. They were from central government, Dorset Council and others.

September – Heritage Assets List

October – Parochial Parish Council consultation on the Philip Larkin board outside St Michael's and response to Dorset AONB teams survey on trees

November – Dorset Libraries Consultation Part II

December 2023 – Dorchester Transport Action Group

January – Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: National Planning Policy Framework consultation

10. Conclusions

Stinsford Council operates on a minimum budget with a small number of dedicated councillors. The parish has delivered all of its key statutory requirements over the last year. In terms of its wider actions it has worked at the limits of its resource capability. In summer 2022 it considered Dorset Council's Community Governance Review without comment. This is more than likely because of the successful delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan and because the council is fully functioning as required. This was a very positive outcome.

If the so-called North Dorchester development is accepted in the Dorset Council Local Plan, and if it does deliver the proposed housing numbers on the ground, then Stinsford Parish needs to be able to demonstrate that it has the capacity to deliver to a much larger group of residents with very different demographics and service requirements. Whilst the council have opposed the development throughout, we need to be aware of potentials and be ready to act as appropriate. If we are to meet such challenges we need to be able to take in more councillors and volunteers by co-option or election in May 2024.