

Stoke St Mary Parish Council

Minutes of a meeting of Stoke St Mary Parish Council held on Thursday, 17th September 2026, at Stoke St Mary Village Hall, at 7.30pm

Public Session

There were three Members of Public (MoPs) present.

Gideon Amos MP provided an update on his work in relation to the Orchard Portman estate. 1. Mr Amos continues to press the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for a proper investigation into the Taylor Wimpey/Crown Estate sale. 2. A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) needs to be carried out sooner rather than later (Somerset Council (SC) propose waiting until sites are processed in Sept 2027). Mr Amos is pressing for this to happen sooner, to feed into that process of site allocation. A discussion took place about the potential ambiguity of SC's response to Mr Amos. 3. If SC could reduce the timeframe of the housing target numbers to 15 yrs (from 20), this would significantly reduce the number of plots needed, and potentially save the Blackdown Vale from being in the local plan.

One MoP expressed concerns about the timeliness, independence and thoroughness of a LVIA. Mr Amos noted these concerns and confirmed he would seek such assurances from SC. Cllr Hossell suggested that a proper and comprehensive brief should ensure the integrity of the LVIA. Cllr Wakefield reported that she had also written to Kate Murdoch, at SC, about a LVIA, and Cllr Wakefield's understands, from Kate Murdoch's response, that the LVIA will only be applied to sites going forward. It was agreed this situation needs to be monitored closely, with reassurances sought from SC. Chair emphasized that LVIA needs to cover the broad area of the Blackdown Vale, not just lot no 291200. Chair asked Cllr Wakefield to forward response from Kate Murdoch. One MoP explained current legislation works on "presumption for development", not against. Cllr Dan Fallance asked Mr Amos about the distortion of housing numbers, and Mr Amos confirmed he continues to challenge this in parliament.

26.33 Attendance and Apologies

Councillors Present: Cllr Daniel Fallance, Cllr Patricia Fallance, Cllr Colin Fisher (Chair), Cllr Rob Hossell, Cllr Graeme Watt, Cllr Tania Watt

Apologies: Cllr Rebecca Pow

In attendance: Mr Gideon Amos MP, Cllr Sarah Wakefield, Somerset Council, Sarah Fisher (Clerk)

26.34 Declarations of Interest – The Chair declared an interest in relation to **item 26.38** (a request for a financial contribution to Save The Blackdown Vale campaign), and indicated he would leave the meeting for this discussion. Clerk advised Chair, Cllr Hossell and Cllr Pow to resubmit their Declaration of Interest forms owing to their connection to the same campaign.

26.35 Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2026 were circulated in advance of the meeting and were approved and signed by the Chair

26.36 Finance

a) Balances (as at 11th Sept 2026)

Current A/c: £6,627.95

Deposit A/c: £9,217.87

95 Day notice A/c: £7,196.41

Cllr Tania Watt confirmed these balances as correct.

b) Expenditure approval:	£
i. ROSPA Play Safety play area inspection	123.60
ii. SSM Village Hall, hire	32.00
All above expenditure was APPROVED	

26.37 Play Area Annual Inspection – Clerk reported that the annual inspection of the play area had taken place and the report had been circulated. All matters were categorised as low risk, but there was mention of damage to some of the wooden legs caused by strimming. Clerk believes this to be historical damage (not since we highlighted the issue to the grounds maintenance team) and did not relate to any new equipment. It was agreed to hold over a working party (varnishing/tidying up) to next Spring/Summer.

Cllr Wakefield presented her report (supplementary to her written SC September report which is published on SSM PC website). 1. She stated that SC's financial position and auditing processes are improving. 2. There is a free Health & Wellbeing Info Drop-in session on 1st Oct at Trull Village Memorial Hall (1-4pm). This will be promoted on SSM PC website. 3. Plans are moving ahead for a storage and distribution centre at Nexus 25 (see also item 26.43). 4. £5m of Flood Fund allocated for parishes – parishes will be consulted.

26.38 New Town/Taylor Wimpey – Chair explained that he is aiming to coordinate all local parishes affected by potential new town development ("Blackdown Parishes Group"), which would endorse and sponsor anything the Save The Blackdown Vale campaign do. Cllr Wakefield to follow up with Corfe PC.

