

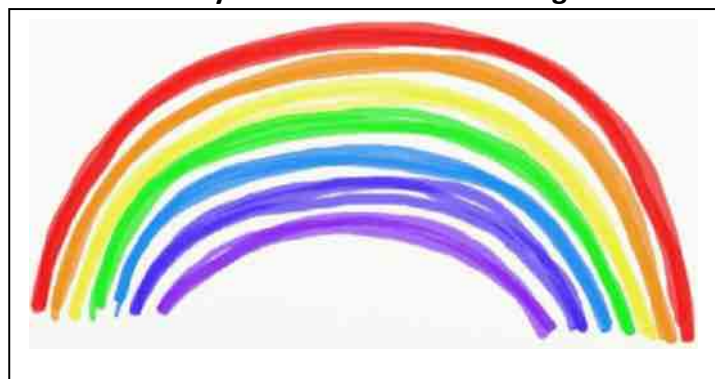
All items for the
Autumn edition by
Friday 21st August
2020

Stoke News

Summer 2020

Contact Jean House
jeanhouse@btconnect.com
For more news look at
www.stokestgregory.org

Thank you to all our contributors and distributors of the Stoke News during this time of the Covid 19 outbreak. Best wishes to everyone who often help out, but are being shielded, or are self-isolating, at this time. It is good to keep things going as well as we can. Care has been taken to distance and keep everyone safe whilst delivering.



HOTV Report

During the time since the last report to the Stoke News two pivotal events have occurred. Firstly, we succeeded in reaching our goal for the community share subscription by exceeding £200,000. An amazing effort and thanks are due to all who contributed. This in turn released grants and loans from donor organisations such that our funding requirement as outlined in the Business Plan is now complete.

Secondly and perhaps more significantly the community benefit society that is Heart of the Village purchased the shop business which had been relocated to a 'shop in a box' in the grounds of the village hall. Trading started as planned on April 1st, coincident with the initial wave of uncertainties around the lockdown. A robust covid policy was devised and operations have functioned smoothly. Our major challenge centred upon the sudden evaporation of our pool of volunteers. This necessitated the short-term employment of local assistant shop managers. This was an unanticipated cost but necessary to ensure continuity.

Despite all these challenges, operations have run smoothly with robust sales across all lines. There are many thanks due, but especially to Ian Upshall for his guidance and flexibility particularly when the transition has not been as smooth as should have been. To Jo and Carolyn for grasping the opportunity and providing outstanding customer service. And not least to David Crabbe who with Sophie Harris has overseen the bookkeeping and treasury functions.

The next significant event will be the creation of an elected management committee. Under the current circumstances a postal ballot was the only practical option. At the time of going to press candidate nominations have been received; ballot papers will be circulated, and a result is anticipated by the first week of June.

In the light of this election it was agreed at the last meeting of the interim committee that all notable decisions that need to be taken in regard to next steps in the project, will be deferred until this elected committee is in place.

Parish Council Report

March now seems like a long time ago. Much has changed, but in many ways very little has changed. Life goes on, despite Covid 19 disrupting so many lives since the middle of March. A description of action the village is taking is outlined more fully elsewhere in this newsletter. But it is important to say on behalf of the Parish Council, a **heartfelt thank you** to all in the village who have done that bit extra to support neighbours and friends during this period of considerable disruption and uncertainty. In particular it is appropriate to mention the work of Kelly de Silva, the Parish Clerk, in responding to requests for assistance. Also, to Rachel Parrish for leading an initiative to supply meals. Overall, the response to this crisis has been positive and measured; all that one would expect from a community such as ours.

Much of what was discussed at the March PC meeting has subsequently taken a back seat, having been overtaken by more pressing priorities. There were however three items worthy of note. Firstly, after many years of service Cecil Boobyer was succeeded as **footpaths officer** by Charlotte Sundquist. We welcome the energy and enthusiasm that Charlotte will bring, while thanking Cecil for his efforts during the considerable time he occupied the role. Secondly it was confirmed that all **CIL monies** due to the Parish Council arising from the housing development in Willey Road, will be retained by the Parish Council with no further obligation to support the infrastructure required for the new pavilion. Finally, it was agreed that the PC will take a more active role in supporting the activity of **Climate Action Athelney** (formerly Transition Athelney).

