BERWICK ST JAMES

MINUTES OF VILLAGE MEETING

DATE: Thursday 22 October 2026 at 7.00pm The Reading Room

IN ATTENDANCE: James Barnes – Chair
Bill Hiscocks – Treasurer
Carolyn MacDougall – Secretary/Clerk

APOLOGIES: Jane Locksmith, Tim Upward, Nigel Rodgers, Ian Gibb, Henry Colthurst, Stephen and Ailsa Bush, Julian and Kate Glyn-Owen, Johanna Hardy, Kate Wood, Sarah Humphreys, Anika Lange.

No. ATTENDING: 33 Parish Residents
6 Non-Parish Residents

AGENDA ITEMS	ACTION
1. WELCOME – James Barnes James Barnes warmly welcomed a number of new members and residents to our village. To Lena and Shane Rose who are the new tenants at The Boot Inn; Ben and Vicky Sharpe; Paul and Fay Martin and their children Charlie and Bobby; Limreg Hy; Tyler Finnegan and Courtney Churcher and their children Archie and Hudson.	
2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING – James Barnes Minutes of the previous Village Meeting required agreement as being a true reflection of that meeting. Motion proposed by James Hardy and seconded by Bill Hiscocks. All voted in favour. Minutes agreed and signed. Items carried forward from the previous meeting: CERP Plans (action completed); River Till data (action completed) Speedwatch – Comparison of speeders (over 36mph) from 2024 to 2026. 2024: Incoming 12.96% Outgoing 13.86% 2026: Incoming 12.55% Outgoing 15.87% Tree Preservation Order on the Lime tree: More research is needed to determine whether this tree was planted for the Queen's Silver Jubilee.	NMacD
3. BARN DANCE AIMS AND APPRAISAL – Christian Lange Christian Lange started by showing slides of accounting entries for 1977 and 1978 highlighting that it was interesting to note that barn dances were held way back then and on consecutive years. The main aims of our barn dance this year was for everyone to get together and have some fun while raising money for the Community Fund. It also allowed the Cricket Club to run the BBQ to raise much-needed funds for the refurbishment of their pavilion; and for the new tenants, Shane and Lena, to run the bar. It is hoped that we might make this an annual event linked to the village cider making. We had a great turnout of 210 people, including many from neighbouring villages. A slideshow of fun photos captured the spirit of the night. Best of all, we achieved our aim of bringing different generations together, with 45-50 children joining the fun. A full breakdown of income and expenditure was presented. Christian Lange highlighted several generous donations—with special thanks to The Boot Inn—and confirmed that the event raised £3,550, making a profit of £1,961 for the Community Fund. Any bids for these funds will need to be approved at the next Village Meeting.	

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Barn Dance/cont. *NB: Any payment of funds up to £100 can be made without prior approval but reasons need to be provided. Any payment over £100 but up to £500 must be given approval at a Village Meeting. Payments over £500 require prior warning of the request no less than 10 days before a meeting for approval by the community at a Village Meeting.* Christian Lange concluded his presentation by thanking the very many individuals who contributed to the event's success and to all those who attended. [Refer to slides for full slideshow] James Barnes took this opportunity to especially thank Christian Lange who, with great enthusiasm initiated the idea of a barn dance and also provided the amazing set-up for the night and we couldn't have done it without him. As a way of appreciation by the Village Meeting, Christian Lange was presented with a gift.	
4. TREASURER'S REPORT – Bill Hiscocks Bill Hiscocks presented the village with a balance of accounts **Precept** **Community Fund** As of 1 April 2026 £3,739 £1,727 As of 30 September 2026 £3,853 £3,534 Major items of expenditure from the Precept were: £500 to the Reading Room; Defibrillator maintenance - with thanks to Carolyn Devitt - and village insurance. The defibrillator equipment is very much needed. Regarding funds for church graveyard maintenance, there was little requirement for cutting the grass but a large branch fell from the beech tree, which needed urgent attention. Bill Hiscocks thanked Dom Ridley for his help in this matter. [Refer to slides for full accounts]	
5. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – James Barnes The Chair opened the discussion by saying that we had been asked by Wiltshire Council to review our community governance and that residents would have received detailed information from Carolyn MacDougall on this matter. The Chair of Stapleford Parish Council had informally contacted us to consider talks on a possible merger of the two parishes. The documents sent out to our villagers outlined the pros and cons of being on the one hand a Parish Council linked to Stapleford and on the other to stay as an independent Village or Parish Meeting. James Barnes continued by highlighting that at tonight's meeting we would be able to make a democratic decision on whether or not electors wish to merge or remain independent under the present governance arrangements. To make the best informed decision the Chair ran through headings of the slides. These included: [refer to slides for full information] • Stapleford Parish Council background information. • Disadvantages for Berwick St James to merge. • Advantages for Berwick St James to merge with Stapleford. • Berwick St James Parish (Village) Meeting background information. • Disadvantages for Berwick St James to remain independent. • Advantages for Berwick St James to remain independent. James Barnes then opened the floor to the village electors for them to share their views on these matters. Emphasizing the importance of the issue in-hand, he encouraged everyone to exercise their democratic right to vote. The following summary captures the key points and questions raised by electors regarding governance, financial concerns, community identity and logistics (in no particular order): • Residents noted that switching from a Village Meeting structure to a Parish Council means decisions would be made by Councillors rather than directly by village residents. • Due to Stapleford's larger adult population, Berwick residents fear they would lose their voice and be underrepresented (for example: 3 Stapleford councillors to 2 Berwick councillors). • Speakers contrasted Berwick's exceptional community engagement and 'proper democracy' with Stapleford's reported struggles to attract councillors and democratic engagement.	