Mr Gideon Amos MP, and Cllr Wakefield left the meeting at 8.25. The Chair thanked both for their attendance and support.

The Chair was asked to justify why a donation to Save the Blackdown Vale was necessary, and the Chair explained that some costs had already been borne personally by members of the campaign, and he anticipated costs would increase. Funds would be used to communicate and consult with the community/for marketing materials, and would not be used retrospectively. The Chair left the meeting (see 26.34). All Councillors voted in favour of a donation of £500 with no conditions/constraints imposed, and agreed it could be used retrospectively.

Chair returned to the room, and on thanking Councillors, assured the meeting that accounts would be published on the campaign website.

26.39 Clerk's report/action list from previous meeting –

- 1. SCRAPP (Somerset Communities Rage Against Poor Planning) AGM** is on 30th Sept 2026 at 7pm in Keinton Mandeville. As members of this group, we are welcome to attend, and Clerk can provide further details if anyone is interested in attending
- Clerk confirmed local government pay awards have finally been announced for 2026/27. An increase of 3.3% has been applied and this should be back-dated to April 2026.

26.40 To consider a request for a donation to Stoke St Mary Congregational Chapel – it was agreed NEM COM to donate £200 towards maintenance, and to offer advice/introduce contacts for possible further grant funding. Clerk to organise.

26.41 Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Community Flood Action Fund Parts A & B.

Cllr Graeme Watt updated on both phases of this work. Part A complete now, with residual work of wood stacking conducted in place of bon-firing, with final Part A bill of £500 ex VAT included in claim to SRA. Part B complete apart from re-seeding which will be done when weather is suitable (seed purchased). Final claim form submitted to SRA for £6100 ex VAT for both parts of the project - Cllr Graeme Watt anticipates full payment by the SRA. Land drainage consent was granted for part B with no otter/vole surveys required. Summary of project learnings - project objectives were achieved, but timings were off target although the SRA deadline (end Sept) was met. All invoices from contractor received and will now be paid. The Chair thanked Cllr Graeme Watt for managing such an excellent piece of work. "

26.42 Councillor Portfolio Reports –

Staff – Cllr Tania Watt has calculated Clerk's back pay following Local Government pay awards. Clerk's appraisal will take place in October.

Volunteers – Cllr Graeme Watt reported that a loan camera had been used to inspect and survey drains, and it is believed that SC have now been out to clear the marked drains. There are three planned volunteer activities: 1. Broughton Brook S bend in middle of village dug/cleared out. 2. Cleaning/inspection of road signage (replace if necessary), 3. Monitor drains as necessary.

Drainage/flood control – see Volunteers above

Highways – see Volunteers above

Traffic/speed management – Chair reported Haydon Speed Indicator Device (SID) still working well. No news on additional SID in Corfe/Orchard Portman (now under the control of Neroche Parish Council).

Rights of Way – nothing to report.

Play Area – continues to be well used, see also item 26.37

Village Hall – Cllr Dan Fallance reported there are significant maintenance issues ahead – windows, curtains, review of heating. The pop-up pub team plan another night before end of year.

Police – Cllr Dan Fallance reported there had been a break in in Meare Green but otherwise quiet.

Local Community Networks (LCNs)/devolution – nothing to report.

Half Moon Inn – nothing to report

Taunton Garden Town Advisory Board (TG TAB) – Cllr Hossell reported that TG TAB had written to Taylor Wimpey about the latter's misleading use of the "Taunton Garden" name in their marketing material.

26.43 Planning –

Barns at Higher Broughton Farm – Crown Estate had written (5th Aug) to apologise for the delay in action on this application (siting the need for further surveys/assessments) but confirmed there has been little change to the plans last shared with the PC.

Nexus 25 – Cllr Hossell confirmed the due decision date for this development is 8th October. The PC have been invited to a meeting with the client's PR company (date still to be agreed), and a public consultation is due to take place end Sept/early Oct.

26.44 To review and confirm the following policy documents:

-Volunteer policy and Procedures framework (Sept 24). Cllr Graeme Watt suggests some minor amendments and modifications to the Risk Assessment template.

-Equality & Diversity policy – All councillors approved the policy.

-Safeguarding policy – All councillors approved the policy

All above policies will be updated on SSM PC website.

26.45 Date of next meeting: Thursday, 19th November at 7.30pm

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm.