

South Stoke Annual Parish Meeting

Thursday 14th April 2016

Annual Reports

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St Andrew's Church



2015 has seen **innovation at St. Andrew's**: in February we began to experiment with a monthly Family Service at 11.15am on the first Sunday of every month. It is now beginning to feel more like a fixture. It is delightful to welcome families with children into the community and worshipping life of the church; consequently, the first Sunday service has been quite the best attended in most months.

A double in 2016! Over the years, there have been many landmarks in the story of the village's church, but probably few doubles to compare with Lady Sally Horton's. It was a delight to see Lady Sally Horton and Dr Alan Stroud married at St Andrew's, recently. It is evident to us that Sally and Alan bring happiness to each other as well as sharing Christian faith and practice. However it will feel like a step into the unknown when, at the annual meeting later in April, Sally gives effect to her long planned **retirement from being Churchwarden**, although not from being a church member. As a village community, we have benefitted from the depth of her Christian wisdom and practice for thirteen years. I add my gratitude to yours for her devoted service of Christ and the village community as your churchwarden.

And so we look to the future. *The big picture* in the Church of England is of there being fewer parish clergy, but more recent years have seen a marked increase in the number of younger people offering for ordination. *The local picture* everywhere is of Jesus calling his followers to live in such a way that they are like lights to the community in which they live. In days when many look for Christian values without Christian faith, evidence is beginning to point to the difficulty of keeping the light on if we unplug from the power source.

Helping each other to re-connect with God, is the business of your parish church, and we would be pleased to hear how you think we can make it easier for you to do just that.

Your clergy, Paul and Liz

Amenities Charity

Who we are

We are a charity made up of villagers representing, as far as we can, activities and groups within the village. Currently we have representatives from the WI, Hall Users, the PC, the bell ringers. We would be very happy to welcome members from other village groups and we are aware that in a time of change this is very important. We will be approaching other groups, either again or for the first time, to endeavour to achieve a fully representative team.

What we do

The Amenities Charity are responsible for maintaining and looking after the Village Hall, the Recreation Ground and the White Hill Quarry site.

Change of Name

During the year both the AC and the PC were made more aware of the fact the AC is a charity in its own right and whilst we work with the PC we are not bound by it. In fact the Amenities Charity has the final say on what happens with the areas under its remit. Saying that we of course work closely with the PC. We changed the name to make it very clear to all that the Amenities Charity is not an arm of the Parish Council but a separate entity.

This Year.

- Finances.

We continue to be in the black at the end of the year. This is very much due to villagers support for our 200 club. The money raised is so very important as maintaining the recreation ground and the hall is very expensive. So many thanks to all 200 club members, your contributions are very much appreciated.

- The Village Hall

We have continued to maintain the fabric of the hall, we are happy to report that we now have what we think are very effective heaters. Very many thanks must go to all the villagers who helped us by raising the funds for the heaters. It's great that raising money can be so much fun!! Thank you also to all of you who support our fund raising.

We have also had a new stage, this was because we knew there was a large hole under the old stage and that we had to do something about it. Thanks must go to the carpenters who did the work at a very fair price. Reports from users are very positive about the new stage.

We have had over the years a number of surveys of the hall and we have hoped that it would go on forever. However in the most recent and thorough survey the surveyor has given us the verbal news that the hall has a limited life expectancy. We are awaiting his written results but in the meantime he has advised us that it is not sensible to spend substantial money refurbishing the hall. This is very recent news and as the Amenities Charity we will continue to maintain the hall until and unless other decisions are made by the village.

Better news. The hall is now being used by lots of groups, Sumba, Pilates, The WI, Ballroom Dancing, Rehearsals both drama and music and the school. We have also hosted some brilliant events including Six Nations, films, talks etc.

We now have an even more brilliant sound and media system which has made the showing of TV possible. Very many thanks to all involved.

- Recreation Ground

Very much as last year. The rec is being used by happy folk from both the village and throughout the area. The super playground and our brilliant shop have made it the 'go to place' in South Oxfordshire. We have also hosted the Christmas shop food festival, village BBQs, every day school use and sports days.

Last month we had a very busy rec. tidy and maintenance with lunch. Lots has been done, new guards on the trees, out of hand undergrowth removed and lots else. Very many thanks to all those who attended, especially the person who chipped all the mass of twigs and the rec. elf who is working away behind the shop.

We continue to have very little problem with dog mess, however can we please urge dog owners to keep their dogs under close supervision.

Once again we have rabbit hole problems, help may be at hand but it is a very difficult to control.

- White Hill Quarry

The trees seem to be doing well, if you are walking by do make a detour into it to get a great view of the village.

- Fund Raising

As mentioned earlier we do rely on your support and fund raising events. If you have any ideas or would like to get involved do let us know. Watch out for information in SS Newsletter.

