



## *Stratton St. Margaret*

### **Caught in the act**

Mindless yobs smashed a new bus shelter in Stratton St Margaret in another moment of deliberate destruction that leaves Swindon taxpayers with an annual bill of around £1 million. This time, however, the youngsters were caught on film. Oxford Road resident Pam Ball was so fed up after a firebomb attack on her car that she set up a camera at her window to monitor the outside of her home at night. Mrs Ball, 59, caught two children as they walked along her street, picked up stones from the pavement and brazenly threw them at the shelter opposite Whilestone Way before running off. Moments earlier another bus shelter window further down the road met a similar fate. Mrs Ball, who has lived in Oxford Road all her life, described the all too frequent vandalism in Swindon as a "disease". Her comments are backed by Swindon Council, which today revealed the shocking cost of petty vandalism in the town through materials for repairs and wasted man hours. "I put the camera up because I just didn't feel safe in my own home anymore," said Mrs Ball. "Why are children allowed to roam the streets so late at night? It is disgusting. There's no control anymore and people ought to be able to feel safe but they don't. The vandalism I caught on my camera was just out and out nastiness and there's no excuse for it. If the police ever find who is responsible then the parents should be made to pay for it. My children were brought up with discipline and that never hurt them."

Stratton St Margaret parish councillor David Roberts, 54, said the Oxford Road bus shelter had been in place for just two weeks before being smashed. He said: "I'm shocked but I can't say I'm surprised at what has happened. While people might think they can get away with vandalism they must remember they are on camera and being watched all the time."

Swindon Council spokesman Adrian Ruck said: "We don't have an exact figure but estimate that vandalism - everything from clearing up broken glass around public buildings to damaged bus shelters and car parks - costs the council around £1million each year." "This is a huge waste of public money and we urge people who witness vandalism to report it to the police as soon as possible."

Swindon Police have dealt with some 2,768 reports of deliberate damage to property over the last 12 months. Of these 767 were related to homes, 609 were other buildings and 1,393 were reports of damage to cars. Detective Inspector Bob Walton said: "Vandalism is often caused by offenders living within the local community and by people leaving pubs and clubs. Damage of this nature not only has a financial implication but causes distress and spoils the town for the majority of law-abiding citizens. "Often this type of offence is quick and unplanned and the chances of it being witnessed by a police officer are remote." "It is therefore vitally essential that any people witnessing such offences are prepared to come forward and provide us with evidence to convict offenders."

Police are studying the tapes recorded by Mrs Ball. One of the culprits appears to be between 5ft 3in and 5ft 5in and is wearing a white hooded top and dark trousers. The second individual is around 5ft and is wearing a dark top and trousers.

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