

SHEPTON BEAUCHAMP PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held on Monday 12th May 2025 at 6.30 pm
In the Village Hall, Middle Street, Shepton Beauchamp

Present: Cllr Nigel Wylie Carrick (Chair)
Jeff Turner (Cowleaze Meadow volunteers)
Kim Lea (the W.I.)
Sharon Humphries (the Events Team & Village Hall Committee)
Caroline Middleton (Shepton Beauchamp School)
Cllr David Bourn
Cllr Sally Burwood
Joan Kennedy and Colin Amesbury (Parochial Church Council)
Julian Black (Shepton Playhouse)
Mike Hatchett (Bell Ringing Group)

In attendance: Stella Davies (Parish Council Clerk)

There were display stands from: Shepton W.I.
Cowleaze Meadow Volunteers
Shepton Bell Ringing Group
Shepton Playhouse

Tea & Coffee and cakes were supplied by members of the W.I.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Carole Creaser (Arts & Craft Group) and Richard Martin (Shepton Beauchamp Charity)

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th May 2024

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th May 2024 were approved. Proposed by Cllr Wylie Carrick and seconded by Julian Black.

3. Information about a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme

Unfortunately, no-one was available from Avon and Somerset Police, but there were information leaflets available on how to set up a scheme.

4. Report from Chairman of the Parish Council for 2024-25

The Chairman welcomed everyone present, particularly those who have provided stands, and the WI who have kindly provide tea/coffee and cakes.

Parish Council Departures. The Chairman noted that the following members of the council have resigned:

- Cllr Hugo Stearn resigned in Jun 2024.
- Stella Davies, after 6 years in post has resigned with effect from 1 Jun 25. In her place we welcome Mrs Ruby Coombes from Langport
- We currently have a vacancy for one Councillor

Somerset Council. Our Unitary Authority has been in existence since 2022, which as yet has not resulted in all the savings anticipated.

- **Ward Boundaries.** Ward Boundaries currently have 2 x councillors per ward with Cllrs Adam Dance & Jo Roundell-Green representing the South Petherton Ward. It is possible that ward boundaries may be redrawn and representation reduced to one Councillor per ward.
- **Reduction in Somerset Services.** With the financial pressures faced by all Local Authorities, there has been a reduction in certain 'lower priority' services that have impacted on services previously provided, including outsourced contracts for Road Maintenance; Grass cutting for open spaces and footpaths; and the Ranger Service.
- **Devolution in Services.** This has resulted in many services and assets being devolved down to local Town and Parish Councils. For example, our Ranger Service discontinued in Oct 23 and was replaced in Jan 2024 by a new contract with Somerset Landscape Ltd who now manage our road

maintenance, drain clearance, grass-cutting on the Recreational Ground. We expect more services such as salt box filling, clearing Dog Bins, clearance of blocked gullies and drain-pipes, road verges, footpath clearance will require to be paid for.

Potential Somerset, Dorset & Wiltshire Mayoral Authority. We anticipate that in line with Government direction, Somerset, Dorset & Wiltshire will combine to form an overarching local Mayoral Authority to be formed in 2026.

Crewkerne & Ilminster Local Community Network (LCN). It's still early days and with all the current changes and proposed changes, the LCNs have yet to prove their worth, largely because there is no LCN budget. We attend quarterly meetings to facilitate community representatives in setting our priorities but at the moment, LCNs appear to be more Town centric rather than meeting Rural community needs. However, the LCN Committees such as the Transport & Highways LCN Committee do seem to be a more useful forum in setting out our requirements

CHALLENGES OF 2024. Looking back on the year, there are two stand out issues that remain unresolved:

- **Ground Water Flooding Oct 2024 & 26 Jan 2025.** If for nothing else, this year will be remembered more for the flooding that swept through Shepton Beauchamp. The first in October 2024, followed by a further flood caused by an 'exceptional' overhead storm on 26 Jan 2025. The combination of these two storms, we estimate resulted in 15 residential properties with internal flooding, and a further 21 properties affected by the floods externally. A total of 36 (12% of residential properties) considered 'at risk'. The Parish Council considered the following priorities of work to be: -
 - P1. Reduce Silt Run-Off. Landowners ongoing engagement with FWAG.
 - P2. Increase pipe capacity at choke points, particularly the clearance of the bottom drains in Love Lane to be undertaken by Somerset Council.
 - P3. Make use of 'accredited local contractors' to help clear local drains and gullies. We are now waiting for Somerset Council to produce a 'working protocol' to enable the Parish Council to employ and work legally on local drains and gulliesWe were well supported by our Councillor Jo Roundell-Green and by our MP Adam Dance who supported the council in prioritising road and drain clearance assets to clear and sweep raids and drains which took some weeks to be completed. This work is still on-going.
- **Theft in the Village.** The second issue of note was that during the year there has been a worrying increase in cases of reported theft, a run of widespread break-ins into residential home sheds and garages, and more recently, in what appears to be a programme of targeted theft of work tools, equipment and motorized tractors from vans belonging to three residents living in Silver Street and Lambrook Road, including a related house break-in of one of the victims. The Police have been involved and although they have recovered one stolen van stripped of its engine and crank shaft, leaving a damaged vehicle body since removed, to date the culprits and stolen items worth tens of thousands of pounds, have not been identified. The Police investigation is on-going. As a result, the Council has contacted the Local Police Support Officer to visit the Parish Council and village area. We are also keen to rejuvenate the Shepton Beauchamp Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, which following the death of John Halsey, has since fallen into abeyance.

PARISH FINANCE (APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025)

- **General.** Council finances remain healthy and robust.
 - **Parish Income:** £46.7K – limited to VAT refunds, Allotments, CIL, Football & 100 Club
 - **Parish Expenditure:** £40.4K
 - **Underspend.** There was an underspend of £6.3K, the majority of which was to cover anticipated costs for roadside maintenance, drains & gullies, verges & footpath clearance which have yet to be delegated.
 - **At Bank.** £48.5K (reserves)
- **Annual Governance & Accountability Return AGARs** – Available on Website.

PARISH PRECEPT 2025/26

Parish Precept is based on estimated shortfall between expected income & expenditure. Last year Somerset Council recommended an increase of 50 – 60% however we could only justify an increase of 40.39% to cover anticipated costs for road maintenance and grass cutting.

For this year, despite the underspend we have kept the precept at the same level with a small increase of 5% to take into account inflation.

PLANS FOR 2025/26

- **Iminster & Crewkerne LCN Meetings.** To work within our LCN and establish closer collaborative links with neighbouring 'rural' parishes
- **Actively Recruit new Councillors in 2025**
- **Local Contractor to clear Gullies and Drains.** Priorities of work to clear the drains are:
 - Storm drainage 1978 – 1983 Ph1. Silver Street – Cowleaze
 - Storm drainage 1978 – 1983 Ph2. Lambrook Road – Cowleaze
 - Great Lane, North Street, Love Lane
- **Rejuvenate our local Neighbourhood Watch Scheme.** We require volunteers to co-ordinate and participate in this useful scheme. Please take one of the fliers on the table.
- **Piece Lane Development.** 16 dwellings (2 Bed x 5, 3 bed x 6, 4 bed 5). 6 x dwellings are affordable.
- **Lethbridge Recreational Ground.** Continue to develop plans for the Recreation Field:
 - Pavilion improvements
 - Plant memorial trees on West bank
 - Purchase one piece of play equipment
 - Leylandii felling in 2027
- **Platinum Jubilee Garden.** To continue support to this open space.
- **Grants.** Council remains positive in supporting village activity groups provided the activity is of benefit to the community by continuing to provide grants to:
 - Shepton Playhouse
 - Shepton Art Group (for materials)
 - Village Hall Trust (for furniture, equipment etc)
 - Cowleaze Meadow Project
 - Events Team (to cover Insurance costs)
- **Allotments** – In general the allotments are in better shape than in previous years. We now have just half an allotment vacant, in the top half of the area. Going forward, it has been requested that the allotment holders to establish an Allotments WhatsApp Group, and to encourage allotment holder to establish a Self-regulating Allotments Committee to act as focal link to PC, and join one of the National / County Allotment Society
- **Report a Problems on The Road** - now much simplified One Page Gateway
- **Footpaths** – Explore Somerset website
- **Report any problem direct to Parish Council Clerk** (potholes, blocked drains and overgrown or damaged styles & gates etc, just take a photo and use What3Words to pinpoint its location and send to the Parish Clerk

5. Report from The Parochial Church Council

Joan Kennedy reported that Geoff Wade was leaving at the end of June. The Church Warden role is being shared between herself and Colin until a replacement is found, which is likely to be a long time. The Chairman thanked the Parochial Church Council for what they do.

