



North Somerset Beekeepers

(a Branch of Avon Beekeepers Association Reg Charity No 271717)

Minutes of Committee Meeting on 16 February 2026

At 7.30pm at the George Backwell

1. Members attending

Heather Pitch, Tony Slater, Michelle Blackborow, Claire Daly, Rob Francis, Michael Batchelor, Tom Francis, Annette Healy, Eric Sortwell.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Jennifer Stallwood. Paddy Brading and Adam Evans were also absent.

3. Approval of minutes of 8 December 2025

- The minutes were approved with a request to upload them to the website.
- A spelling error in Ruth Chadney's name on page 8 needs correction before uploading.

4. Matters arising (not covered below)

- The location of a small projector screen was uncertain but had been located in Tony's garage.
- Tom had sold the Omlet Beehaus Beehive on eBay for £350.
- Phil Chisnell's nuc was accounted for, and his wife would take it on after her introduction course.
- Michael and David have yet to visit the show shed owing to the wet conditions.

5. Treasurer's Report

- Bank Balance 31 January 2026 = £21,949 (31 January 2025 £19,329)
- The bank balance was similar to last year due to recent expenditures of £2,414 on fondant and syrup for the Bulk Purchase Scheme, £206 for a mower service, other apiary items, and £880 for two new extractors. Additionally, the club has paid for hall hire and other costs associated with training and events, including Introductory and

Improvers classes, the Skep Course, the Honey Show, and Saturday talks. Spending was approximately £650 in October and November, and £5,660 in December and January, highlighting the variable nature of income and expenditure throughout the year.

- Two extractors were purchased.
- Capitation fees expected soon of around £6,000.
- Another Lloyds customer had accidentally used NSBK bank account details to set up a direct debit for £35 to DVLA. This was detected by Michael and refunded by the bank.
- A member had mistakenly paid £10 for the Spring Convention Day to the club instead of Avon, and Michael had corrected this.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

- Membership decreased from 245 to 221.
- 46 members lapsed, with 15 from the 2024 intake.
- Gift aid was down from 208 to 188.
- Lapsed members needed to be removed from Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Heather had already removed lapsed members from Facebook. Annette would become a WhatsApp admin so she would be able to do this herself.
- There were seven people on the intro list for 2027.
- The BBKA ADM minutes from January indicate capitation fee would increase from October 1st, 2026, by £1 for Registered, Partner and Country members. Junior membership would remain unchanged. The BBKA (and Avon's) Treasurer, Mark Hunter, had suggested small yearly increases were preferable to larger increases every five years.

WhatsApp Community Proposal (moved up from AOB)

- Stefan Dewer, Adrian Wells, and Simon Thatcher suggested creating a WhatsApp community for all groups. The proposal involved consolidating all WhatsApp groups into one with subsections.
- Concerns were raised about managing permissions and notifications: Advantages: potentially easier to remove members from all groups at once. Disadvantages: potential confusion and the need to join multiple subgroups.
- It was suggested that the Committee should invite Stefan to a meeting to explain his proposal further.
- Bee Noise: was created to separate general conversations from swarm-related discussions.
- Swarm Collectors: Adrian was in charge and spends a lot of time on it during the summer. He manages swarms, resolves issues, and offers advice.
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7. Secretary's Report

- Tony said that there was a crate of old NSBK records in his garage given to him when he took over as Secretary. They probably need preserving – at least some of them – and he wondered if anyone would like the job of digitising them for eventual storage on our website. It was suggested that we contact Wendy Welham to see if she would take this on. Tony mentioned a minute of a committee meeting in 2009, held in Tom Salter's house. It was very interesting and he said he would circulate it.
- Tony had explored Black Mountain Honey's "14 Day Beekeeper" online course, - by paying the subscription and then asking for repayment after a day - which features 150 videos by Lawrence Edwards and a members' forum. The program aims to transform novices into beekeepers within 14 days of four-hour daily study (or any longer period of the customer's choosing). While Tony believed it didn't replace in-person teaching, he saw it as a valuable alternative for aspiring beekeepers unable to attend traditional courses. The £150 course offers lifetime access to videos and the forum, and Tony suggested it as a *possible* recommendation for those who were too late for the course and want to start beekeeping straight away.
- Still looking for a successor when Tony resigns as Secretary at the end of the year.