Village Hall Booking

It is nearly a year since we lost lovely Sarah. Always a stalwart help and support in all AC happenings. We miss her still. We have been very lucky to recruit Ann Powell to take over as bookings secretary and I am sure you will all agree she is doing a great job.

Finally we are uncertain what the future holds for our current hall but whatever the Amenities Charity will do the best to maintain what we have as well as we can.

From Jacqui, current chair Amenities Charity

South Stoke Primary School

Once again the school has enjoyed a successful year with our year 6 children all gaining their preferred choice of secondary school. As always we often see past pupils during the year and are able to keep up with all that goes on after leaving South Stoke.

Christmas came and went in a flurry of glitter and carols. After losing the Nativity backdrop the last few days of term were fraught with painting Bethlehem and cutting out what seemed to be at least hundreds of stars! Despite the scenery set back the Nativity went to plan and there weren't many dry eyes in the audience. Once again the youngest children excelled with one particular child showing real talent during the singing!

The new year brought back cross country and inter school races. We are delighted to announce that Lydia Godfrey (Year 5) represented the South of Oxfordshire in the County Cross County Finals which is an amazing achievement. Lydia ran a strong race and we are so proud of her.

Spring brings us new challenges as we are preparing for the new SAT tests in May as well as May Pole Dancing for the May Fayre. We will be working on our dances in the playground and often get an audience at the end of the school day, please feel free to come along and watch. The school has been invited to perform at the Trafalgar Day Celebrations in Wallingford and look forward to seeing you there.

Summer will bring sport to the forefront of our learning in school as our topic is The Olympics. We are lucky enough to have our Sports Coaches coming into school every Monday and Friday afternoons. Not only do the coaches provide high quality PE but are able to support the staff with their own career development. This high quality provision ensures that our children receive the best possible start towards life long healthy habits and an active participation in sports in the future.

We are looking forward to the longer, sunnier and warmer days and hope to see you at some of our planned events such as the annual May Fayre, 'Parent/Carer Day' in June and our end of year celebrations for our leavers in July.

We are always looking for volunteers to come into school to help. Whether you are an avid reader, a cook, a gardener or a knitter you have skills which you can share and we would appreciate if you could spare some time to come into school. If you are interested in sharing some of your talents please feel free to come in to school or if you are shy please feel free to approach our Community/Parent Governors David Kennedy, Diana Hathaway and Clare Wortley.

Amanda Rogers, Head Teacher

South Stoke Parents' Association

The year for the Parents Association starts with our main fundraiser, the May Fayre. This event is heavily weather dependent and whilst the event was once again a success with many hundreds of people enjoying the traditional fayre, the weather was not as glorious as in 2014 and numbers dropped back to "normal" levels as a result.

The PA organized a number of small school events including a picnic BBQ for sports day on the rec, a school disco in the village hall and we have supported various coach trips including the Young Voices concert, this year held in Birmingham.

Our other major fundraiser, the fireworks display and bonfire on the recreation ground (another weather dependent event) was a great success and despite rain for most of the day we had a weather reprieve in the evening and the display went ahead as planned. The parking organisation was improved after feedback in 2014, however a late surge in attendees meant a delayed start as we ushered everyone through the gates. As with any well run event, we have learnt lessons from 2015 and will be further improving the event for this year.

We finished the year with the traditional Christmas dinner in the village hall, and a visit from Santa.

At our AGM in June, Michelle Coffield stepped down as chair and was replaced by Phil Wortley. Michelle has remained on the committee as secretary and we are very grateful for her ongoing leadership and support.

Planning arrangements are nearing completion for this year's May Fayre on 2nd May which will see a renewed cooperation between the PA and village residents. Having a brilliant pub landlord, supportive villagers and the fact that more and more parents within the village are sending their children to the school helps this significantly.

There was significant expenditure in 2013-2015 on projects for the school, so the last 6 months of the year in addition to our ongoing commitments, we have been replenishing our reserves.

On behalf of the PA, I would like to say a big thank you to the village for your support and I look forward to a collaborative spirit amongst the village in 2016.

Phil Wortley, South Stoke PA

South Stoke & Woodcote Charities

A report submitted to the Parish Councils of South Stoke and Woodcote

The Dr. Griffith Higgs South Stoke Educational Charity

This Charity benefits children who attend one of the two village primary schools, and who live in the ancient ecclesiastical parish of South Stoke cum Woodcote, and later supports students as they proceed in their education through the state system.

