

Notes of Shipton Gorge Parish Assembly (Public Meeting), held on Thursday 15th April 2026.

Attendance. Approximately 20 parishioners, including all parish council members and the Clerk and Cllr Sally Holland, Ward Councillor for Dorset Council.

Introduction – Shipton Gorge Parish Council Chairman – Paul Thimont

Parish Council Chairman Cllr Paul Thimont was in attendance and took the role of Chair for the meeting.

Cllr Thimont welcomed all to the meeting and explained the proceedings for the meeting.

Dorset Council – Ward Councillor Sally Holland.

Councillor Holland updated residents on efforts to improve Wi-Fi and broadband access in Shipton Gorge. She explained that residents should register their interest in broadband with Openreach to help strengthen the case for improved infrastructure. Currently, internet access across the village is inconsistent, with some properties receiving good service while others have very limited or no connection. One possible solution being explored is the installation of a 23-metre mast on the ridge between Shipton Gorge and Burton Bradstock, although alternative options are still under consideration. Councillor Holland said she would continue supporting the parish council in finding solutions.

Consultation had taken place regarding a proposed parish boundary change with Loders Parish Council. Those affected had been consulted, and the agreed changes are due to come into effect in April 2027.

Residents were informed that speed restrictions will remain in place at various points along the A35 until October 2026, when responsibility for maintenance of the road transfers back to National Highways from the current contractor. Ongoing maintenance work is also being coordinated with any necessary road safety improvements and speed limit changes. Where new speed limits are introduced, there may be an adjustment period of around six months to allow drivers time to become familiar with the new restrictions before stricter enforcement begins.

Your Parish Council – Paul Thimont

Councillor Thimont reported that Townsend's of Bridport is carrying out refurbishment work on some of the equipment and gates at the playing field. He also confirmed that the contract for cutting the grass at the playing field has been awarded again to the same local company for the upcoming season.

The parish council has also been approached by several residents seeking support and training in cybersecurity. Parish councillors have completed online cybersecurity training

themselves, and while the council cannot provide direct assistance, it agreed to help residents identify suitable resources and guidance.

Further information on cybersecurity can be found at the following online addresses:

[Security and Data Protection - Nimble Elearning | Nimble Courses | Nimble LMS | Nimble Author](#)

[Dorset Police Cyber Crime Unit | Dorset Police](#)

Surface Water Inundation. Cllr Martine Simmonds issued an update on work that the parish council have been following up with regard to surface water inundation in the village. Councillor Simmonds updated residents on progress relating to surface water and flooding issues within the village. Following a request last year for residents to provide photographs and videos showing surface water on roads and footpaths, the parish council compiled evidence and submitted a report to the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West (FWAGSW). FWAGSW agreed to take the matter forward as part of its Dorset Rural Runoff Project, which is funded through the Dorset Council Local Levy Fund.

Representatives from the parish council, including Ian Ferguson, met with FWAGSW officers in December. Since then, the assigned project officer has carried out technical assessments around the village, including examining soil conditions and overland water flow routes.

During visits to Shipton Gorge in January and February, following periods of heavy rain, the project manager observed significant run-off from Shipton Road near the junction with Chapel Street, as well as strong surface water flow along the public footpath by Barton House. Although the drain at the junction appeared to be functioning, substantial water flow remained on the footpath.

FWAGSW stressed the importance of carefully considering any intervention to avoid creating unintended consequences elsewhere. Potential mitigation measures, therefore, need to be assessed carefully to determine what solutions would effectively slow or stop the water flow.

The issue is further complicated by the need to work with private landowners whose fields contribute to the run-off. FWAGSW will lead discussions directly with the farmers and landowners, while the parish council will not be directly involved in those negotiations. Discussions will focus on possible mitigation measures and any grant funding opportunities that may be available to support the work.

A meeting has already taken place with the owner of the field above Barton House. However, Councillor Simmonds confirmed that no contact had yet been made with the owners of the field near the junction of Chapel Street and Shipton Road.