8. Education Secretary's Report

- Claire looked into booking a room at Langford (University of Bristol) for the Bee Health Certificate Training. However, the cost was £550 for the day or £450 for four hours. This was agreed to be a much higher cost than anticipated and too expensive. Depending on the format of the day the Churchill Memorial Hall could be a viable and more affordable option. Claire to action.
- Heather asked whether anyone knew where the straws and stickers were for the honey tasting session at the Introductory course. She would buy more.
- Attendance at the Introductory course numbers seemed down this year. Last week there were about 22 attendees. One lady was pregnant and can't attend but hasn't asked for a refund. A snapshot would be taken of the register, and Heather would follow up persistent and unexplained absentees.

9. Apiary Manager's Report

- The apiary was in decent shape. There had been one loss over the winter: the Flow Hive which dwindled due to Varroa and too big a space. Tom has been sterilising all the poly kit in the apiary shed, using soda crystals and sodium hypochlorite solution.
- The mower has been serviced.

- Bi-weekly visits would start now.
- Newbees from last year were facing difficulties around taking their hives away from the apiary because of unseasonably mild temperatures. Tom has agreed they can keep them in the apiary until mid-March and then must remove them.
- Frame making sessions had been held.
- Fondant and syrup delivery had been received.
- Ruth had revamped the hive record cards.
- Tom said he was going to the Beekeeping Show in Telford this Saturday (21 February 2026). He would like authority to buy miscellaneous equipment (hive straps, hive tools, etc.) for the apiary. The estimated budget of a few hundred pounds was approved.
- Extractors were in the apiary shed. Simon Thatcher was prototyping 3D printed anti scratch “bungs” for the legs,
- The new beekeepers would be coming to the apiary probably before the next committee meeting. Heather said they would need to sign a Health and Safety document, and Permissions needed to be added to a WhatsApp group.

Admin Secretary Assistant for Tom

- Tony said he had included in a recent members’ email a request for a volunteer to take on some of the admin work associated with managing the apiary, such as maintaining the rota and managing the sale of bulk goods and supplies. This person wouldn't need beekeeping experience.
- Ruth was suggested as an ideal person for the role.

Re-queening Discussion

- Tony had written a briefing note on this subject which had been circulated to the Committee.
- Tom explained the background to his proposal. He said he had had both good and bad experiences with beekeeping over 15 years. Bad experiences with "vile colonies" almost made him quit. He then had contact with Jed Marshall (BHP Queens) and Keld Bramstrup (Danish queen breeder) and this changed his experience. He bought island mated Buckfast queens from them. The queens resulted in a good honey yield and calm bees.
- Tom said he also had concerns about irresponsible re-queening. He said beekeepers were buying imported queens in large numbers, risking the introduction of tropical diseases and pests. However, there were good UK breeders that should be supported instead.
- Tom’s proposal was to:
 - Buy from a select number of UK bee breeders (around three).
 - Form a small sub-committee to discuss and decide on breeders.
 - Conduct a trial to compare the selected stock with locally adapted stock.
 - The goal was to see if there were noticeable differences in quality or productivity.

Discussion about the proposal

Past Queen Rearing Experiences

- Eric said he used to buy queens for the apiary regularly mainly from Black Forest Mountain, for both him and the apiary.
- Rob said a queen rearing group was formed 10-12 years ago, but it lacked focus and a scientific approach. The group learned from experienced beekeepers like Martin Stickland and Phil Clemente, but it didn't push forward in a structured way.

F2 Aggression

- Some experienced F2 aggression (second-generation aggression) after buying Buckfast queens.
- The original queens were excellent, but their daughters were aggressive. Tony said that one of his colonies, whose queen was the daughter of a Buckfast queen he had bought, became so aggressive that the colony had to be destroyed.

BBKA's position

- Tony said that the BBKA's objections to buying commercially produced queens centred around three concerns:
 - Risk of introducing pests and diseases. The proposal was to purchase queens bred in the UK, albeit bred from breeder queens imported from Denmark. *Tropilaelaps* was not present in Denmark.
 - Belief that local stock was better adapted. Tony said he thought this was exaggerated. The climate in Denmark (which was where the better Buckfast stock were imported from) was similar to that of the UK and locally adapted stock were not necessarily superior.
 - That new beekeepers should be taught to raise their own queens. It was part of the craft of beekeeping. However, buying queens to requeen a few colonies did not prevent local queens being bred for other colonies.

