

Shipton Gorge Ltd

Notes of the public meeting held on 2nd February 2007 in the Village Hall, Shipton Gorge.

Over 60 persons were present including the 5 directors. Apologies were received from 10 village residents.

1. The Chairman, Charles Errington, **welcomed the public** and asked each director to introduce themselves and briefly explain their reason for becoming involved in the company. He then said that he was sorry if some villagers had been upset by the way the company had told the village about the purchase of the land but that it was now time to move forward and to be constructive.
2. The **purpose of this meeting** was to dispel fears and concerns, share information, seek ideas and plan for the future management of the land and the company.
3. The Chairman then explained the **organisation of the company** and that legal advice had been sought before the company formation. Shipton Gorge Limited has been formed as a company limited by guarantee using standard charitable rules. This means that the Company cannot dispose of assets except to a charity with similar objects or with the permission of the charity commissioners, nor can the status be changed except by permission of the charity commissioners. The Company was in the process for applying for full charity status. Public meetings would be held at least once per year so that village residents and other interested parties can express their views. He further explained that Members of the Company have a responsibility much like shareholders but with no financial benefits and there is one vote per member. It was proposed that all contributors of funds to the Company to date should be invited to become initial Members, who would have the power to appoint or to remove directors.
4. The Company Secretary, Mary Boughton, told the meeting about the **current finances** of the Company and of the money received by way of donations and loans and money spent to date. Currently the Company has £1,577.50 in its current account and loans to be repaid of £8,000.00
5. The next item on the agenda was a **Question and Answer session** for the public to ask the directors to clarify anything that was not clear. The Chairman started this section by inviting Christine Hewlett to read out a letter from her husband who is the current Chairman of the Parish Council. He then read out a letter received from Revd Bob Thorn the Rector of St Martin's Church. Both had been unable to attend the meeting and asked for their letters to be read to the meeting and both offered their support to the Company and its objectives. In the open question session one member of the public voiced his concern about the consultation with himself as the owner of property adjoining the land that had been purchased and his concerns about privacy. The Chairman explained that all neighbours had been consulted by letter and only one, St Martins Church, had replied in writing with concerns about ivy roots in the footings of the wall bordering the churchyard. He reassured the public that the wishes of the adjoining property owners would be paramount in any decisions taken on the use of the land for the future and that all the directors would welcome dialogue with any of the neighbours. Another village resident asked whether it would be necessary to put low level lighting along the footpath for safety reasons and another person asked for reassurance that the footpath would remain. Robert Langran confirmed that the public footpath would remain across the land and that lighting was not necessary. However he also told the meeting that Dorset County Council had recently offered to undertake some work on the path to improve its safety and that this was expected to be completed within a few weeks. There were no other questions at this stage.
6. The Chairman then invited everyone present to join in a **discussion on what the community would like to see the land used for** once it was cleared. The only restriction on it was that it could not be used for the sale of alcohol. There were many suggestions including grazing for sheep or pigs, allotments as in the recent past, a war memorial, garden of

remembrance, an orchard and just a quiet space. Pamela Graham then told the meeting about the research she had undertaken looking back at the archives to find out about the land. She showed the meeting a copy of the Tithe Map of 1843 with a record showing that the land had been owned by the Earl of Ilchester and occupied by one Abraham Bartlett as an orchard. This idea of looking at the history of its use had come from a letter from a Miss Patricia Lawrence who had written to the Company to say that she remembered it being an orchard prior to 1938 when she moved into the village. The 2006 Shipton Gorge calendar also shows a photograph of the land in 1953 where the apple blossom is clearly visible. The idea of restoring the land to an orchard was widely discussed and was supported by over 40 people at the meeting. No other suggestions for possible use were supported.

7. The next item for discussion was a possible **name for the land** and some suggestions received were Church Field; Brookstreet Field; The Old Orchard. There was no consensus of opinion as to what name should be used and it was agreed that further thought would be given to this and Pam Graham would carry out some more research so that a decision could be made at the next public meeting that was arranged for early April.

8. The first priority was to **clear the land and erect a fence** as a boundary on the eastern edge.

It was necessary to have this done professionally as the land had been derelict for some time and was thick with brambles and many half grown sapling trees which would need removal. A quotation of £1,000 had been received for doing this work and a further quotation of £398 to erect the fence. Mary Boughton explained that funding might be available through a community fund to help with the cost of this initial work but that this was subject to the parish council contributing 5% of the cost. The meeting was asked if they supported applying for this grant and unanimously agreed that an application should be made.

9. It was felt that **future maintenance** would be relatively simple and much of this could be carried out by volunteers, of which many had already come forward. Mary Boughton explained that the conditions of the liability insurance precluded volunteers lighting bonfires on the land and also that all volunteers and contractors carrying out any work would be required to sign a register to show that they were aware of the health and safety arrangements in place.

10. **Future funding** was discussed and various fund raising ideas were put forward including an auction, coffee mornings, dance, competitions etc. The Chairman said that it was hoped that some residents would contribute a regular, even if small, amount monthly by Standing Order and that forms were available. Just half the village households giving £1 per month would provide an annual income of over £1,000 which would cover the basic ongoing maintenance costs such as insurance. However it was necessary to do some initial serious fund raising so that the loans could be repaid as soon as possible. There were many offers of help and suggestions with fund raising.

11. Under **Any Other Business** a number of people in the hall voiced their support for the project and their pride in the achievements of Shipton Gorge, of which the acquisition of this land and the proposal to return it to a village orchard was just one example.

12. The **next meeting** would be held on Good Friday the 6th April and notices would be posted as a reminder.