Drains. Councillor Simmonds reported that the parish council has produced a small leaflet to be distributed with the next edition of the Bride Valley News. The leaflet encourages residents to monitor local drains and, where possible, clear away debris to help prevent blockages and flooding. It also includes contact details for Dorset Council so that residents can report blocked drains and related issues directly.

Community Resilience Plan. Councillor Simmonds advised that the first draft of a new Community Resilience Emergency Plan has now been completed. The draft plan covers a range of emergency situations, including loss of electricity, water or gas supplies, fallen trees, and includes relevant national and local emergency contact numbers.

The parish council now intends to share the draft with other village organisations to gather further comments, feedback and additional information before the plan is finalised.

During the discussion, one resident noted that a previous draft resilience plan had been produced around five years ago. The parish council confirmed that it has access to the earlier document and will incorporate relevant information from it where appropriate.

The Village Hall

Presentation from Village Hall Chairman Richard Hewlett

The village hall continues to be well used by a wide range of organisations on both a regular and occasional basis.

For the 2025 financial year, income from hall hire totalled £5,700. This was more than £1,000 lower than the previous year due to a reduction in hire bookings. General running costs for the year amounted to £4,700, resulting in a small overall profit.

Over the past five years, hire charges for the hall have been intentionally kept low to encourage community use. The hall is also provided free of charge for the Breakfast Church, the Village Fete, and the Archive Day.

Additional financial support comes through donations and fundraising activities. Around £850 is raised annually through the village 100 Club, alongside other smaller fundraising events held throughout the year.

Arts Reach also provides funds for the hall.

A substantial amount of grant funding has recently been secured and is currently being used to support improvements to the village hall building. Of the hall's annual income of £4,700, more than £2,000 came from interest earned on these grant funds. However, it was noted that this interest income will not continue into the next financial year.

The ongoing success of the hall depends on four main groups of users. Firstly, village residents regularly hire the hall for events and activities. Secondly, local organisations, including the parish council, contribute through payment for meetings and regular use. Miscellaneous bookings account for around 18% of total hires. The largest contributor is the Table Tennis Club, which provides over 50% of the hall's income and is considered essential to the hall's financial stability. Other regular users include the Dog Training Club and the Circle Dancers.

Richard appealed for additional volunteers to serve as Trustees of the Village Hall and expressed thanks to those currently serving in the role.

The ongoing Access for All project will extend the village hall building to provide improved accessibility for all users. The project includes the creation of a new accessible toilet and washroom facility, enlargement of the entrance lobby, and refurbishment of the existing toilet facilities. Access routes and exits throughout the hall will also be upgraded to ensure they are fully wheelchair friendly.

Three-quarters of the funding required for the project has been secured through public grants and support from the Lottery Commission.

The hall remains available for community hire at a rate of £22 per session, with a session defined as either half a day or an evening.

Lillian Stone Trust

Presentation from Richard Hewlett.

Richard reminded residents that the Trust was established in 1936 and has now been operating for 90 years. The charitable objective of the Trust is to apply its income for the benefit of poor residents within the parish of Shipton Gorge. The Trust is formally classified as supporting the prevention or relief of poverty, with grants funded primarily through interest generated from the original capital sum, believed to have been £10,000 — a substantial amount at the time the Trust was created.

Grants are available to individuals within the parish, including children and young people, elderly residents, and members of the wider public. Eligibility is specifically limited to residents of Shipton Gorge parish.

Richard explained that the understanding of poverty has evolved considerably since the Trust's inception, and the Charity Commission now provides more modern guidance on who may benefit. Between 2006 and 2010, grants supported a variety of needs, including higher education, school expenses, transport, school trips, and equipment for elderly residents. However, no grants had been awarded in recent years until last year, when the Trust was advertised again, and applications were invited.

Two applications were received, although one was unsuccessful because the applicant lived outside the parish. A grant was successfully awarded to a young person within the village, which Richard described as particularly rewarding.

