

Shapwick Parish Council
Minutes of a meeting held on 21 November 2023
at 7.00pm at the Village Hall, Shapwick

- 23/24/97 Present:** Graham Croucher, Lesley Gaskell, Moray McGowan and Paul Rogers
- 23/24/98 In Attendance:** Sue Williams (Clerk)
- 23/24/99 Also Present:** 8 villagers
- 23/24/100 Apologies for Absence**
Apologies were received from Nikki Polden and County Councillor Matt Martin
- 23/24/101 Declarations of Interest**
There were no declarations on agenda items.
- Villagers' Open Period**
- 23/24/102 County Councillor's Report**
County Councillor Matt Martin has agreed in principle to the suggestion of quarterly 'Meet your Councillor' sessions to be held within Parish Council meetings. Dates to be agreed. Councillor Martin suggested that questions should be given in advance to make best use of the sessions.
- 23/24/103 Parish Council Vacancies**
The Parish Council currently has two vacancies to be filled by co-option. To date no one has expressed an interest.
- 23/24/104 Village Green – Working Party**
The Chair expressed thanks to all this who took part in the working party morning to clear some of the site and install the seats and benches. Particular thanks to Tim Coombes and Tracey Lockyer for their help in hedge cutting and removal of the debris from the work on the village green.
The Chair is going to create a plan of action to address the issue of illegal caravans occupying the village green should the situation arise.
- 23/24/105 Village Green – Governance**
Working party still to meet. Will report back to Parish Council in due course.
- 23/24/106 Remedial Works Required**
a) Concrete Pad – Work delayed due to bad weather. It is hoped it will be completed before Christmas.
c) Boundary Walls – To date two quotes have been received. Paul Rogers has contacted two more contractors and is awaiting a reply. Once all three quotes have been received they can be compared and a decision made.
- 23/24/107 Open Central Area**
a) Benches and Seating – Benches and seating are now in place and have been secured with ground bolts. On reflection the two padlock system is more appropriate as it makes the benches and seating easier to move for events etc. whilst maintaining security. Padlocks to be purchased and key holders to be agreed. Stuart Dennes currently has the key for the table tennis table.

23/24/107 cont'd

b) WI Bench – SALC advice is that one of the benches could be donated to the WI using Section 19 Local Government Act 1976 - to provide and equip recreational facilities.

Lesley Gaskell said the WI are still fundraising to purchase a bench and are undecided as to where the bench should be located – the village green or the churchyard. Agreed to keep in communication with the WI.

c) Grass Cutting – Dovecote School has requested that the Parish Council self-bill for grass cutting. A self-billing agreement is required and has been sent to Dovecote School for completion.

23/24/108**Play Area Phase 1****a) Meeting Feedback**

Members of the Parish Council met on site with three different suppliers who have been given a brief to come back by the end of the year with a plan for a cost of £10,000 including instalment. The suppliers were advised that phases 2 and 3 will be dependent on funding but it is hoped that match funding can be found – Scott Mason of Somerset Council will support the Parish Council throughout.

b) Goal Post Offer

A villager has very kindly offered some metal goal posts for the village green. The Chair and Paul Rogers have been to inspect the goal posts and they are in good condition. However, the concern is where the posts could be sited being mindful of nearest neighbours. Moray McGowan queried the size of the posts – 5 aside size. Lesley Gaskell asked about the risks involved and whether the posts meet current required specifications. Paul Rogers said there is a potential for children to swing on the posts and the posts to topple over. The Chair said the posts are such that the front posts are longer to hold them into the ground so the post would be of a semi-permanent nature. Lesley Gaskell also commented that the ground near the goal mouth would become churned up in winter months. Graham Croucher proposed that the Parish Council accept the offer on the goal posts on the basis that a suitable location can be found. Seconded by Lesley Gaskell who added that if no such location can be found the goal posts will be donated to a good cause. Unanimous. Chair to contact villager.

