

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th November 2012 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

Present - Councillors: Liz Hollis – Vice Chairman, Jayne Cox, Ian Sage, Yvonne Sommer and Justin Witcombe.

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, Gloria Cawood – County Councillor, and seven members of the public.

3404 – Apologies for Absence: Chris Wildridge, who had undergone a medical procedure, and David Stevens – County Councillor. In the absence of the Chairman, the meeting was chaired by the Vice Chairman.

3405 – Declarations of Interest: Liz Hollis declared an interest in item 3409 as the landowner of the allotment field. Councillors' Register of Interests forms had been sent to the Monitoring Officer but had not yet been published on the Mendip District Council website.

3406 – Public Participation: Jill Canning expressed concern about how the District Council had dealt with the recent “Bodstock” event at Pennysquare Barn, and felt that they had only taken it seriously after she had informed them what was being said about the event on the internet. Bryan Pearson felt that the landowner, Bruno Cristofoli, had been “hoodwinked” by the organisers of the event. Bruno responded that the event had been very well organised and there were less than 200 people present on the two nights of the event. It was noted that there had been no complaints during the event, and that neither the Parish Council or the District Council had any control over potentially misleading information given on social media. It was suggested that the District Councillor should raise the issues arising from events of this nature with the Licensing Department, given that there was no consultation with the Parish Council or neighbours over the issuing of Temporary Event Notices, which this event was staged under.

3407 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd October 2012 were approved and signed by the Vice Chairman.

3408 – Matters Arising: None.

3409 – Allotments Letting Policy: As there were two allotment holders present it was agreed to move this item forward in the Agenda. The Clerk reported that allotments rent had become due on November 1st and he had received the rent for seven and a half allotments to date. There was one vacant allotment, which left one and a half allotments with rent outstanding. One of the existing allotment holders had expressed an interest in the vacant allotment and other allotment holders had expressed interest in other allotments should they become vacant. The vacant allotment had been advertised and it was agreed that if no one else was interested it could be let to an existing allotment holder on the understanding that the Parish Council could give twelve month's notice on the second allotment should there be a future demand for an allotment from someone without one. Sam Pick asked for clarification as to when the twelve months notice would end and it was agreed that it would be at the end of the season after the twelve month period (i.e. at November 1st after the twelve months).

There had also been a request from an allotment holder to erect a small poly tunnel (10ft x 8ft) on her allotment. This was agreed provided that it was not a permanent structure and that the members of the Allotment Holders Group were happy as they would be the ones affected.

3410 – Footpaths and Highways: The bridleway between the Lodge road and the Alham road at Honeycliff (SM 2/26) had been closed temporarily for 21 days from October 12th due to water damage to the surface and would be closed for six months from November 2nd to allow repairs.

The Chairman had spoken to the occupants of Church Farm about the stones on the road verge that complaints had been received about, and these had been removed.

The Guide to Winter Services had been received from Somerset Highways and the road through Batcombe from Evercreech to the A359 would again be part of the pre-salting network. Somerset Highways were also offering ten bags of 20kg of de-icing materials to parish councils and Justin Witcombe volunteered to collect these from the Highways Depot in Frome. Ian Sage offered to store the materials at Portway Farm. Suggestions for the distribution of the materials to be made at the next meeting.

The Vice Chairman had raised the issue of the road closed signs with our new PCSO at the Neighbourhood Watch meeting. Council signs were only advisory, but if roads were unsafe the police would close a road provided they could get there. Jayne Cox raised that issue of the school buses using Portway and Crows Hill which were unsalted and problems by the school in Upton Noble where roads were also unsalted. The County Councillor noted that if the Parish Council provided grit bins the County Council would fill them.

3411 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: In her absence Iona FitzGerald was thanked for removing the bag of builder's waste that had been dumped behind the bus shelter in the Playing Field.

Geoff Sparkes had reported problems with moles and dog mess in the Playing Field while cutting the grass. The Vice Chairman to supply the Clerk with the contact details of a local molecatcher. It was suggested that more prominent signs stating the reasons dogs were not allowed should be investigated and the Clerk was asked to contact the District Council to see if anything could be done about people continuing to bring dogs into the Playing Field.

It had been agreed to allow the Playing Field to be used for a charity football match organised by a family in the village on the understanding that the Playing Field remained open for others to use. It was agreed that the grass cutting should stop – Mr Sparkes would be willing to make a cut later if needed.