6. Report from The Shepton Beauchamp Village Hall Committee

The village hall committee would like to report that after making losses in the previous two years of between £2000-£3000 getting back on our feet after covid, we were determined to try and break even in the last financial year, which ended in September 2024.

We adjusted the hourly rate of the hall and fundraised in 2024 by holding a plant sale – earning £632 in a couple of hours. We held a bingo night and the annual flower show in August and finally managed to achieve a profit for the year of a whole £ 5.33!

The income for the hall was £8239.99 and expenditure £8234.66

Our main expense is heating and lighting at around £3600. Insurance costs £1033 per annum and we paid out £1638 for cleaning and £1144 on maintenance

The hall is used for regular weekly classes in yoga, a fitness group, for WI monthly meetings, by the Events Team, by Art Group, by the School, for Taijiquan classes, for a monthly breakfast club and by Shepton Playhouse. We are hugely appreciative of the support they give us.

This year we had hoped to do the same or better financially, but storms and heavy rain earlier in the year rusted away one of the cowls on the roof, causing metal to break off and slide down the roof. This being of immediate danger to the public, we immediately closed off the garden area and got scaffolding up and a company to remove the cowl and cap it off. This unforeseen situation has cost us in the region of £1700, which, to be honest, we can ill afford.

We held the plant sale last month again and it was great to see this very well supported, with people buying plants, bacon rolls and tea and cake and meeting and chatting with friends. We provided more herbs and vegetable plants this year, more bedding plants and a few perennials. Plants left over have been used to fill the pots and planters at the village hall to pretty things up for summer. The event which lasted two hours raised just over £800 for the village hall funds. This was fantastic and we were so pleased, but obviously this has just now unfortunately vanished into the payment for the roof!

The committee will meet next month, when members return from holidays, to discuss what we can try and do in addition to the planned bingo night and the village hall flower show to try and raise more money. We will start planning for the Village Hall Flower Show at the same time and putting the programme together. This will be held on Saturday August 30th. Hopefully we will put on an additional event in the village hall garden in the summertime.

We thank the parish council for the generous grant which was given to us to buy a new bench and shed in the village hall rear garden and for the project to turn the old sandpit into a planted up raised bed. The committee feel that this project perhaps needs to be scaled back now because of the unforeseen maintenance work and ask the parish council please if we may use some of the grant money towards the roof bill instead.

Our team is small, but dedicated and we want to try and promote the hall more for private parties and events going forward to earn funds to keep this lovely village facility at the heart of the community. We would also welcome support from anyone in the village we can call on for help with maintenance work when needed.

Thank you for your time this evening

Following a question from the Chairman, the Committee confirmed it was researching additional funding grants from Charities to support the Village Hall.

7. Report from The Shepton Beauchamp Charity

The Shepton Beauchamp Charity started in 1886. It is a collection of charities for the benefit of residents of Shepton Beauchamp; some of the charities are several hundred years old. The income of about £1,500 a year is generated from rent received from three small parcels of land owned by the Charity.

Any resident can apply for one of two main grants: -

1. Educational, which covers the village school, students going to university or starting an apprenticeship and have been resident in the village for more than 3 years.
2. The Over 70's Christmas Box which is a small payment, paid in early December, to help with the cost of Christmas and is payable to residents who are 70 years old or over and have lived in the village for 3 years or more.

In 2024 the charity paid out two educational grants and the Christmas box was paid out to 40 residents slightly down on the previous year.

Details of how to apply for grants or the Over 70's Christmas Box will be posted on the village Facebook page and advertised in the Web from July to September.

