



North Somerset Beekeepers

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

Minutes of Committee Meeting on 8 December 2025

At 7.30pm at the George Backwell

1. Members attending

Tony Slater, Eric Sortwell, Tom Francis, Michael Batchelor, Claire Daly, Heather Pitch, Jennifer Stallwood, Rob Francis, Annette Healy

2. Apologies

Paddy Brading, Adam Evans, Michelle Blackborow.

3. Approval of Previous Minutes (27th October):

- Decision: The minutes were approved.
- Action Item: Tony Slater to send the approved minutes to Adam for upload to the website.
- It was noted that the September 1st minutes were missing from the website; only February, April, and June were currently posted, and Tony should send these to Adam as well.

4. Matters Arising:

- Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Registration: It was confirmed via Mark Hunter that ICO registration was not required for North Somerset Beekeepers.

5. Treasurer's Report

- Michael said the bank balance was currently very healthy, approximately £6,500 - £7,000 higher than last year. This was primarily a timing issue, as recent bulk stock purchases had not yet been paid for. Incoming funds had been substantial (£10,000 in six weeks), but this was expected to slow.
- The 2024/25 accounts had been signed off by Mark Hunter.
- Debit Card: The club debit card was now fully operational and had been used by Tom for an online purchase, and as the means of payment for the recent Christmas meal.
- Efforts were underway to update recurring club expenses (e.g., McAfee subscription, Microsoft) to be billed directly to the club's account to avoid members paying and claiming expenses.
- Work was proceeding on documenting software licences and setting up cloud storage (linking to the training program).
- Annette now had banking access to track membership payments.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

Annette said:

- The club had 245 members in total.
- Renewal Status: 67% had renewed.
- Lapsed Members: 13 members were lapsed.
- Non-Responders: 33% had not responded to renewal notices.

Gift Aid: 208 members out of 245 had Gift Aided.

Renewal Strategy:

- There were five members who had ticked the renewal box but had not paid; these had been chased once.
- The strategy would be to continue chasing via email (e.g., a mid-January email from a personal Outlook account to bypass potential ER2/Junk folder blocks).
- Annette would send a final reminder email in January. If members still hadn't responded by the end of January, she would consider ringing them.

WhatsApp Groups:

The Committee needed to tidy up WhatsApp groups at the end of the renewal cycle (end of January) to remove non-members.

7. Secretary's Report

Use of AI (Artificial Intelligence):

- Tony said that AI (e.g., Google AI) was proving helpful for drafting better notes from transcripts and for academic study (e.g., Module 5 preparation).
- It assisted in finding current, complex information (e.g., the microbiome of the honey bee, which was not widely covered in traditional literature) for a proposed article.
- Rob questioned if AI mentioned the possible negative effect that poly-hives had on the micro-biome. Tony agreed to ask the AI chain for this information.

Resignation: Tony Slater had tendered his resignation as Secretary, effective November 2026 (the end of his current three-year term).

Successor Recommendation: Ruth Chadney was recommended as a potential successor due to her reliability, commitment, and writing skills (she previously wrote reports for the Hive project).

- Action Item: Tony said he would approach Ruth regarding the Secretary role with a view to inviting her to sit on the Committee temporarily as a non-portfolio member.

8. Education Coordinator's Report

A. Introductory Course Preparation (Led by Heather Pitch, Paddy being absent)

- Attendance: There were currently 29 confirmed attendees (plus two expected children, one aged 8 and one aged 10). One person was due to pay on December 15th.
- Registration: All parent/child attendees were registered as either full or junior members.
- Presentation Customization: Michael was customising all 10 presentation slide decks and demonstrated some of the work so far:
 - The new style was less gloomy, more professional, and used a honeycomb-type format with standardized fonts and colours.
 - Michael would continue to customise presentations and beginning to set up OneDrive for presentation storage/sharing with trainers.
- Logistics: The venue had been booked; Ruth Chadley, her husband Bill, and Warren Riches were handling catering.
- Paddy's Involvement: Due to Paddy's inability to drive in the dark, she had had no practical involvement in the scheduling.
 - Decision: Heather would send out the joining instructions and schedule after Christmas. Tony would continue to handle initial contacts for courses via the NSBK Gmail account.
- Training Plan for the Intro course:
 - Rob would kick off the first session.
 - The presenter for each session would be introducing the session.
 - Equipment: Presenters generally preferred to use their own PCs. The club kit (Projector, Screen, Extension Cable) needed to be moved weekly by the presenter for the following week (Bill and Ruth might assist).
 - Heather was directed to send a circular to all trainers explaining the presentation/equipment process.
 - There was uncertainty regarding the location of the smaller projector screen; it needed to be tracked down.
 - Heather said she would prepare labels and badges for the Intro course.

B. Improvers/Refresher Course

- Rob said there were currently 18 attendees.
- Logistics: The course would be held at St Andrew's Church House, Backwell. Final information had been sent to participants.
- The course aimed to be as interactive as possible.

