



# Stoke St Michael

## Village Design Statement

July 2016

Final

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Stoke St Michael Village Design Statement

## The Purpose of this Village Design Statement

This village design statement (VDS) is the follow up to an extensive questionnaire, compiled in 2013, set up by a small group of parishioners who were considering developing a neighbourhood plan. The plan was put into abeyance but the seeds for a VDS were sown. The parish wide survey included information and statistics on the village and its facilities, best and worst aspects of the village, views on new housing developments and subsequent business aspects, concerns over the quality of life in our village, travel, social isolation, and what improvements parishioners wanted.

This document gives a focus on Stoke St Michael that highlights design and local distinctiveness. It is a way of

recording and celebrating what the village community feels are the features that make our area unique. These aspects can be used to frame design guidelines and to inform initial discussion with developers. VDSs are a non-statutory form of guidance which local communities may prepare. Their main aim is to encourage developers and householders to design new buildings or extensions to buildings (including use of materials, boundaries, fences and tree planting) so that they are in keeping with existing local character. Once adopted by the District Council, a VDS becomes a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications.

## The Process

An article in the village newsletter encouraged the formation of a working party of villagers to draw up a Village Design Statement. They were to use the Natural England/ Countryside Commission and CPRE's VDS guidelines as a template. Membership of the group was open to anyone interested. Meetings were always arranged in both the village school during afternoons and in the village hall in the evenings. All the sessions were advertised in the village newsletter, on the parish notice boards and in the village shop window.

This document is the work of local people with local insight. The group comprises: John Johnston, Sebastian Wolf, Rachel and John McEntee, Michael Williams, Nick Tinworth, Jackie Adams, Teresa Taylor Wolf, Becky Alexander, Tanya Squire, Anna Mearns, Kelly Baker, Sarah and Alun Stewart, Colin and Cecily Middle, Louise Green, Malcolm Martin, Barry Maggs, Keith Holder, Jan Cullen, Emma Cullen and

Simon Clark. Officers from the Planning Policy Department of Mendip District Council provided advice and assistance at key stages.

A community exhibition was linked to the annual parish meeting and a full display of resources, the photographic archive and maps was on display throughout the afternoon and evening. This event was promoted through the Lychgate newsletter, available in the shop and pub in the village.

The Draft VDS was published for consultation in May / June 2016 and residents, infrastructure providers, local organisations and developers were invited to comment. A small number of responses were received and considered by the Parish Council in the compilation of the final draft. The Parish Council were asked to ratify the statement in July 2016 in readiness for adoption by MDC in August 2016.

## Introduction

Stoke St Michael is a Somerset village 4 miles from Shepton Mallet and 8 miles from Frome and Wells. There are around 400 dwellings in the village. The wider parish includes the hamlets of Midway, Three Ashes, East End, Stoke Bottom, Withybrook and Fosse Road. It is set in the characteristic East Mendip landscape of farmland and pastures, streams and swallets, wooded valleys, quarries and caves.

There is a C17th pub and the surrounding countryside shelters SSSIs and conservation areas. The church, though largely a Victorian renovation, has a tower from c1400. There is village shop and post office, a primary school and pre-school. There are buses to Bath via Radstock, Wells via Shepton Mallet and a service to Frome.



## Geographic and Historic background

First mention of the village occurs in 982 AD. Evidence of human activity in the area of the Mendips stretches back to Neolithic times and historically the inhabitants of Stoke St Michael have used the natural landscape around them to develop their way of life and economy. The lush pastures were used for grazing sheep that were reared for their wool. When the enclosure act came into force, the grazing of cattle became more predominant. The milk from the cattle was transported to London via the railway at Cranmore and until the 1970s a milk processing plant took milk from 26 farms in the area.

The numerous streams not only provided the villagers with their water but also enabled them to develop water meadows and small industries in the form of cotton mills and paper making. An edge tool industry known as the Stoke Lane Iron works was also developed here.

Coal was mined up until the early C19th and quarrying for limestone was carried out on a large scale in the C20th in Cookswood, Fairy Cave and Stoke Lane quarries, all of which are now disused. Quarrying still plays a part in the landscape and economy of the village. Moons Hill quarry to the south of the village has been owned and operated by John Wainwright and Co since 1897. It is the only basalt quarry in the Mendips and the south of England. Stoke Lane quarry remains wild and abandoned though the mineral rights are still extant.

