

SHEPTON BEAUCHAMP PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE SHEPTON BEAUCHAMP PARISH COUNCIL

Held on Monday 21st October 2024 at 7.30 pm
In the Village Hall, Middle Street, Shepton Beauchamp TA19 OLQ

Councillors present: Cllr Nigel Wylie Carrick (Chairman) Cllr David Bourn (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Angie Joy Cllr Ed Wakely
Cllr Tim England Cllr Nick Howard
Cllr Sally Burwood

In attendance: Stella Davies (Clerk)

Members of the public: There were 13 members of the public in attendance.

Unitary Councillors in attendance: Somerset Cllr Jo Roundell Greene sent her apologies

Open session (opened at 7.30 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)

Before the open session the Chairman commented that we had had unprecedented weather in the last few days which had coincided with the harvest season and is not an ideal situation. He said it would affect (a) people on an individual basis, and householders would be expected to look after their own property, but if they needed help the Parish Council could provide assistance. If a householder believes their property is at risk from flooding, then let the council know, so that a record can be made. (b) the landowners, who have their own specific responsibility, not only for their business but also how any run off affects the village, they can help mitigate the circumstances that caused it in the first place and (c) the Parish Council who need to review the situation and decide what further action they could take in the future to try and stop the problems occurring again.

Members of the public made the following comments concerning the recent mud in the village:

A resident of Love Lane asked who was responsible for the drains. The Chairman said that the main responsibility lay with the County highways department, either by rodding or jetting the drains. The Parish Council does employ a ranger on a weekly basis and his role is to clear the tops of the drain covers of leaves, to enable water to flow into them. It was not his responsibility to dig out the drains. We have asked the County Council to rod or jet the drains, but as this will take some time for them to do, we will look at whether the Parish Council can hire in local qualified contractors to clear the drains. Ditches around the side of the fields are normally cleared by the landowner.

It was commented by a member of the public that the drain at the top of Great Lane had not been cleared and the Chairman said that we had asked the Highways department to jet this, but their response has been slow. It was mentioned by Cllr Joy that individuals could report problems direct to the County Council highways department.

A second resident from Love Lane said concerning the Great Lane drains, could we not employ the ranger more than once a week to clear the drains as the rain/silt brings more leaves with it, perhaps every other day. His driveway was getting damaged with the sand and water being brought down into Love Lane.

A resident from Lambrook Road said her house was very nearly flooded but that her property would be safe if sand was not brought into the village with the rain. She would like to know how the Parish Council could correct this and would be happy to participate in any effort to stop this happening again. The property was last flooded in 2002. She said that it is not just about property damage, it is also about the environmental problem as the water carries organisms that are a danger to humans.

The Chairman said that in future properties that were in danger of flooding should be given the expanding sandbags that we hold a stock of. He also noted that the Somerset Council have stopped issuing sandbags and so this would rest with the house owner or the Parish Council. A resident from Love Lane said this would not help the situation as the weather cannot be predicted and the sandbag could be needed when the householder was away. The flow of the water needed to be slowed down.

It was noted by a member of the public when it happened last time, the road was cleared by a tractor in a couple of days, but this time nothing had happened.

A resident from Middle Street said that they had been flooded in the past, when there had been a problem with the big drain by Silver Springs. A resident asked if the mud could be stopped coming into the village, as this was what was causing the problem – water on its own would wash into the drain, but the mud blocks the drain.

Cllr Wakely commented that the problem at the moment was the timing of the rain. If this had happened at Christmas, when there were established crops in the field, the water would not be stopped, but the soil would not have come with it. The rain we had recently was unusual for the time of year. At the bottom of Love Lane there used to be a ditch going down to Cowleaze and pipework. The water at the other end of the village did not bring mud with it as the culvert was capable of taking the silt away. He wondered if any more culverts could be sited at the end of Love Lane to keep the water moving. The County Council do not have the money to clear the drains on a regular basis.

A resident from Littlefields Lane said he raised a case with the Parish Council and the County Highways department to say that the drains had not been cleared. He received a reply to say that they were 3 drains which were cleared every 2 years, whereas there are actually 7 drains. The Council say their truck is too big to go down Littlefields Lane. He said nearly all drains in the village were blocked and that the County Council saying they did not have enough money was not a viable excuse. The County Council have closed the case without taking any action. He suggested that if the County Council could not carry out the work, then the Parish precept be raised considerably and the Parish Council could then take on responsibility for the clearing of the drains. He would be willing to get involved.

