STAUNTON ON WYE GROUP
PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of an extraordinary meeting of Staunton on Wye Group Parish Council called by the Chairman under the provisions of Standing Order 6 (a) held on Tuesday 1st September 2026 at 7 p.m. at Staunton on Wye Village Hall, Staunton on Wye, Herefordshire, public notice having been given on 13th August 2026 in compliance with Paragraph 8 of Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor Nigel Sellar (Chairman) and Councillors A Andrews, B Arthur, L Boddington, M Jones, E Pearson-Gregory, W Shepherd and S Williams.

In attendance: David Thame (Clerk)
Eight members of the public.

2026/32. Apologies for absence

None. Councillors R Skyrme and J Price were absent.

2026/33. Declarations of Interest/Requests for Dispensations

None.

2026/34. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman explained the purpose of the meeting, stating that: “The parish council has received a letter from the external auditors of parish councils concerning the mistaken application for exemption from providing some information for the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, known as AGAR. Councils with income below £25,000 are exempt from submitting an AGAR and from providing other documentation. Historically Staunton on Wye Group Parish Council has always had income substantially below this limit. In the financial year 2024/2025 we mistakenly omitted to take into account the money raised to move the war memorial.”

“The background is: In December 2023 the parish council was asked to help to provide a governance structure for the group of parishioners that was trying to arrange for the war memorial to be moved from the A438 to the centre of the village. In March 2024 the parish council agreed to set up a committee of the council to manage the activities of the group. The group already had a bank account to receive donations from charities and from fund raising and to pay for the contractors to move the war memorial. In the financial year 2024/25 they received two large donations from charitable trusts. None of the money used to move the war memorial came from the council’s precept. When completing the parish Council’s annual return the Clerk omitted the war memorial fund from the return. As the money raised by the committee took the Council's income over £30,000 this meant we should not have been exempted from an external audit and from providing more information. Unfortunately the error wasn’t picked up by the internal auditor or parish councillors at the time.”

“When completing the annual return for the financial year 2025/26 the new Clerk realised that there had been a mistake in the previous year’s return and reported the error to the external auditors.”

“We are now obliged to share this letter with parishioners and to let you know what steps we have taken to prevent such an error reoccurring.”

"I want to assure you that all money, whether received as from the precept or from charitable trusts or fund raising was accounted for at all times. The error was in requesting exemption from reporting requirements to central government."

2026/35. Public Session (15 minutes)

At the request of a member of the public, the Chairman paused proceedings to allow more time for reading a summary of the background, paper copies of which had been made available.

A member of the public expressed the view that there had been no deliberate decision to avoid external audit, simply an error of judgement.

A member of the public asked if guidance on how to handle the War Memorial project had been available, and if it had been sought.

A member of the public addressed the desirability of seeking advice on the financial elements of the War Memorial project, and the extent to which it had been seen as financially separate from the Council.

2026/36. External Auditor's Public Interest Report: Certifying exemption from a limited assurance review for the year ending 31 March 2025 where the exemption criteria were not satisfied

The Council considered the public interest report issued by the external auditor on 5th August 2026 under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act), copies accompanying this notice, and published on the Council website on 5th August 2026, and what action is to be taken in response, as required by Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, Schedule 7, paragraph 5.

The substance of the report was that Staunton on Wye Group Parish Council certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review for the year ended 31 March 2025 which meant that it was not required to submit an AGAR or any of the necessary supporting documentation for that year. As a result of figures reported within the AGAR submitted for 2025/26, information has come to our attention in respect of the year ended 31 March 2025 to indicate the criteria for certifying exemption were not all satisfied, as total income or expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2025 exceeded £25,000. The prior year certification of exemption is therefore not valid and by certifying exemption for that year, the authority has failed to submit the relevant documents for review.

The Clerk explained that whilst the public interest report arose from a contravention of regulation 9 of The Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015, it implies that the Council may also be regarded as having failed to meet the requirements of regulations 3 and 4 of The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 which required the Council to "ensure that it has a sound system of internal control which (a) facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives; (b)ensures that the financial and operational management of the authority is effective; and (c)includes effective arrangements for the management of risk" and for appropriate records and control systems. The Clerk advised that the Council's response should address those requirements for adequate internal controls.

After discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the Council re-iterates the full and unreserved acceptance of the findings of the external and internal auditors as previously resolved in May 2025 (Minute 2025/18) and March 2026 (Minute 2025/100), and that the Clerk write to the External Auditor drawing attention to the steps already taken to remedy deficiencies in internal control as identified in those resolutions; notes that the Clerk has now obtained the Certificate in Local Council Administration and that the Council has rejoined the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils; draws attention to the training undertaken by Councillors and to its commitment to further training for Councillors; and the Council's determination to continue to improve internal controls including supporting the Clerk and Councillor Boddington to complete the Certificate in the Principles of Internal Auditing Local Councils (PIALC).

2026/37. Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014: Notices Required To be Published

It was **RESOLVED** to confirm publication of a notice as required by paragraph 4 of Schedule 7 of the Act in such a manner as the Council thinks is likely to bring the notice or report to the attention of persons who live in its area, the notice having been published on the Council website on 13th August 2026, and on notice boards; and that the Clerk be authorised to give and to publish on the Council website, the notice boards and via the Parish magazine, the summary notice required to be published under Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, Schedule 7, paragraph 10.

The meeting closed at 7.27 p.m.

Confirmed as a correct record:

Signed ____ Date ______________________