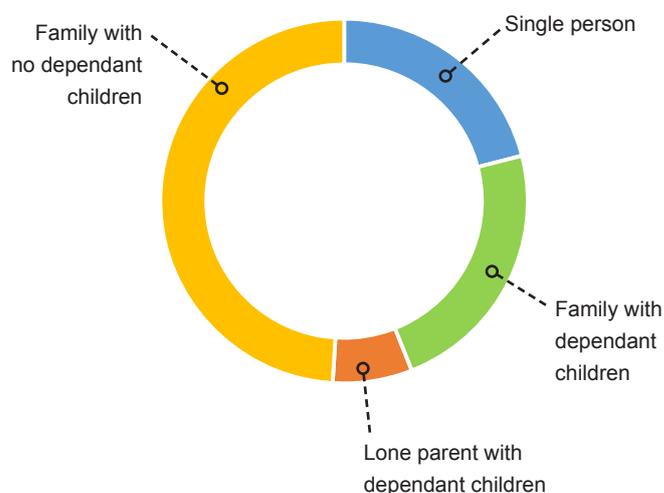


## The Village Today

Figures from the 2011 census record 488 households within the parish and a population of 1,239. The demographic makeup is shown in the diagram to the right. Respondents in a survey of residents conducted in 2012 described the village as friendly and welcoming. The surrounding countryside and the opportunity to use the many footpaths and bridleways are highly valued, whilst traffic was cited as one of the worst aspects of village life.

For a small rural village, Stoke St Michael retains a lot of facilities that are well regarded and used by villagers. They include:

- A **pre-school** and **primary school**
- The **shop** and **post office**
- The **Knatchbull Arms** which regularly holds live music, karaoke and quiz nights
- The **playing field** with a small children's play area and a skate park for older children. It is also where Stoke Rovers football club play.
- The **allotments**
- The **Memorial Hall**, used regularly by a baby and toddler group, junior and senior youth clubs, an exercise class and Parish Council meetings. It is also used for functions including birthday parties, wedding receptions and coffee mornings.
- The **parish church** of St Michael and All Angels which holds Sunday services 3 times a month and also organises other events such as Taize community singing and concerts.
- The **Earth Science Centre** at Wainwright's Moons Hill quarry, which provides an educational facility in geology, quarrying and environmental science for schools, colleges and other local educational groups. It also provides forest school for the village primary school.
- The **Millennium Wood**
- The **Millennium green** and **lychgate**, a popular place to play pooh sticks and the venue for the annual Duck Race.



## The character of the landscape setting

The parish extends to around 1,920 acres. Stoke St Michael is set in a landscape of pastures, streams, swallets, wooded valleys and quarries. There are sites of special scientific interest at Fairy Caves, Cookswood and Edford Wood. Disused quarries have been reclaimed by nature.

Other remains of industrial past are evident in limekilns and waterways for the C19th edge tool works and bell pits. There are open views of the Mendip Hills. Views from Three Ashes, a hamlet to the west of the village, show arable land and meadows. Deciduous woodlands, both old and new, can be found in the parish.

The parish boundary encompasses Edford Wood and Harridge Wood on the northern edge. The Millennium Wood runs down to the centre of the village on land provided by Somerset. The village stream below Cooks Farm disappears down a swallow hole and those brave enough to explore this swallet can revel in an extensive cave system. The Fairy Caves on Limekiln Lane rival Cheddar Caves and Wookey. Some landscaped parkland remains in Ashwick Grove. Small settlements are common within the parish boundary. Withybrook, Midway, Three Ashes, Stoke Bottom and East End are distinctive communities with working farms. Historic buildings dot the landscape.



Roads into the village are distinctly rural. They are largely narrow lanes through farmland bordered by hedging, smallholdings, paddocks, woodland and streams. These roads offer views of a purely pastoral landscape. There is an excellent network of footpaths. These are well marked and well used. Some bridleways exist for the community of horses and riders in the area. Springs and streams support wildlife and are a distinct feature of the parish. The village stream runs through the centre of the village to the Mill, Cooks Farm and beyond deep into the hillside by Stoke Lane quarry. It is used for the annual Duck Race, as a play space and has a history as the source for the old horse pond. This is now replaced by the Lychgate and garden.

There is a feeling of spaciousness exemplified by houses with large gardens, the mixed density of housing and green space in the centre of areas such as the Moonshill estate and St Michael's Close. Situated in a small valley, many of the houses enjoy views over the Mendips and many have large gardens.

## Settlement pattern

The centre of the village is located at the convergence of the four main roads which provides an open space known as the Square. This is the location for the 17th century Knatchbull Arms, the village shop, post office and Memorial Hall, making for a traditional village centre. St Michael's Church, with its C15th clock tower and Art Nouveau windows is to the north along Church Street.

Radiating out from the middle of Stoke St Michael are the four main roads of the village:

- Mendip Road - south to Cranmore
- Stoke Hill - west to Oakhill
- Church Street / Tower Hill - north towards Holcombe
- The Hollow - east to Leigh on Mendip.