It was recognised that awareness of the Trust needs to improve so that more residents know support may be available. Four trustees currently manage the Trust: Richard Hewlett, Paul Thimont, the local Rector, Andrew Rawling, and Heather Butter. The trustees remain open to receiving applications for funding from parish residents who may need assistance.

Arts Reach

Arts Reach, a Dorset-based charity funded by the Arts Council England and Dorset Council, continues to bring cultural performances to rural communities and village halls, including Shipton Gorge.

During the past year, four varied performances were hosted in the village hall. These included alternative poet Luke Wright, the music act Music for Cows, the international trio Flowers, and John Doran with Northern Assembly. Although the size of the village hall and stage limits the types of performances that can be accommodated, the events collectively raised £658 for the hall.

The performances are intended not only to provide cultural entertainment but also to raise funds for the village hall through ticket sales and bar income. A matinee performance was trialled for the Flowers concert and appeared to work particularly well, especially given the age profile of the village population. As a result, further afternoon performances may be considered in the future. Organisers welcomed additional ideas to help improve future events.

Typical audiences range between 50 and 70 people, with around half travelling from more than four miles away, helping to attract visitors into the village. Approximately 20% of attendees are village residents. Efforts are also being made to work with the local pub by offering pre-show meals, which would help support the pub as well as the events themselves.

The Village Society

Presentation from Graham Garner.

Graham explained that the Village Society is made up of six members and thanked those who had recently contributed updates for the village welcome pack, which is provided to all new residents moving into Shipton Gorge. Feedback on the pack has been very positive.

He also thanked everyone involved in organising the annual Flower and Vegetable Show and Village Fete, which remains one of the highlights of the village calendar. As well as raising important funds for local organisations, the event's main purpose continues to be bringing the community together and ensuring everyone has an enjoyable time.

The Society has also organised several other successful community events, including quiz nights with fish and chips at the village hall and a popular race night. In addition, the annual archive weekend is due to take place in May. Considerable work has gone into creating a visual history of the village, showing its development from earlier times through to the present day. The event will provide an opportunity for both long-standing and newer residents to learn more about the village and its history.

At Christmas, the Society supports the local pub by funding and decorating an outdoor Christmas tree, which was particularly well received last year. The Society also provides small summer gifts for village children and contributes towards the funding of outdoor hanging baskets around the village.

The Society reported that funding is available to support additional community events, but there is currently a shortage of new ideas and volunteers willing to organise and run them.

One initiative the Society is particularly keen to continue is a social gathering introduced last year, aimed especially at residents living on their own. The idea was to provide regular

opportunities for people to meet for tea, coffee, and conversation to help reduce loneliness and social isolation within the village.

Due to the ongoing works at the Village Hall, the gatherings were unable to continue into the new year, but it is hoped they will restart later this year once the hall improvements are further advanced.

Shipton Gorge Heritage

Presentation from Anne Crowe

Membership of the organisation remains fairly stable, although there is always a need for new members and volunteers. There is currently a vacancy for a trustee, and anyone interested in taking on the role has been encouraged to contact Anne.

Regular volunteer working sessions continue to take place in the village orchard and the Saunders Richardson Wood, with the aim of holding one session each month. Dates for these activities are shared through the village Facebook page, noticeboards, the village diary, and the Bride Valley News.

Earlier in the year, trees in the orchard were pruned with assistance from David Squirrel. Despite a particularly wet early spring, the damson tree has already blossomed, and the apple trees are beginning to grow. Volunteers have also tidied the top border area and cleared back rosebay willow herb, which had become invasive.

During the working session held in the second week of April, additional areas were cleared, and wildflower seeds were sown. Recent rainfall has helped the seeds establish, and yellow rattle, donated by one of the members, was planted in selected areas.

Thanks were extended to residents for regularly checking and emptying the dog waste bin. However, disappointment was expressed that some dog owners are still failing to clean up after their pets.

In the Saunders Richardson Wood, work has recently been carried out along Slackham Lane, where a couple of trees affected by ash dieback have been heavily cut back for safety and conservation reasons. The organisation has also funded the traditional laying of a significant stretch of hedge.