Cllr England said that in the past Shepton Beauchamp had been deemed a special case by the County because of the soil and drains were cleared more regularly.

The Chairman said that when the Local Council Network was set up one of the things that was trying to be organised was the devolution to Town and Parish Council level to carry out some of this type of work and we are looking at clearing some of the drains using a local contractor.

A resident from Love Lane said they could not be expected to remove the mud from outside their properties, as many of them were over 70 and not capable of doing it.

It was asked if County Council were now devolving services to Parish Council level. The Chairman said that the County Council had statutory responsibilities, which had previously been devolved to District Councils. With the formation of the Unitary Council, they now rest with Somerset Council. Because the Council are finding it difficult with the money they have, they are asking the Town and Parish Councils to raise their precepts to become more self-sufficient, so this results in a double taxation. We did raise our Parish precept last year in anticipation of this happening, which means that we should be able to do limited work.

A resident asked if we could go through our local MP, Adam Dance, to see if we could be given special dispensation due to our geography. Another resident said local MPs have a lot of power and to get his support may well help. The Chairman said we would be speaking to our local County Councillor about this issue.

Ser Item

1132. To receive apologies for absence and to approve the reasons given (LGA 1972, s85(1))

Apologies were received from Cllr Rowsell (away).

Resolved. To accept and approve the apologies given.

1133. 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

Cllr Joy declared an interest in item 1140 and signed the book

1134. To approve as a correct record the minutes/decisions of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 16th September 2024 (LGA 1972, sch 12, para 41(1)).

Resolved. That the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Monday 16th September be signed as correct.

1135. LCN (Local Community Network)

To discuss any relevant issues that have been received from the LCN

The Chairman highlighted the date of the next meetings, which were Monday 9th December 2024; Wednesday 19th March 2025; and Wednesday 11th June 2025. We are required to send one representative. As we get nearer the date, we can decide who attends.

1136. Mud in the village following the recent heavy rain

To discuss the amount of mud being brought into the village every time we have heavy rain, including the resulting blocking of drains and gullies and resolve what action the Parish Council can take.

The Chairman said that this was a combination of heavy rain and field run-off and asked if there was value in the Parish Council talking to the four local farmers in a separate meeting, to see where we can improve the situation or whether the farmers can do something more to prevent the situation.

Cllr Bourn mentioned that last time Love Lane had been cleared by one of the farmers, he had spoken to him and was told he had received a message from DEFRA who had been contacted by someone in the village, but this time this did not happen.

The farmer who was attending the meeting said as Love Lane was bad, he would clear it the following day. The Chairman thanked him for doing this.

The farmer asked how bad the situation was on Saturday compared to Tuesday as we had as much rain, but since Tuesday he had blocked the field entrance with straw bales and the track halfway down and wondered if it had helped. One of the councillors said he thought there may have been less mud brought down, but the water was washing the existing mud further through the village. Cllr England commented that you are going to get soil erosion in the village, simply because of the nature of the soil. The volume of rain means that you don't just get run-off, you get displacement. If we can keep the drains clear and the water flowing, then it does stop the flooding. Cllr Wakely said the culvert at the bottom of Love Lane had eradicated the flooding, but only if it was clear. He asked if we could put something more substantial in place. It was noted that the culvert alongside and leading into Cowleaze had been covered over and turned into a drain. Water was also coming down Muckleditch Lane and Hollow Road and the culvert in Upper Silver Street and the drains could not cope.

The councillors decided the Parish Council must do what they could to keep the drains clean. We are already meeting with a private contractor to find out costs and how often he could jet the drains.

The Clerk said she had been in contact with the County Council and they had confirmed that they would clear the gullies for the main routes and the three silt traps, but they could not give a timescale as they have a number of sites on their list.

Initially we will speak with Jo Roundell-Greene about this problem, as it is technically the responsibility of the County Council, prior to speaking to Adam Dance.

It was decided that our January Newsletter should include all County Council contact details for any issues within the village that are their responsibility. This should also be on the front page of our website.

