

# **The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe**

## **was held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.**

Anne Page, Chairman of the Parish Council presided. Seven members of the Parish Council and the Clerk attended, together with further 21 parishioners. There were apologies from the County Councillor - Gloria Cawood, the District Councillor - Dick Skidmore, and Michael Page.

Anne Page **welcomed** parishioners to the meeting.

**Minutes of the 2010 Annual Parish Meeting** were read by the Clerk, agreed and signed.

**Matters Arising** – Robert O’Farrell asked about progress on the website and the Anne Page stated that this would be included in her Chairman’s Report.

Anne Page gave the **Chairman’s Report**, noting this was the 116<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting in Batcombe, and thanking Hazel Davidge for acting as the Parish Council’s internal auditor. During the preceding year 21 planning applications had been received by the Parish Council, comprising five applications for tree works in the conservation area, seven for listed building consent, and nine for householder or full planning permission. Of these nine the District Council approved six, refused two and one was withdrawn. Planning permission had been granted for an “eco-house” behind Chapel Row, and the Parish Council had recommended approval of a similar house at Carrot Hill Farm.

Anne commented that the Parish Council had not always recommended approval of applications. Parish Councillors were not planners, but had a duty to look objectively at the plans submitted, take into account views voiced at meetings, and report back justifiable concerns to the District Council, whose planners decide if the concerns are material considerations or not.

The application for a full premises licence at Pennysquare Barn had been withdrawn, and events held over previous summer were either private parties or run under Temporary Event Notices. Bruno Cristofoli had kept the Parish Council informed of events each month.

The Parish Council had not been informed about premises licences for the music festivals held at Gilcombe Farm as this was in South Somerset, despite the fact that noise from Sunrise Festival crosses the District boundary into Batcombe. After a letter or two, South Somerset added Batcombe to the list of Parish Councils it informs of all licence applications and Mendip was looking into the possibility of doing something similar.

Following complaints the previous year, last summer Sunrise Festival organisers informed Batcombe residents what was to happen, but despite their assurances the first night of the Festival was very noisy - although subsequent nights were quieter. In preparation for the coming Festival in June Anne and Liz Hollis had attended a meeting with the South Somerset licensing officers, the police and the Sunrise organisers, who agreed steps to limit the noise at the Festivals. The Parish Council would also be invited to future meetings before and after the Sunrise Festival.

The Parish Council had discussed the possibility of more affordable housing in the village, given that Ash Tree Cottages took some eight years to materialise. However, suitable plots were not apparent and funding was likely to a major difficulty.

The remaining £1,000 of the £2,750 grant from our County Councillor’s Local Initiatives Budget to fund the establishment of allotments in the parish had been used to provide a permanent water supply for the allotments. Bryan Mead was thanked for the work he put in in establishing the water supply. At the end of the first year two allotment holders gave up their allotments which were taken up by two new allotment holders, one from Kale Street and the other from Brewham.

RoSPA had inspected the Playing Field and revealed no major safety concerns, although some people still ignored the fact that dogs were not permitted in the Playing Field. Anne noted that some of the parents of children who use the field would be describing their aspirations for the play equipment

later, and reflected on how good it was to see the Field full of children, while noting that it was a multi-purpose recreation area for the whole community.

The state of some of the roads in and around the parish caused concern - particularly after the Parish Council's Vice Chairman had to be flown to hospital in the Air Ambulance after hitting a pothole while riding his bike – shortly after having shown the Somerset Highways representative the position of that particular pothole.

The Council asked Somerset Highways for their definition of a pothole and received the following: “a pothole (Sharp Edged Depression) will become a safety defect when it is a depth greater than or equal to 40mm (1.6 inches) and it is greater than or equal to 150mm (6 inches) in diameter.”

Snow and ice caused major problems in November and December. It was hoped that most people knew that the road from the A359 through Batcombe and Westcombe to Evercreech was pre-salted and should be used in icy weather rather than the unsalted Portway and Crows Hills. Mike James and Bryan Mead were thanked for collecting bags of de-icing materials offered by Somerset Highways.

The Council's Parish Paths Liaison Officer, Yvonne Sommer, was thanked for liaising with the County Council's Area Warden over any problems with the footpaths and other rights of way in the parish. Thanks to Yvonne's persistence the Parish Council had again received a grant of £150 for the maintenance of the footpaths, although cutbacks in the County Council budget mean that the grant was unlikely to be available in the coming year.

After a saga of over two years Batcombe Parish Council was now the owner of the Westcombe Telephone Kiosk. All telephone equipment had been removed and BT would be responsible for the electricity supply to the kiosk for up to five years. The kiosk was now a listed building and so the Parish Council have had to insure it as it would be responsible for any repairs should it be damaged. Nick Sommer was thanked for agreeing to be the unpaid custodian of the kiosk and for offering to repaint it.