Over the winter, small trees and additional hedging plants were planted throughout the wood. In early April, further bird-friendly hedging plants were added along the Slackham Lane hedge. These plants have been marked and will be monitored as they establish.

Residents were also invited to take part in Dawn Chorus Day on 3 May, when the wood will open at 5 am.

The use of nettle fertiliser is also expected to continue this year. As nettles begin to grow again in the woods, they can be put to practical use rather than simply being cut back and discarded.

The organisation reported that it had made a small donation to the local pub to support the introduction of insect-friendly planting within the pub gardens. Patsy Jacobs is overseeing the project and is currently considering suitable plants for the scheme.

This year, the organisation will also be running the Tombola at the village fete, and donations for prizes will be gratefully received.

The popular Gin Club will continue, with tickets expected to go on sale shortly.

A successful application was also made to the Waitrose Community Matters community funding scheme, and payment from the initiative is expected soon.

Discussions are continuing with Dorset Council regarding possible improvements to the section of footpath running from Slackham Lane up towards the field.

The annual Apple Day event is planned for around the third week of October. While volunteers are always needed to support the event, external contractors may occasionally need to be employed to undertake specialist work. This creates additional costs, meaning further fundraising efforts will be necessary.

Anne concluded by thanking all members for their continued financial support, as well as their contributions during volunteer workdays and fundraising events.

St Martin's Church

Presentation from Helen Fry.

The church continues to be looked after by a volunteer band of pretty amazing people. From churchyard operators mowing the grass, to keep the brambles at bay, to flower arrangers, polishers, key holders, and flag monitors. Every day the church is open, and the business book shows that people continue to love the peace and restful opportunities that St Martin's provides. And they praise the work of these volunteers. It was noted that there is always room for more volunteers to become involved.

The church currently holds two regular services each month: a Holy Communion service in the church itself and a Breakfast Church service in the village hall. Both are well valued by those who attend, and visitors are always welcome.

The breakfast church sometimes welcomes up to 12 children attending with their families, but usually around 8 to 10. The event is intended to be intergenerational, not solely focused on children. These events would not happen without the amazing volunteers, including the wonderful Sally. Sally is there at every breakfast, in the church kitchen, washing the dishes, sorting out all the breakfast. She is everywhere. She is brilliant. Thank you, Sally.

The church continues to hold a variety of occasional services and events throughout the year, including funerals and baptisms. Recent services have included a remembrance service for loved ones, a United Benefice service, Easter Sunday celebrations, the Carol Service, Bell Sunday, and the Good Friday service.

It has also been a challenging period for the church community. Reverend Margaret, who had been part of the ministry team, recently retired. In addition, many residents will be aware that Andrew Rawling suffered an accident at Christmas. Although he has now returned to work, a variety of visiting clergy and lay worship leaders will continue supporting services until a replacement for Margaret is appointed.

The church was pleased to host the community choir for its first-ever concert on a wet and windy day in December. During the ongoing village hall refurbishment works, the church has also accommodated the dog training group.

It was emphasised that the church remains open and available for anyone who may need to use it in whatever way is helpful. Andrew Rawling welcomed further ideas for community use of the church.

There is a merry band of bell ringers who continue to enthusiastically practice and ring for Sunday services, and there is a real commitment amongst them. This is also reflected by some amazing fundraising, which has been secured alongside many grants, for the work necessary for the maintenance of the bells. Tracy's Pies for Peals was a notable success, serving refreshments to visiting bell ringers and running the tea tent at the village fete.

However, the church continues to face financial pressures, and further maintenance work is required. A recent drone survey of the building revealed several areas of concern, including a significant crack visible in one of the photographs. Additional fundraising activities are therefore being planned to help maintain the building.

An opera night is scheduled for 13 June, with around half the tickets already sold. The evening will be hosted by Ian Bloomfield, who will be joined by a number of visiting opera singers. Plans are also underway for a Christmas Tree Festival, which will include several associated community events.

