

# Shapwick Parish Meeting

8 November 2021 at 7pm at the Pavilion, Shapwick

Present: Chair of Parish Council - Martin Davis  
Clerk to Parish Council – Sue Williams – Minute taker for the meeting  
Approximately – 80 to 90 villagers

## Welcome

Martin Davis welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the difference between a Parish Council Meeting and a Parish Meeting.

The clerk to the Parish Council was introduced as the minute taker for the meeting.

Ground rules for the meeting were established with the Chair asking attendees to remain friendly and polite towards one another and to respect the views expressed.

The chair requested that the meeting was not digitally recorded.

## Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from County Councillor David Huxtable and District Councillor Duncan McGinty.

## Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interests were made.

## Opening Statement from the Chair of the Parish Council

In the interest of transparency and openness Martin Davis introduced the members of the Parish Council explaining that for the purpose of the Parish Meeting that they attend as villagers.

The chair said he felt that the current Parish Council had a positive attitude and the members bring a broad skill set/knowledge to the Council. He reminded everyone that all Councillors are volunteers and they take up the role for the good of the village. The clerk is employed for 4 hours a week by the Parish Council.

All agendas and minutes are posted on the Parish Council website as well as a copy of meeting agendas also being posted on the village noticeboard.

Parish Councils are the lowest tier of local government representing the community, delivering services to meet local needs and promoting well-being.

The chair informed the meeting that the Parish Council is proactive between meetings – working behind the scenes to gain information. As an example – the Parish Council had recently met with the chair of another Parish Council who had experience in dealing with large scale planning applications – help and advice was sought on how the Parish Council can best support the village when replying to such applications.

The chair explained that all Councillors abide by the seven Nolan principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

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Returning to Integrity. The chair explained that declaration of interests is the responsibility of each Councillor and they should declare an interest at the first opportunity. Martin Davis declared that he had, in the past, had agricultural business dealings with land owner of the proposed Mill Lane development. Martin Davis explained he has sought advice from the monitoring officer and that a dispensation had been granted.

**Village Design Statement (VDS)**

SD said that he had been in the village for 26 years. He commented that at the last Parish Council meeting held on 21 September 2021 during Villagers’ Open Period he had asked Parish Councillors to comment on how they saw the validity of the VDS which they duly did. However, as the Open Period does not form part of the minuted meeting there was disappointment that the comments made by Councillors were not minuted. SD asked for Councillors to remake their comments.

Martin Davis reminded everyone that Councillors are only present as villagers at this Parish Meeting so he would not ask them to comment but did confirm that the views expressed at the Parish Council meeting were positive. The VDS was compiled in February 1999. Since then the village has changed. The VDS is a tool used as part of the planning process and is still functional. The Parish Council continue to use it when considering planning applications.

JA said he wanted to say thank you for putting the meeting together. He expressed appreciation for the transparency. He said several had questioned why call a meeting now when there was no registered application - he said this is the time to consider the facts and find the true opinion of the village. He said he would like to see the village and the Parish Council working together. He said it is not about affordable housing and there is a need to explore other avenues because it one application outside the development boundary is allowed a precedent is set. Better to do it early than when it is too late.

FB said he was disturbed to hear that the Parish Council has been talking to other Parish Councils. He said Shapwick is a special village with character and history. He reminded the meeting of the unique project taken on by Mick Aston which lasted a period of 10 years before the final report was written in 1998. The village has a rare and well documented field system – this makes Shapwick special. FB introduced Dr Michael Costen, Honorary Research Fellow with the University of Bristol’s Department of Archaeology, to the meeting.

JP – Blackberry Cottage – C17th cottage was at the centre of the study being applauded for its location and history. JP said she had seen several changes over the year. The cottage was originally bigger but reduced during the development of Mill Lane. Condemns the proposed plans in many ways – it will create a secondary community within the development – we have a village already!

Dr Michel Costen took the floor. He explained the background to the Shapwick project. A research student, as part of his work, saw what he thought was a planned village and thought it should be investigated. Mick Aston and Dr Michael Costen came to the village and saw that most was the under agricultural land so a field walk was carried out. A new, carefully

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controlled system was used. Recording, sorting and examining finds showing how the village was used. Villages first emerged in the C10th – Shapwick is a very good example of this being the centre of the Glastonbury Abbey Estate – this was broken up to the parishes we see today with Shapwick being a main player.

Gardens in Shapwick were dug up to discover the extent of the plan. The plan has altered over time. Shapwick has a well preserved village plan of a particular sort – it is a type source. Shapwick is often used as a good an example of a village plan.