Shortly after the March meeting the lockdown guidance was issued, causing an extraordinary meeting to be called, on March 19th in order to delegate the conduct of essential PC business to The Parish Clerk. Needless to say, this was passed unanimously. In the absence of guidance on how best to manage **PC meetings**, there was no meeting in April, but subsequently SALC (Somerset Association of Local Councils) sanctioned the use of virtual meetings, subject to certain protocols.

On May 11th we held our first **virtual meeting**. Members of the public were offered to opportunity to participate however no one took-up this option. The meeting was successful with no unanticipated disruptions due to the technology.

Two **planning applications** are noteworthy. Plans have been submitted to convert the current visitor carpark at the Willows and Wetlands centre to a pedestrian plaza with additional amenities. An application was also received for change of use of the Royal Oak from a public house, to a public house with a shop. Both of these were fully supported.

It was reported that an advisory 20 miles per hour **speed limit** would be implemented outside schools in the County. This includes Stoke St Gregory Primary School which has been assessed and prioritised for implementation. Our thanks to David Fothergill for putting our case forward.

The **next PC meeting** will be held as per the normal calendar and will be a virtual meeting. Notification of the agenda and meeting details will be made in the usual way.

Stoke St Gregory Tennis Club

In these troubled times we are pleased to be able to share some good news for a change. Our recently resurfaced tennis courts were spray painted on May 15th, after several weeks delay due to lockdown. Thank you to Courtstall, our court contractors, for putting us at the top of their list once they restarted working. The courts are looking smart in green & red – please take the opportunity to go & see this village sports facility & be tempted to pick up a racket & play.

The courts are open to both the public on a pay & play basis & to Club members. After so many weeks of Covid-19 restrictions this is a wonderful opportunity to get your fix of exercise & enjoy yourselves.

At time of writing the courts are to be reopened on May 24th with strict safety procedures in place.

Pay & Play costs per hour are £7.50 a court.

Membership fees have been calculated for the remainder of this tennis year at a pro rata of the annual rates with a small additional reduction to take account of current reduced access/facilities.

This results in fees from June 1st through to April 1st next year of:

Single Adult £75 (2 adults in a family £150).

Family members, children 18 years & under, of a paying adult member are free.

**Juniors 18 years & under with no adult family member £25
Over 18 in full time education at junior rate of £25**

For anyone paying for 2 adult memberships please note that we can offer a monthly direct debit adult payment option. Please also enquire about our rolling month on month membership, or quarterly membership terms.

BACS payments to: TSB Bank, Sort Code 30-18-16, Account No. 00419290 or cheques payable to Stoke St Gregory Tennis Club.

NB. If wanting to play, it will be necessary to book a court in advance, pay fees, if not a current member, & obtain a code to access the courts. We are looking to provide an automated online booking system, but meanwhile please contact Stuart Mark – details below.

At all times, players should adhere to the Government's social distancing guidelines (staying at least 2m away from others), and practice public health advice for hygiene. Please also bring own sanitiser & hand gel. Here is the link to the LTA's guidelines for players, which we ask all of you to read. Information is also posted on the noticeboard at courts.

<https://www.lta.org.uk/globalassets/news/2020/lta-guidance-for-tennis-players---covid-19.pdf>

Updates will be posted on Facebook & the Village website.
Members will also be updated by e-mail.

For more information, contact Stuart Mark 490541

stuart.w.mark@btinternet.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Stokestgregorytennis>

Wanted – Stoke News Sponsors

If you would like your business featured in the next edition, please get in touch with Jean House; or Kelly de Silva, Parish Clerk, at
ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk

Local History - Your House

Did you know . . . that there may be a lot of information available on your house if it is one of the older village properties? Even more modern buildings are often sited in interesting places. One example is The Mardy, built around 1910. In 1786 there was a cottage behind where the present house stands. Along with its neighbours, it had been built as an 'encroachment' on Woodhill Green common. Woodhill Road, Windmill Lane and Pincombe Drove did not yet exist. Woodhill Green disappeared, along with Meare Green, Curlwood Green (Curload) and Warr Moor (Stathe), under the last Enclosure Acts of the early 19th Century.