New Inn Support Limited (NISL)

Presentation from Graeme Foster.

NISL is a group of five people — Paul, Simon, Sally, Graeme, and Ashley — who manage the relationship between the pub and its owners, Palmers Brewery. The organisation is not responsible for the day-to-day running of the pub, which is handled by the tenants, currently Jack and Tia.

Jack and Tia took over the tenancy in May 2025, with a soft opening taking place on 23 May. Before their arrival, a large number of village volunteers worked extremely hard to refurbish and improve the pub. Considerable work was carried out, and thanks were extended to everyone in the village who contributed their time and effort.

Since reopening, Jack and Tia have worked tirelessly to rejuvenate and reinvigorate the pub despite difficult trading conditions. They have introduced regular opening hours, improved the food menu and drinks selection, and begun letting the two upstairs guest rooms, which have generated valuable additional income. They have also overseen redecoration and improvements to the pub's overall appearance.

Several successful events have recently taken place at the pub, including popular quiz nights, three music evenings during 2025, ladies' and gentlemen's Christmas lunches, and a lively New Year's Eve celebration. Support from the FONIs (Friends of the New Inn) group has also been greatly appreciated.

However, as with many UK pubs, trading continues to be challenging, and the New Inn relies heavily on the support of the village. Anecdotally, a pub closes roughly every day in the UK, and there were between 365 and 370 pub closures last year.

The pub is now managed by two excellent people, Jack and Tia, who are doing a good job in managing the pub on the village's behalf.

What is happening in 2026? A new wine list will be available very soon; however, if anything is missing, if you have a particular favourite wine that you would like to be on the list and you are going to come and consume it regularly, then please have a word with Jack about it. There is a new menu which will constantly evolve to meet seasonality and customer needs, so again, Jack is receptive to any changes there.

However, the letting rooms are currently closed. This is due to compliance issues identified after a Legionella survey and a fire safety audit carried out by the owners, Palmers. Remedial work is required before they can be reopened, and they will only return to service once fully signed off.

After the village fete on 8th August, the pub will host a live band to entertain villagers. Quizzes will continue, and hopefully, the village lunches, in conjunction with the FONI's, will also continue.

The pub is continuing essential remedial work to meet safety and legal standards, including previous upgrades like fire doors, a refurbished upstairs, and a new water tank. Remaining issues include water pressure (possibly requiring boiler or pipework work) and upgrades to fire safety systems, with NISL and Palmers working together on compliance.

Funding is tight, but has been supported by a large single donation, village fundraising, and FONI's help. The pub still relies heavily on local and visitor trade for food, drink, and accommodation.

The lease has six years left, with Jack and Tia running the pub under a sublease from Palmers, who remain supportive and have recently contributed financially to its upkeep.

Communication about pub events could be improved, as information is often shared on Facebook or email, which not everyone uses. To reach more people, events should also be added to the village diary, notice boards, and the Bride Valley News.

Additional questions and points raised by those in attendance.

Litter in the village was raised as an issue, particularly along roads leading into the village. While many villagers already help by picking up litter when they see it, the problem persists in some areas.

It was also noted that Dorset Council do not always clear all road signs after highway work.

Any remaining litter or highway-related issues can be reported directly to Dorset Council via their portal, [Report a problem on a road or pavement - Dorset Council](#)

It was suggested that the annual village litter pick be reinstated in early spring, and the Parish Clerk has asked for details on how previous events were organised.

The Parish Council also plans to launch a new website to meet legal requirements for transparency and data protection and will discuss this further with local organisations.

An update was given on village fingerposts: cleaning and refurbishment work is already planned and will be carried out soon by Cllr Crafter and a volunteer, with help from a local expert. Additional volunteers are welcome to contact Cllr Crafter directly for further information. An appeal for help will also be placed in the Bride Valley News.

The Chairman thanked everyone who attended the meeting and expressed appreciation to all those who gave presentations during the evening.

The meeting ended at 8.31pm.