

# Stoke St Michael Parish Council Chairperson's Annual Report

May 2024 to May 2025

This year, the Council has worked diligently to enhance our village's infrastructure, support community initiatives, and address local concerns, all while maintaining prudent financial management.

The Council welcomed two new councillors, Phil Howard and Dan White, through co-option in May 2024, strengthening our team. The Council also noted the successful conclusion of the 2023-2024 external audit.

## Community Support and Grants

The Council approved several grants to support village organizations, fostering community spirit:

- £175 to the Community Events Group for local events.
  - £5,500 to the Village Community Field for maintenance and development.
  - £920 to the Baby and Toddler Group to support young families.
  - £3,000 to the Stoke St Michael War Memorial Hall for operational costs.
  - £2,000 to the Stoke St Michael Woodland Group for environmental initiatives.
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- Bus Shelter Replacement: The damaged bus shelter was replaced in September 2024 covered by insurance, despite delays due to culvert works.
  - Millennium Bridge: The Council progressed plans for replacing the bridge on Millennium Green, approving a structural survey and seeking tenders from local stone masons, with initial enquiries ongoing as of March 2025.
  - Churchyard Maintenance: Responsibility for churchyard maintenance was formally transferred to Somerset Council, but the Parish Council covered tree works to address immediate safety concerns.
  - Defibrillator: The Council took responsibility for the village defibrillator, adding it to the asset list and covering maintenance costs, with plans to reimburse volunteers for expenses.
  - Litter and Dog Waste Bins: The Parish Council approved £3,042 + VAT annually to continue emptying nine bins.

- Moonshill Green: £300 was allocated for planting bulbs, with residents volunteering to assist, enhancing the village's aesthetic appeal.

## Planning and Development

The Council reviewed numerous planning applications, recommending approval for projects such as a self-build accessible dwelling, equestrian buildings, and residential extensions, while raising concerns about traffic impacts for developments like Yellowgate and Frog Lane. We recommended refusal for the Moons Hill Quarry extension due to environmental and community concerns, engaging with MP Anna Sabine to amplify these issues. The Council is waiting to respond to Somerset Council's call for sites to protect future development.

## Community Safety and Traffic

Traffic issues, particularly at Withybrook, were a recurring concern. The Council explored a 40mph speed limit but resolved to conduct a speed survey instead, awaiting pricing as of March 2025. The Auto Speed Watch cameras' data licence was renewed (£358 annually), with discussions about relocating them to better suit community speed zones. The ongoing culvert repair, complicated by utility services, remained unresolved, with incidents of vehicles hitting protective bollards prompting continued advocacy with Somerset Council.

Community Engagement and Working Parties

Two working parties were established:

- Youth Services Working Party: Engaged with the Community Field to explore new play equipment, with discussions ongoing.
- Emergency Plan Working Party: Progressed a village emergency plan, attending a training session on 4th March 2025 and seeking templates from local authorities and businesses.

The Council also resolved to fund first aid and defibrillator training for residents.

## Financial Overview

The Council maintained a healthy financial position, holding back some reserves to cover unforeseen cost like bin emptying charges. The Projected Use of Reserves for 2025-2026 was also approved.

## **Challenges**

The unresolved culvert repair continued to frustrate residents and complicate infrastructure projects like the bus shelter replacement. The devolution of services from Somerset Council, including bin emptying and maintenance, posed budgeting uncertainties.

## **Looking Ahead**

In the coming year, the Council aims to finalize the Millennium Bridge replacement, progress the Emergency Plan. We still await information on the culvert repairs plan, pursue traffic calming measures based on the speed survey, and monitor Somerset Council's devolution plans.

## **Thanks and Engagement**

I extend my gratitude to our Parish Clerk, Kate Egan, for her diligent support, and to my fellow councillors for their dedication. Special thanks to residents who volunteered for bulb planting and other initiatives, and to organizations like Wainwrights and Cookswood for their contributions, such as donating rocks for Moonshill.

I encourage all residents to attend our meetings, share your views, and participate in shaping Stoke St Michael's future. Meeting minutes are available on our website, <https://stokestmichaelpc.org/>

John McEntee  
Chairperson, Stoke St Michael Parish Council