8. Report from Shepton Beauchamp Primary School

I am pleased to report that our recent Ofsted inspection highlighted the outstanding leadership and management of our school. We were praised for our strong Christian ethos and the excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of our pupils.

We can now offer wrap-around care with a free breakfast club and after-school provision, which is highly valued by our families.

However, we are concerned about our low intake in Reception this year, despite our excellent Ofsted rating. We believe this may be due to the high cost of housing in the village, which is pricing out young families. We would welcome the parish council's support in exploring the possibility of building more affordable housing in the area.

Additionally, we would be grateful if the parish council could help us conduct a survey of village facilities and services. This would enable us to better understand the needs of our families and identify reasons why not all our village children attend the school in which they reside.

Finally, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the parish council for their sponsorship of our story-share books. This initiative has been a great success and has helped to promote a love of reading and storytelling among our pupils.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement with our school. I look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead.

The Chairman thanked the Headmistress for her report and asked that she contact the Council concerning the survey and questions to be raised.

9. Report from The Events Team

Thank you for inviting the Events Team to present a report at the Parish Meeting

Our free event for the village last year was held in Cowleaze Meadow on 22nd June and we had a lovely afternoon attended by several other village groups with live music, a drum workshop, Bar, BBQ, Pimms stall and some fun games for the children. The event was well attended and we had a dry and sunny afternoon. We ran a bar and BBQ to cover some of the costs of the entertainment and ran this at a loss of £385.

In November, we held the Laser light Show down in Cowleaze Meadow – again another lovely well attended event. They put on a spectacular light show for us, which was very enjoyable and again we ran a bar and BBQ to try and offset some of the cost. The cost of the light show was £2995 and we made a loss on the event in the region of £1800 after expenses. Ticket sales recouped only £1006 towards the cost.

Whilst we have sufficient funds this year to run a street party, we will not have sufficient funds to hire the Laser Light show as well this year.

We wanted to commemorate the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ days in our usual Shepton style with a street party. Due to holiday commitments of most of the events team in May, we have opted to hold this on July 19th this year, when all the team can be in attendance – this being part way between VE and VJ day dates. There is a wedding in church the same day, so the event will follow a slightly different format, with a children's tea party at 3pm and the main street party commencing at 5pm.

We are working with other groups in the village to have teddies off the church tower, games at Cowleaze and various activities. Face painting and balloon artists have been booked for the children and the live

music is also booked. Street closure has been applied for and we will have all risk assessments, licenses and insurance in place.

This is still very much a work in progress as we liaise with other groups.

Letters have gone out to the houses in North Street, The Shambles and Church Street in this regard. We hope the weather will be kind to us in July and we are very much looking forward to putting on this free event for the village

To put on a street party does of course mean we have significant expenditure and so we are busy raising funds for this currently.

So far in 2025, we have had a very successful and well attended Burns Night supper earning £623, a valentine's event with a lovely film and ploughman's supper and a couple of films. Unfortunately, due to illness of the singer, we had to cancel our Jay Night at the last minute, which was a real shame. We can raise anything from £85 to £250 for a film night and are very much reliant on the support of the village and attendance and also bar and hotdog sales on the night.

Recently we have also supported the Shepton Playhouse by running the bar at the village pantomime, which was a huge success and we will support them in their forthcoming plans. We raised £180 over the three nights on the bar after paying for the cost of the village hall

We will continue after the street party with our planned film nights, possibly an Oktoberfest and something in place of the laser light show and then the village Christmas market. The team will meet to discuss further when the others return from holidays.

In 2024 we arranged for poppies to be displayed around the village for Remembrance Sunday and will do this again this year and we will organize the annual village Christmas tree again.

We continue to strive to provide activities for the village which we hope people of all ages can enjoy and at the same time raise funds for our ongoing programme of events.

Our events we will continue to advertise in the Web, on Facebook, by leaflet drop and by updating signage at the entrance to the village.

We would once again like to take the opportunity to thank the parish council for the grant this year to cover insurance costs.

The events team currently

Ian Brown, Dave Burwood, Amy Cook, Tom Dawson, Sharon Humphreys, Michele Hutchinson, Liz Sanderson & Claire Uren.