Dr Costen explained Shapwick is special – to tie in with how it came to be – enormous social and agricultural change in the English landscape took place – a social revolution which altered status. There were communal agricultural fields with break fields which rotated in the main part of the village with animals being out on the levels. The village plan indicated that people had to live here rather than wanting to.

Scientific advances could show more. Lots of land in the village was not surveyed. If this site is to be built on then it must be surveyed as any building will destroy the history for ever.

Shapwick is an important planned village and how it fits into its landscapes. It is a type site for Southern England.

JL asked about the importance of ladder formation of the village.

MC said it is a rare format linked to the Abbey. Other planned villages only show crofts on either side of the ‘street’ –not the ladder formation Shapwick has.

A villager asked if soil testing had taken place – in particular for phosphates.

MC said soil testing had taken place. More sophisticated tests are available now but testing costs money.

FB asked MC if he heard that the proposal had gone through how would he feel.

MC said he would be saddened – many of the views would be lost. He went onto say that you cannot turn the village into a museum – there is nothing wrong with development (he gave examples of where properties close to the manor were lost and bigger properties built) but he said any development has to be done sensitively.

A villager asked about the village boundary.

MC said the boundary relates back to the Anglo Saxon period and the Domesday book. Many settlements had churches for the first time. In C12th the incumbent of the church had control of the tithes – this delineated boundaries. Many of the boundaries in Shapwick are manorial.

FB asked about development outside the Shapwick development boundary.

MC said he personally would not want it – he felt development is best within the structure of the village not as a bolt on.

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Dr Michael Costen was thanked for addressing the meeting.

The chair invited comment about the proposed Mill Lane development.

LD asked about the fact that it had been suggested that villagers should avoid sharing too much information and was that still applicable.

The chair said he believed that point had past as villagers present at the consultation meeting on 16 October had provided a lot of information to the developer.

A villager asked how villagers had been told not to share information. The chair said it had been posted on social media by someone from outside the village.

A villager suggested all information should be given in paper form as well.

JA said there needs to be more Parish Council involvement going forward.

The chair said that at present that no planning application has been submitted.

FB said that the Parish Council had seen the plans. The chair said the Parish Council had not seen the plans just the design drawings put out to the village by the land owner's planning consultant – it is only a design.

TD said that Facebook is not the way forward. She said it would be good to get Dr M Costen back so we can all learn more about our village. She said she thought the purpose of the meeting was about the Mill Lane proposal and said that the meeting was a good opportunity to find out what the village wants. She said she has concerns that the village is 'dying' – fewer facilities, buses are becoming less frequent. The village has a wonderful history which does need to be preserved but it also needs to move forward.

RF agreed many important things have been said which dictate against the development. The VDS has been adopted as part of the Local Plan – the VDS sets out things about our village and its character and is against such development in scale and character. He said the government had changed housing policy to discharge building on greenfield sites – this is a greenfield site and outside the village development boundary.

CF said she could see that the village needs to move forward but has concerns about the roads in the village – very few pavements and no traffic calming measures exist. Is not against development per se but it has to be the right development.

SD said he was disappointed to hear the village is 'dying. He said there are lots of varied events that happen – this does not represent a village that is 'dying'.

TD said some people have been too scared to come to the meeting to say they would support the development. The village does need to grow a bit. Activities for all are required.

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MA asked if you had a shop would people use it? He suggested 90% of villagers would not use it.

SM said an increase in cars would come with the development and this would increase the risk of pollution. He said a discussion about a real affordable housing project for people in the village is what is needed. Somewhere in the village that is good for everyone.

SD said it was wrong to say that FFSCG has not done anything – they have but at the end of the day the land belongs to someone else and it is not known long term what will happen to that land.

A villager said we don't have a choice. We are supposed to be discussing this proposal that has been put upon us – we need to get our views across.

FB said Shapwick has to grow in the right way. A little bit with sensitivity and reference to the past. It is a lovely place to live and is not dying. If large scale housing development is allowed the Shapwick we know will die.

A villager asked about the environment and expressed concerns that removal of the hedgerow would result in loss of diversity as well as saying pollution and noise would increase.

JL said she was saddened that people felt too scared to attend. She said we need to come together and work together. She said she was not against development but it had to be the right development in the right place. Unlikely to get back a shop. A mechanism needs to find common ground and find consensus to move forward. Need to be proactive.

SD said that he thought using the banner of affordable housing for promoting this development was giving false hope to younger members of the village – we would still be looking at expensive properties. There is a need to do something for the younger members of the village.

The chair said he felt that SDC believe the proposal has 'legs' (because of the need for housing) and that as a village we need to get a great deal of evidence together to back the proposal down.