- Virtual Hive: Rob requested the Virtual Hive to be available for each session. This was currently located in the Show Shed.
- Heather said she would produce labels and badges for the Improvers course.

9. Apiary Manager's Report

- Tom reported that a number of new beekeepers' hives were present in the apiary. All but one were scheduled for removal by the end of February (weather permitting).
 - Exception: Angus and Margaret's hive would remain for another year as a reasonable accommodation, as previously agreed.
 - The Flow Hive would definitely be moved, meaning the apiary would no longer have Langstroth capability.
- Members agreed that the donated Omlet Beehaus Beehive should be disposed of.
 - Tom offered to put it on an online marketplace (e.g., Marketplace) and donate any proceeds to the club, which was approved.
- A question was raised regarding Phil Chisnall's nucleus colony. Tom had been unsure of its status and agreed to follow up to clarify the situation, as it was thought the hive might remain for Phil's wife.
- Oxalic Acid Vaping:
 - A vaping session was scheduled for Sunday, 14 December when there should be minimal or no brood presence.
 - A new product, Varroxal would be used. Unlike Api-bioxal, it is 100% oxalic acid. It is licensed for a single dosage.
- Fondant Collection: Fondant could be collected from 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM following the vaping session.
 - The apiary currently held a healthy supply of 39 boxes of fondant, but a new order would be placed if stock ran low.
- Tom said that:
 - visits to the apiary would move to monthly in the winter, with an invitation for other beekeepers to attend.
 - Tom:
 - would continue to visit roughly fortnightly for safety and security checks. As she lived nearby, Jen said she would be happy to help with these checks.
 - had a healthy number of assistants for next year and expressed an intention to offer them ownership of some sessions to inspire greater involvement and potential future leadership.

- planned to purchase small tubs to create separate solutions of Pure Soda and Sodium Hypochlorite for a double-dipping sterilisation method, which was deemed important due to the increased use of polyhives.
- would look into requeening within the year once UK-mated queens became available. This would likely be a biannual event for swarm control.
- Tom was asked to review and update the Health and Safety policy and Risk Assessment on the website to the 2026 version. The updated document was then to be sent to Adam.
- Apiary Rota: The apiary rota for sessions would be created over the next few weeks and put on the website, including any planned talks.

Mower: Michael said the mower drive was broken again. Tom agreed to take the mower to be fixed this weekend.

- There was a discussion about a potential robotic or electric mower. Michael said he was not in favour of a mower that does not collect grass cuttings as, if left, they encourage more growth.
- The health and safety policy specified no-one could mow the lawn without someone else being present. A robot mower might solve the problem. This matter would be reviewed again around March.
- Power Supply: The issue of a power supply at the apiary was raised, with the club being reminded of an initial offer for a connection to an adjacent building when they first moved there. NSBK would have to pay for the installation. This was noted as an alternative to purchasing an EcoFlow battery unit.

10. Program Manager's Report

- Claire said the skep making event had been organised and was taking place in January at The Old School Rooms at Congresbury.
 - 11 people were booked, with a maximum suggested capacity of 15. All participants had paid.
 - The possibility of a last chance advertisement for more people was discussed.
 - Event Booking System: Claire said she was investigating a free event booking and ticketing system (www.zeffy.com) specifically for charities as an alternative to Eventbrite. This system could simplify booking and payment for charged events.
- North Somerset Show: Planning was starting for the North Somerset Show with a focus on refreshing the display boards and signage.
 - It was noted that funds were available for this refurb.
 - Michael said he and David Capon were visiting the Show Shed in the New Year to explore options and do a stocktake.

- The current folding stands were noted as being difficult to use and in need of possible replacement.
- 2026 Program: The program was largely finalised and could go live.
 - The main outstanding item was securing a speaker for the AGM, which Claire agreed to action.
 - Members noted that the BBKA website had an extensive list of available speakers, and the option of a remote speaker was also available.

11. Avon Beekeepers Rep Report

- Eric reported the following important dates:
 - 24 January 2026: Somerset Beekeepers Yellow-legged Asian Hornet update for the Southwest.
 - 7 February 2026: Somerset BKA Lecture Day
 - 28 March 2026: Avon BBKA Spring Gathering at Shipham.
 - Entry was £10, including refreshments, which Eric was arranging.
 - Claire offered to assist Eric with setting up the lunch at the Spring Gathering, which Eric accepted.

