

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 5th December 2012 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

Present - Councillors: Chris Wildridge – Chairman, Jayne Cox, Iona FitzGerald, Liz Hollis and Ian Sage.

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage and three members of the public.

3417 – Apologies for Absence: Yvonne Sommer who was unwell, Justin Witcombe who was working, and David Stevens – County Councillor, who was at another meeting.

3418 – Declarations of Interest and Granting of Dispensations: All Councillors, including those not present, had a disclosable pecuniary interest in the setting of the precept, item 3427, and had made a request in writing before the meeting for a dispensation on the grounds that otherwise the Council could not agree a budget and set a precept. As all Councillors had an interest in the matter, the granting of the dispensations was automatically delegated to the Clerk under Standing Orders. The Clerk granted a dispensation to each Councillor allowing them to consider the Council's budgets and set a precept until the date of the next Parish Council election.

It was noted that the Parish Council Register of Interests forms had not yet been published on the Mendip District Council website. The Clerk was instructed to ask the District Council when they would be published.

3419 – Public Participation: None.

3420 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7th November 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3421 – Matters Arising: Allotments – The Clerk reported that the rent had been paid on the nine occupied allotments. There had been no interest in the vacant allotment and so in line with the decision at the last meeting it would be let to an existing allotment holder who wished to rent it.

3422 – Footpaths and Highways: Justin Witcombe was thanked in his absence for collecting the bags of de-icing materials from the Highways Depot in Frome and these were being stored at Portway Farm. The Chairman volunteered to speak to Mike James and Colin Pool about storing some bags at Millards Hill and Batcombe House. It was noted that there was a particular problem with water on the road freezing at Saite Farm.

The Council had received an e-mail from Nick Sommer about the poor state of the road from Evercreech to Westcombe following its re-surfacing. It was noted that following complaints after the re-surfacing Somerset Highways had inspected the road and had found no problems (apart from one pothole) but it was felt that the road had deteriorated since then. The Clerk was asked to write to Somerset Highways.

3423 – Planning Applications: It was agreed to bring this item forward on the Agenda.

Planning Application Ref: 2012/2557. Internal and external alterations (west) to former scullery area to create new utility room and cloakroom. Boords Farm, Batcombe (Listed Building Consent). The applicant, Anne Page, stated that this was the simple resurrection of two rooms. There would be no external changes apart from a single vent, as the proposed rooflight was not going to be installed. The Council agreed to recommend approval as there were no objections to the proposed alterations.

Planning Application Ref: 2012/2651. Proposed felling of a Cypress hedge and replacement planting. The Weavers House, Kale Street, Batcombe (TREE – Conservation Area). Iona FitzGerald declared a pecuniary interest in this application as her husband was the tree surgeon. Before leaving the room she was allowed to make a presentation in line with Standing Orders and noted that the Cypress hedge would be replaced with a native species hedge. The applicant, Joanne Weber, stated that they wished to remove the hedge because of its size. The Council agreed to recommend approval as there were no objections to the replacement of the hedge, which was felt would be an improvement.

Planning Application Updates: The application for a two storey rear extension, removal of tree and additional window in the front elevation at Knoll View had been approved with the condition that the first floor windows on the east and west elevations of the extension were permanently glazed with ‘obscure’ glass.

3424 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that the mole was still causing problems and he would be contacting a molecatcher.

Two quotations had been received for the cutting of the grass in the Playing Field and the ‘car park’ area around the telephone kiosk. After careful consideration the Council decided to accept the quotation from Geoff Sparkes whose prices were unchanged from the current year on the basis of the proven quality of his work.

Iona FitzGerald reported on progress on the Playing Field improvements. The project would have around £6,000 to spend, which included sums from fundraising, the Health and Well-being grant from the County Councillor, and a grant from [REDACTED], including £500 for a willow weaving day. Iona proposed that the first phase of the project should be a day for volunteers to weave a willow tunnel and huts at the bottom of the Playing Field behind the cricket nets. Floss Barnett-Howland was willing to organise the day, having previously done one at the Wanstraw Playing Field. The willow structures were attractive when made and would then take root and come alive. The Council approved the suggestion and asked that pictures of the willow structures and a map showing where they would be placed should be put on the website with a notice in the parish magazine to make people aware of what would be happening.

