Newsletter No. 45

SOUTH STOKE PARISH – ANNUAL REPORT 2011-2012

Elections were held in May 2011. Three members had decided not to stand again but Sue Dustin, Tim Haines and Jenny John were elected, bringing our number back up to seven. We would particularly like to thank the retiring Councillors for their major contributions to the Parish over many years:
Mark Dunningham for his invaluable help with our numerous Planning Issues and for his time as Chairman. Sylvia Williams for transforming our footpaths and open spaces and James Townsend for his wise legal counsel.

Parish Council officers and their individual responsibilities.

Michael Devenish.	Chairman	Planning & Liaison with Midford
Sue Dustin		VHMC Representative
Tom Geake		South Stoke Sweeper & Millennium Wood
Tim Haines		Highways Inspection and Management..
Rhona Harvey		Midford Sweeper & Liaison
Robert Hellard	Vice Chairman	Planning, VHMC, and Liaison with Bath Preservation Trust.
Jenny John		Footpaths and Open Spaces

Geoff Davis is our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer. Contact 840201. southstokeclerk@hotmail.com

The period 2011 -2012 has been another busy one with the Parish Council meeting 14 times, 6 full meetings and 8 planning meetings, together with the Annual Parish Meeting and a Public Meeting. The Parish Council also responded to 5 Consultation Documents in addition to the major items below.

National Planning Policy Framework
This Government led proposal will eventually see over 1000 pages of Planning guidance and legislation "simplified" down to 52 pages of new Planning law. A public meeting was held in South Stoke village hall on 12th October 2011 to allow parishioners the opportunity to learn about and comment on the proposed changes. The final version of the document has just been published. It is a significant improvement on the draft and offers sound protection for Green Belt Areas and AONBs. It also retains a commitment to the principle of developing Brownfield Land first.

Core Strategy Examination in Public
Bath and North East Somerset Core Strategy development plan for the period to 2026 was subjected to an Examination in Public in January of this year. Robert Hellard represented the Parish at this public enquiry attending numerous sessions relating to issues concerning the Parish. The Inspector's report was delayed until release of the NPPF but is now expected in May.

Planning Applications
We have considered 18 planning applications this year, one of them in an adjoining Parish. In considering planning applications your Council continues to seek to protect Green Belt policy, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Our responses are always carefully restricted to 'Planning Issues'. Two of the most contentious planning applications this year have seen these policies challenged. The Parish Council, together with other parish councils and the Bath Preservation Trust, is pressing B&NES Development Control Team and The Council Development Control Committee to account for their actions.

Highways Maintenance
A relatively mild winter this year meant that we have had fewer potholes. However the PC regularly inspects our roads and footways and liaises closely with B&NES' Highways Department.
Ongoing lobbying by the PC for further improvements to the footways through Midford would appear to be bearing fruit at last. Major works are now scheduled for this summer. The sum of £97,000 has been included in the budget for 2012/13 for footpath improvements between Midford and South Stoke. (Confirmed at B&NES Full Council Budget Meeting.)
Furthermore, the Highways Agency has agreed in principle to allow a height restriction sign at Woolverton, to warn of the 'low bridge' at Midford.
The Parish Council also worked closely with Morrison Utility Services to mitigate the disruption caused by the recent Gas Main replacement works.

Snow Warden scheme
The PC applied for and was successfully included in the new B&NES pilot scheme for voluntary snow wardens. This resulted in us taking delivery of one tonne of road salt along with a hand operated spreader. This was used on a single occasion to help clear the centre of the village, the churchyard path, Hodshill, and South Stoke Lane. A full review of this initiative will take place in conjunction with B&NES.

Parish Sweepers
One of the biggest areas of expenditure by the Parish Council is in the employment of the Sweepers. They do a magnificent job of keeping the streets clean and the bins emptied throughout South Stoke and around most of Midford.
The sweepers are Martin Bambury for South Stoke, and David Brown for Midford. Should you see them out and about please stop and give them a word of thanks and encouragement. They will really appreciate it.

Footpaths and Open Spaces
The footpaths of South Stoke & Midford are very well used by locals and visitors. The Parish Council tries to make sure they are in good condition, and welcomes information concerning fallen trees, faulty stiles etc.
The path along the Wansdyke suffers from erosion and litter. Many are unaware of its significance as a scheduled ancient monument. With the aim of increasing people's understanding of its importance, the Parish Council is proposing to put up an information board at the Eastern end of the footpath, near the bus stop opposite the Cross Keys Inn.
The dead tree on the Village Green has been removed and replaced with a Hawthorn sapling. This was kindly donated and planted by a parishioner.
Further improvements to the Green are planned. It is intended that a working party will be formed to repaint the white railings early in May.

Allotments
One Allotment is vacant at present. All the others are now enthusiastically cultivated.

Police and Community vehicle
The Police Community support team continue to visit the centre of South Stoke and the Hope and Anchor at Midford. Dates and times can be found on the Parish notice boards.

Parish Council finances
For the forthcoming year, in acknowledgement of the dire financial situation that faces us all, we have frozen the precept per-capita. This is in line with BANES' own policy decision. There are slightly fewer 'Band D' equivalent properties within the Parish, so the precept has been set slightly lower than last year at £4790 (2010/11 was £4,860).
The Parish Council put out to tender the contracts for the upkeep of the village green, the church yard and the footpaths. The Landscape Group, based at Manor Farm Buildings, were the successful bidders.
The Councils finances are in good shape with reserves at the optimum level, planned to cope with possible contingency demands. South Stoke remains one of the lowest charging councils in the County.
We thank Geoff Davis, as Clerk & RFO and Derek Satow, as Internal Auditor, for their tireless work on our behalf.

Village playground.
There has been a call for a playground to be established in South Stoke for the children of the Parish. Possible sites are being investigated and volunteers are being sought to involve themselves in this worthwhile project.

In Conclusion
We would particularly like to thank our District Councillor, Neil Butters for his continued interest, help and enthusiastic support throughout the year.

The **Annual Parish Meeting** will be held in **South Stoke Village Hall at 7pm on Monday 16th April 2012**. This is your opportunity to find out what has been going on for the last year, to contribute to the discussion and to guide us for next year. Please try to attend and take part.

Michael Devenish. Chairman, South Stoke Parish Council.