The Chairman thanked the Events Team for the energy and support that the Events Team gave to the Community and asked that the Team contact the Parish Council with their requirement for an activity survey for to identify future potential events.

10. Report from Cowleaze Meadow volunteers

Cowleaze Meadow Volunteers have had a very busy year.

I took over as volunteer co-ordinator in September and found that the Management Plan, which was a requirement of the 25-year lease with Wessex Water, was many years out of date. We had a site visit from both Somerset Wildlife Trust and Wessex Water ecologists and with their help we have drawn up a new management plan to guide us through all the things we need to do to keep Cowleaze a great place for nature and for visitors.

We have recently planted a new hedge at the far end of the meadow with plants donated by Woodland Trust, and we have taken down the old willow tunnel and put up a new one and a kids play dome with living willow, using some of the money from this year's parish grant.

We have borrowed a meadow cutting machine for the Spring cut and have seeded a small area of meadow with a trial wildflower seed mix. We also held a village Bat Survey which was well attended.

We continue to need volunteers to help us with the various tasks as they come up and I am course grateful for our regular volunteers and those villagers who have come along to help occasionally.

11. Report from Shepton Beauchamp W.I.

Shepton Beauchamp WI is in good shape with several new members. As usual we have had a very varied programme and this year we have made good use of the mass of talent there is in Shepton Beauchamp. This has ranged from a painting class led by WI members Karen Turner and Jeannie Knight, a class on Indian Tassels from Tina, a demonstration and lesson on floral Christmas decorations from Diane Sarker and a talk on gemmology from Fiona Linton of Second-Hand Bling. We also nabbed Michael Hatchett after last year's Parish Meeting and asked him to talk about Tower Bells to the WI. There was an evening of Tai Chi, a cheese tasting night, a thoroughly cheery Christmas party and a very interesting talk on sewing machines which included the surprisingly complicated love life of Isaac Singer.

The programme for the rest of the year includes an outing to the History Hut in Low Ham, a talk on the history of gardening, a talk from Alida of Crimson Gate Flower Farm in South Petherton, an evening of skittles at the Duke of York, a film made by 'The Anoraks', a local amateur group whose films are on local history, and a session of Christmas Decoration making with Karen Turner.

The WI meets at 7pm on the first Wednesday of the month in the Village Hall. Meetings last a maximum of two hours. Visitors are welcome at a cost of £5 and can join at the meeting or subsequently. Meetings are advertised in the web and on Facebook and agendas are usually available in the Village Shop.

Shepton Beauchamp WI remains in good shape.

12. Report from Shepton Art & Craft Group

Sadly, there is not much good news to report from the Arts and Crafts Group. We have had a few people leave to join other groups in the village, one person has moved and the 'new' persons have not joined us for a few weeks. Our numbers are down to 9 members.

We did however put on an Art Exhibition earlier in the year, which the first one in three years, due to Covid. This however was a complete success, with plenty of villagers coming in to look at the Artwork and whilst here having a bite to eat. A few paintings were sold on the day, which is always a bonus. There was a raffle with plenty of prizes to be won! All in all, we made £170 which has helped, as funds were running low. We plan to run an Exhibition next year again.

We are advertising in the web for new members. We will also 'advertise' on the Shepton Beauchamp Facebook page.

The Group has been running for nearly 30 years, and we would like to see the Group thrive/survive for many years to come! 2025 hopefully will be kind to us.

13. Report from Shepton Bell Ringing Group

It is just a year since we described the actions we had taken to address the shortage of bell ringers within the Winsmoor Benefice. Therefore, in this update we will summarise the problems and the actions we are now taking to address these problems.

Within the Winsmoor Benefice there are eight parish churches of which five have bells hung for full circle ringing. However, following Covid, none of these churches had sufficient ringers to ring all their bells on any occasion. As a consequence, we decided to combine all our ringers into a Benefice wide band so that we could ring before one church service at least every Sunday and on other occasions as and when requested. Here is a summary of our towers, the number of bells each has and the number of ringers currently available:

Barrington: 6 bells with five regular local ringers
Dowlish Wake: 8 bells with no regular local ringers
Kingstone: 6 bells with one local ringer

Puckington: 6 bells with three local ringers

Shepton Beauchamp: 12 bells with four regular ringers, five very occasional ringers and one new recruit.

Not all of these bells are easy to ring and some of our ringers are therefore not yet sufficiently experienced to ring the heavier bells at Barrington and the Kingstone bells which are rung from the church floor without adequate rope guides and, as a consequence are much more difficult to control.

Our practice night is Monday at Shepton Beauchamp between 7.00 and 9.00 pm. During these weekly two-hour sessions, we are teaching and encouraging our new recruits to handle a bell safely without gross errors likely to harm themselves or other ringers; we also encourage the more experienced ringers to ring together in teams of six, eight or ten so they develop confidence in placing their bells in appropriate sequences with even spacing between the sound of each bell. Developing these basic skills takes up the majority of the time available each Monday evening.

During the last year we have also held theory and method ringing workshops to which we invited experienced ringers to join us so that our own ringers could develop their own interests and skill levels. Our intention is to develop personal skills with an awareness of what is involved in becoming an experience ringer. These sessions traditionally include eating and drinking tea and coffee together. We are also aware that the churches who own the bells we ring have financial difficulties of their own which are not restricted to just looking after the bells we ring. We recognise the need for fund raising, for providing basic maintenance and thoughtful care and attention of the equipment we use, together with safeguarding the health and welfare of those who ring for us. Therefore, we provide coffee mornings, cream teas and other fund-raising events so that the local community knows what their bell ringers do and why they do it. Thus, we generate funds needed to provide new bell ropes as necessary and books and other equipment as required. Next year we will be organising visits to ring at other local towers so that we can widen our experience of what happens elsewhere in the ringing world.

There is a bell ringing event on June 8th at 6.00 pm at the church at Seavington St Mary, where there will be a demonstration of bell ringing and tea and cake will be available. Everyone is most welcome to attend.

14. Report from The Shepton Playhouse

The last 12 months has been eventful for The Playhouse starting with a cancelled summer play followed by a very lively pantomime.

This time last year we were planning to put on a play in the early summer but this had to be cancelled following a major personal issue with one of the cast which we fully understood and supported. A short while later we started working towards our first pantomime, Cinderella written by a Shepton resident, Bryony Black who had a master's degree in script writing and had two previous successful pantomime scripts in her varied portfolio.

By October the panto was cast – every member of the cast lived in the village - and rehearsals started. The Parish Council were generous in giving us a grant towards building a wonderful set designed by Bob McGarva. The Playhouse backstage crew went into overtime – props obtained, sound effects recorded, lighting designed, costumes borrowed from Barrington Players and others – a huge undertaking, much of it being done by people who had little or no experience of working on this kind of project.

By the New Year everything was pretty much in place. Rehearsals had gone well, the set was almost ready, tickets were selling well at Shepton Stores, final adjustments were being made to costumes – much cast hilarity watching the ugly sisters trying on their dresses! And so, the last weekend of January saw four sold-out performances including one afternoon show for Shepton School which by all accounts the children loved – especially seeing their Head Teacher in a long blond wig on stage!

Financially the show proved successful and we were able to give our chosen charity £250.00

More importantly we showed we were able to put on a really successful, very funny old-fashioned pantomime. One middle aged gentleman thanked us “for allowing me to be a child again”. Lots of happy smiling people left having been shouting “Behind you” and “Oh no its not!” with lots of memories of a great Shepton evening.

We are already starting to plan next winter's pantomime though we are also hoping to put on a short one act play in the late summer. Whatever we do we need lots more people to join us on stage or backstage to guarantee the future of the Shepton Playhouse.

CONCLUSION

- The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking:
 - All those who provided stand and everyone attending this evening
 - He saw that one of the main roles of the Parish Council was to support, encourage and enable the community develop areas of interest and activities that were of benefit to the wider community.
 - He made a special mention to our Parish Clerk who after 6 years in post leaves us on 1 June 2025. Stella has been an OUTSTANDING Parish Clerk and RFO. Her commitment to the Council and to the community of Shepton Beauchamp has been exemplary.

Meeting closed: 7.45 pm

DRAFT