

**DRAFT Annual Residents Meeting**  
**hosted by Severn Stoke & Croome d'Abitot Parish Council**  
**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023, 7.30pm at St Denys' Church, Severn Stoke**




**Present:** Parish Cllrs L Freeman (Chair), S Faulkner, R Garrard, P Preston, L Russell and R Williams.  
L Stevens (Clerk and RFO). S.S (Lengthsman). County Cllr M Allen.  
District Cllrs D Harrison and J Michael. Members of the Parish Hall Committee.  
42 registered members of the public and estimated 20 that declined to sign in.

**Apologies:** J.H (Church Rep). M.F (National Trust).

<b>1</b>	Welcome and apologies as above. Thanks that the church is able to be used for this meeting.
<b>2</b>	<b>Open Forum – residents raised matters without notice.</b>
<b>2a</b>	<p><b>Flood bund update.</b>  <b>Parish Chair Cllr Freeman</b> gave an update as per information received directly from Paul Jones (Environment Agency) in late March 2023. See parish council minutes 29<sup>th</sup> March for further in-depth details.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Current pause in works is temporary, due to health and safety matters.</li> <li>2. Assurance has been given by Environmental Agency (EA) that building of the bund will commence in the next few months and be in place by this autumn (approx. timescale for construction is five months), with potentially the road heightening being outstanding in early 2024.</li> <li>3. Archaeologists will be back on site shortly. Medieval fragments have been found but most significant finds are on higher ground and will not interfere with plans.</li> <li>4. Funding for construction costs was in pace according to last years prices, but this will require re-evaluating to include 11% inflation.</li> <li>5. Newts are due to be relocated in June 2023.</li> <li>6. Trees on site will be taken down under specific license (bird nesting season).</li> <li>7. Parish Council has written to remind EA of urgency and that all possible action must proceed if the community is to avoid flooding in late 2023.</li> </ol>
<b>2b</b>	<p><b>Question</b> – How long will soil remain stored adjacent to parish hall?  <b>Answer</b> – No timetable specific to that section that the parish council is aware of. All soil on site represents only 10% of soil required to complete the project.</p>
<b>2c</b>	<p><b>District Councillor David Harrison</b> provided additional information at the invitation of resident S.W.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Site visit took place ten days ago to look at additional drainage issues. Soil on site will undergo additional testing to check quality, although all soil on site has a certificate and has been tested by Regulatory Services. Ham Lane raising of road will take place in 2024 funded by Worcestershire County Council.</li> </ul>
<b>2d</b>	<p><b>Resident S.W</b> stood to refute all info just given and provided the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jacksons is the likely contractor for the site – discontent with some aspects of this probable choice.</li> <li>- Soil testing – discontent with aspects of this procedure.</li> <li>- Soil quality – discontent with sources, which may include location near Upton and a hospital site near Redditch.</li> <li>- Project management – discontent. Unclear as to who is leading the project and indications of multi-agency incompetence.</li> <li>- Funding – discontent. Concerns that there is no obvious funding in place.</li> <li>- Timing – discontent. It is not clear what the exact timings are. Wider residents questioned why the parish council had not been in receipt or indeed requested a project spreadsheet of actions, timings and deadlines.</li> </ul>