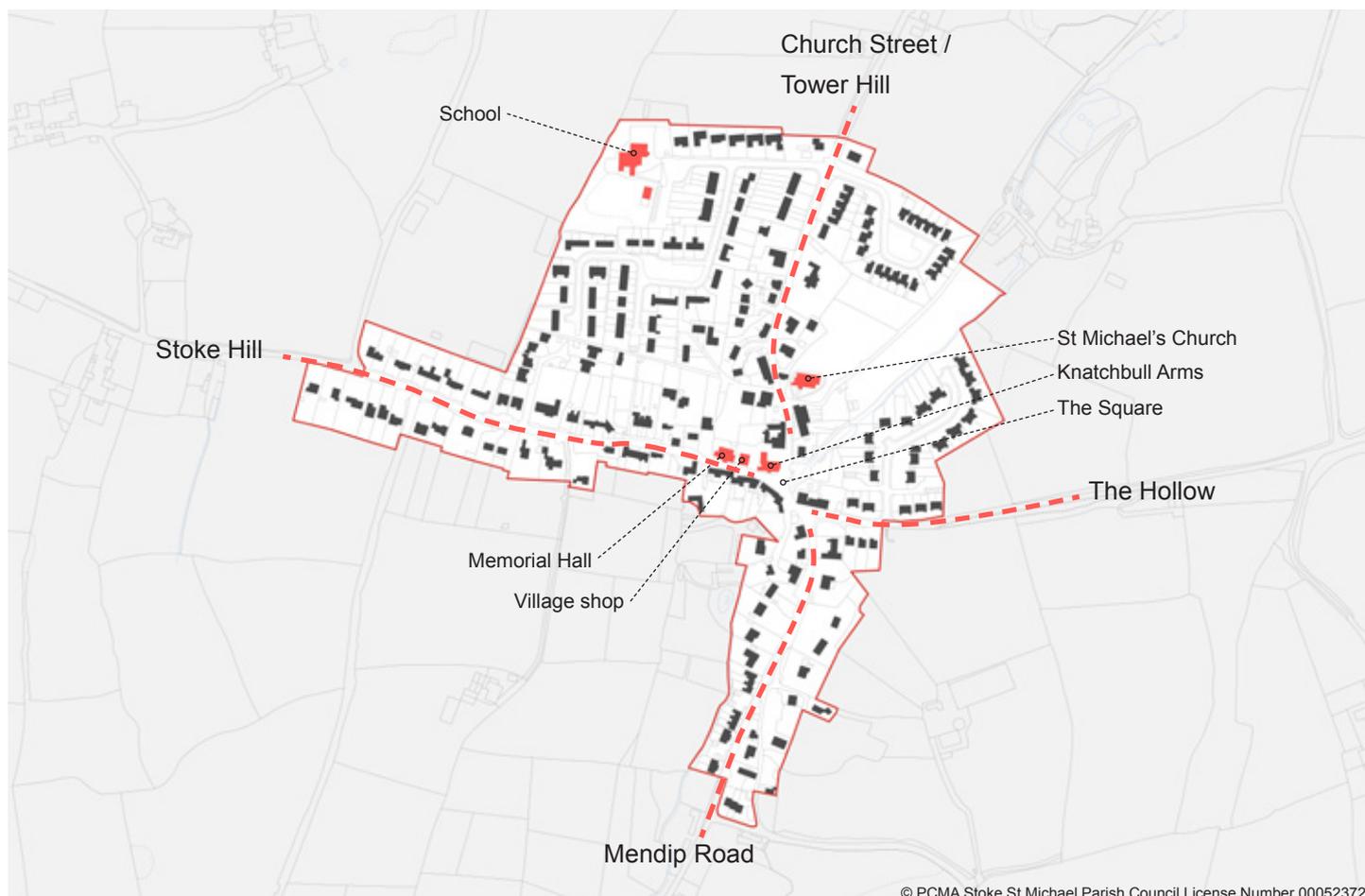
Busiest of these are Stoke Hill and Mendip Road, as they carry much of the heavy commercial traffic.

In the past, much of the housing and several farms were built along the four roads and some of these older houses remain, including C15th Tooses Farm and the C17th Manor

House. Some cottages in Mendip Road and Stoke Hill were built at the turn of the last century by traditional Mendip gypsies who settled here.

The Slum Clearances, begun in the 1930s, saw a huge number of the older dwellings swept away and the village lost many old cottages, mainly on the northern side of the village. Newer buildings now fill in the gaps left behind, giving the village a rich variety of architectural styles.

Following slum clearance, the pattern of housing changed as fields were taken up to create roads and small estates, the largest of these being Moonshill. In the 1970s other pockets of development appeared including The Mead, Mead Close and St Michael's Close. The practice of building in the numerous small quarries or re-using semi-industrial land continues to the present day; Millennium Close and Steeple View are recent examples. Other housing built recently includes Primary Close and Waters Edge.



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## Buildings in the village

The buildings in Stoke St Michael are distinguished by appearance, size, style and their history. Their date of construction forms the greatest influence on materials and design. Today, buildings are largely residential or tied to farming.

There are 31 Grade II listed buildings in the parish including the Knatchbull Arms. Tooses Farm, in the middle of the village, is at least five hundred years old. The Manor House on Church Street, once used as a general stores that later became a sweet shop, is noteworthy. Home House and Manor House Farm are impressive. Crosslynds, on the central crossroads, is a well-proportioned Georgian building. The village contains many stone terraces built of the local rubble stone.

