

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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**Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2013 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.**

**Present - Councillors:** Chris Wildridge – Chairman, Jayne Cox, Iona FitzGerald, Liz Hollis, Ian Sage, John Sommer and Justin Witcombe.

**Also Present:** The Clerk – Rob Sage, David Stevens – District Councillor, Nigel Woollcombe-Adams – County Councillor and one member of the public.

**3591 – Apologies for Absence:** None.

**3592 – Declarations of Interest and Granting of Dispensations:** None.

**3593 – Public Participation:** Oliver Moberly from Westcombe stated that he was the grandson of John Coney, who had given Coney Wood to the Woodland Trust to be preserved as a public amenity, and was concerned that the Trust were considering leasing the Wood. It was noted that the Parish Council had considered taking on the lease but, as the terms of the lease would require maintaining the Wood as a public amenity with 70% woodland cover, had decided that the potential liabilities would outweigh any benefit. Mr Moberly asked the Parish Council to reconsider their decision and it was agreed to consider the setting up of a Working Party to look into this at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

**3594 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> November 2013** were approved and signed by the Chairman.

**3595 – Matters Arising:** None.

**3596 – County and District Councillors' Reports:** The County Councillor apologised for not having attended previous meetings as he was the Chairman of the District Council's Planning Board which met on the same evening as the Parish Council. He noted that each County Councillor had received £5,000 under the Health and Wellbeing budget which was available as small grants for their parishes to support projects in this area – such as playground equipment. Any grant would need to be applied for by mid-January. He also noted that the County Council had received a "satisfactory" Ofsted report on its children's services due to poor record keeping but a highly regarded professional had been brought in to sort this out. He also commented on the rationalisation of children's centres, with investment in people rather than buildings; the need to save £100 million over the next four years, with closer co-operation with District Councils; the hoped for improvement in rural broadband; and that the go-ahead for Hinckley Point was an exciting project for Somerset.

The District Councillor noted that he was also a member of the District Council's Planning Board and reported on the fact that the District Council offices in Shepton Mallet were going to be shared with other organisations including the County Council in order to save money. Unfortunately a problem with the new computer system had meant a delay in dealing with planning applications but the staff had dealt with the chaos very well. The County Councillor noted that the District Council's Local Plan would shortly be submitted and parishes would be approached about details in the Plan next year.

It was noted that the owners had moved into the house behind Chapel Row but as it was not yet finished enforcement action could not proceed.

**3597 – Footpaths and Highways:** Road Closure – The Clerk had contacted Somerset Highways about allowing the school bus to continue using Gold Hill during the period it was closed, but the nature of the work meant that this was not possible.

Frys Lane – Jayne Cox reported that work had been done at the bottom of Frys Lane to reduce water flow in a manner that was sympathetic to the lane's use by horses.

De-icing Materials – Justin Witcombe was thanked for collecting the 20kg bags of de-icing materials from the Highways depot in Frome and these were now being stored at Portway Farm. The Chairman suggested that a couple of bags be left at the Village Hal.

**3598 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report:** The Clerk reported that there was more evidence of a mole in the Playing Field. He had turned off all the water in Playing Field and had asked Geoff Sparkes to stop cutting the grass. Mr Sparkes was willing to undertake an extra cut if needed. Mr Sparkes had also provided a quote for cutting the Playing Field grass next year at the same prices as this year.

**Tree Works:** Iona FitzGerald had spoken to the owner of the field by the Playing Field and tractors would not be using the field until the spring. Tristram FitzGerald was busy until Christmas, so the tree works in the Playing Field would be done in January and the owner of the adjoining field was happy with this. Iona also noted that the pollarded Horse Chestnut needed to be looked at and may need to be felled or at least cut down to the height of the surrounding seat.

Iona also stated that she would come back to the January meeting with ideas for obtaining a grant for the Playing Field under the County Councillor's Health and Wellbeing budget.

**3599 – Planning Applications:** There were no applications to consider.

**Planning Application Updates:** Donald Sage had appealed against the conditions on the planning permission for a replacement bungalow at Hedgestocks. It was understood that he wished to have a tiled roof instead of the stipulated slate roof. The Clerk was instructed to write to the Planning Inspector noting that the Parish Council had approved the original application which had asked for a tile or slate roof, that the Parish Council had no objection to a tiled roof and that all the buildings near to Hedgestocks had tiled roofs.

The District Council had approved the materials for the house behind Chapel Row.

**3600 – Batcombe Community Shop and Café:** Justin Witcombe the Parish Council's Village Hall representative reported back on the last meeting of the Village Hall committee when those proposing a community shop had made a presentation stating that the survey they had done had been very positive and they would like to use the Committee Room in the Old School as a shop and the main room as a pop-up café. The Village Hall Committee had stated that they would need to see a business plan before considering the proposal in detail. It was also noted that the proponents of the shop had also been offered facilities at the Three Horseshoes. The Village Hall committee had also received a letter asking that the users of the Old School and Jubilee Hall be consulted before the facilities there were lost.

The Parish Council Chairman noted that the public meeting promised by the proponents of the shop had not yet taken place and the Parish Council would discuss the proposed shop after this meeting had been held.

**3601 – Annual Parish Meeting:** The Chairman asked Councillors to think of options for the Annual Meeting and to bring them to the January meeting. An exhibition of enterprises in the village was a possibility and it could be an opportunity for a public presentation on the village shop.

**3602 – Budget and Precept 2014/15:** At the last meeting it had been agreed in principle to increase the Clerk's hours to seven a week. The Clerk had prepared a summary of items in the budget showing that there were very limited opportunities for savings. It was agreed to accept the budget with an increase in the precept of £250 to £7,450 - confirming the increase in the Clerk's hours, accepting the quotation from Mr Sparkes for cutting the Playing Field grass and agreeing the upgrade in the website to include a calendar.

**3603 - Authorisation of payment:** Councillors authorised the following payment:

£45.00      Mr G Sparkes – Grass cutting for November.

**3604 - Other Business - Matters of Information:** It was agreed to move the February meeting of the Parish Council to Wednesday February 12<sup>th</sup> as the Clerk would be unavailable the previous Wednesday.

Justin Witcombe reported that he had been approached by a parishioner asking if mobile phone reception could be improved by placing a booster mast in the church tower. It was doubted if this would be feasible but it was suggested that the parishioner should approach his phone company to see what would be the trigger in terms of number of users for supplying a booster mast.

**3605 – Date and Time of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2014 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe. The Chairman gave his apologies in advance.

*E Hollis*  
*8/1/2014*