2d	<p><b>District Councillor David Harrison</b> provided additional information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harriet Baldwin has been a regular advocate of progress on the bund and has secure £750,000 from Central Gov.</li> </ul>
2e	<p>Resident concerns were not allayed and the following general actions were agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A meeting with EA needs to be arranged. District Councillors to organise.</li> <li>- All residents need to write to Teresa Coffey, Paul Jones and Harriet Baldwin to express their mind about progress with the bund. Addresses at the end of these minutes – Appendix 2.</li> <li>- Parish Council instructed by residents to write again to EA and indicate strength of feeling and pin down the timetable, including concerns that the bund would not be built by this winter.</li> <li>- Parish council and volunteers to keep residents informed.</li> </ul> <p style="color: red;">Subsequent to this meeting, the parish council contacted the Environment Agency and asked for a further update and offered the right to reply. This update is attached as Appendix 3.</p>
3	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>A presentation on Severn Stoke Parish Hall</u></b></p> <p>The parish council has received proposals from St Monica's Trust (SMT) (land owners of current site) that provide an opportunity to locate a new hall.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">  </div> <p><i>A number of parish councillors have made individual declarations of interest which have been accepted by the parish council as non-pecuniary<sup>1</sup> and dispensations duly agreed.</i></p>
3a	<p><b>Parish Chair Cllr Freeman and Richard Hill Chairman SSVH Management Committee gave a presentation – slides are included in Appendix 1.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Site on which hall is built is owned by St Monica Trust (charity based in Bristol) and is part of the wider estate owned by that charity. (NB. This is separate from Croome National Trust.) Business aspects of St Monica Trust are part managed by the Society of Merchant Venturers as Trustees (including the hall site in Severn Stoke). The hall site is further specifically managed at a local level by Savills, based in High Green. The Parish Council leases the site from St Monica Trust and this lease is due to run out 2033. The building on the site is managed by the Severn Stoke Village Hall Committee, a charity, under the terms of the Committee Constitution in agreement with the parish council. Current hall was built in 1900s.</li> <li>2. Flooding occurred in 1970s, 1980s and in 2020 at which point the building became <b>structurally unsound</b>. At this point a decision was taken to close the hall and it has remained empty ever since. At the AGM of Hall Committee in 2020, a decision was made to try to <b>rebuild the hall</b>.</li> <li>3. February 2021 a public consultation and questionnaire established that residents wished for the hall to be rebuilt and that residents felt there was a local need for the facility. Consequently, a <b>design brief</b> was created by the Hall Committee, listing site constraints and aspirations in design.</li> <li>4. Early 2022, the Hall Committee commissioned and received a <b>Feasibility Study</b> which confirmed that the existing site could be successfully used for a hall that would meet the design brief, but at a cost of £750,000+. Other options include using a company to build a basic shell and the community finishes the rest, or to sig reduce the spec.</li> </ol>

<sup>1</sup> A non-pecuniary interest is a private or personal interest a person has that does not amount to a pecuniary interest but that may arise from family or personal relationships, involvement in community, social or other cultural groups that may include an interest of a financial nature.