There are examples of building developments throughout the C20th. Moonshill Cottages are from the 1930s, Moonshill estate is post WWII, The Mead is 1970s and Water's Edge from the 1990s. More recently, Grumbles Farm is a modern sustainable self-build home using locally sourced timber for cladding.

Housing is mostly on a small scale with two stories. Much of the building is in ribbon developments along the four routes to and from the village.



## Open spaces in the village

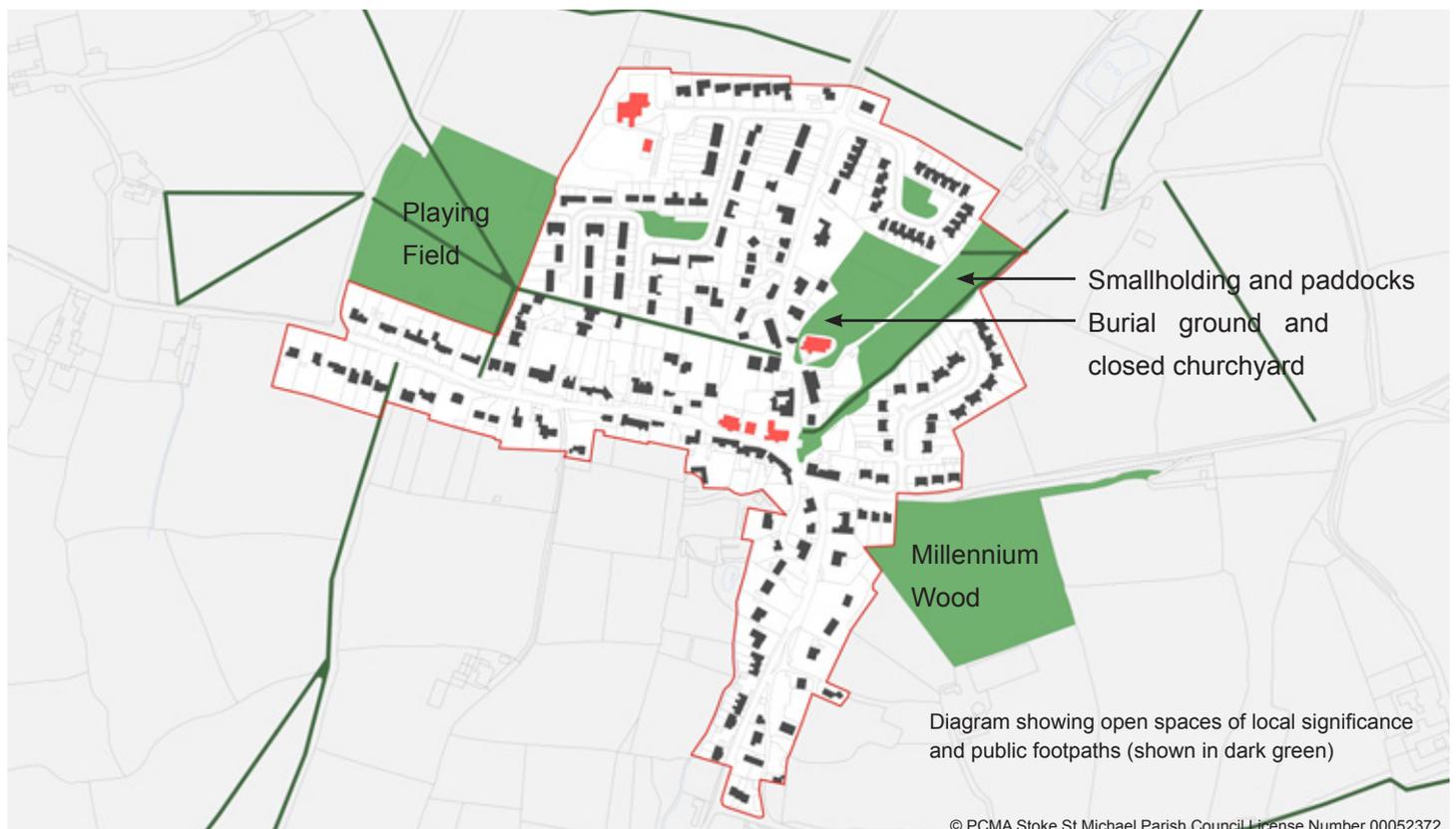
Stoke St Michael is criss-crossed with footpaths and bridleways that link farms and settlements across the parish. These open up the land on the fringe of the village to dog walkers, horse riders and all who enjoy the open countryside.

The community playing field is a protected recreation area and the whole parish is within a bat consultation zone. Three Ashes lane and fields are grass and marshland sites with restrictions in place. To the north west the caves in Cook's Wood and Stoke Lane quarry with their adjacent woodlands are SSSIs. Further afield in the parish Edford wood and Bector wood and Fairy Cave quarry are also designated as SSSIs. However there are no Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, no green belt and no conservation areas. The woodland is not listed as ancient woodland. The centre of the village is registered as an area of high archaeological interest.