The County Councillor reported that she had received Batcombe's application for a Health and Well-being Grant. The County Councillor's report had been e-mailed to Councillors earlier and paper copies were distributed to those without e-mail. It was noted that the Chairman was planning to attend the Local Choices meeting and the Vice Chairman offered to attend if he was unable to do so.

Jayne Cox raised the concerns about the issue of "fracking" or hydraulic fracturing to release shale gas and the environmental damage this could cause. The County Councillor noted that the current applications were all in north Somerset and there were none in this area.

3412 – Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2012/2536. Proposed re-coppicing of an Ash tree in a Conservation Area. Brook House, Batcombe (TREE – Conservation Area). This was a tree near the

footpath along the river at the bottom of Mill Lane. It was agreed to recommend that the decision be left to the planning officer after consultations.

Planning Application Updates: The application for works in association with the conversion of the coachhouse to a self contained annexe at Westcombe Stables had gone to the Planning Board where it was refused Listed Building Consent.

The Clerk reported that he had been notified of an application for Listed Building Consent for work at Boords Farm, which had been too late to be considered at this meeting. He had spoken to the planning officer who had agreed that the application could be considered at the next Parish Council meeting.

3413 – Budget Update 2012/13; Budget and Precept 2013/14: An update of the budget for the current year had been distributed with the Agendas. The Clerk noted that actual funds at the start of the year were healthier than those projected when the budget was produced, as additional money had been raised for Playing Field equipment, the cost of the 2011 election had been less than expected and no money had been spent on a website in the previous year.

Receipts were largely as budgeted, although the money raised for the Playing Field improvements and the contributions to the costs of the Jubilee celebrations had not been budgeted. The money raised for the Playing Field improvements was shown as being spent in the current year to make it clearer the actuals funds that the Council has available for its other commitments at the end of the year. (This doesn't mean the money has to be spent in this year.) The grasscutting was higher than budgeted due to the small increase in the price and a larger number of cuts. The cost of the new gate was not included in the budget. Administration costs were likely to be slightly less than budgeted – mainly because there was no increase in the Clerk's salary. Grants were as budgeted. The cost of the website was slightly higher than budgeted but this was the VAT that would be reclaimed. The cost of the Jubilee tokens was not budgeted but contributions had been received towards the cost.

The projection showed a deficit on the year of £812 against a budgeted surplus of £412. However, this was due to the 'spending' of the £976 raised for the Playing Field improvements in the previous year. Taking this into account there was actually a small projected surplus on the year. It should be noted that of the £3,470 in funds projected for the end of the year, roughly £700 was allotments money. Accounts showing the amounts currently in the allotments funds and Playing Field improvement funds were also distributed. The allotment funds were currently £350 but this did not include the £350 in rent being collected; and the money raised for the Playing Field improvements came to a total of £3,265.

A budget for the coming year and a forecast for the next three years had also been distributed with the Agendas. However advice from SALC, received after the Agendas had been sent out, stated that Councillors could not consider the precept without first receiving a dispensation and this could not be given unless it was an item on the Agenda. Discussion of the budget and precept was therefore deferred to the next meeting. (Apparently the Government had repealed the blanket dispensation that had previously allowed Councillors as Council Tax payers to consider the precept.)

3414 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

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| £21.71 | Southern Electric – Playing Field Electricity - July to October. |
| £81.05 | The Parish News – Photocopying. This included the colour copying of the Jubilee programmes for which £41 had been raised at a coffee morning. |
| £135.00 | Mr G Sparkes – Grass cutting in October. |

3415 - Other Business - Matters of Information: The election for the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner would take place on November 15th, with polling in the Old School.

The Mendip Rural Forum had been attended by the Chairman and Vice Chairman. There had been a presentation on Mendip Community Transport and the service they provide and one on Planning. There was a clear concern in the District Council Planning Department at the Government's planning policies.

The Vice Chairman had also attended a celebration for the Torr Works quarry having obtained planning permission to deepen the quarry. She had been invited to sit at the same table as the Chief Executive of the quarry company and had taken the opportunity to explain Batcombe's concerns at the deepening of the quarry. As a result the company's experts were summoned to explain how the quarrying should not affect Batcombe.

3416 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 5th December 2012 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge

5th December 2012