Tom's Experience with Re-queening

- Tom doesn't breed from his bees but has allowed them to re-queen themselves.
- He hasn't experienced issues with aggression or other negative traits.
- He attributes this to the proximity of his apiary sites, which leads to drones from calmer colonies mating with his queens.

Bloreng Honey

- A beekeeper near Abergavenny called Bloreng Honey raises 150 nucs a year from their own line, without importing anything.
- It could be a good option for new beekeepers.

Bee Farmer's Perspective

- A bee farmer from Bloreng tried to get Bristol university to run scientific trials to test the theory of F2 aggression by comparing locally bred bees with a Buckfast line.

However, commercial breeders were unwilling to participate due to potential negative results.

- Tony reported that the Blorenge bee farmer believed the government may eventually ban all imports of queens and bees. The bee farmer also believed that if this happened, the trade would go underground and that some bee farmers would smuggle queens into the UK. At least, currently, there were good Sanitary Controls at points of entry.

Proposal

- A proposal was made for Tom to go ahead with a trial of selected queen stock.

Decision

- The proposal for Tom to conduct a trial was approved. All present were in favour except Michael who abstained on the ground that he could not vote in favour of a motion that might, however tenuously, encourage the importation of queens, thereby increasing the risk of introducing pests and diseases to the UK.

10. Programme Manager's report

- Feedback forms were used to collect opinions on events.
- The skep making event with Vanessa Woodford had 12 attendees and received good feedback.
- Hive monitoring talk at Churchill received mixed reviews.
- Claire said suggestions for future events included wax extraction, wax cleaning, wraps, creams, cosmetics, and candle making. A lady from Bridgewater who does wax flower making may be contacted for future events.
- The forms would be adapted based on feedback.
- Feedback forms would be available at the next event on Saturday.
- Vanessa, who led the skep making, didn't charge for her time, so a donation would be made to Maggie Gill's research on *Tropilaelaps*. It was decided that £200 would be donated.
- Concern was raised about sending children away with candles made at the North Somerset show. A self-adhesive label for the candles was being designed with safety information. The risk assessment for the show should incorporate candle rolling safety.
- Claire said Zeffy was a free booking system, ideal for non-profit organisations. It would be trialled for events requiring payment (the skep making course would have been ideal). It could simplify payment management compared to Eventbrite.
- Volunteers were needed for the North Somerset Show on May 4th.
- Hans Wilson was sponsoring the event again. North Somerset Show was providing 28 free tickets for helpers.

- Belinda Kumpel was taking on the secretarial role for the Branch Honey show in February, with Sandra's help. Claire Eden may be able to assist. It was likely (since confirmed) that Sandra would also be the show secretary for the North Somerset Show in May.
- Avon Spring Gathering at Shipham was on March 28th. More advertising was needed every 10 days to remind people. Rob thought the program lacked an outside speaker which would have added to the attraction.

11. Webmaster's report

- There was no report.
- Website review postponed to next meeting.

12. Avon BKA Representative's report

- Eric said he was winding down from committee work but wants to continue beekeeping. He was stepping down from organising the special needs school event in Nailsea and would like someone to step forward to take over as it was such a good cause.
- There was no enthusiasm in the committee for repeating representation at the Jackland's fishing lakes countryside events.
- The venue and singers had been booked for the Christmas event. Eric said he assumed that Claire would now be taking over the organisation. It was noted that Zeffy could be used for this event.

13. Yellow-legged Hornet coordinator

- There was no report as Jen was absent due to work commitments. Heather said she would have liked feedback from the Yellow-legged Asian Hornet talk on 24 January in Bridgwater.

14. Chair's report

- The electric extractor needs a PAT test. Heather would action.

15. Website review

- Michael sent a comprehensive document.
- Tony still had minutes to send to Adam.
- Seasonal advice on the website needed sorting.

- The application form for the introductory beekeeping course should be removed.

16.Any Other Business

- Purchase of two microscopes: Jen was handling this.

17.Date of next meeting

- Monday 20 April 2026 at the George, Backwell, at 7.30 pm.