

# Stonesfield Parish Council

## Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2025

Held on Wednesday 7 May 2025 at 7.30pm at Stonesfield Primary School

Chair: Cllr Ursula Rice

Parish Clerk: Kay Linnington

County and District Cllrs Andy Graham, Genny Early and Tim Sumnor.

Public: 19 members of the public

### **1. The Chair opened the meeting**

Cllr Ursula Rice opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees.

### **2. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 8 May 2024**

The minutes of the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting were reviewed. No amendments were raised and the minutes were approved and signed.

### **3. Parish Council Report**

The Chair summarised the Council's work over the past year, including the significant progress on the Neighbourhood Plan, village safety considerations, ongoing bin management issues, and community grants awarded. The Chair reflected on the importance of civic involvement and encouraged continued participation from residents.

### **4. Reports from County and District Councillors**

Cllr Andy Graham (Oxfordshire County Council): He has supported the fantastic community initiative with a £5000 grant to save The White Horse pub. Instigated an engineer's approach to solving the flooding issues on Laughton Hill and new measures to ensure safe walking to school measures in Pound Hill to be introduced in 2025.

Cllr Genny Early (West Oxfordshire District Council): **Appendix A**

Cllr Tim Sumnor (West Oxfordshire District Council): He began by confirming that he is the District Councillor representing Stonesfield and emphasised that West Oxfordshire continues to be a very good place to live, noting that the more he observes the challenges faced by other districts, the more he values the work of Stonesfield's parish councillors and the engagement of local residents. He highlighted ongoing pressures on rural communities, including planning pressures, reduced central government funding, and the resulting threats to local facilities. Despite these challenges, residents and councillors have continually worked together to protect the interests of the village. Cllr Tim Sumner reported that he holds the Executive Portfolio for Leisure Centres, Car Parks and Major Projects, all of which impact residents across the district. He outlined substantial investment and progress in the renovation and decarbonisation of local leisure centres, which are being

transformed into wellness hubs accessible to all ages and abilities. He drew particular attention to the success of cold-water swimming at Woodstock Outdoor Pool, which has allowed the swimming season to be extended due to strong demand. He noted that this achievement is especially significant given that more than 400 public swimming pools have closed nationally in recent years, making West Oxfordshire's continued investment crucial for community wellbeing. In closing, Cllr Tim Sumner reiterated that although challenges persist, the District Council and Stonesfield Parish Council remain committed to acting solely in the best interests of the village, free from external political or commercial pressures. He thanked all residents for attending the meeting and for their continued involvement in local matters.

## **5. Thames Valley Police**

No representative from Thames Valley Police attended the meeting and no formal report was received.

## **6. Reports from Local Groups and Organisations**

The following groups gave reports:

1. The Slate: **Appendix B**
2. Transport Scheme: **Appendix C**
3. Megalosaurus Society: **Appendix D**
4. Scouts: **Appendix E**
5. Village Hall: The committee reported increased bookings due to the online system, continued maintenance, and a strong programme of regular weekly groups.
6. Community Club / Pub: The committee highlighted the successful first year since reopening, a strong programme of events, high community engagement and approximately 1,000 shareholders, including international supporters.
7. Gardening Club, Gaye Olesen: The Club remains active and well supported, involving:
  - Approximately 58 households
  - Around 80 individual members

The Club continues to work hard to attract younger members, noting that its demographic currently skews towards older residents. Its programme focuses on current themes such as:

- Wellbeing and mental health benefits of gardening
- Organic and sustainable gardening methods
- Reducing waste
- Cost of living aware approaches to home growing

Talks and activities during the year have included topics supporting:

- Vegetable growing for beginners
- Gardening techniques suitable for older residents
- Environmentally conscious gardening

During the meeting, residents and the Club discussed opportunities for future collaboration with Stonesfield Primary School, particularly in relation to the Forest School and potential small vegetable growing areas. The Club expressed openness to exploring this further. The representative invited suggestions from residents regarding other local charities or village projects that might benefit from future Gardening Club donations.

## **7. Residents' Questions and Contributions**

Residents raised several questions and comments during the meeting, including:

- A question regarding the increased demand for hospital transport journeys. The Transport Scheme representative explained that wider awareness, increased age-related need and greater hospital appointment requirements contributed to the rise.
- A discussion about links between the Gardening Club and the school's Forest School, with residents expressing interest in future collaboration.
- Clarification regarding GP surgery referrals and voluntary driver availability, with assurances that the scheme continues to meet local needs effectively.
- General praise and support were expressed for community-led initiatives and village organisations.

