

The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe

was held on Wednesday 7th April 2010 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.

Anne Page, Chairman of the Parish Council presided. Five members of the Parish Council, the County Councillor, Gloria Cawood and the Clerk attended, together with further 16 parishioners, and the PCSO, Paul Edwards. There were apologies from the District Councillor, Dick Skidmore and Sarah Maude.

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

Minutes of the 2009 Annual Parish Meeting were read by the Clerk, agreed and signed.

Matters Arising – Mike James reported that the plastic rubbish had been cleared from the river and that the District Council were about to collect it.

Anne Page gave the **Chairman's Report**, welcoming our guest speaker for the evening, PCSO Paul Edwards, and thanking Mike James for his six and a half years as Parish Council Chairman.

The Parish Council continued to be concerned about the state of some of the roads in the parish, and recurring problems with pot-holes had been regularly reported to Somerset Highways. Four Councillors had met the Somerset Highways Area Supervisor and walked him around the worst areas – some holes had been mended immediately and the worst part of Holly Hill was to be resurfaced. The road from the A359 through Batcombe and Westcombe to Evercreech was salted during the winter, but Portway and Crows Hill were not and Ian Sage had had to help at least 20 vehicles stuck there in the worst weather. Mike James and Brian Mead were thanked for collecting extra salt bags for use in the parish, although when more salt was offered they returned to find that none was available – this was bad communication by Somerset Highways.

The Council's Parish Paths Liaison Officer, Yvonne Sommer, was thanked for obtaining a £150 grant for the maintenance of the footpaths in the parish – it was only given to those parishes who had asked for it. Unfortunately County Council cutbacks meant the grant would not be available in the coming year.

There had been 16 planning applications during the year, of which 9 were for full or householder planning permission, the remainder being for listed building consents or tree works in a conservation area. Of the nine, six were approved, two refused and one withdrawn. The application to demolish the house at Bailey's Lane Farm and build a new one had been approved at the Planning Board. It would be a sustainable house and be clad in natural stone. The Chairman urged anyone who was considering submitting a planning application to talk to their neighbours before they received official notification from the District Council.

There had been a number of complaints about the noise from the Sunrise Festival the previous year at Gilcombe Farm, near Bruton, which was in South Somerset. Three people from the parish would be attending the hearing for the licence application for the current year's Festival and it was hoped there would be better control of the noise from the Festival. An application for a premises licence at Pennysquare Barn in Batcombe had been made recently and over 100 people had attended an additional Parish Council meeting to allow people to air their views and the Parish Council to formulate a representation. A hearing to consider the application would be held later that month and the District Council would inform all those who had made representations about it.

The allotments project had proved to be a great success, by mid-summer a small field of grass had been transformed into 10 allotment plots filled with growing crops. The Chairman thanked our County Councillor for the grant of £2,750 from the Local Initiatives Budget; Tony and Liz Hollis for renting the Council the field; Colin Pool and Bryan Mead who had worked hard to turn the field into workable plots, the eleven allotment holders (two share one allotment) who had created their own

plots; Richard Read who had donated a trailer to carry water, and Bruno Cristofoli who donated the water tank, that Bryan Mead had filled from his bore hole. Bryan Mead had then had the idea of piping water to the allotments from a nearby spring and with the agreement of the landowners this had been done and the allotments have a large new water tank, which meant the last of the allotment grant was spent before the end of the financial year. The running of the allotments was then handed over to the allotment holders and their liaison with the Parish Council, Francis Self.

In June 2008, BT had proposed removing the payphone in Westcombe along with many others across the country. Following a national protest, BT had offered local councils the opportunity to adopt any traditional red kiosks in their area for £1 and keep them in place without the payphone. The Parish Council had submitted an application but heard nothing from BT until June 2009 when it was informed the adoption could not go ahead because BT had not undertaken the proper consultation with Mendip District Council. After the consultation had taken place, the Parish Council submitted another application but had yet to hear anything further.

The Parish Council had given a £300 grant to the Village Hall Trust, partly to enable village organisations to hold committee meetings in the Old School free of charge; and a grant of £200 to the PCC for the maintenance of the churchyard; and two small grants of £30 to St Margaret's Somerset Hospice and Somerset Art Works.

The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA in June had revealed no significant concerns. New bark had been added under the fort. Despite the signs stating "no dogs allowed", some residents continued to take their dogs into the Playing Field. The Parish Council had given Mr Graham Sparkes of Gardens of Avalon the contract to cut the grass in the Playing Field last season and this had been renewed for this season.

The Parish Council had had to increase the precept by £500 to £6,400 largely to cover the increase in the cost of Parish Council elections. The Parish Council election in 2007 cost £933 compared to £347 for the previous election in 2003 and another election would take place in 2011.

The Chairman thanked the Councillors for the jobs they had done: Kicko Cox for regular inspections of the Playing Field; Wiff Cox for his local knowledge and unblocking of drains; Brian Mead for his work on the allotments; Yvonne Sommer for keeping tabs on the footpaths. Hazel Davidge was thanked for acting as the Parish Council's internal auditor, and it was noted with sadness that our local PCSO David Adams had died suddenly in May.

It was also noted with great sadness that Wiff and Kicko Cox had resigned from the Parish Council. The vacancies would be advertised and if no election was claimed the new Councillors would be co-opted. The Chairman then thanked the Clerk for his work and noted that it had recently been reported in the journal of the Society of Local Council Clerks that Batcombe was one of a very few parishes where there had only been five clerks since parish councils were established in 1894.

In her **County Councillor's Comments** Gloria Cawood noted that potholes were getting larger, but the flood prevention bridge works at Higher Alham had been completed and were a great success. She was sad that the centralisation of the Rights of Way maintenance had happened, and noted that the allotments were a good example of how to do a local project right. She had met Prince Charles at an event at St James' Palace, and he had remembered his visit to Batcombe and had been impressed with the local community. She thanked the Parish Council for their leadership in getting the allotments project done.

There were no **Questions** from parishioners.

Affordable Housing – The Chairman noted that affordable housing had been raised as an issue twelve years ago and eight years later Ash Tree Cottages were built – it was a slow process. Mike James felt that the Parish Council should do another survey to see if there was a need for more affordable housing.

The guest speaker Paul Edwards explained that he was one of 10 PCSOs based in Frome and one of three with a rural beat. His was the Postlebury beat which included Batcombe. He noted that the local Neighbourhood Watch was going through a transition and there was currently no overall co-ordinator, which meant messages were not going out.

Asked about slow police response times he explained that police officers have to come from Frome and particularly on Friday and Saturday nights they would be busy in Frome town centre. PCSOs dealt with lower level crimes such as traffic offences and anti-social behaviour and could issue penalty tickets. The manager of the Batcombe Vale campsite stated that he had had a problem with someone on the campsite and the police wouldn't come out so he eventually had to drop the person in Bruton. PCSO Edwards stated that someone should have come out, although he did note that the rural PCSOs felt the town was getting too much attention.

The PCSO then explained about the Horsecatch scheme for horse owners that worked on a similar principle to Neighbourhood Watch. Regarding HGVs getting stuck, he asked for the vehicle registration to be taken as he could then send a warning. PCSO Edwards concluded by asking parishioners to let him know about any problems as he couldn't help if he didn't know what the issues were.

The Clerk then gave a presentation on a possible **Parish Council website**. The idea of a website was supported by those present and it was suggested that local businesses could help with the cost of the site through advertising or sponsorship. The Chairman then closed the meeting.

Anne Page

6th April 2011