



STICKLEPATH AND OKEHAMPTON CONSERVATION GROUP

StOC PLANNING MEETING – WEDNESDAY 23 July 2025 – 2pm

PRESENT

Mike Watson – Chairman (MW)*

Steve Matthews - Voluntary Warden(SM)*

Ged Fitzgibbon – Comms & website (GF)*

Norman Dunn - StOC member (ND)

Malcolm Learmonth – StOC Member(ML)

Matt Parkins – Wild Oke

* Committee Member

Mike Gratton – Project Coordinator &
Quartermaster (MG)*

Derek Moore - StOC member(DM)

Fiona Porter - StOC member (FP)

Kit Hancock – DNP Ranger

Alan Wright – Secretary/Treasurer (AW)*

1. APOLOGIES

Jackie Barrett - StOC member

Terry Speyer – StOC Member

Tom Bell – StOC Member

2. ACTIONS FROM THE LAST MEETING (19 Mar 25)

All Actions arising from the March meeting had been taken, progressed or would feature later in the Agenda.

3. StOC PLANNED TASKS – AUG TO DEC 2025

The Project Coordinator (MG) outlined the tasks which would form the programme of work for the period. In discussion, the following extra events were included:

- **22 Aug 25** - FP has arranged First Aid Training with Joe Rice on this day. MG amended his programme to reflect this. FP was invited to set up the Training, inviting as many StOC Members as could make the event. **Action: FP**
- **19 Aug 25** – StOC representation at the Annual Meldon Wildlife Day was also included. The theme this year is “Bogs” and GF and ML were tasked with producing and displaying photos of the Board Walk on Pixies Moor which demonstrates that Bogs can still be accessible. **Action: GF & ML**

Discussion of the remaining Work programme included the following items which require specific mention:

- Matt Parkin had continued to receive encouraging comments from walkers on what had so far been achieved at both Ball Hill and Old Town Park. The final stretch of

stone walling was included in the programme. Matt also mentioned the possibility of StOC working in Meldon Woods in the New Year (coppicing) and around Okehampton Castle, noting that plans for the future opening of the Castle were still extremely vague!

- Steve Matthews pointed out that there was still some strimming required on DNPA Footpaths and asked for Ranger help in clearing a fallen tree from the one from Beloes (sp?) Bridge to Belstone.
- There was also a small drystone walling task on the bridleway at the top of “Don’s” Lane. **Post Meeting Note: Brandon and John Savage would tackle this as a separate project.**
- The SW Lakes Trust had indicated they might like StOC involvement in tasks around Roadford Lake. It was noted that this would be at about the limit of our area and it was agreed to await specific requests before making any decision. They were promising pasties and cake, though!

The full programme will be published and promulgated to all as soon as it has been agreed with the appropriate StOC Partners. **Action: MG (Programme posted on Stoc info 29 Jul 25)**

4. ITEMS FROM DNPA RANGERS AND OTHER StOC PARTNERS

There were no other issues raised and Matt Parkin left at this point in the meeting.

5. StOC ACCOUNTS AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

AW provided a Financial Statement which is attached (not to all):

- The Account shows a Credit Balance of £9634.59 – some £1200 more than at the March meeting. Donations have exceeded expenditure in this period, despite the increased costs of Strimmer fuel.
- This increased cost (£104 for a 25 litre drum) initiated a request from the Treasurer to increase the amount which can be spent by an individual Debit card holder without further authorisation, from £100 to £150. This was supported by the Examiners of the Account and approved by the Committee. The Treasurer would make the appropriate change to the Constitution and publicise it at the AGM.