Iona proposed that the second phase of the project should be the replacement of the fort. Although this was the most popular piece of equipment in the Playing Field it was rotting and needed replacing. It was proposed that the swings be moved to the other side of the bus shelter in place of the wooden equipment that was not used. This would enable an enlarged fort to be built with a Wendy House for the young children and monkey bars for the older ones. There was some discussion as to whether the orientation of the swings should be changed to avoid the hedge being in the fall space and whether the hedge should be laid at some point in the future. Three quotations would be needed for the replacement fort. The Council asked to see the specification for these quotations at its next meeting before approving the second phase. Iona also stated that the bus shelter would be painted, but that the zip wire would have to wait for the next round of fundraising.

3425 – County Councillor’s Report: There was no report to consider. [Apologies from the County Councillor for being unable to attend were received after the meeting.]

3426 – Neighbourhood Plan: The Clerk reported that the District Council had produced a draft Local Plan (formerly known as the Local Development Framework Core Strategy) for consultation. The consultation would run until January 24th and so the Parish Council could consider the Local Plan at its next meeting.

The Chairman felt that the Parish Council should consider the possibility of initiating the process of requiring the District Council to make a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Batcombe. One of the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, a Neighbourhood Development Plan was “a plan which sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land in the whole or any part of a particular neighbourhood area specified in the plan.” A Neighbourhood Plan would be made by the District Council but the process would be initiated by the Parish Council. If the District Council was satisfied that necessary requirements have been met they would submit the Plan to independent examination. If the examiner was satisfied, the District Council must then hold a referendum. One of the requirements was that the Neighbourhood Plan should broadly comply with the District Council’s own Local Plan.

It was felt that the possibility should be explored. The District Council was holding a planning session to answer questions about the Local Plan when the possibility Neighbourhood Development Plans could be discussed with the planning policy team at Mendip. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman hoped to attend this session.

3427 – Freedom of Information Act – Guide to Information Available: In 2008 the Parish Council had adopted a Model Publication Scheme prepared by the Information Commissioner which committed the Council to making a range of information available to the public, and to publishing a Guide to the Information Available from the Parish Council. As the Parish Council now had a website this Guide needed updating and an updated Guide had been enclosed with the Agendas. It was agreed that the Guide should be published on the website and updated as more information was made available on the website.

3428 – War Memorial Wall: A quotation had been received from M & S Osborne for the repair and re-pointing of the war memorial wall along the roadside. Another quote had been requested but had not been provided. The Council was happy with the quote but decided not to undertake the work at present.

3429 – Budget and Precept 2013/14: This item had been deferred from the last meeting when it was discovered that Councillors needed a dispensation to consider the precept. A budget for the year ending 31st March 2014 and a forecast for the years 2012-2016 had been distributed with the Agendas of the previous meeting and the Clerk provided additional copies. A projection for current year had been considered at the previous meeting and the budget was based on an assumption of similar expenditure to the current year with small increases for inflation. The exceptions to this were the Parish Council’s grants, where it was decided to double the money given to charities other than the Village Hall Trust and the PCC to £200, and an estimate of the cost of repairing the war memorial wall. The budget showed that an increase of £100 in the precept to £7,200 would produce a small surplus in the year 2013/14.

Ian Sage reported that replacing the large gates in the Playing Field would cost roughly £110. Ian offered to get the gates from Read Agriservices and this was agreed. It was noted that the gates would need to be made dog-proof and that the gaps in the Playing Field fence would need to be blocked to prevent dogs entering.

The forecast showed that similar increases to the £100 proposed for next year's increase in the precept would be needed in following years to ensure that there were sufficient funds to cover the cost of the next Parish Council election in 2015 and to maintain the level of reserve recommended by SALC of between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of the Council's precept. A precept of £7,200 for the year ending 31st March 2014 was agreed by the Council.

3430 - Authorisation of payment: There were no payments to authorise.

3431 - Other Business - Matters of Information: Together with a representative of Evercreech Parish Council, the Chairman had welcomed the Revd Rosey Lunn, the new Priest in Charge of Batcombe, Evercreech with Chesterblade, Lamyatt, Milton Clevedon and Upton Noble, on behalf of the civic community at her licensing in Evercreech Church.

The Clerk was asked to write to Philip and Eileen Clark thanking them for removing the stones from the roadside by their wall.

Liz Hollis reported that the Sunrise Festival was moving from Gilcombe Farm and that Bruton Town Council had requested that the licence for FarmFest be recalled. A meeting had been held on November 29th but the result of this meeting was not known. Concern was expressed that Bruton Town Council had acted alone when a joint representation would have been more effective. The Clerk was asked to request that South Somerset District Council inform the Parish Council of any licence applications for Gilcombe Farm.

3432 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 9th January 2013 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge

9th January 2013