For the benefit of those new to our two villages, the Rev, Dr Higgs was born in South Stoke, and in his will bequeathed various sums of money to the village and church of South Stoke. From these bequests the Educational Charity was gradually formed. Land was purchased in Woodcote, known as School Piece, for which we receive an annual rent of £1,350. Other money invested with the Charity Commissioners, and this past year we received the goodly sum of £434.05. In 2014 we received the very generous donation of £1,000 from the Woodcote Charitable Trust, part of the proceeds from the Steam Rally. This meant we were able to increase the amount of awards for 2015 and again in 2016. In November 2015 we received £600 from the Woodcote Trust.

2016 has been a very successful year. We have been able to donate 64 awards – a total of £2,460. We gave 19 book tokens for £25 to those children leaving primary school at South Stoke and Woodcote; 23 book tokens for £35 to students reaching 6th Form standard; 8 cheques to the value of £60 to 1st year college students and 14 cheques to the value of £50 to 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th year students. Many of the students have sent letters of thank you, and this year several parents have telephoned their thanks. Unfortunately we may have to decrease the amount of awards for next year.

The Trustees of the Charity are the Rev. Paul Boughton, ex officio as our Vicar, Dr Geoffrey Botting representing Reading University, Mrs Patricia Solomons for Woodcote PC, Mrs Lucinda Phipps for Oxfordshire County Council and Mrs Maureen Palmer.

The Smaller Charities

These are very small charities so we are only able to make awards every 3 – 4 years. The last awards were made in December 2014. However, in 2015 we did make an award to the Larkin-Smith twins following an appeal by South Stoke Parish Council. As the Fuel Charity is slightly larger and solely for South Stoke, we were able to make this special award of £50. The Trustees for the Small Charities are the Revd. Paul Boughton and Mrs Maureen Palmer.

Maureen Palmer

Women's Institute

The past year has been another busy one for South Stoke W.I. with a packed programme of speakers, and events. We meet in the Village Hall on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. Sadly we lost two of our long term members this year, Joyce Ashworth and Joyce Forrest. Both had served as committee members during their time with South Stoke WI. We are pleased to welcome four new members and our membership now stands at 40.

We have had a variety of speakers during the last 12 months on various subjects including, 'Experiences on Master Chef', 'The Wallingford Food Bank', 'Changi Red Cross Quilts' and a chocolate making demonstration from two local chocolatiers. One particularly enjoyable afternoon was when Patricia Purcell sang and gave a hilarious talk about her life as an opera singer. For our Christmas meeting the Committee provided a very enjoyable lunch followed by a talk about candle making.

In March several members attended the OFWI Annual Council Meeting at the Oxford Town Hall. Members have supported various county events throughout the year including the Jane Austen Museum, Hilliers Gardens, the Music Taster Day at Benon and the St Albans Christmas Market. Two members went to Harrogate in September to the Country Fair, celebrating 100 years of the WI. Four members went to the celebrity evening at Didcot in October to see Isla St Claire.

This being the WI Centenary year, and as the Annual Meeting from the Royal Albert Hall was being screened live, Rita Mann booked the Corn Exchange in Wallingford and asked local WIs to join us on this special occasion. One hundred ladies joined us on what turned out to be a very memorable day. Rita also joined the other Oxfordshire ladies who went to Buckingham Palace for the Garden Party to celebrate our centenary.

The weather this year forced us to change our plans on two occasions. In July we had to hold our President's Lunch in the Village Hall, but this still proved to be a very enjoyable afternoon with a delicious lunch provided by the members. And in September a garden party we had planned to hold in a member's garden, had at the last minute to be moved into the Village Hall.

In August we once again supplied teas at the South Stoke Open Gardens, the weather although slightly better than last year, was not ideal, and the numbers were slightly down on previous years. But we were pleased to see a number of brave soles who turned out despite the rain, and we were able to donate the money we made to the Village Hall. Again, in July we had a very enjoyable evening at the Springs Golf Club, where we had supper and played skittles. In May some of us went to the Wolf Conservancy at Beenham, this turned out to be a very enjoyable day, and in August 22 of us went to The Mill at Sonning for dinner and a show.

There have been two Thames Valley Group Meetings this year that members from South Stoke have attended and enjoyed. The first at Aston Tirrold when we received the Centenary Baton from the Berkshire Federation, the author Julie Summers spoke about her book 'The Jam Busters' and the forthcoming television series based on the book. The second, at South Stoke, when Nick Thomas a comedy scriptwriter gave an amusing talk about his career.

This year we were pleased to give donations to Breast Cancer Awareness, the NSPPC, Hearing Dogs for the Deaf and ACWW Pennies for Friendship.

Once again we have supported the Samaritans Purse Charity by donating a number of shoeboxes filled with small gifts that are sent to children overseas at Christmas.

We continue to enjoy our WI and look forward to another interesting year.