23/24/109**Village Hall Car Park**

Members of the Parish Council have met with representatives from the Village Hall Committee. It was a positive meeting with both organisations having a good understanding of the expectations of the other.

It is the Parish Council belief that the boundary wall on the car park belongs to the village hall and this has been accepted by the Village Hall Committee.

The main area of concern is that once the play area has been installed visitors to the play area might park in the village hall car park which could cause an inconvenience to a hirer of the village hall. Presently this is an unknown quantity so it has been agreed to keep an open mind and act accordingly should the situation arise.

Having a Parish Council representative attend Village Hall Committee meetings, as has happened in the past, was discussed. Lesley Gaskell said while two Councillor vacancies exist this may not be possible in the short term due to capacity.

23/24/110**Church Footpath**

There have been several enquiries regarding the ownership of the footpath that runs from Bridewell Lane into the churchyard. The ownership is unclear – it did not appear as part of the land owned and subsequently sold by the Vestey Estate nor is it shown on any Rights of Way map. The suggestion is that the Parish Council, without accepting any of the liability of ownership, look after the path – cutting back overgrown vegetation etc. so that it can be used by villagers.

23/24/110 cont'd

Paul Rogers commented that there are a series of steps along the path which were possibly put in by the previous owners of the school.

23/24/111 True Speed

The Clerk had made additional enquiries with True Speed regarding current access rights as these had not appeared on any documentation when the village green was purchased. True Speed advised that there would have been an agreement between OpenReach and the landowner when that pole was originally stood. As a wayleave, rather than an easement, it wouldn't appear on the searches. It was agreed to acknowledge receipt of this information and make further enquiries regarding the wayleave.

23/24/112 Community Christmas Tree

It was agreed that this year instead of buying a tree one of the yew trees in the churchyard will be decorated with lights. The Chair had met with Nathan Pitt to discuss how he can be involved in the decoration of the tree and turning on the lights as his suggestion of having a tree at the top of Orchard Way is not possible due requirement of a licence. Sunday 3rd December at 10.00am is the chosen date for decorating the tree.

23/24/113 Allotments

a) Area for Allotments – The Chair had met with members of the Shapwick Allotment Association (SAA) following the recent clearing of the land to discuss the area available for rent. Simon Dawes (chair of SAA) has redrawn the plan which maintains the open vista, meets the plot requirements and those of the conversation officer. The hedge along Bridewell Lane will be retained with the proposal of a slight amendment to the field entrance. Councillors reviewed the amended plan.

Paul Rogers said he felt the new plan is a good compromise which maintains the view between the church and the manor house. Moray McGowan recognised that a lot of work has gone into the design and said the new plan is a good solution.

Open Session

The owners of Church Cottage asked for clarification on where pathways would be. The Chair said there would be pathways amongst the plots and one to the west of the far side of the plots running north to south but it would be of no more than one metre wide – this path is required for health and safety reasons to allow full access to all plots.

Closed Session

Graham Croucher proposed that the Parish Council accept the new plan (a copy is filed with these minutes) of the area to be leased out for allotments. Seconded by Paul Rogers. Unanimous

Open Session

A villager asked what the plans for the buffer area are. The Chair explained that the buffer area will separate the allotments from nearest neighbours. It is currently rough grassland which over time will return to a more natural meadow state. There are no plans to dig it up nor plant in it.

A villager commented that there is a need to be mindful of the consequences of rewilding.

Closed Session**b) Development of Agreement between Parish Council and SAA**

Initial discussions will be at Parish Council level before sharing with SAA.

Lesley Gaskell informed the meeting the Parish Council has become a member of the National Allotment Society (NAS) and has obtained a copy of a model lease agreement.

23/24/113(b) cont'd

There will be a lease agreement between the Parish Council and the SAA and individual agreements between the SAA and plot holders.