**The meeting closed at 8.22pm.**

## **District Council Report from District Councillor Genny Early 9 April 2025 - Appendix A**

### **1. Youth Development Officer**

James Edney has started at WODC as the Youth Development Officer. This role was born out of the Youth Needs Assessment 2023 which heard from almost 4,000 young people across the district and identified barriers they faced accessing positive activities and issues they considered most important to them. James plans to reach out to parish and town councils where young people appear to be in need of support. Stonesfield and Tackley is one of these. We need to help James understand the challenges that our rural communities face when seeking to engage young people and what worked and did not work so well in the past.

### **2. WODC loans to renovate empty homes**

West Oxfordshire District Council has announced a new initiative to bring empty homes back into use, helping to increase housing supply and improve neighbourhoods across the district.

At the end of March 2024, there were 1,128 properties in the district registered as long-term empty, with 125 of these vacant for over two years. Many of these homes require financial investment to be made habitable again. This can be due to people inheriting homes in a poor state of repair or homes being stood empty for long periods.

The Council's new loan scheme, delivered in partnership with Lendology, a not-for-profit social enterprise lender, will provide financial support to property owners who need help to renovate empty homes.

### **3. Wychwood Flora Group**

It is the start of the new survey season for the Wychwood Flora Group. We have a full program of plant surveys at local sites, including Sunday 1 June, 10 am at Combe, for Meadow clary *Salvia pratensis* and at Combe Fen. The full survey calendar is available at <https://www.wychwoodforesttrust.co.uk/about-us> The Flora Group is very friendly, and welcome new volunteers with no or any level of experience.

## Report to Annual Parish Meeting 7 May 2025 - Appendix B

### *Stonesfield Slate*

The *Slate* is now in its 557<sup>th</sup> issue and continues to be delivered to every house in the village and in Fawler, thanks to our team of bundlers and deliverers. It also goes to the library, village shop and to the White Horse, where it gets read by people from outside the village – and taken away judging by the times we have to replenish the stocks.

We have 52 advertisers in the *Slate* at the moment, which generates enough profit to distribute money to good causes in Stonesfield. Thanks to our advertisers' support, In the last year we've donated over £1100.

The editors and publishers are very grateful to all those individuals, community groups, sports clubs and local politicians who take the time to write articles every month, to keep everyone informed and entertained.

Our new feature called "I'm a Resident" has prompted very varied articles and we'd love to hear from anyone else who'd like to put pen to paper – or fingers to keyboard.

Diane and Paul Bates  
Publishers

## **Stonesfield Voluntary Transport Scheme - Appendix C**

### **Report to Annual Parish Meeting, 7 May 2025**

Our scheme has just completed 17 years of providing voluntary transport to medical appointments for Stonesfield residents. We take people to GPs, dentists and all sorts of other appointments in local towns and villages, and also to the hospitals in Oxford and Banbury, and to their outlying clinics.

In the year to the end of April 2025, a total of 19 volunteer drivers gave lifts to people without other forms of transport; often giving half a day of their time for each lift.

In that time our drivers gave 106 lifts and drove a total of almost 2,200 miles – a 32% increase over the previous year. We helped 24 people; many of them several times over and one gentleman as many as 23 times.

Viv Kendall  
Chair  
Stonesfield Voluntary Transport Scheme

## The Megalosaurus Society of Stonesfield - Appendix D

### Report to Annual Parish Meeting, 7 May 2025

Stonesfield's newest society came into being in the autumn of 2024. It followed a number of events organised by individuals throughout last year celebrating Stonesfield as the source of *Megalosaurus* in the bicentenary of the first scientific description and naming of what would be recognised as a dinosaur. One of those was the creation of the new information board on Stonesfield's dinosaur at the top of Brook Lane, developed together with the Oxfordshire Geology Trust, and generously funded by the Parish Council.

Those events had such an enthusiastic response that we wondered if there was scope for a new local history society covering a much wider range of topics than dinosaurs. Building on the response from an exploratory meeting in October, we have set up the Society which now has over 70 members, a committee and a growing programme of talks and visits for this year and next.

We have strong links with the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, and have welcomed their expert speakers to Stonesfield, and spent an evening at the Museum in November to see and give feedback on their planned new displays. Since then we have had talks on archaeology and Stonesfield's Roman villas, and a working party field trip to clean newly-exposed dinosaur footprints at Ardley Quarry. Plans for later in the year include a visit to Hook Norton to look at the 19<sup>th</sup> C iron ore industry, a talk on the dinosaur trackways which featured in BBC's *Digging for Britain*, and a roundtable discussion on glove-making in the village.