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Community Governance Review – Points and Questions/cont. • Our current Village Meeting structure works perfectly and is recognised by the government for small villages. This structure has not prevented Berwick from achieving any significant local goals. • Questions were raised about whether Stapleford's need for a paid clerk (potentially linked to a recent significant precept increase) would financially burden Berwick residents. • Residents worried that funds raised by Berwick volunteers might be absorbed by Stapleford and that could destroy the motivation to fundraise. • Berwick is highly cost-effective because residents complete tasks voluntarily. • Concerns were raised about where joint meetings would be held, specifically regarding elderly residents who might struggle to travel to Stapleford. • Residents are struggling to see any real value to Berwick for a Berwick-Stapleford merger. • Residents emphasized that the two villages have entirely different identities, making a structural amalgamation difficult. • The current proposal remains extremely vague regarding councillor numbers and distribution, ward structures and meeting timings and location. • This discussion is part of a wider Community Governance Review by Wiltshire Council affecting all of Wiltshire parishes. • It was noted that the Chair of Stapleford stated that they would not proceed with the talks on a merger if Berwick vote against it, meaning the final decision lies entirely with Berwick's residents. • Berwick will formally respond to both the informal approach from the Stapleford Chair and the official Electoral Review Committee. A particular poignant message was delivered by Christian Lange, which received an overwhelming cheer: Christian Lange pointed out that it would be very interesting to know how many Stapleford villagers actually turn up at their meetings. From his understanding perhaps 10 and that would be a good attendance. For Berwick we get such huge engagement from our residents. So for instance, when we are talking about organising a barn dance, this is where people here are fully involved. It would be an enormous shame if we lost this. Christian Lange went on to add: *"When I first came to the village I was amazed to find a proper democracy – we can't get a much closer 'democracy than the one we enjoy here in Berwick and it makes me feel so proud when I go to other parishes."* The Chair announced the need to move over to the voting. There are two motions. In order for them to be voted on we will have to secure a proposer and seconder. Under government legislation, only the following are eligible to vote: those who are resident within the village boundary and those who are registered to vote in Berwick St James. The Chair has a casting vote, if required. **Vote A**: Engage in on-going informal talks with Stapleford on a possible merger of both villages. A request for a proposer for this motion was not forthcoming. Motion was withdrawn. **Vote B**: Remain as an independent Parish (Village) Meeting. Proposed by Neil MacDougall. Seconded by Christian Lange. All those who are eligible to vote were asked to raise their hands for a count. Numbers recorded in favour 33. Abstentions: 0 Against: 0 Motion carried. James Barnes thanked Carolyn MacDougall for all her work in gathering and distributing relevant information to help residents understand the process and enabling them to make decisions on our village governance.	JB

