

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 4th June 2014 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage and one member of the public.

3700 – Apologies for Absence: None.

3701 – Declarations of Interest: None.

3702 – Public Participation: None.

3703 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7th May 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3704 – Matters Arising: Music Festival at Gilcombe Farm in July – Liz Hollis reported that she had sent in a representation stating the Council's concerns about noise levels and road safety. There would be a meeting with South Somerset District Council to consider the application later in the month, which Liz would attend on behalf of the Parish Council. Review of Insurance Cover – the Clerk reported that he had received confirmation that the Council was insured with Came & Co as agreed at the last meeting.

3705 – Footpaths and Highways: It was reported that there was a large hole in the verge opposite Churchbridge Lodge that was hidden by the grass. The Clerk was asked to report the hole to Somerset Highways.

3706 – Free Roaming Dogs: The Chairman reported that he had received two complaints about free roaming dogs in Kale Street, that could cause an accident if they ran out in front of a car. Concerns were also raised about dogs worrying sheep and horses, and about the time taken to return stray dogs to their owners. It was felt that dogs needed to be under control even if with their owners, and that owners could be liable if their dog caused an accident. It was suggested that the dog warden be asked to visit Kale Street. Iona FitzGerald felt that it would be better to speak to the dog owners on Kale Street before calling out the dog warden and volunteered to do this. It was agreed that the Chairman would write a note for the parish magazine pointing out the concerns about loose dogs and the dog warden be asked to visit.

3707 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June. The Clerk reported that there were no more molehills. Mainstay Projects had re-concreted one of the legs of the nest swing that had come loose from its foundation, and Iona FitzGerald reported that Mainstay Projects had also re-adjusted the zip wire.

The Chairman had received a complaint about the response of the contractor cutting the Playing Field grass to a resident asking him to undertake an additional task in the Playing Field. The Chairman had spoken with the contractor and had agreed with him that the only person who could give him instructions was the Clerk and that if any member of the public

approached him with a request for additional work he would contact the Chairman. The Clerk reported that the contractor had supplied him with a copy of his public liability insurance and a timetable of cuts for Playing Field. He had also agreed to cut the Field just before the Village Fete and to cut back hedge inside the Playing Field before the Fete.

Iona FitzGerald reported that the tree work in the Playing Field had been undertaking, raising the trees overhanging the neighbouring field, cutting deadwood from the oak tree and removing a self-seeded sycamore. It was noted that access to the Playing Field to remove the wood had not been possible as the Clerk had been away and no one else knew the combination to the lock on the vehicle gate. The Clerk shared the combination with Councillors and asked them not to share it more widely.

3708 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: The Clerk reported that the Enforcement Notice had been served on the owners of Ash Tree House requiring them to modify the solar panels on the house to accord with the approved drawings within two months of the date of the Notice on May 29th. They had until June 30th to appeal against the Notice.

The Clerk also reported that planning permission had been granted for the conversion of 1 & 2 Giles Cottages into a single dwelling and planning permission and Listed Building Consent had been granted for the variation on the design of the extension at Rockwells House.

3709 – Adoption of New Financial Regulations: Draft copies of new Financial Regulations prepared by the Clerk on the basis of model Financial Regulations produced by the National Association of Local Councils had been distributed to Councillors with the Agendas. The Clerk went through the Regulations noting changes to existing Financial Regulations, optional requirements that had been omitted as not relevant to Batcombe Parish Council and some proposed changes from the model Regulations. It was noted that someone other than the Chairman was now required to check the bank reconciliations each quarter. It was agreed to do this at a meeting of the Council, appointing someone present each time. The requirement for a quarterly comparison of budget and financial statements was felt to be excessive but it was decided to do this as it was also a requirement of the new Standing Orders.

The new Financial Regulations allowed the Council to make payments other than by cheque if the Council thought this was appropriate. The Clerk suggested that the only situation where the Council might consider this was in the payment of the utility bills for the Playing Field by Direct Debit. It was agreed to consider this at the next meeting. It was also agreed to delete the sentence from the model that would prevent the use of the Clerk's debit card to make small "cash" payments in line with the Regulations for cash payments. It was agreed to increase the sum that the Clerk could spend on emergency safety work from £250 to the £500 recommended in the model. It was agreed unanimously to adopt the Financial Regulations as produced by the Clerk, with the change of the figure at 12.2 to £50 from £25.

