Stow Maries Parish Council
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Locum Clerk to the Council: John Watson

Stow Maries Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Council Meeting held at the Smythe Hall, Church Lane, Stow Maries, Essex, CM3 6SL on Monday 11th May 2026 commencing at 8.15 pm.

Present:	Cllrs D Driver, D Hopping and J. Petts
In Attendance:	L. Wiffen (District Councillor), J. Watson (Locum Clerk), Three member of the public.

MINUTES

1. **Opening of the Meeting**
   The Chair declared the meeting open.
2. **Recording of the Meeting**
   No persons present indicated they intended to record the meeting.
3. **Election of Chair**
   a) Proposed Councillor Petts, seconded Councillor Driver that Councillor Hopping be appointed Chair of Stow Maries Parish Council for the 2026/2027 council year. Carried unanimously.
   b) The elected Chair duly signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.
4. **Election of Vice Chair.**
   a) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Driver that Councillor Petts be appointed Vice Chair of the Stow Maries Parish Council for the 2026/2027 Council year. Carried unanimously.
   b) The elected Vice Chair duly signed the Declaration of Office.
5. **Apologies for absence**
   Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brown.
6. **Election of Representatives**
   It was unanimously agreed that the following representatives be elected
   a) Finance – Councillor Hopping
   b) Dengie Hundred Group of Parish Councils – Councillor Hopping
   c) Highways, Transport and Public rights of Way and biodiversity – Councillor Petts

d) Police Liaison – Councillor Petts
e) Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome – Councillor Brown
f) Smythe Hall Management Committee – Councillor Brown
g) Planning – Councillor Driver
h) Stow Maries Opposition Group (SMOG) – Councillor Driver

7. Declarations of Interest

Councilor Driver declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in matters relating to Smythe Hall.

8. Public Question Time

No questions or observations were received from members of the public.

9. Approval of Minutes

Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Driver that, subject to Councillor Driver's name being spelt correctly in Minute 13 a). the minutes be approved. Carried unanimously.

10. Reports from County and District Councillors

The Report form District Councillor Wiffen, circulated prior to the meeting) was noted. Discussion was held about repairs to the bridge in Church Lane and Councillor Wiffen offered to follow this up for the Council.

11. Internal Audit/AGAR

a) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that the Annual Internal Audit Report in respect of the year to 31st March 2026 as prepared by Legra IAS be approved. It was agreed that the Locum Clerk would take appropriate action to rectify the various criticisms.
b) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that the "Certificate of Exemption – AGAR 2025/26 Form 2" be approved
c) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that the "Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26" section of the AGAR be approved.
d) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that "Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2025/26" section of the AGAR be approved and signed,
e) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that "Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2025/26" section of the AGAR be approved and signed.

12. Bank Account

a) The Clerk reported that a new Bank Account had been opened with Unity Bank. Councillors Hopping, Brown and Petts were signatories on the account. Any transactions had to be input by the Clerk and then approved by two Councillors.
b) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that the Barclays Bank signatories be authorised to sign a

cheque to transfer funds from Barclays Bank to Unity Bank. It was further agreed the, when appropriate, the account with Barclays Bank would be closed.

13. **Finance**
    a) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Driver and carried unanimously that the payments for April 2026 be confirmed.
    b) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Driver and carried unanimously that the payments for the month of May be approved.
    c) The revised 2026/2027 budget was noted.
14. **Highway Speed Control.**
    Councillor Petts gave a brief report. No action required.
15. **Love your Bus**
    a) The Clerk reported that he had received an offer letter from Essex County Council re “Love your Bus”.
    b) Proposed Councillor Driver, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that the Chair sign the offer letter re “Love your Bus”.
16. **Grass Cutting**
    a) The Clerk gave a report re the situation regarding the grass cutting. It was noted that the current contractor felt that it would not be reasonable to reduce the number of cuts done in the season.
    b) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that, due to the costs involved, the Council would cease the grass cutting with immediate effect and that the Locum Clerk should advise the contractor.
    c) It was further agreed that the Chair and the Clerk would prepare a leaflet to be distributed to those Parishioners impacted by this decision.
17. **Website/e-mail addresses**
    a) The Clerk reported that, due to the requirements of the AGAR Assertion 10, it was not possible to reduce the website costs.
    b) It was noted that, currently, the Smythe Hall use the website with as booking portal. It was discussed as to whether the Parish Council should be charging the Smythe Hall for this facility. It was Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that the Locum Clerk should contact the Smythe Hall Management Committee to suggest that Smythe Hall allow the Council to use the Hall for their meetings at no charge to offset the cost of them using the Parish Council website.
    c) A discussion was held as to whether the parish Council should open a Facebook account as a means of communication with their Parishioners. It was agreed that Councillor Petts would investigate this and report back to the next Council meeting
18. **Stow Maries Opposition Group (SMOG).**
    Mr Stuart Cooper gave a detailed report

19. **Crowd Funding**
    It was agreed that no further action be taken in this regard and the subject could be removed from the Agenda of future meetings.
20. **Defibrillator**
    Councillor Hopping reported that he had assumed responsibility for maintaining the defibrillator going forward.
21. **Councillor Co-option**
    The Locum Clerk reported that no applications for co-option had been received.
22. **Planning**
    a) The Locum Clerk reported that he had received a quote of £240 plus travelling costs for Councillors to have a two hour training session which would be held at Smythe Hall.
    b) Proposed Councillor Hopping, seconded Councillor Petts and carried unanimously that The Locum Clerk was asked to arrange this.
23. **Clerk Report**
    a) The Locum Clerk reported that no action had been taken regarding SharePoint.
24. **Exchange of Information**
    No information was exchanged.
25. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**
    It was resolved that, in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act 1960 and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.
26. **Appointment of Permanent Clerk**
    This matter was discussed and it was agreed that the Locum Clerk would continue in office until the end of August at which time the situation would be reviewed.

Meeting closed at 9.25 pm

19th May 2026