*If you have any information on your house, or would like to find out more, please contact Dave Evans
gregorystoke@aol.com*

Stoke St Gregory Baptist Church News

Whilst we are currently unable to use our church building, Stoke St Gregory Baptist Church is still alive and thriving. We have relocated our church services and home group meetings onto Zoom and are also supporting those in our church family who are unable to access the technology in other ways. If you'd like to join us one Sunday morning for our service at 10.30am, please email Ssgbaptists@gmail.com and we'll give you details.

We continue to love and care for our local community and will restart activities whenever the government advice tells us it is safe to do so. We will let you know when events are happening. We have a prayer meeting on Zoom every week so if there is anything you would like prayer for, please email Ssgbaptists@gmail.com and we will pray for you. Or if you would value a conversation with our minister, Sonya, on the phone, please email the same address and we can arrange something.

Wells Hay

In the last Stoke News, there was an article by Dave Evans describing the origins of the naming of Willey Road, it being derived from Wells Hay. The suggestion was made at the time that this was a potential name for the new development. This will be discussed at the next PC meeting, but if there are alternative (appropriate) suggestions we would be happy to include them in the discussion.

If you would like to contribute a name for the new development please contact the Parish Clerk, Kelly de Silva.

Let's finally eliminate slow broadband from Stoke

Broadband capacity is being stretched to the limit during lockdown as we stream movies and hold Zoom meetings. At the same time it is more than ever critical that we are able to do business reliably from home. Depending where you live, you probably experience:

- (near the end of Church Close) *potentially fast but unreliable coverage from BT*
- (up to a kilometre from Church Close or N Curry) *reasonably fast but less reliable coverage from BT*
- (over a mile...) *painfully slow and even more unreliable coverage from BT, or about 10 Mbps over wireless (Rural Broadband Southwest), or maybe satellite or 4G (putting up with laginess and/or low caps).*

Some History

As you probably know, when introducing "superfast" fibre broadband, BT opted for a cheaper hybrid network: fibre to the cabinet/old copper from cabinet to house. For the most part it is the copper that is the problem, since copper is sensitive to distance and any speed gained from having a fast fibre connection to the cabinet is lost once your broadband signal has travelled more than a kilometre along a copper wire.

This is not the only problem with BT: there is insufficient capacity in their cabinets and the network seems chaotic. However good a job the Openreach engineers try to do, their management has given them an impossible task. It's a great shame because back before privatisation in the early 80s, Post Office Telecommunications was an impressive institution with their own fibre production and an ambition to bring a world-leading fibre network to the whole country. Once it had been sold off however, the emphasis switched to maximising short-term profits and satisfying shareholders. This is why the UK now lags so far behind other countries, and why we are still using a telephone network that originated in the reign of Queen Victoria!

Five years ago I mapped out Stoke and surrounding areas to show where all the houses are in relation to the BT cabinets that serve them. From this it was possible to predict roughly what speeds everyone should be able to receive and where the major slow spots were. The next step was to meet BT and ask for a new cabinet which could have solved most of the problems at a stroke. BT were dismissive and unhelpful: we could have a new cabinet, but we would have to pay a fortune for it while they would rake in the profits from upgraded subscribers.

After a false start with another wireless provider, we then approached Rural Broadband Southwest in 2016 and invited them to set up a wireless network in the village. They moved quickly, and about forty households who were previously struggling with speeds below 2 Mbps are now getting reliable wireless broadband at 10+. These people (I am one of them) are now pretty happy, but a similar number are still left out in the cold: *[see top of next column*

- In-betweeners who get comparable or lower speeds from BT but a very unreliable service.
- Those living in a few scattered areas which the wireless network does not yet reach.

Weren't we supposed to be getting universal fibre from Gigaclear?

Don't get me started! The national (BDUK) and local (CDS) rollout of superfast broadband has been patchy at best. BT danced rings around Connecting Devon and Somerset, took huge subsidies and picked all the low fruit. For the second phase, CDS took the more positive option of commissioning Gigaclear to build a universal full-fibre network, but unfortunately Gigaclear had over-reached themselves (falling victim to the Carillon crash among other things) and the contract was cancelled. CDS has only recently launched yet another procurement process.

Full fibre will come here eventually, but for now there are only two horses in the Stoke St Gregory Broadband Challenge—BT and RBS—and both of those are standing still.

What is to be done?

We have little or no influence over BT, though if we know more we can better support a complaint—and you may be able to improve things locally by getting an engineer to check your line. We can however extend and improve the wireless network if we can provide enough new subscribers to justify it.

To start with we aim to gather as much information as possible on current experiences. *Whether you use BT, RBS, satellite or 4G, please let me know what speed you are getting, how reliable it is and where you live, so that we can build a clear picture of coverage across the parish (email nick@curloadfarm.co.uk, subject: **Broadband Survey**.)* Many of you may have been in touch before, but it would be helpful if you could write afresh so that I have the fullest current info.

Next, in collaboration with RBS, we will work out what infrastructure needs to be put in place to ensure that everyone has access at least to a good wireless signal. Finally the Parish Council will do their very best to make it happen. *[Nick Sloan*

Since coronavirus restrictions have put a stop to events for the foreseeable future, the Noticeboard in this edition covers special arrangements to help with the pandemic. General information can be found on the Coronavirus page on www.stokestgregory.org (see banner on Home page).

There has been a truly amazing response from the village. Many in our community have risen to the challenge by offering help to their neighbours.

Kelly de Silva is acting as an information exchange on behalf of the PC, and co-ordinating several of the delivery and collection services listed below. Contact Kelly via email: ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk or phone: 07701 053 903

PRESCRIPTION COLLECTION

Orders are taken from residents on a Tuesday, collected from North Curry Health Centre on Friday, and delivered the same day (safely following social distancing guidelines). This is flexible, so if you require this service on another day, please contact Kelly (see above).

FOOD DONATIONS

Many kind residents are offering food donations for vulnerable households. These are being distributed either by Kelly or by Rachel Parish from the Willow Set. Delivery is on Wednesdays—along with the free hot meal delivery service that she is also so kindly providing.

If any of these services would be useful for you or anyone you know, please contact Kelly in confidence. (Also if you would like to donate food—thank you!)

GROCERY DELIVERIES

The Shop-in-a-Box is delivering groceries to residents within the village with the assistance of volunteers. To use this service please contact Jo or Carolyn: shop@hotvssg.org or 07842 992 825. Shop opening times are 7:30 to 5:30 Mon to Fri, 8:00 to 2:30 on Sat and 9 to 12 on Sun.

The Withies Deli and the Lemon Tree are also doing limited deliveries. See respective websites.

Alternatively, Kelly is co-ordinating supermarket shopping on a Saturday, and also arranging collection of customer orders. Contact Kelly for details.

TAKEAWAY FOOD

Now that they have been forced to close, several local pubs are selling takeaways. The Rose & Crown is providing evening meals from Monday to Saturday, and lunch on Sunday. Contact Joanne Bown on bownjoanne@gmail.com or 01823 490296. The Knight Fryer is also planning to return to (or near) its usual pitch on Tuesday evenings from the beginning of June.

REEVE'S FEAST

During these unprecedented times there may be some who are experiencing considerable financial hardship. Reeve's Feast is a charity exclusive to Stoke St Gregory which is able to make small grants. Referrals can be made on behalf of others where there is reluctance or a specific need. The management of this is carried out with care and compassion and in absolute confidence.

Contact Heather on 01823 490 010

WIDER SERVICES

If your needs are more urgent, Somerset County Council have set up a dedicated phone line on 0300 790 6275 (SMS on 07781 482 858 for the hearing-impaired). Information is updated daily on the website www.somerset.gov.uk

It is normal to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed in these times. If you require emotional support, call **Mindline** on 01823 276 982.

Somerset Age UK have a friendly telephone line 01823 345 610. Give them a call if you are feeling low or lonely. They also have a confidential information and advice service on 01823 345 613.

COVID-19 HEALTH ADVICE

Advice on taking precautions against coronavirus can be found on www.stokestgregory.org, and our Coronavirus page there includes links to many other sources of advice which are regularly updated. Perhaps the most important thing is *not to go to the Health Centre if you feel unwell*, but to check the advice on their website or ring first. The NHS Coronavirus Helpline number is 111.