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3b	<p>5. Mid 2022 the parish council was approached by the Hall Committee to ask if a <b>public works loan</b> could be applied for to pay for the hall rebuild. The Hall Committee is unable to apply for funding or grants (eg lottery etc) as the remaining lease time is insufficient to meet most if not all grant/loan criteria. The parish council debated and was reluctant to start applying for a public works loan (one criteria of the loan is a lease period of 75+ years which we do not have) and also reluctant to begin negotiations to extend the land lease until the <u>flood bund</u> was completed – this is still a major obstacle on the present site. The parish council also felt that a referendum of parishioners should be undertaken and began taking steps towards this.</p> <p>6. Late 2022 - Hall Committee approached MHDC planning department to obtain in principle thoughts relating to a rebuild on the current site. In principle, it appears that MHDC have no initial objections. Hall Committee and Parish Council wrote to Savills to ask if a lease extension in the order of 75 years was possible on the current site or on any other estate site and what the conditions would be.</p> <p>7. March 2023 – Savills wrote back with numerous options for location. A lease of 75 years from them is only possible if a commitment is also made towards supporting options for housing, whereby the parish would qualify for sufficient s106 financial grants from the house builder. This would significantly reduce the amount of public works loan that the parish council will need to apply for. The Village Hall Committee has written to merely acknowledge these options. The Parish Council so far has made no comment, subject to parishioner comment and opinion/survey.</p> <p>8. Alternative sites suggested by Savills are: ● Kinnersley – existing barn could be converted, located on road to Defford before leaving Kinnersley village. ● Severn Bank, A38, left hand side as you travel up the hill. ● Severn Stoke village, on the site opposite Deerhurst Close.</p> <p>9. Reminder that the parish council will hold a public parish wide survey and then a financial referendum later this year before final decisions are made.</p> <p><b>Resident comments and questions:</b></p> <p>1. Must have a sound business case both initially and over time before proceeding with a rebuild.</p> <p>2. What specific activities would take place on any of the sites? Not just a parish hall but more of a community space? Prior to closure, it may be that the hall was not significantly used by those within the parish.</p> <p>3. Survey will need to include costings.</p> <p>4. Has SMT offered to sell/gift the land? Answer – they have refused to consider these options</p> <p>5. What will happen to the current site if the hall is knocked down and no replacement facility is built there? Answer – cannot say for certain that planning permission would not be applied for for housing and this may be true of any of the sites proposed by Savills. The current hall site is classed as brown field land, which often invites more attention of developers.</p> <p>6. DCllr Harrison noted revisions that are planned to the South Worcestershire Development Plan which may or may not permit development outside of existing settlement boundaries.</p> <p>7. Residents noted that the site opposite Deerhurst Close experiences surface flooding from the direction of the Panorama.</p> <p>8. Option of facilities that could be provided within St. Denys church. The church has commissioned its own feasibility study to convert part of the church to a meeting room, kitchen, toilets and storage, at a cost of £150,000 approx. 5 years ago. Show of hands at meeting suggested that 75% of those present would prefer an option that involved developing the church. Chair thanks residents for their information and noted that a survey is required of all residents, not just based on the strength of feeling within the room. The meeting was closed with a commitment by the parish council to a survey asap and ideally to commence before the next parishioner meeting to discuss the flood bund.</p>
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<b>16</b>	<p>AOB – Clerk noted the 6 vacancies on the parish council, noted that the burden of decision is best spread across a full parish council and invited residents to step forward to express an interest. 7 residents did so.</p> <p>Close of Annual Meeting of Severn Stoke and Croome d’Abitot PC.</p>
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Appendix 1 – slides from the meeting:

## The Current Situation

- Current hall is structurally unsound and not fit for purpose
- It lies within the flood area
- There is an unusual lease / land ownership situation
- The Land owners will only grant a 25 year lease
- There is an increased cost to rebuild a new Community Facility on this parcel of land in order to mitigate flooding

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## Challenges

- The current economic climate
  - Inflation
  - Cost of living – disposable income
  - Rising build costs
- The Parish is small
- Obtaining funding is a requirement
- Low alternative land availability within the Parish

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## Issue of the lease

- Current lease is 25 years paid by the parish council.
- The land owner (St Monica Trust) has a short lease policy bound by Charity Commission requirements.
- The SMT has indicated the possibility of a longer lease if linked to associated development and uplift in rent/premium.
- SMT have undertaken a review and provisional identified three possible locations for a new hall site.

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## Funding – How?

- Win the lottery!
- Grant funding
- Parish funding via a precept on the Council Tax
- Local fundraising
- Donations
- Parish donates labour to a “self-build” project
- Joint venture to benefit the community and the land owner
- Any combination of the above

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## What do the Residents want?

- Is the Village Hall Survey conducted in 2021 still valid ?
- Has your view changed?
- Do the results of the survey address today's evolving needs/wants of the Community?
- How has the Pandemic affected Community requirements for shared space?
- What are your thoughts on funding?

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## For Consideration

- The existing hall will be demolished in summer 2023
- Parish Council will then have a decision to make on what to do with the lease on the land
- We need to understand whether a community facility in the Parish is something the Residents want?
- The South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) is due to be renewed – still pending – which could impact development boundaries
- Incorporate a facility within an existing structure ie: St. Denys Church?

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## Next Steps

- Survey the Parish
- Analyse findings
- Parish Council to decide future based on “voice of the Parish”
  
- Your questions.....
  