12. Asian Hornet Coordinator's Report

- Jen reported the latest figures: 544 sightings and 161 confirmed nests, with the majority still in Kent and the Southeast.
- Jen attended a BBKA Zoom meeting and reported on the findings of the Kent volunteer coordinator.
- The coordinator reported that the Asian Hornet Coordinator in Kent viewed the trend as static based on continuous monitoring in their area over three years (four traps per square km across 75 km). This contradicted the perception that the problem was worsening nationwide, with the Kent coordinator suggesting the high national figures were due to increased searching rather than increased establishment.
- Establishment: The coordinator did not believe the hornets were getting established in the UK, suggesting most detections were fresh incursions, often by hitchhiking via lorries or other transport.
- The coordinator had concern that the way nests were recorded (e.g., counting primary, secondary, and tertiary nests) could be misleading and skew the official figures provided by the NBU (National Bee Unit).

- There had been discussions regarding the current government policy to eradicate Asian Hornets. It was noted there was ongoing debate about whether this policy would continue, or if the responsibility would eventually fall to beekeepers.
- If the current resources—including the use of advanced radio transmitters for tracking nests—were maintained, the trend could remain flat (i.e., new incursions being killed in similar numbers each year).
- It was noted that beekeepers and AHATs (Asian Hornet Action Teams) were currently not allowed to release hornets for tracking, as they are an invasive species.
- Future Updates: Jen confirmed she would continue to attend winter meetings and keep the Committee updated.
- Southwest Update: The Committee was informed of a Southwest Asian Hornet update day, organised by Somerset Beekeepers, on January 24th at Bridgewater. Jen agreed to share details on Facebook and encourage attendance.
- Website Update: Jen stated she would update the club website's Asian Hornet information over the winter, as it was currently out of date.
- Club Strategy: The club agreed to maintain its current strategy of educating the public and refraining from tracking, tracing, or putting out traps as a club (though individual members may choose to do so).
- Resources: Jen confirmed that posters, banners, and honey labels were available and that she had Trappit traps should a problem arise.

13. Chair's Report

Extractor equipment Extractor Condition: The Chair reported receiving a phone call from Sheila James (who looked after the club's extracting equipment). Sheila reported that two of the club's manual extractors were "on their last legs" despite previous repairs (including welding).

- It was confirmed the club owned four manual extractors and one big electric extractor (kept at the apiary). The big electric one had been let out three times over the summer. Sheila reported in October that the extractors had been used approximately 20 times by 16 different people over the season.
- Given the extractors' poor condition, their value to members, and the healthy club finances, the Committee agreed to buy two new extractors.
- Tom volunteered to scope out and purchase two new manual extractors. The preference was for good quality radial, six-frame models rather than tangential ones.
- Tom inquired about the demand for uncapping trays. Jen (and others) confirmed demand, and Tom agreed to include the scoping of a couple of decent uncapping trays in his purchasing inquiry.
- Risk Assessment: It was noted that instructions and the risk assessment would need to be updated for the new equipment.

- Jar Bulk Buy: Claire enquired about a bulk buy for jars. Tom and others recalled that a jar bulk buy had been done in the past but was a lot of work. Tom did not wish to organise it but confirmed that significant bulk discounts were available.

Website Review

- Website Review: Heather raised the need for a comprehensive review and tidy-up of the club website, as it contained much outdated information.
- Heather asked for volunteers to help with these necessary changes. She said new content should be sent to Adam who was the only administrator.
- Jen was to review Library Books and Hornet and Pests.
- Michael was to review education content, particularly links for Children/Youth Groups/Schools, including signposting to the new BBKA Learning Platform resources.
- Claire and Michelle to review Social Media pages and links.
- Structural Change: The Committee agreed not to change the website's overall structure, as a complete redesign would be a massive undertaking (which last occurred five or six years ago).

14.Any Other Business

- Ruth Chadley had provisionally booked the Old Farmhouse for Saturday, December 5th, 2026.
- Michael provided feedback on the recent Christmas party, saying it had been fantastic and praising the staff.
- Eric thanked Heather for organising the cards with meal choices, and Elaine Sortwell was thanked for making the favours.
- Eric confirmed that he would not be making a claim for expenses for that or the raffle.
- He confirmed he was happy to continue organising the event, noting that he enjoyed the task and the venue was excellent and accommodating.
- Vote of Thanks: Tony proposed a formal vote of thanks to Heather for her seven years of service as Membership Secretary (a period that included time as Chair). The proposal was unanimously approved.
- Meeting Format Discussion: Jen raised a concern that Zoom meetings were not effective for group discussions and that the original reason for using them (to accommodate those unable to attend in person) was no longer applicable, as those people did not attend the Zoom sessions either. The Committee agreed to hold all future Committee meetings in person.
- 2026 Committee Meeting Dates (All in person at The George): Heather confirmed the following meeting dates:

February 16

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April 13
June 15
September 14
October 26th (AGM planning meeting)
December 14

- As regards the date of the AGM, Tony said it crept forward every year, which put the treasurer under great pressure to produce the accounts in the time between the end of the financial year and the AGM. It was agreed to move the AGM back to 21 November.
 - Claire was asked to check the availability and book the Memorial Hall for the new AGM date of 21 November.
 - Closing Time: Heather closed the meeting at 9:02 PM.
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