Action: Treasurer

ANNUAL EXAMINATION OF ACCOUNTS - Nick Chadwick and Malcolm Learmonth conducted an in depth examination of the StOC Accounts covering the period from 1 Jan 2024 to 30 Jun 2025 and were satisfied with what they found. Their report is attached. It contains 2 main recommendations:

- The report commented on the high credit balance and suggested that, if this is not reduced soon by planned expenditure on the replacement of the tool shed, consideration should be given to transferring some of the balance to an interest bearing account. The Committee noted this suggestion but decided to wait until planning approval for the shed was granted, at which point a better idea of costs would be available, before deciding how to reduce the excess balance. Treasurer to bring up at an appropriate meeting.

Action: Treasurer

- The report also recommended that consideration should be given to an asset register for items held in the shed of value £25 or more. The Secretary was tasked to include this item for discussion on the Agenda for the next Planning Meeting.

Action: Secretary

The next Examination of Accounts will cover the period between 1 July 25 and 30 June 2026 and this will be the pattern for future checks.

INSURANCE – The Group Insurance is due for renewal on 9 Aug 25. Our current Insurers – Zurich – are no longer offering the policy we have been on for years. Their new product would cost £273.55 for equivalent cover. This is an increase of 74%. By reducing our Public Liability cover from £5M to £2M and not covering cash loss insurance, the premium could be reduced to £227.55, still a premium increase of 45%. The Treasurer would continue to look at alternative providers but initial searches indicate that a premium around the £230 mark seems pretty common. Treasurer would report findings and recommend way forward before the end of July so that effective insurance can be in place by 9 August 25.

Action: Treasurer (Committee agreed on 30 July to reinsure with Zurich for 2025/6)

BANKING - Finally, Santander, our bank, is introducing a monthly account charge of £4.99 with effect from 1 October, the only exception being for registered charities. The Treasurer recommended that, in view of the bureaucracy and hassle involved in finding an alternative bank and changing banking arrangements, we should accept the charge. The Committee agreed.

6. QUARTERMASTER'S REPORT

MG reported that the tools were in generally good condition with only minor repairs being required.

- A small, electric chainsaw had been purchased and was being evaluated. There were concerns over some aspects of it (eg no chain guard) but it was decided to continue evaluating it and to train 4 trusted operators. In the meantime, MG would explore options for another model with better safety features.
- He further reported that he had negotiated supplies of strimmer fuel at a reasonable rate from local Agricultural Engineer Luke Liversidge, who had also quoted good rates for the future servicing of our Strimmers.

Action: MG

Post Meeting Note: The Treasurer received and paid for a 25 Litre drum on 30 Jul 25

7. StOC SHED UPDATE

SM had submitted a new draft application to FIPL to advise on the final wording. He had also gathered updated costings. The Planning Application was currently held up by the lack of architectural drawings. Kit Hancock suggested contacting a fellow Voluntary Warden who might be able to assist in this. The Treasurer would meet the costs of the Application.

Action: SM & Treasurer

8. SKAIGH WOOD TRUST – FWAG REPORT ON OPTIONS FOR FUTURE MANAGEMENT

Skaigh Wood Trust (SWT) invited us to comment on the FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) Report they had done earlier this year. The FWAG Report recommends a formal Management Plan for Skaigh Woods.

The Chairman and Secretary had sought advice on this matter from others with more experience of Woodland Management and of dealings with SWT. This advice is summarised as follows:

- (a) There had been a previous, successful Management Plan between DNPA and SWT which ended in 2010.
- (b) The tenancy on the Warren (part of SWT) expired this year and, with it, the rental stream for grazing rights (£3k pa). It is unclear whether a follow on tenant has been secured.
- (c) SWT is a registered Charity but does not have significant funds.
- (d) Belstone PC (which is the sole trustee of SWT) was described as “very careful with funds and that it gives very small donations to local charities/groups”.
- (e) By seeking to involve StOC in decision making for the management of Skaigh Woods, there is possibly a danger that SWT might seek to delegate responsibility to a third party and StOC would end up chasing its tale if it took this on!