3710 – Review of Banking Arrangements: The new Financial Regulations required an annual review of banking arrangements. The Clerk reported that the Council banked with NatWest Bank where it had a current and a reserve account. He also reported that transfers were not currently being made between the accounts because banking regulations made such transfers cumbersome and the reserve account was earning very little interest. Four Councillors were currently signatories and cheques were required to be signed by any two of these. The Clerk was also a signatory in order to receive bank statements. It was agreed that there was no need to change the current banking arrangements.

3711 – Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control: The new Financial Regulations required a review of the effectiveness of the Council’s system of internal control before adopting the Annual Governance Statement that formed part of the Annual Return to the external auditor. The Clerk reported his belief that the Council’s system of internal control was more than sufficient for a small Parish Council. The details were given in the Financial Regulations and included the budgetary process, the authorisation of all payments by the Council, the signing of cheques at Council meetings by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the internal audit undertaken by Griff Williams, who was both competent and independent of the Council. However, the internal auditor had noted that one area in which internal controls could be improved was in the receipt of large sums of cash as had happened during the fundraising for the Playing Field. To comply with the new Financial Regulations it was agreed the cash should be counted in the presence of the person presenting the cash to the Clerk and a signed receipt obtained. The internal auditor had also recommended keeping a register of money received.

3712 – Annual Return for the Year Ended 31st March 2014: Copies of Section 1 of the Annual Return - the Statement of Accounts – had been enclosed with the Agendas, together with a copy of the Financial Statements, considered at the previous meeting, showing how the figures in the Statement of Accounts had been derived. The Annual Return with the Internal Auditor’s Report completed by Mr Griff Williams was passed around for Councillors to see. Approval of the Statement of Accounts was agreed.

Copies of Section 2 of the Annual Return - the Annual Governance Statement – had also been enclosed with the Agendas, and approval of the Annual Governance Statement was also agreed.

The Clerk reported that the Internal Auditor had made three recommendations to the Council. The first was for a review of internal audit, for the Council to set out what was required of the internal auditor, and it was agreed to undertake this at the next meeting. The second was for greater internal controls on the receipt of income as covered in the previous item. The third was that documents that form an integral part of the decisions made by the Council such as the Financial Statements should be included in the Minute Book.

3713 – Annual Grants from the Parish Council: It was agreed to provide the budgeted grants of £300 to the Village Hall (£100 for our own meetings, £150 for committee meetings of other village organisations and £50 to help with maintenance costs) and £200 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard. It was also agreed to give two grants of £100 (as budgeted) to Mendip Community Transport under the section 137 power, and to the Mendip Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

3714 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments in addition to the grants agreed in the previous item:

- £96.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting for May.
- £10.00 Somerset Playing Fields Association – Subscription.

3715 - Other Business - Matters of Information: The Parish Council had received a request from Gary Weller who would like to plant one or more oak trees in the village in memory of his mother Pam who used to run the Post Office in Batcombe before dying of cancer. The Council was unaware of any public land that would be suitable but the Clerk was asked to suggest that he put a request in the parish magazine to see if a landowner in the village would be willing to plant a tree on their land.

The Clerk reported that the District Council had received three applications for the designation of Neighbourhood Plan Areas from Croscombe, Evercreech and Wanstrow Parish Councils, although Wanstrow had subsequently withdrawn their application.

Matt Ballard of Connecting Devon and Somerset would be addressing Wanstrow Parish Council on Monday 9th June about the provision of superfast broadband and members of Batcombe Parish Council were invited to attend.

The Council had received a copy of the Mendip Police and Crime Plan for 2014-2017 from the Police and Crime Commissioner along with copies of her latest newsletter. The Council had also received a copy of the public summary of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Somerset.

The Council had received two requests from Jane Batchelor of Longleat Cottage: to explore installing a Batcombe sign to the north of the village on the Lodge road; and to consider supporting the use of materials provided by the “20s Plenty for Us” campaign encourage a voluntary speed limit of 20mph. It was agreed to consider both items at the next meeting.

Dan Jarman of Ravenswood, Westcombe had requested that the Parish Council consider the Community Heartbeat project which encouraged the placing of defibrillators in community locations such as old telephone kiosks. It was agreed to consider this at the next meeting.

Nigel Humphreys, the churchwarden, had asked if the Parish Council could clean up their notice boards and whether the Council had a notice board policy about notices displayed. The Clerk noted that the noticeboard on the churchyard wall was in a poor state due to condensation problems and it was agreed to consider the state of the notice boards at the next meeting. It was felt that a notice board policy was not needed.

Bruno Cristofoli had informed the Parish Council about events at Pennysquare Barn over the summer. It was noted that there were events taking place almost every weekend. Most were wedding receptions or birthday parties although a music festival was planned for October.

3716 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 2nd July 2014 at 8.00pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
2nd July 2014