The Parish Council made a grant of £300 to the Village Hall Trust; of which roughly £100 paid for the cost of the Council's own meetings; £150 met the cost of village organisations using the Old School for committee meetings free of charge; and the remaining £50 was a donation to the Trust. The Parish Council also made a grant of £200 to the Parochial Church Council for maintenance of the churchyard; and a grant of £90 to Mendip Community Transport.

Unfortunately the Parish Council had had to increase its precept by a further £500 to £6,900, due to the increase in election costs. The Parish Council election in 2007 cost £933 compared to £347 for the previous election in 2003, and so the Council had to budget a cost of at least £1,000 for the coming election.

A working party had met over the summer and agreed a development brief for the website which had been sent to the company offering to provide the site. Later a selection of photographs were sent as the basis of the website banner. Unfortunately we had not heard anything since despite repeated attempts to contact the company who had promised a draft website would be available by this meeting. No money has been paid and so a 30 day ultimatum had been sent to the company – if there was no progress the Parish Council would make other arrangements.

The Parish Council agreed to support Donald Sage's project to establish a Village Records Room in the Old School. If successful the Records Room would be managed by a Trustee from each of the Parish Council, the Village Hall Trust and the Parochial Church Council.

Two vacancies for Parish Councillors arose last year and Liz Hollis and Chris Wildridge were co-opted. They were thanked for agreeing to join the Council. The other councillors – Bryan Mead, Yvonne Sommer, Ian Sage, and Mike James were also thanked for their contributions, as was the Clerk. Anne noted that she and Mike James would be standing down after the elections in May and wished the Parish Council well for the next 116 years.

**Presentation on Proposed Playing Field Equipment** – Iona FitzGerald introduced herself as a mother of three who loved and appreciated the Playing Field and hoped to make it into a better place. It was used most days by families waiting for their older children coming home on the school bus. It was great to have a space for children to let off steam after school, but she felt the facilities needed to reflect the growing number of children in the village (94 under the age of 12) and particularly the needs of the younger children. Sasha Smith Bingham felt the play equipment in the Playing Field needed to be revamped, some of the current equipment was not used and there needed to be areas where the mothers could sit. There were a group of mothers who were happy to form a committee to raise funds for improved play equipment. Ideas for fundraisers included showing a children's film, an Auction of Promises, a children's event and an outdoor day in the Playing Field. Grants from Lottery funds and other bodies would also be applied for.

A representative of Touch Wood Enterprises Ltd showed a selection of pictures of examples of wooden play equipment that his company produced. He suggested an evolving project rather than a complete makeover, with people and children being involved in the construction of the equipment. The typical budget for a new playground would be £20-£50,000, but a plan could be produced for £1,000 and then the money for individual items could be raised. It was noted that the football pitch and cricket nets were an important part of the Playing Field and this would need to be recognised in any plan for improved facilities. Health and safety would need to be taken into consideration and any play equipment would need to be appropriate for the Playing Field.

There was general support for the project as presented amongst those present. Arish Turle stated that he was coppicing a wood and had plenty of timber to offer to the project. It was noted that the granddaughter of King George V would be celebrating her Diamond Jubilee next year and it would be appropriate to work towards having something ready for June 2012. Dominic Henry was concerned about overpopulating the Playing Field with play equipment and the impact this might have on the Village Fete. Mike James suggested treating the Field as a blank canvas. Colin Pool offered the use of equipment for the construction of the play facilities. It was noted that the swings were too low. A question was raised over the future of the 'bus shelter'.

Bryn Mead thanked Anne Page for all her work as Chairman of the Parish Council. Mary La Trobe Bateman reported that the residents of Kale Street were planning to hold a street party outside the Playing Field to celebrate the Royal Wedding. Everybody in the village was invited to the party which would last from 5.00 to 8.00pm and there would be a fancy dress prize for the children.

David Stevens gave Dick Skidmore's **District Councillor's Comments** and noted that Dick would not be standing for election in Postlebury this year and that he would be standing in Dick's place. Anne Page then gave Gloria Cawood's **County Councillor's Comments**, noting that Gloria was standing for re-election as the District Councillor for Cranmore, and Gloria's concerns about the cutbacks in county recycling centres.

Bruno Cristofoli noted that he had made a lot of changes to the way events were held at Pennysquare since last year and over the last year he had not received any complaints about events there except for one complaint about the litter left after an event.

Anne Page read the Neighbourhood Watch Report for Kale Street from Dot Cox who reported that everything was quiet, but stated that it would be good to have more volunteers so that the whole of the village was covered. Anne also gave a report from the PCSO Paul Edwards who stated that chainsaws and power tools were popular with thieves and fuel thefts were also on the increase. However rural crime had dipped in recent weeks following operations targeting individuals suspected of rural crime and the arrest of a prolific thief from Frome.

Anne then closed the meeting.

*Chris Wildridge*

*4th April 2012*