Rita Mann

Bell Ringers

We have been able to fulfil most of our ringing needs in the last year - only failing on some Sunday mornings. For the weddings we were able to call on outside help if that was required, likewise I reciprocated to help in other towers. It was a difficult year for me personally with not much time available for the teaching of new recruits, hopefully as this year progresses I will be back in the driving seat, so if any budding ringer wishes to join please give me a call and some lessons can be arranged.

Robert Small

South Stoke Drama

With the demise of the South Stoke Players the only home grown theatre activity seems to be the Christmas Cracker although we mustn't forget the song and dance troupe! Perhaps they will do a 'turn' for us at the next one-make a note in your diary –Friday 23rd December.

Some residents are still active Thespians though. Jacqui is directing Arsenic and Old Lace at Goring Village Hall on the 20th to the 23rd of April and Jonathan Rohll, Michael Saunders and myself are in the cast.

For Shakespeare's birthday we are all also involved in Shakespeare As We Like It on June 16th in Goring Village Hall. This is a compilation of prose, poetry and drama in association with music from Goring Chamber Choir.

Finally if anyone is interested in taking part in developing a new Murder Mystery look up the background to a fascinating character who used to live on an island in the Thames called Maundy Gregory- he was an actor, impresario and spy who sold honours for Lloyd George.

Chris Bertrand

Angling Club

I personally am proud what we have achieved, and last year we donated from match days £856 to local and non local charities.

We have a fantastic following, and this year its a flat £15.00 membership cost for anyone, which represents a reduction in membership costs, despite Christ Church (who own the water meadows and riverbank) having increased the rent, and the insurance premium having been raised.

Paul Stevens

South Stoke Community Shop

The Shop has now been trading successfully for three years and it is expected that it will be possible to declare a comfortable trading and business profit for the trading year from February 2015 to January 2016 at the May shareholders' meeting.

Turnover has been static during the period and pressure on margins due to the competitive nature of the UK retail sector has squeezed profitability performance. However, tight control of overhead expenditure has enabled overall profitability to be maintained.

The success of the shop is largely due to the ever-creative Jules Costello our Manager who has introduced many new lines including the pick-and-mix frozen foods and the Village Value section both of which have been hits with many shoppers.

Another important innovation has been the events organised by the shop. Recently, the Six Nations rugby matches screened in the village hall and in the summer the Pizza in the Park and the Fish and Chips supper evenings have been important in bringing the village together and for adding a very welcome small boost to turnover. The next event is a curry, cooking and Bollywood evening in the village hall on the 13 May.

We have lost some of our loyal volunteers this year as people have retired or moved away from the village which has stretched resources to the limit some days; if there is anyone willing to learn the ropes and do a shift they would be very welcome.

The business currently has 7 board members but there is a need to bring new blood onto the team. In particular, we are searching for a replacement for the treasurer's position; anyone interested should contact Mick Woodall (chairman) on 873831.

The business has secured an extension to the original temporary planning permission from SODC which means the shop can continue to trade in the existing premises until March 2019. The three years until March 2019 will pass quickly and the shop needs to arrange to transfer to permanent premises around that date; this subject is addressed in a separate paper below.

David Kennedy

Shop Permanent Premises Project

We currently have an extension to our planning approval for our temporary shop on the Recreation Ground through to March 2019. We have been told that we are unlikely to get a further significant extension. So we need to start work on getting new permanent premises for the shop straightaway and have set up the Shop Permanent Premises Project or SP3 for short.

We have been set up as a sub-committee of the Parish Council, reporting to the Shop board operationally. The task we have undertaken is to build and fit out new shop premises on the Recreation Ground. This includes designing a building to meet the needs of the shop, getting all the approvals, raising the money, contracting builders, getting it built, fitting it out and making good the old site once the containers have been removed. It is a big project.

Having considered all the currently available options to deliver the new premises by March 2016, we have selected the Recreation Ground as the site because the shop gains from being near the playground; it is right in the middle of the village; The Glebe is not owned by the village; and The Park has restricted access.

We estimate that the cost of the new premises is in the region of £300,000. We should be able to get about 80% of that from grants. That still leaves £60,000 that we need to raise in the village. We will plan a number of fundraising activities. We will ask for donations, run events and have raffles and sales to raise the money.

We are working hard to make sure that this is a community project. We would like to get local people involved in helping to raise the funds and in helping to build the new premises. Some of the building work can be done by ourselves – from digging the foundations to building parts of the roof. The more we can do ourselves – under expert supervision – the more cost we save.

So if you think you can help in any way, please contact me.

Geoff Ward

RAG – Rail Electrification in the Goring Gap

In summary in the last six months of the campaign Network Rail (NR) has 1) agreed to retrofit the section of track that lies within the AONB boundaries by replacing the current, erected infrastructure with a more

sympathetic design and 2) has apologised for their failure to consult with the local authorities and the general public.