Action – Parish Clerk

It was decided that we would try and improve the drainage leading down to Cowleaze. As it is along the Wessex Water access road, it was thought that they should do this. Initially we need a map of the drains, which we can get from Wessex Water.

Action – Parish Clerk

The councillors said that those houses that have been identified at risk, be given some of our sandbags.

Action – All councillors

Cllr England said a post had already been put onto Facebook saying where our stock of sandbags was and how people could access them.

The Chairman said that our resilience plan should be updated.

Action – Parish Clerk

1137. Flooding near Lopen Head

To update the council on the response from the Unitary Council concerning the flooding near Lopen Head.

The Clerk reported that she had received a response from the County Council Assistant Highways Service Manager about the flooding near Lopen Head, to say that he had chased National Highways as it is their ditch, the Council's ditch outfalls into theirs, so they all need digging out. He said that they would also jet the drains at Wash Cross.

Cllr England asked if the Clerk had contacted Barrington to see if they had contacted the County Council about the flooding, as they also used this road to Lopen Head. She had not, but will do so.

Action – Parish Clerk

1138. Councillor Co-option Policy

To review the draft Councillor Co-option Policy and resolve if any amendments need to be made and if it can be approved and adopted by the Council

Resolved. Section 4 was amended and The Councillor Co-Option policy was then approved and adopted.

1139. Grant Application – The Shepton Playhouse

To review the grant application received from The Shepton Playhouse and resolve whether to give a grant of £550

Resolved. The grant application of £550 was approved unanimously.

1140. Grant Application – Operation Christmas Dinner

To review the grant application and resolve whether to give £329 towards the cost of the Senior's Christmas meal

Resolved. The grant application of £329 was approved unanimously.

1141. AGAR – completion of Audit *For information only*

The Clerk updated the council on section 3 – the external auditor's report for FY 23-24.

1142. Finance

To review the Bank Reconciliation as at 30th September 2024 (previously circulated).

To approve the schedule of payments totalling £2,984.19 (previously circulated)

Resolved. The bank reconciliation was approved and signed as correct by a non-bank signatory. The payments were approved.

1143. Quarterly Budget Report Quarter 2 *For information only*

To review the budget report for July - September

The Clerk presented the quarterly budget report for July – September which was reviewed by the councillors.

1144. Report from Clerk/RFO. *For information only*

The Clerk reported that she had received an email from a resident in Piece Lane who was concerned that the work appears to have started and had contacted the County Council about this, as the planning had not been approved.

Cllr Wakely said that the plastic fencing that had been put around the field was for slow worm assessment, which was part of the process that had to be gone through for bigger developments.

One allotment holder has not renewed her allotment for this next year. An adjoining allotment holder asked if they could take over the bottom section of the allotment and add it to theirs, which would then put the row of allotments in line with each other. They had asked about the additional cost, but the Clerk suggested that as there was a lot to clear, that they have the additional part at no extra cost and then this could be measured and reviewed in 2025. This was agreed by the councillors.

1145. Reports. *For information only*

Highways

In the absence of Cllr Rowsell there was nothing to report

Lethbridge Recreational Ground Committee

Cllr England reported that the committee had met last week. He will report in full at the next council meeting, although he did say that they had a plan for the embankment and the current undergrowth will be cut down when it is dry enough. One of the committee members is a landscaper and can let us have wild flower seeds and he is getting some quotes for trees.

Ranger

Cllr Wylie Carrick said the ranger had been working on Great Lane, Silver Street and Love Lane clearing the drain covers. We have a temporary ranger next week and will be concentrating on clearing the mud piles from North Street. Cllr Wakely suggested we buy a double-handled posthole digger that we keep this in the village and the ranger uses it to clear one or two drains each week, to clear the build-up of sediment. This was thought to be a good idea. **Action – Parish Clerk**

Cllr Bourn asked if the ranger could clear the fallen branches from the footpath at the bottom of Ash Lane.

Allotments

There was nothing to report.

Cowleaze

Cllr Bourn reported that the Laser Light show was taking place on 2nd November which the Events Team were organising. Cowleaze volunteers will make sure the grass is mown before that. The final positioning of the equipment will be discussed with the volunteers. There will be a bar, BBQ and portable toilets.

Footpaths

There was nothing to report.

1146. Annex A – Deferred items register

Annex A was updated.

Meeting closed: 9.20 pm