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6. INVASIVE RUSSIAN VINE – Vivienne Hill and Christine McConnell High Street residents Vivienne Hill and Christine McConnell, who live south of the Reading Room, raised concerns regarding an invasive Russian vine. While a relative of Japanese Knotweed, this specific vine is not illegal to cultivate but grows aggressively through a fast spreading rhizome root system. Its growth has been alarming since it was first logged at the Village Meeting on October 3, 2024. Although a working party was proposed at that time to try and eradicate the vine, no action was ever taken. Photographic evidence highlights the fast growing vine creeping along the rear of gardens and climbing a Southern Electric power pole; though previously cleared, the pole requires attention once more. [Refer to slides] Although this is not a village issue per se, it is important to bring it to the village's attention. Suggested actions to be organised by Vivienne Hill and Christine McConnell: • Identify which properties are affected by the Russian vine. • Urgently engage with all owners of properties affected to get a cohesive approach. • Arrange a village working party to cut back as much as is possible (January/February) • Possibly engage a company such Dom Ridley's group to cut back hard for the next stage in eradicating the vine. • Arrange to utilise an effective industrial chemical to eradicate the root (before the spring).	VH/CMcC
7. RIVER TILL – Neil MacDougall The presentation began with an overview of the River Till, which feeds into the Wylye, one of the five rivers converging in Salisbury. The source of the river is transient depending on the time of year and amount of rainfall received. Although during extended periods of heavy rainfall the source of the river can be up at Tilshead, Wessex Water places the source of year-round water supply for the river in the water meadow close to the White Lodge in Asserton. Crucially, England hosts most of the world's rare chalk streams with their delicate ecology, underscoring the urgent need for their protection. It is estimated that between 75% and 85% of the entire length of the River Till is ephemeral, i.e. non-permanent nature from Tilshead through Berwick, as was seen on the slides shown. The *'River Till Monitoring Group'* (RTMG) was established earlier this year, with members representing each village along the River Till. Through monthly testing, the group aim to locate pollution sources and improve water quality, creating a safer ecosystem for wildlife, vegetation, and our communities. In order to have the appropriate equipment for testing the water, the group required around £7,500. Recently, they received a grant from Wiltshire Wildlife for £4,200 and £3,500 in match funding from Stonehenge Area Board, which has been approved. As a result the request for £170 from Berwick may not now be required. Three key sources of river pollution have been pinpointed: the Shrewton Sewage Treatment works, agricultural fertilizers and livestock effluent The Shrewton sewage works in its present form is a major concern. Wessex Water has recently scrapped its original idea to pipe treated effluent and storm overflow from the Shrewton Water Recycling Centre (WRC) to either Winterbourne Stoke, or piping it further down the river bed to a location near the church in Berwick. The options for handling storm overflow and processed effluent are now either an engineered subsoil soakaway (drainage field) at the WRC site, or a nature-based solution routing it to a nearby vegetative plot soakaway. [Refer to slides for full presentation] The *River Till Monitoring Group* will keep the pressure on Wessex Water while conducting their monitoring.	
8. AOB **Assets of Community Value** (ACV) – Bill Hiscocks The current listing as an Asset of Community Value for The Farm Shop – now known as The Old Forge Café and Farm Shop - has expired. Following a discussion with the owner, Georgia Hansford, they have warmly welcomed a new ACV nomination to help safeguard their business's future in Berwick. The shop is thriving and remains a deeply valued part of our community. To move forward, we must form a community association and gather as many signatures as possible—the form was made available for signature at the meeting.	BH

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AOB/cont. **The Boot Inn** Shane and Lena both attended the meeting and were invited to say a few words. Shane thanked the village for their support and that we had made them feel very much 'at home'. They emphasised that the pub belongs to the whole village and expressed a strong desire to keep hearing everyone's views. Additionally, following a recent health and safety assessment for their 5th November event, they have reviewed their plans and decided to go ahead with the upcoming event without a firework display. Everyone at the meeting showed their appreciation for everything they are doing at the pub. **Events for your diary** 1. Saturday 28th November: Reading Room Christmas Fayre from 10.30 a.m. 2. Monday 14th December: Cheese & Wine & Chat evening from 7pm held at the Reading Room	

The Village Meeting closed at 8.15 p.m. followed by wine and chat