“We apologise to residents for not carrying out the public consultation before the installation of the existing overhead line equipment. Going forward we are committed to working with them and other stakeholders on alternative designs.”

The Railway Action Group (RAG) has taken legal advice and has issued two legal challenges to Network Rail over the way that they have carried out due process with regards to the planning requirements for the electrification programme.

However, the earliest form of the agreement to retrofit was heavily caveated with conditions, including the agreement of a mutually acceptable design and the availability of funds. RAG has subsequently been pushing NR to give further confidence in its firm intention to carry out the retrofit, and NR has recently confirmed that it will arrange for a letter to be sent from the CEO, Mark Carne, to the Conservation Boards (Chilterns and North Wessex Downs) giving this affirmation, and also NR has said that it has made provision for the necessary funds within the recently revised budget for the whole Great Western Mainline electrification.

In more detail NR has appointed Balfour Beatty to do the retrospective design options report for this project. They will do the technical feasibility work in three phases 1) an initial design phase to come up with 40-100 speculative designs. These will then be sense checked and shortlisted to 10 through scoring and weighting 2) technical review of 10 options to check feasible and check compliance and 3) whole life cost and constructability/ fundability work. NR has also engaged a consultant to conduct landscape and visual impact assessment of the selected designs. The final proposal will then need to go to the Department for Transport for funding approval.

In terms of timing the design process is expected to take several months and will lead to the full public consultation envisaged to take place in the summer. However, the retrofit itself is unlikely to take place until mid 2017 at the earliest as NR plans to continue to finalise the Reading to Didcot section and then to test their new electric trains on it in the latter part of the year. This seems reasonable as the cost to the taxpayer for any delays to the testing, due to the contract agreements for the electric trains, would be significant; however, this is only our position based on complete confidence that the retrofit will actually happen and that it will be a significant improvement on the infrastructure that is currently being put in place with respect to the environmental and visual impact.

Ian Haslam

Parish Council

The following are reports from each of the Councillors

Cllr Roy McMillan – Chairman

GOVERNANCE & DEVELOPMENT

The Parish Council has experienced a year of highs and lows since we last met at the Annual Parish Meeting on 16th April, 2015 – I will leave it to the reader to decide which was which!

Just a few of the key dates and happenings in which the Parish Council were - and in some cases still are - involved:

- The issues of the School playground and Network Rail's electrification infrastructure rumbled on through the whole year – and continue to rumble on
- Sarah Larkin-Smith – a former Cllr and much loved villager – very sadly passed away on 17th May
- Geoff Ward retired as Chairman and as a Cllr at the PC's AGM on 18th May – after some 12 years of service to the Parish
- On 22nd July the Sovereign Housing Association and its builders completed the four new affordable homes on the Glebe field and just two days later they were all occupied
- In October the Housing Development Group circulated all Parishioners with a questionnaire about future development in the village – a summary of the results appeared in the December newsletter

- On 23rd October Network Rail (NR) held an all-day drop-in meeting in our village hall to allow interested people in the local area to express their views about the infrastructure – despite some very poor advertising of this event by NR over 700 people attended ... and expressed their feelings!
- On December 8th the PC held an extraordinary meeting to consider the School Playground issue
- Over the Christmas holiday BT finally made faster broadband available to some parts of the village – thanks in no small way to the efforts of Geoff Ward & Roger Guiver
- On 1st February this year the Park was finally handed over to the PC on a 999 year lease – some 14 years after it was first promised to the Parish!
- At its February PC meeting the PC received a presentation from the Shop Development Group about its plans for a permanent new Community Shop. The PC endorsed the proposals, and promised to help where possible.
- On 22nd February the new South Stoke PC website went live
- At its March meeting - by a majority decision - the PC agreed to recommend to St Andrews PCC that it should allow the School to submit a new planning application for an amended playground structure incorporating several compromise suggestions

Apart from the above, the PC - including its 5 other Cllrs, the Clerk and I - continue to be routinely involved in the day to day management of the Parish, and in particular with the growing workload of taking on an increasing amount of consultation and decision making, brought about by:

1. The Localism Act – which entails the Parish being more routinely involved with decisions and policy making that would formerly have been handled exclusively by South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC)
2. Oxfordshire County Councils (OCC) budget cuts which has resulted in them cutting back on – or totally scrapping – some services
3. Our decision - in February last year - to go ahead with a new version of the Village Plan called the Parish Plan Refresh.

This third item has brought, either directly or indirectly, four main projects into being - each with their own project group and involved Cllr or Cllrs. Namely:

- The Village (housing) Development Group
- The Shop Project Group
- The Village Hall Project Group
- The Bus Service Project Group

All the above are on-going, and regular updates as to progress appear in the pages of the monthly village newsletter.

