

SHEPTON BEAUCHAMP PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE SHEPTON BEAUCHAMP PARISH COUNCIL

Held on Monday 15th January 2024 at 7.30 pm
In the Village Hall, Middle Street, Shepton Beauchamp TA19 0LQ

Councillors present: Cllr David Bourn (Vice-Chairman) Cllr Andrew Rowswell
Cllr Angie Joy Cllr Ed Wakely
Cllr Tim England

In attendance: Stella Davies (Clerk)

Members of the public: There were 4 members of the public in attendance, including 2 members from Seavington Parish Council.

Unitary Councillors in attendance: Somerset Cllr Jo Roundell Greene (arrived 7.50 pm, left 8.50 pm)

Open session

A representative from the Events Team committee said that the Bonfire Night last November had been cancelled due to the weather, but that the company organising the Laser Display would not refund the £1,500 as it had been cancelled at short notice. They have agreed to do a laser display as long as it is before the end of March and so the Events Team would like this to take place at the recreation field on 16th March. It will be free entry to the villagers and the Events Team asked if the Parish Council would let them use the recreation field and pavilion free of charge. They will be running their food and drink stall as usual. It was suggested by one of the councillors that there was a donation pot, should people wish to contribute to the event. The council thought that the recreation committee should make the decision on this and Cllr England will contact them as soon as possible.

Report from Somerset Councillor

Cllr Roundell Greene reported that there had been an executive meeting today and they have a £100 million deficit and have to balance their budget. If they can't sort their finances then a 114 notice will have to be issued and the commissioners will come in. If this happens all non-statutory services will be stopped immediately. Savings have been made but the children's and adult services cost a lot and they have a statutory duty to provide these services. They have put forward proposals to close the Octagon, Westlands entertainment centre and Yeovil recreation centre. They have asked DLUHC (The Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities) if they can raise their council tax without a referendum to 9.99%. This would give the council another £17 million. They have also asked for a capitalisation directive, which means if they sell assets and have capital money coming in, then they can use it for revenue expenditure. The reason that the council is in this situation is that the 4 district councils and the county council were brought together into one organisation and they brought with them different amounts of money and different levels of borrowing. The interest has gone up which has made millions of pounds difference. They are hoping that by reshaping the council they can get this situation under control. There will be increases on the council tax bill from Somerset Council, the police and the Somerset Rivers authority.

Cllr England mentioned that there had been a street light not working in Piece Lane which had been reported over a week ago, but it had not yet been replaced. Cllr Roundell Greene asked for the reference number so she could follow it up.

In the absence of Cllr Wylie Carrick (Chairman) Cllr Bourn chaired the meeting.

Ser Item

- 1010. To receive apologies for absence and to approve the reasons given (LGA 1972, s85(1))**
Apologies were received from Cllr Howard (working) and Cllr Wylie Carrick (away)
Resolved. To accept and approve the apologies given.

1011. Declarations of interest – Members to declare any interest, including Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they may have in agenda items that accord with the requirements of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct and to consider any prior requests from members for dispensations that accord with the Localism Act s33 (b-e). (NB this does not preclude any later declarations)
There were no declarations of interest.

1012. To approve as a correct record the minutes/decisions of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 18th December 2023 (LGA 1972, sch 12, para 41(1)).
Resolved. That the minutes of the council meeting held on Monday 18th December be signed as correct.

1013. Casual Vacancy - Co-Option of new Parish Councillor/s
To resolve to appoint 1 or 2 new parish councillors to the vacant positions, who should sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office.
Resolved. To co-opt Hugo Stearn and Sally Burwood as Parish Councillors. Hugo Stearn was present at the meeting and signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office. He then joined the meeting. Sally Burwood was not able to attend, so will sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office at the next meeting that she attends. Both candidates were proposed by Cllr Bourn and approved unanimously.

1014. Parish Council Newsletter
To resolve to approve the January Parish Council newsletter at a cost of £85
Resolved. The January Parish Council Newsletter was approved.

1015. Virements
To resolve to approve the list of virements (previously circulated)
Resolved. The list of virements were approved.

1016. Budget for FY 24/25 and Precept
To resolve to agree the budget for the new financial year and to set the precept

A discussion took place around the current financial difficulties that Somerset Unitary Authority find themselves in, as a result of which they have declared a financial emergency. Many services previously paid for by them will need to be paid for by the Parish Council, either direct to the Unitary Authority, or if they cease to provide the service, then to a private contractor. They will not meet to make a final decision about these services until 20th February and in the meantime the Parish Council has to set their budget and inform the Unitary Authority of the precept amount that they require by 2nd February.

The Somerset Councillors had advised that the precept should be increased by 50–60% as a minimum, some Parishes were increasing their precept more than this. The parish councillors were not happy with a huge increase. Following a lengthy discussion and adjustments to some of the projected budgets, the revised budget was approved and the precept set, on the assumption that the council would need to use some of its reserves to meet the budgeted expenditure.

Resolved. To approve the revised budget and to set the precept at £40,000 (72p per week increase for a Band D taxpayer). This was a majority decision. The Clerk to inform Somerset Council.

Action – Parish Clerk

1017. Finance
To review the Bank Reconciliation as at 31st December 2023 (previously circulated).
To approve the schedule of payments totalling £2,055.03 (previously circulated)
Resolved. The Bank Reconciliation was approved and signed as correct by a non-cheque signatory. The payments were approved.

1018. Report from Clerk/RFO. For information only

Electricity for the Pavilion. The Clerk reported that she had moved the council to a 3-year fixed rate, which means that we are not paying 60p per day standing charge, instead of £2 per day. The KWH rate has reduced from 39.69p to 31.20p.

There is a change in law relating to funding church property and so we will now be able to pay a grant towards the maintenance of the churchyard.

She believes that Ilminster are setting up a Highways Steward Scheme, which will include mending of potholes and pavement edges etc. It may overlap with our replacement ranger for some jobs. She has emailed them for more information, but as yet has not received a reply.

She asked the councillors for a response to the SALC (Somerset Association of Local Councils) Asset and Service Devolution questions that they had sent out and so these questions were answered in the meeting. The Clerk will respond to SALC.

Action – Parish Clerk

1019. Reports. For information only

Highways

Cllr Rowsell reported that there were just the usual potholes which he had reported. Work was still going on at the crossroads, but we have not heard why it is taking so long. The street light at the bottom of Shells Lane has been reported. There is a street light out near the junction of Wash Cross Lane which will be reported. Cllr Wakely said he had cleared nearly every drain on Shepton Hill, but most of the drains are set deep into the hedge and so the water seems to be bypassing the drains and going straight down the hill. The top drain needs to be jetted properly.

Lethbridge Recreational Ground Committee

Nothing to report.

Ranger

In the absence of Cllr Wylie Carrick there was nothing to report

Allotments

In the absence of Cllr Howard there was nothing to report

Cowleaze

Cllr Bourn reported that it was a very quiet month, with not a lot happening.

Footpaths

It was noted that the footpaths were drying up, but there was nothing else to report.

To resolve to exclude members of the press and public. To agree that item 1020 below be dealt with after the public have been excluded as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

Resolved. The remaining members of the public were asked to leave the meeting.

1020. Tender for Ground Maintenance within the village

To review the tenders received and resolve which tender (if any) to accept.

Resolved. The tenders were reviewed and Somerset Landscapes was accepted unanimously.

The Clerk is to prepare a contract.

Action – Parish Clerk

Meeting closed: 9.10 pm