The Museum's *Breaking Ground* exhibition which focuses on William Buckland, *Megalosaurus* and the other fossils of Stonesfield, also features a poem entitled *Megalosaurus* which the Museum commissioned from the Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage. The Society has been given permission to present the poem and background information on a permanent public display in the village in the coming months.

So far, so good – we are thrilled with the enthusiasm of our members and are working hard to keep that going.

Viv Kendall  
Chair  
The Megalosaurus Society of Stonesfield



## Chair's report for Parish Council May 2025 - Appendix E

1st Stonesfield Scouts is a thriving local scout group and we are pleased to be core to the Stonesfield Community. We have been running since 1948 and we are proud to have been leading changes to set up for the next generation of Scouts.

We have around 66 young people in the group and a volunteer team of 18 leaders, assistant leaders and trustees, with one Young Leader who has been helping the Beaver section. The sections continue to meet in the week, and some edited highlights of the sessions are at the end of this report to show you what we have been up to. One notable highlight, however, was the Group Camp last Autumn.

In October 2024 the group had a Group Camp where all sections camped together at Youlbury Scouts Site. The aim of this was to bring the sections together, and this worked really well. The family-like atmosphere fostered teamwork across all sections. In a display of leadership, older kids acted as parents to the younger ones, teaching them skills and helping run events. Adrenaline junkies found their thrill on the zip wire, while budding explorers conquered the orienteering challenge.

Beyond that we have all been teaching about bushcraft skills, first aid, healthy eating, respect for our environment, local history, local services as well as running lots of events at fire stations, climbing walls and even on the Thames. It is great fun and we want others to be part of it too!

### **Upcoming events**

We will continue to hold events in the local community where possible, including our Christmas Bingo and Duck Race. These allow us to keep our fees low and support everyone who wishes to take part.

### **Changes to volunteering**

In line with the guidance from Scouts, we have moved to a new layout for both the Trustees and the Groups. A move to a team-based approach with people being encouraged to get involved as and when they can makes sense to how we work, and we are keen to get more people involved in the teams.

This brings me onto an important point. [Scouting is not just for young people.](#) It is something anyone and everyone can get involved with. We need people to give a little of their time.

One of the best things is that we have children and grand-children of former Beavers, Cubs and Scouts in our group at the moment and, with close to 70 young people, we seem to be getting bigger! Scout groups across the country are finding the same challenges as we are around finding volunteers. The changes in how all groups run are now allowing more people to get involved by lowering the barriers to entry. You can volunteer on the trustees, for a few sessions a year, as a fundraiser, as one of the team and (soon we hope) as painter and decorator on the hut.

### **The Hut**

We have started to build our Community Hub having raised £193,000 over the whole campaign. We had a successful Phase 2 round of funding and raised over £60,000 through the SpaceHive platform. Notably we received £30,000 from the WODC Communities and Infrastructure grant, so wish to thank everyone who demonstrated how the hut would benefit the village, and pledged their own money. Local organisations have been really supportive. Special mention to Stonesfield Community Trust, Parish Council, Blenheim Palace and numerous others.

We will soon have a watertight shell and we hope to be using the hut by the end of this year. If anyone would like to help us fit out the hut then please get in touch with us!

We'd like to formally record my thanks to everyone who gives their time to support us. There are many to mention, but to highlight a few:

- Sarah Drew for her support in leading the Beavers, and now as Lead Volunteer
- All the Leaders and Section teams. Without you Scouting just would never happen.
- Paul, Mark, Kelly and others on the Hut Build team - this is a full time job in its own right, and we are grateful for all your time and effort.
- Finally all the cake bakers, parent volunteers, campers.

Ben Whitworth  
Chair  
May 2025

## **Potted highlights for the record**

### **Beavers**

- Night hikes
- Fun day at 24th Abingdon Scout Hut
- Adventurous Activity day at Far peak climbing at North Leach
- Being part of the Remembrance Day parade in the village
- Growing (or trying to grow) plants in windowsill greenhouses
- Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum (Nov 2023)
- Made key hooks
- Litter pick hike
- Fire station visit to Charlbury

### **Cubs**

- Campfire cooking, and navigating like seasoned explorers.
- Kayaking expedition on the mighty Thames.
- Camp doughnuts
- Crafting luminous Diwali paper lamps
- Creating felt poppies for Remembrance Sunday
- Crafting mealworm pinecone bird feeders – 100% natural and biodegradable.
- Hand knitting for Chinese New year
- Personal growth challenges
- Life-saving first aid training
- An upcoming Cubs-only camp

### **Scouts**

- Camps throughout the year, including sleeping under shelters in the woods
- Learning about WW1 trenches
- Visiting the climbing wall
- Running the santa's letters
- Making our own food
- Playing lots of Wide Games