A villager asked whether the farmer had looked at any other land.

MA – Asked what is the solution? – need to find something that is workable for younger people – suggested houses in a trust.

A villager said that would not be possible with this development. Also there would be terrible flooding. Trees would be lost. People should have a say in who is in the village.

JL questioned whether SDC would see the proposal as viable.

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A villager asked if the village could get a planning consultant to work for the village.

The chair asked those present to consider what would happen if the development went ahead – would it be better to be working with the developer?

BR – Said people should give their views to the Parish Council. He said many traffic studies had been carried out – could these be used as evidence. He said the Parish Council could be asked to put forward a case.

A villager said Shapwick is a Tier 4 village and this is a greenfield site. Felt that the affordable housing is a ploy to get round the policy. Need to put a strong case forward. Plenty of spots within the village to put affordable housing.

FB questioned what ‘has legs’ means.

The chair said - means it is a potential project

FB said he was concerned that the Parish Council has met with another Parish Council. The chair said that as this is new ground for the Parish Council that they had met with another Parish Council which had experience of trying to stop such developments.

JA said at the consultants meeting the planning consultant had said that there is a race to develop. We need to come up with a community led project – lots of research has been done and said the Parish Council had not attended when invited. LG said she is the Parish Council rep for FFSCG but had not been able to attend and had made it known to the group.

The chair asked the meeting whether those present felt there was a ‘Them and Us’ situation

JA said sadly he thought there was and it was not a great position. The chair apologised if that is how people felt.

BR asked if a vote is taken at the meeting will it be binding. He was informed that any vote taken is not binding on the Parish Council.

GC informed the meeting that Councillors had prepared for the meeting but that members have to make sure that they do not pre-determine any application and need to keep an open mind.

SM Proposed a vote – he asked people to vote against this specific development.

A show of hands for and against was asked for. The chair said he could see that a majority of the room were against this specific development.

A villager asked for a count of the for/against votes so it could be matched against numbers attending. A villager counted 66 votes against and 6 votes for.

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SC said bearing in mind that not all members of the village were at the meeting he suggested that a Parish Poll be taken where everyone in the Parish is balloted.

The clerk to the Parish Council informed the meeting that a Parish Poll is run by the returning officer at SDC and all costs had to be borne by the Parish Council. She also informed the meeting that the vote is not binding on the Parish Council.

FB said there is a need to be cautious about communication with the village as not all are on social media. KA offered to help with any printing and distribution.

MA said shouldn't we be talking to our neighbours and making sure everyone is made aware of what is going on in the village.

SC informed the meeting that a minimum of 10 parishioners are required to call a Parish Poll. He asked for a show of hands. 47 people voted for a Parish Poll.

JL handed out 15 copies of the proposed question:

*Shapwick is listed as a Tier 4 settlement in Sedgemoor District Council's Local Plan, due its basic services and limited infrastructure. The plan states that any development should be appropriate to the scale, design and existing character of the village. Shapwick also has a unique and historically important north/south ladder formation, as set out in the SDC adopted Village Design Statement.*

***As such, do you agree that any new housing development be limited to at most, small scale\*, in-fill development which is only within the defined settlement boundary of Shapwick?***

**Yes/No**

*-\* small scale means a development which adds no more than 5% (10 properties) to the existing housing stock of the village.*

A villager asked how much would a poll cost. SC said between £1,000 and £5,000.

A villager asked if the village could conduct their own poll. JL said no as need to ensure only those on the electoral vote.

No objections were raised to the proposed question.

A villager asked What Next?

The chair said that a formal response cannot be made until a planning application has been submitted. The clerk to the Parish Council said she was collating all the emails/letters received – for and against as these will inform part of the Parish Council response. She also advised that individuals should also express their opinions via the SDC online planning comments system or via letter.

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SC expressed thanks for the organisation of the meeting.

MB questioned the credibility of affordable housing on the proposed site. He said from research an average salary of someone in their mid-20s is £24,000 and a mortgage of 3.5 times a salary is standard. He said he felt the way forward is to develop a trust to something in the village.

SB has experience in the housing profession. He posed what is affordable housing?

1. Social for rent
2. Shared ownership E.g. buy 50% rent rest from Housing Association
3. Discounted housing – market value at a discounted rate

SB When it comes to it affordable housing does not necessarily go to local people- he gave several examples locally.

KA asked what happens after the first owner and wouldn't a community led project be the way forward to ensure homes stay for local people.

FB said he had spoken to the local doctors' surgery who said that an increase in patients would be a concern

Being no further business the chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Meeting ended at 9.10pm

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