Lesley Gaskell said the NAS model agreement is a standard lease agreement to which the rules can be attached. The Parish Council need to make decisions on responsibilities and look at the rules proposed by the SAA to see if they are in alignment with Parish Council thinking. The Parish Council has also viewed the lease agreement Walton Parish Council has with its allotment society for use as guidance.

Prior to the meeting Councillors had reviewed the rules put forward by SAA and comments made are as follows:

Allotments to be used for personal use only not commercial.

Subletting – Parish Council would need knowledge of who the land is being sublet to. Lesley Gaskell said that in Walton PC agreement there is an obligation on the association that any sublet plots are actively maintained and asked Councillors if this should be included in the Shapwick Parish Council agreement. Graham Croucher said a definition of actively maintained would be needed. Lesley Gaskell it is up to the Parish Council to decide what it wants and make it clear in the agreement.

Buildings – There should be no buildings on site except for the maintenance shed. Fruit cages would be acceptable.

No barbecues allowed unless organised by the allotment society – Lesley Gaskell suggested this clause include the phrase unless permission is gained from the Parish Council.

It was suggested a clause to include no cultivation of illegal plants/prescribed plants should be included.

No fences to be allowed.

Lesley Gaskell asked Councillors to consider a limiting hours of use clause. It was agreed dawn to dusk as this would allow those who work during the day to still be able to access their allotment during the week.

Use of pesticides – Lesley Gaskell asked Councillors to consider this. Graham Croucher said the proximity to the water course must be taken into consideration.

Compost bins – Councillors agreed that there should be a clause stating no more than two compost bins per plot.

It was agreed that Lesley Gaskell will complete a draft agreement to circulate to Councillors before discussing with SAA. Meeting to be called to approve final document.

c) Determination of Rent

The Chair has reviewed other allotment rental agreements and made enquiries about suitable rental values. Looking at local rents it would appear for the area of land to be rented that £120 per annum is a reasonable amount.

The Parish Council has set aside funds to install a gate as part of the site preparation. As part of the rental agreement SAA will be responsible for maintaining the inside of the perimeter hedges with the Parish Council being responsible for the outside.

Moray McGowan observed that the boundary walls are separate from the agreement with the SAA and are the responsibility of the Parish Council.

Before a final decision is made on the rental value it was agreed that the Clerk would contact the Parish Council insurers to make sure that by renting land to the SAA and placing a shed on the land there would be no increase in the insurance premium which would need to be passed on.

d) Development of Allotment Rules

Covered in section 23/24/113 b) above.

e) Feedback from Grant Application

An application has been made to the Somerset Community Foundation for the purchase of a shed. A decision is expected mid-December.

23/24/114 Minutes of Meetings held on 17 October 2023
The minutes were approved and duly signed. Proposed Graham Croucher. Seconded by Lesley Gaskell. Unanimous.

23/24/115 Finance
a) Approval of Expenses
Expenses approved for payment were: Woolavington NHW £16.21 (Christmas Cards), Graham Croucher £222.54 (Bench & Table fixings), NSALG £67.00 (Membership to National Allotment Society), HMRC £108.40 (PAYE/NI Months 7 & 8), Shapwick Village Hall £72.00 (Hall hire), Charles Rayment £55.65 (Nuts, bolts and padlocks for bench fixing), Mrs SE Williams £231.38 (Salary & expenses), Marmax Products Ltd £2,186.34 (Picnic benches and tables) and BWW Print Ltd £125.26 (Shapwick News)

23/24/116 Future Meetings
a) Return to Bi-Monthly Meetings and Time of Start of Meetings Councillors discussed return to bi-monthly meetings with the working parties continuing to work on the designated areas. Meeting start time 7.15pm with Villagers' Open Period to be included within the body of the meeting. Proposed by Lesley Gaskell. Seconded Paul Rogers. Unanimous.
b) Date of Next Meeting
The date of the next Parish Council meeting will be Tuesday 23 January 2024 7.15pm Village Hall. Please note this is one week later than usual.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Signed.....

Date.....