The village has smaller spaces that lend character to each site. The Lychgate and garden is well used and comes into its own for the Duck Race each summer. The large green

on the Moonshill estate is a busy play space for youngsters. Property in St Michael's Close borders the grass and mature trees that are in the centre of this cul-de-sac.

Parishioners are within sight of open spaces. Children are within range of natural adventurous play space. Those on horseback or on foot can roam far and wide and be off roads within minutes. Formal play space is limited to the children's playground and the skate ramps on the football field, but the Parish Council is committed to the purchase of the Millennium wood to guarantee access to maturing deciduous woodland for all to enjoy.



## Natural environment in the village

Stoke St Michael sits in a wonderful landscape defined by farmland and pastures linked by a network of hedgerows and interspersed with wooded valleys, streams and springs. The historical quarries are of great ecological and geological importance.

There are four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within just 2 km of the village. These are notable for their geology, cave systems, semi-natural woodland, unimproved meadows and pastures and unimproved calcareous grassland. These SSSI's are linked to the village itself through the extensive natural corridors that surround them. With such a diverse range of natural habitats there is a wealth of wildlife.

### Mammals

Roe Deer, fox, badger, weasel and stoat are found within the area alongside many other species including mole, brown hare, rabbit, field mouse, field vole and bank vole.

The European protected otter is regularly recorded on the streams and rivers of the area, particularly within the Nettlebridge and Stoke Bottom valley. It is not unknown for individuals to make it as far as the garden ponds of Stoke St Michael village residents.

Numerous bat species can be found in the area, but of particular significance are the greater horseshoe, lesser horseshoe and natterer's bat that use the local cave systems.



Roe Deer Buck - Photo by Lynne Newton

### Birds

The woodlands and hedgerows provide a fantastic breeding and feeding area for many songbirds e.g. dunnock, wren, blackbird, nuthatch, tree-creeper and greater spotted woodpecker. On the local streams, heron, kingfisher, yellow wagtail and dipper can be seen whilst the quarries provide a home to species such as raven and peregrine.

### Amphibians and reptiles

Frog, toad, newt, slow worm and grass snake are found throughout the landscape. Of notable importance is the great crested newt that has been recorded in some local ponds.

### Invertebrates

A variety of invertebrates can be found in the area including many bees, butterflies, hoverflies, moths and beetles.

### Botanical Interest

The semi natural woodlands and old hedgerows contain many trees and scrubs including ash, alder, oak sp, willow sp, holly, hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel. Species such as bluebell, ransomes, and wood anemone carpet the woodland floors in the spring and some rarities found include monk's hood, wild daffodil, solomon's seal and herb paris. In the meadows and unimproved pasture crested dogs tail, quaking grass, cowslip, pignut, yellow rattle, green winged and heath spotted orchid are some representatives of these important plant communities.



Oak - Photo by Lynne Newton

## Highways and traffic

The village's four main roads that meet in the centre are all lined with domestic properties. All the roads are rural in nature and while they have not changed or been upgraded, the last 50 years have seen a significant increase in the amount of traffic that they carry and the size and weight of vehicles they support. Many of the roads do not have pavements.

The north / south route is used by commuters at rush hour. Mendip Road, Stoke Hill and Frog Lane provide a route for HGVs, particularly in relation to the haulage of raw materials and concrete products for Stowell Concrete based in Holcombe. Residents have repeatedly expressed concern over the speed of vehicles and size of HGVs through the village. Noise issues have been raised, particularly when HGVs travel through in the early hours of the morning, as well as the impact of vibration on housing adjacent to the roads.

There is a lack of space allocated to pedestrians and cyclists on key routes through the village and in its centre. In the Village Survey many residents have requested additional pavements eg on Mendip Road and in the centre, particularly for children walking to and from school. Speeds through some parts of the village can exceed 30mph. A Community Speed Watch group works to raise awareness and reduce speeding.

The installation of inappropriate street furniture and the accumulation of signs over the years have created visual clutter on some roads which diminishes the effectiveness of important signs and undermines the unique visual character of the village.

Parking is problematic in many areas of the village such as Church Street, where vehicles frequently park on the pavement restricting pedestrian access. Parking and emergency vehicle access is also compromised in other areas of the village. There are many residents who park outside their homes in the Moonshill Estate and, because of lack of off-road parking provision and increasing car ownership, emergency vehicles could have difficulty reaching Field Close.

The selection of future development sites within the village will need to consider the severe width restrictions on key highway routes through the village. The historic settlement pattern has created difficulties for modern traffic flows with road widths measuring less than 4 metres and in some key locations less than 3.5 metres. The absence of pavements makes some significant parts of the highway network unsuitable for pedestrians. Therefore there is a requirement for creative highway design solutions being agreed prior to the granting of any planning consents.



## Character Studies

Stoke St Michael's built form has a rich diversity of architectural design and appearance but can be divided into six areas.