My thanks to each of my Clouncillor colleagues and to the Clerk for their support, advice and time spent on all of the above important issues, as well as their consideration of a plethora of other more mundane, day-to-day, parish council matters.

Councillor Roy McMillan, Chairman

Cllr Chris Bertrand

ENVIRONMENT

- After much discussion and many emails to Highways the grips along the road to Woodcote were dug out and the overgrown ditches reinstated. The hope was that this would mitigate the flooding by Martin Bullocks farm but sadly it has had very little impact perhaps because they were dug in a somewhat haphazard manner.
- With regards to floods in other areas of South Stoke we have sent a letter to all landowners with waterways and drainage channels on or adjacent to their land reminding them of their responsibilities and the need to keep the water flowing. Where possible we will see if we can identify any remaining areas of blockage and pursue further
- We have been informed that we need to have a plan for maintaining all the trees that are on Parish land and to this end Roy is putting together a map to identify where they are.

- Trees by the slipway have been cut back to reduce the hazard of falling branches and the fallen tree across the road to the slipway has been removed.
- Potholes that effect the village are regularly reported through the highways online system which seems reasonably effective.
- The Parish Council with support from the Amenities Committee and the Shop resurfaced the Recreation Ground Car Park and the contractor will be returning soon to make good the unexpected level of wear and tear
- As part of the Village Plan Refresh the Railway Action Group was launched and Ian Haslam and his team are doing an excellent job on behalf of the village to improve the look of the electrification
- As the Parish Council representative on the Amenities Charity I have also been involved in the building of the new stage, the installation of new heating and other matters to do with the maintenance of the village hall.
- Similarly as Steward of the Recreation Ground I maintain a weekly visual check of the Playground equipment and instigated the Big Rec Tidy. This process is ongoing.
- The diary for the recreation ground is also used to maintain a weekly check on the defibrillator.

Councillor Chris Bertrand, Vice Chairman

Cllr John Verrill

LEGAL & LAND

We have made good progress this year in a number of areas particularly raising flood awareness which has made the village seem drier in what has been a wettish winter. There seems to be less standing water around generally so we should be pleased, but keep an eye on things. SSPC is always open to suggestions on this important issue.

On the property front since it was first promised to us after nearly 15 years we now have title to the Park, as it is called. The Park is the piece of land which runs from Ferry Road on the river side of the Railway along the track almost as far as Cross Keys Road. It runs behind Manor Farm, the Church, the School and the pub and ends at the Village hall.

The land is not now developable: we own it; it is a village asset to use as we want for that purpose. The permitted use is

'Authorised Use' means community use to extend to amenity use, a community shop, car parking, the grazing of animals any agricultural equestrian or conservation uses only to include but not exclusive to building a new Village Hall (possibly including a community shop) and associated car park on the Park, with the necessary access way or ways for vehicles to /from the nearby highway, the grazing of animals and establishing community playground and/or sports field on the Park, possibly with an associated pavilion;

This has permitted us to offer to put some of the unpopular school equipment behind the school – which is still an option.

The village hall is in poor condition so it will in due course need rebuilding, we need a more permanent shop than the successful container which has served us so well recently. We have a lot of options for use.

We could, for example, set up allotments, perhaps a tennis court or any number of general beneficial uses. Until we decide what to do we get a small income for letting the grazing.

The lease is for 999 years and the rent is a peppercorn so it is ours for more than the foreseeable future. We can sublet parts but cannot sell the lease as a whole. The land is now registered in the name of SSPC. Ongoing costs are negligible and insurance etc. is within our general cover.

I was able to get my firm to progress the legal side at no cost other than land registry and search fees, which were modest. Our landlord is Christ Church. The gift of land was the quid pro quo for the development on Ferry Road of the former farm yard and grain dryers.

We now have a duty to complete an asset register so that the Park, the Rec which is trust land run by the Amenities Charity and the plantation at White Hill Quarry will all be entered onto it shortly.

It may be of interest that the lane (Ferry Lane) to the river is an OCC adopted 'highway', and even though the slipway area is not owned by anyone, the PC endeavours to maintain it.

We have already asked for ideas for use of the Park and have had very few suggestions so far, but it would be good if some of the energy in the village could be harnessed to put that land to proper use.

Cllr John Verrill

Cllr Bryan Urbick

FINANCE & COMMUNICATION

Finance - The Council has several powers allowed by statute, though most powers are not typically used. One requirement, though, is that the budget and precept each year must be determined by the Council. The precept is a tax, paid as part of the Council Tax that is specifically collected from those who live in the Parish. It is set each year by the Parish Council as part of the budgeting and this year was approved in our December Parish Council meeting.

This year, the budget increase the precept (thus increase the Council Tax for each Parishioner) by about £1.80/month (for a Band D dwelling). This increase is due to an elimination of in an SODC grant that was designed to help keep precepts low, to replenish the reserves for money spent on the Rec car park, to cover additional costs for verge and grass cutting and tree maintenance. We have also seen the services of OCC and SODC erode because of their own budget restrictions, and the Parish Council sees that it needs to be ready to take on some of these. District and County Councils are currently limited to the amount of increase they can make, and therefore Parish Councils need to decide if they will pick up the slack. It is a tough time for local authorities.

The decision to increase the precept was not a decision taken lightly, and we keep our focus on investing in our village life and support our local community.

Our Clerk reports details of our finances within – but if there are questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Communication - The Newsletter continues to thrive, with the increase in advertising revenue being channelled to provide more content, and as many colour editions/part colour editions as possible. Catherine Rohll does a fantastic job with managing this and keeping the advertiser support coming in. Sue Ling, Sian Rasmussen and Trudy Scarratt continue to deliver each issue to all. A very big thanks!

There have also been some changes to the website. For the past year or so, we have been having some difficulty in getting good service from the Parish's website service provider and have had to find a new provider. Our new website host and e-mail provider is an Oxford-based company (public-internet.co.uk) and are providing the service for much less than the previous provider - and we also have much more flexibility than we previously had. Have a look at www.southstoke.org – if you have ideas for different or more information or pages, let me know. I am particularly interested to make a contact list of all local businesses and South Stoke Parishioners who have businesses in the area. Please provide the details so I can include it. I look forward to helping keep the website up-to-date and an excellent, continuing resource for the Parish.

Councillor Bryan Urbick

Cllr Andrew Scrivener

PLANNING

Between the last Village Meeting in April 2015 and 5th April this year, we have received 20 original planning applications. This is nearly twice the number received last year.

As a result, we will have the two new dwellings on Wallingford Road, a replacement dwelling on Icknield Farm and a new house at the back of Freedom Cottages. The remainder, with one key exception, the School Playground, relate to improvements and alterations to existing dwellings within the Parish.

Some of these applications are contentious and as a Parish Council, we aim to listen and support the views of our Parishioners within the guidelines set by SODC. We would therefore encourage all parishioners to

make their thoughts known to the Parish Council on Applications so that these can be taken into consideration.

The School playground has been a key issue this year with the final revised proposals coming back through the formal planning process shortly. As this is an important issue within our village we will ensure that it is advertised in the parish newsletter and strongly recommend that you feed your comments back on the SODC website. All comments made on the website before it is considered at the appropriate Parish Council meeting will be reviewed and you are of course welcome to make your representations to the PC at our meeting.

Councillor Andrew Scrivener

Cllr Mick Walsh

PARISH INSURANCE

The current insurance in place with Aviva Insurance Ltd, policy number 24414511 CHC is due for renewal 1st October 2016, and as mentioned in the last annual report, is a comprehensive policy covering both the South Stoke Parish Council, and the South Stoke Village Hall and Recreation Ground.

This is the last year of the previous 3 year agreement where, good cover was arranged, and a good saving was made by signing the agreement, with reasonable increases applied each year by the insurers.

The brokers organising the cover (Came & Company) are specialists in Parish Council Insurances and have schemes with three separate insurers.

Contact has been made with Came & Company already, and in the months prior to renewal, we will be reviewing sums insured, and speaking to them about the options available, and negotiating the best covers and premiums. Depending how these negotiations go, it may be necessary to look at alternative markets, but the insurance market is pretty stable and we are not expecting any great rate increases, with continuity of cover with a specific insurer being important.

Councillor Mick Walsh

South Oxfordshire District Council

Kerbside collection- From 7 September residents have been able to leave out broken small electrical items next to their grey bin, and any tatty clothes or textiles that aren't good enough for charity next to their green bin. They'll be picked up by Biffa and taken away to be recycled.

Neighbourhood Plans- SODC have put considerable more money & support into this area to both encourage the take up of NP & to give better support to those already doing one.

CIL - SODC have issued their Community Infrastructure Levy proposals.

Oops! Biffa are paying closer attention to what's going into people's green bins as the companies recycling it are getting tougher on contamination with other waste. So we want to prevent any of ours being rejected and ending up in landfill. If Biffa spot any they'll put a tag on the contaminated recycling bin, which will explain why they haven't emptied it. The councils have very low contamination rates but the little we have is usually when people are unsure about what bins certain things can go in - so it's partly about educating people to make sure all the right things are recycled. There are a few items that always crop up in green bins that can't be recycled - things like nappies, Pringles tubes, cat food pouches, and plastic clothes hangers - so we know what messages we need to put out.

Unitary The district leaders have issued their ideas on the future of local government, my personal view is that they still have a lot of unanswered questions on how they will work in practice, they could make democratic control by the people of South Oxfordshire even worse and save little money. I also do not like the fact that the leaders are currently refusing to speak to county about other unitary options just the one they've come up with which lacks some important aspects of a true unitary bid. It may be the best but the

jury still out on that and I encourage the Parish Council & people to start asking hard questions on all parties about this potential change to local government. I do have a separate list of questions which I've already circulated to the Parish Council.

Councillor Kevin Bulmer

Oxfordshire County Council

Third Reading Bridge'. The bridge would link the end of the A329(M) in Berkshire to Playhatch in Oxfordshire. The enthusiasm of the scheme promoters is not shared by many Oxfordshire residents or the county who are concerned about the large amount of extra traffic that would be deposited on to already congested rural roads. Cost would double with mitigation works to surrounding roads.

Budget-The net result of this is that the council will be able to set a balanced budget in 2016/17 but over the medium term now has £15.2m of unidentified savings to make as opposed to the previous figure of £11.2m. The new £4m of unidentified savings all fall in 2017/18.

Transport- 21st Feb notice to cancel bus subsidies given 27th July end, hoping to have information by end of May which routes are effected (homes to School transport, commercial working with in, flower May pilot but area to be decided). Alexandria

Potholes - OCC have bought a new and innovative road repair machine that has been nicknamed 'the Dragon' is now tackling potholes across the county. According to Skanska Infrastructure Services, which developed the unit, its unusual nickname arises from the fire-issuing nozzle it employs to de-ice pothole surfaces on roads in Scandinavia. The 'Dragon' also repairs minor cracks and other defects that could develop into potholes, resulting in cost-saving preventative measures. It is being tested on UK roads over the summer to gauge and evaluate performance. The machine is operated by a single driver in the cab. It's touted as safer, faster, less expensive, and more environmentally friendly than traditional forms of road repair. First the affected area is blown free of debris; for colder conditions a flame melts the ice off of the surface first. Then a hot bituminous emulsion is applied to the defective area. After chippings, the material is compacted and treated with compressed air to ensure water- resistance. Then the road is immediately ready to accommodate traffic.

New Oxfordshire Libraries APP - Oxfordshire Libraries can now be accessed from smart phone or tablet. People can: manage their account, search the catalogue, renew and reserve books. Bar code scanning is available on devices with a front-facing auto-focus camera. Search for 'Oxfordshire Libraries' at the App Store or Google Play. -

Property, Back Office and Reserves - There have been misleading media reports that OCC could reduce its financial challenges by selling property, cutting the back office and drawing on reserves. The reality is that OCC has already sold more than 100 properties realising over £62 million that has been used on capital projects. Furthermore, 26 leases have been terminated saving over £2.1 million pa. With regard to back office functions, the number of directors has been cut by 50%, senior managers by over 40% and staff generally by 30%. Various services are already shared with other councils and partners, and further options are being explored to find even more back office savings. Reserves are already being drawn upon and will soon become low compared to expenditure.

Didcot collapse- site handed over to the health & safety executive for recovery & investigation and will take two to three months.

Household Waste Recycling Centre Strategy - I like to think that pressure from a local Councillor has led to Oakley Wood being retained at least for the next few years.

Councillor Kevin Bulmer

PC Financial Summary

Please note that these are indicative figures only as we have not yet received the final bank statement and the finances are not finalised for the year. They will be audited in June.

Summary of receipts and payments for Year Ending 31st March 2016		
Receipts	2014/2015 (£)	2015/16 (£)
Precept	14,388.00	14,869.00
Grants/donations/advertising/grazing	5,511.52	3020.00
Fund raising for Village Hall Heaters		3,541.10
Insurance share from Amenities Charity		714.32
Bank interest	1.79	1.80
VAT	958.56	1,780.01
Total receipts	20,859.87	23,926.23
Payments		
Administration – General	3,698.34	4,644.87
Administration – Salaries	2,182.95	2,362.24
Memberships, rents and licences	103.97	470.43
Regular maintenances	829.12	691.66
Grants	5,700.00	5,700.00
Additional items and Section 137 2015-2016 Recreation Ground/Shop car park £4847.10, Village Hall heaters - £3390, The Park legal costs - £343 and S137 - £500	3,338.65	9,080.10
VAT	716.89	1,760.41
Total payments	16,569.92	24,709.61
Surplus/deficit receipts over payments	4,289.95	783.48
Closing Bank Balance End of last fiscal year	17,610.72	£17,243.74
Memo: uncleared cheques	00.00	426.50
Memo: uncleared invoices	160.00	170.00
Memo: End of year "true" bank balance	17,450.72	£16987.24

Sue Gill, Clerk



The Park



The Glebe Field



**South Stoke
Community Shop**



**South Stoke
Village Hall**

Photographs by Roy McMillan