In discussion, the following points were made:

- Paras (a) and (b) above suggest that there is no income (that we can see) to the Trust at present. The FWAG report, which was presumably commissioned to seek ways of correcting this, holds out the prospect of an income up to £4k pa.
- As regards the comment in Para (d) above, several StOC Members (some present, others not present but their views reported) had expressed considerable disquiet at being tasked to work for SWT, which, they felt, did not value our work sufficiently to fund it appropriately. Recent StOC dealings with SWT concerning the costs of work done for the Trust in Autumn 2024 support this view. Certainly, compared to all other donors to StOC funds, Belstone and SWT lag far behind.
- Notwithstanding these comments, it was decided to support the proposal for a formal Management Plan, noting that StOC had nothing to offer for this process.
- The Committee – with others co-opted as necessary – should discuss ways of working with the Trustees of SWT to improve relations to mutual benefit.

The Secretary was tasked with drafting a letter to SWT for approval by the Committee which supports the FWAG recommendation for a Woodland Management Plan for Skaigh Woods as a sensible way ahead, but notes that StOC has no expertise in this area and thus no role to play in this process. The letter should point out that StOC already does considerable work in Skaigh Valley Woods by maintaining designated rights of way through the valley on behalf of DNPA. It also has a full programme of work with other authorities in the North Dartmoor area but would be happy to be approached for specific tasks in support of the resultant Management Plan.

Action: Secretary

9. CONDUCT OF THE AGM

The Secretary had provided a brief, summarised as follows:

The AGM Agenda was posted on StOCinfo on 7 July to give the required 30 days notice, as required by the as yet unapproved Constitution.

1. The Chairman's report - achievements and work of the group over the year.

This is MW's opportunity to review the year we have had, highlights and lowlights (if any). I also think that this where we need to mention the need to raise the public profile of the Group. The whole should last no more than 10 minutes.

2. Adoption of the Accounts

The accounts up to 30 June 2025 were examined by Nick Chadwick and Malcolm Learmonth and their report has already been discussed. The Financial Statement covering 2024 and the first half of 2025 was posted on StOCinfo on 7 July. Treasurer will introduce the report and, assuming no questions, will ask for a Proposer and Seconder for the adoption prior to a vote.

3. Approval of the draft Constitution

Already circulated. I asked for comments by Friday 4 July. None were received, but Secretary will now highlight the change required at para 2 of the Finance Section which removes the fixed limit of £100 for expenditure on Debit Cards without further approval and substitutes "up to a limit decided by the Committee". Secretary will ask for a Proposer and Seconder before putting to a vote to adopt the Constitution as drafted. Ged will put on the website after the meeting.

4. Election of the Committee for the next year

Again, I asked on StOCinfo for any nominations for the "Officer" posts as well as any volunteers for the vacant 4 possible slots. Unsurprisingly, I had no responses or even queries. Suggest that we hand this item over to an independent StOC Member as we are all standing for re-election. I will brief him, but he will announce that the present incumbents are willing to serve for another year and ask for a Proposer and Seconder for the motion that all 4 should be elected.

5. Motions raised for debate by StOC members

I asked on 27 June on StOCinfo for any items which members wish to raise under this heading to be with me by Friday 4 July. Again, nothing heard. Secretary will say this and then hand over to the newly elected Chairman to close the meeting

Closing Remarks

Suggest MW thanks the Group for their confidence (!) and points out the role of the DNPA Voluntary Warden (Steve) as a permanent member of the Committee who does not need re-election each year. This would also, I suggest, be the appropriate moment for MW to state his intention of retiring from the role of Chairman at next year's AGM and encouraging members to think about who they want in that role from 2026 onwards.

In total, the meeting should take less than 30 minutes, but we will have to be disciplined!

10.DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Planning Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 12 November 2025. Details of venue and timing to be promulgated later.

The Secretary would circulate a List of Actions on StOCInfo. There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 1600.

Original signed by:

M Watson
Chairman

A Wright
Secretary

30 July 2025

Attachments: (to Committee Members only)

1. Financial Statement
2. Report of Examination of Accounts
3. Santander notice of charging account fees