- Village Centre (blue)
- Mendip Road (red)
- The Mead and Mead Close (green)
- Moonshill (orange)
- St Michael's Close and Tower Hill (Pink)
- Stoke Hill (yellow)

These are looked at in more detail in the following pages.



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## Village Centre

Area	2.81 ha
Dwellings	54
Dwellings per hectare	19.2

Four roads lead down to the crossroads and roundabout that dominate the heart of the village. This is known as the Square. Some of the older buildings are found here, notably the C17th Knatchbull Arms, the Manor House, Crosslynds and the old village school. The terrace of cottages to the south was, in living memory, a post office and garage, a baker and a butcher's shop. The current village shop is between the pub and the Memorial Hall which is in frequent use by all ages. Much of the centre of the village flanking Church Street and Tower Hill, the lower reaches of Mendip Road and Stoke Hill is designated as an area of high archaeological potential.

Key characteristics are:

- local random stone used in buildings adjacent to the Square
- pastel painted render on the terrace of cottages
- a traditional signpost by Bourne House
- variety of scale to the buildings
- variety of building use
- the village millennium green and Lychgate opens up to the Square
- open access to the village stream
- roofs of differing materials, roman tiles or slates
- no clear building line that stretches along the four main roads leading from the centre
- generally no front gardens and no boundary walls
- parking is largely on the street



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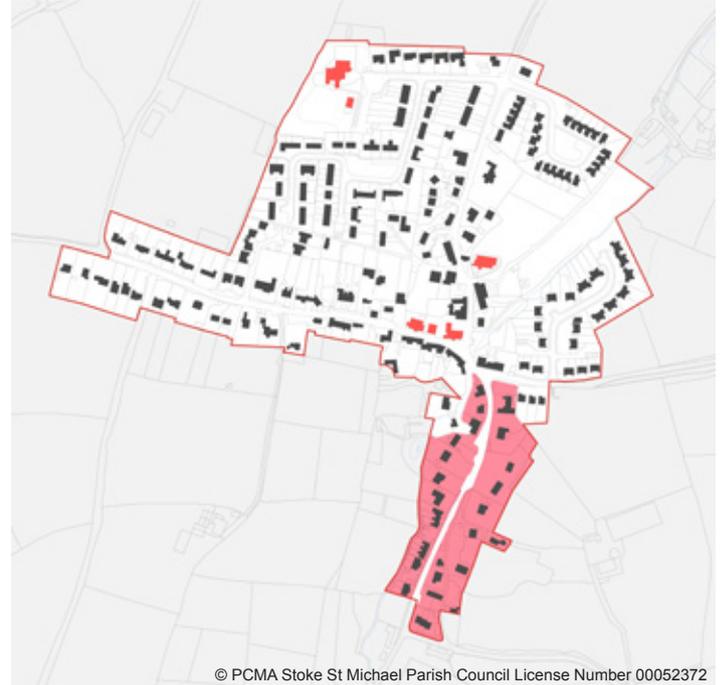
## Mendip Road

Area	2.18 ha
Dwellings	33
Dwellings per hectare	15.1

The Mendip Road area of the village is located to the south and has grown up as a ribbon of houses alongside the road. The buildings vary in age from 1800s to present day constructions.

Key characteristics are:

- detached buildings or small terraces
- stone or painted render facades
- traditional pitched roofs
- buildings set back from road
- large gardens open to countryside
- mature trees
- driveways
- valley topography
- mostly off street parking
- lack of pavements at key areas



## The Mead and Mead Close

Area	1.57 ha
Dwellings	44
Dwellings per hectare	28

This estate is on the site of the old milk factory that closed in 1932 and was demolished in 1977 to make way for these houses. Mead Close is an extension of the first development. The properties are of uniform sizes and designs very typical of the time. Parking is on driveways and the front gardens are unfenced giving greater width and space to the street view. The colour scheme is a uniform reconstituted stone façade with white doorways and window frames. All the houses have views of farmland or over the smallholding across the village stream.

Key characteristics are:

- uniform semi-detached and detached property
- open plan front gardens
- parking on driveways for the majority of houses
- mature trees on the fringes of the estate
- white doors and window styles