- -end of presentation-

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### **Appendix 2 - Contact details as requested by residents:**

- Paul Jones - Partnerships and Strategic Overview Advisor, West Midlands Environment Agency, Hafren House, Welshpool Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 8BB. Email: [paul.jones2@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:paul.jones2@environment-agency.gov.uk) Tel: 03708 506 506.
- Harriett Baldwin, West Worcestershire MP, House of Commons, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA Tel: 01684 585165. Email: [harriett.baldwin.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:harriett.baldwin.mp@parliament.uk)
- The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, appointed Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 25 October 2022. When writing address as Dr Thérèse Coffey. House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. Email: [therese.coffey.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:therese.coffey.mp@parliament.uk)



**Appendix 3 – Response and update from Environment Agency**



## **Severn Stoke Flood Alleviation Scheme – June 2023**

**This update provides the latest information on the delivery of the Severn Stoke Flood Alleviation Scheme.**

### **Recent work**

Over the winter we have been working with J Prosser's & Sons to import material for the embankment. We have imported two types of material. The majority of the imported material is to form the embankment. There is also material that has been brought to site to form temporary access routes for the main construction phase. All material is tested before it arrives on site to ensure that it is suitable and safe in compliance with our duties as the Environment Agency and the planning conditions.

Archaeological work started in February 2023. The first round of the archaeology progressed well with some finds but nothing major that will impact the scheme. Following a health and safety audit we had to pause the archaeological work on the 3rd of March 2023 while we reviewed the ways of working to ensure a safe environment for both the community and those working on the site.

We have now completed this review, and this will allow the archaeology and other activities to resume later this month.

### **Upcoming work**

The Environment Agency remains committed to completing the scheme. We must ensure that we get the best value within the limited budget we have to spend on the scheme, and we continue to work in partnership with Worcestershire County Council (WCC), Malvern Hills District Council (MHDC) and J Prosser and Son Ltd. making challenging decisions to ensure that the scheme remains viable.

**Continued overleaf.....**

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Over the next couple of months, we have the following work planned:

- The archaeological work will restart from early June 2023 and is likely to take 4 to 6 weeks.
- At around the same time in June, Jackson Civil Engineering will start testing the material currently stockpiled to confirm its grading characteristics. This is done so they can develop the appropriate construction methodology to place and compact it within the embankment in accordance with the design specification.
- Fencing of the whole site working area will be completed along with the installation of newt fencing along the site boundary to exclude Great Crested Newts.
- Following the installation of the newt fencing, an exercise to trap and relocate any newts found in the working area will be undertaken. This is to ensure we comply with environmental legislation. Newt trapping will take upwards of 30 days and will commence soon after we have received a licence to trap from Natural England, which we expect to receive in the next 4 to 8 weeks.
- In advance of construction of the flood embankment, construction of associated culverts, toe drainage and drainage diversions will be undertaken. This will commence after newt fencing, and trapping is complete.
- Following the material testing an initial length of embankment will be constructed using the material on site. This is to test the proposed construction methodology to ensure we can meet the design specification. When this is proved this will then allow the rest of the embankment works to progress.

Our ambition is to complete two sections of the flood embankment either side of Ham Lane this year. We will import and stockpile material for the realignment of Ham Lane over the embankment during the winter ready for construction in spring 2024. We are aiming for the new realigned road surface to be complete during summer 2024. We will continue to work closely with WCC Highways on this area of the scheme.

To give assurance around the 'gap' that will be in place between the flood embankments over the winter period of 2023/24, we will have in place a contingency plan to seal this area to protect the community from flood waters, until the highways work, and scheme is fully completed.

### **Future updates**

We will continue to keep you updated with the progress of the scheme via future newsletters and updates to the Parish Council and the Flood Action Group.

### **Contact us**

If you have any queries or comments about the proposed scheme, please contact the Environment Agency Project Manager via email at [paul.jones2@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:paul.jones2@environment-agency.gov.uk) or call 03708 506 506. Thank you for taking the time to read this update.

End of minutes.

Signed by Parish Council once adopted and no longer draft

..... Chairman .....Date