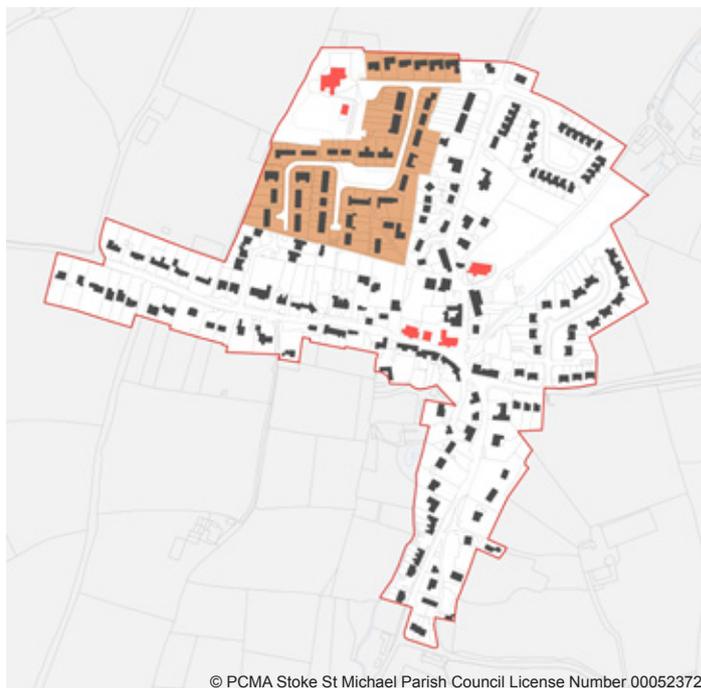
## Moonshill

Area	2.64
Dwellings	75
Dwellings per hectare	28.4

An estate that was started in 1928 and largely built in the 1930s. It was once a council estate and now retains some housing association property, managed by Aster Homes. Field Close is a recent addition that includes housing association property. This cul-de-sac runs along side the community field. Moonshill homes are terraced and semi-detached, usually brick built although some are stone blockwork. The site surrounds a green with open play space and mature trees. Blocks of garages are provided but the majority of households must park on the street. The village school moved here in 1984. Land adjacent to the school was sold and provided sites for large private bungalows and gardens.

Key characteristics are:

- Brick built construction of the original properties
- Both terraces and semis flank the green
- Pavements run throughout the estate
- Tiles are uniformly red romans
- There are front gardens for all the houses
- The estate homes are all two stories with uniform roof lines
- The buildings are aligned on a regular grid pattern of side roads and access roads



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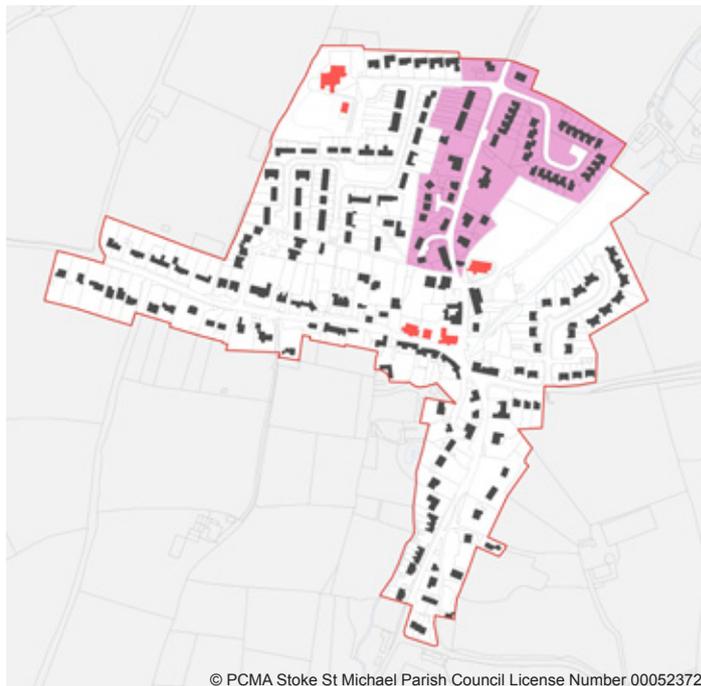
## St Michael's Close and Tower Hill

Area	2.70 ha
Dwellings	60
Dwellings per hectare	22.2

This is the road that links Church Street to places to the north of the village. There is a natural bottleneck in this street and consequently a weight restriction of 7.5 tons, except for access. The road leads to the Moonshill Estate, created between the wars. To the east is access to St Michael's Close. Older houses on the hill are stone built. Front gardens are constrained by the narrow roadway, though estate homes do have some space. Many have created parking bays at the expense of gardens.

Key characteristics are:

- there are two modern cul-de-sacs leading off the hill, Steeple View and Millennium Close
- there is no clear cut building line either side of the road
- many homes have porches or canopies over the front doors
- there is a variety of window styles both ancient and modern
- roof lines, ridge heights and materials vary considerably



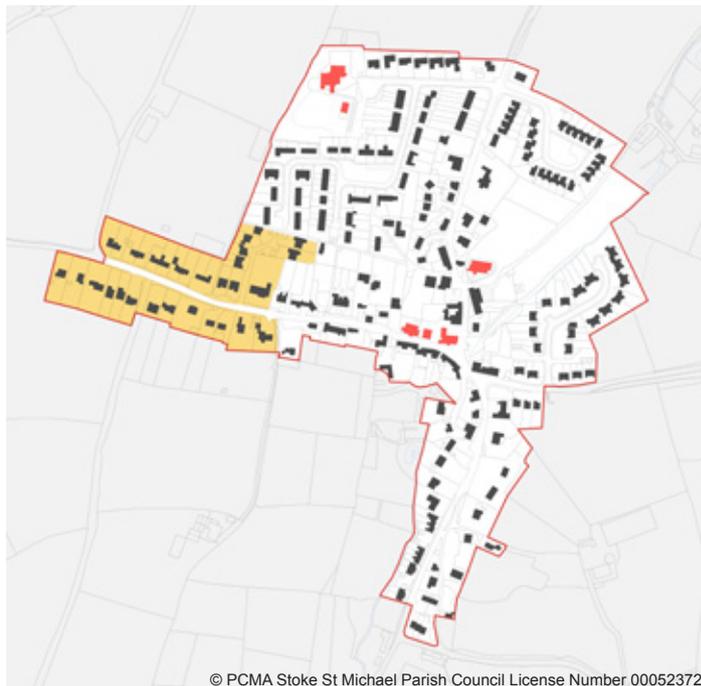
## Stoke Hill

Area	2.55 ha
Dwellings	33
Dwellings per hectare	12.9

This road takes you west out of the village towards Oakhill. There are buildings from the C15th to C20th. Tooses Farm may be the oldest house in the village, Home House a fine manor house on the outskirts, Sweetleaze a well proportioned row of 1930s semi-detached homes and C19th artisan cottages and post-war detached houses are evident on both sides of the hill. There is a modern cul-de-sac of private houses known as Stoke Crescent.

Key characteristics are:

- local random stone used in the C19th terraced cottages on the hill
- brightly painted front doors
- roofing is usually with double roman tiles
- there are no pavements
- where parking exists it is on driveways rather than in garages
- boundary walls tend to be stone built with cock and hen tops
- the building line is very varied
- many houses have front gardens so homes are set well back from the road
- houses have extensive views to the north or south over arable fields
- the old farm livestock auction block is still in place at the top of Stoke Hill
- older properties have dressed stone mullions around their windows, some with staggered stone known as 'Frome ears'



## Recommendations

### R01 Building lines

Existing building lines (facades) should be maintained for infill development

*Reason - To ensure that the established settlement pattern is maintained and enhanced. To ensure that no new building is more prominent than its neighbours*

### R02 Building heights

New buildings should be no higher than its immediate neighbours and the roof forms should be similar or subservient

*Reason – To ensure visual harmony*

### R03 Infill development density

New infill development should be at a density appropriate for the area of the village. These densities have been identified in the area studies in earlier chapters

*Reason – to ensure that the established character of areas of SSM are maintained and in order to prevent over development*

### R04 Larger development density

Large development sites should match the average density of SSM

*Reason – to prevent over development*

### R05 Pavements and footpaths

- a New development should ensure that provision for pavements and pedestrian routes is considered where possible
- b Development near or adjacent to established rights of way should enhance access and awareness eg signage or improved gates
- c New development along the roadway should consider the provision of pavements where this is lacking

*Reason – to improve pedestrian safety*

### R06 Materials

- a Traditional materials sourced locally should be encouraged. Eg local rubble stonework or local timber cladding
- b Larger developments should display a variety of different materials and not be standardised national housing types

*Reason - to ensure that the varied character of SSM is maintained*

### R07 Boundaries

Low boundary walls alongside roadways should be built from local stone with a traditional cock and hen coping

*Reason – To enhance the streetscape*

Continued

## Recommendations

### R08 Parking

All new development should ensure that adequate off-street parking provision is provided

*Reason - Many houses in the village do not have adequate off-street parking provision. This situation should not be made worse by future development*

### R09 Open spaces

Large development sites to provide publically accessible open amenity space appropriate to the scale of development or enhance existing village spaces eg the play area or playing field facilities

*Reason – to ensure that the village benefits from new open spaces and that existing facilities are improved*

### R10 Natural environment

Local wildlife can benefit by creating wildlife friendly landscaping around new developments, for example planting native hedges, creating wooded areas, providing wetland features such as ponds, creating hibernaculum, incorporating green roofs into designs and planting flower rich grasslands etc. Such landscaping can also provide an opportunity to develop connectivity between existing habitat networks as well as providing a valuable community asset for play, relaxation and recreation. Within the development there should be scope to incorporate nesting and roosting sites for birds (e.g. swift and barn owl) and bats.

*Reason – to ensure that Stoke St Michael's natural environment is enhanced*

### R11 Hard landscaping

Porous surfaces should be encouraged for external areas surrounding development eg permeable paving for parking areas.

Note: Stoke St Michael is located in zone 1 of a Source Protection Area and new development connected to non mains drainage may require a permit from the Environment Agency.

*Reason – to minimise rainwater runoff and the overwhelming of drainage systems*

### R12 Affordable housing

Large development should make provision for affordable housing located in SSM. This should be integrated into larger developments rather than located separately

*Reason – the local need for affordable housing has been identified. Integrated affordable housing is more successful in creating a varied village community*

### R13 Street furniture

The provision of new street furniture, external lighting and signage needs to be considered carefully. Street furniture should be appropriate eg galvanised utilitarian light columns are not appropriate in the historic centre of the village

*Reason – to enhance the character of the village and minimise unnecessary visual clutter*

## Bibliography and Credits

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Year</b>
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