

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 5th November 2014 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

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

The Chairman introduced the meeting, noted that the planning applications would be brought forward on the Agenda and outlining the procedure for considering the applications.

3782 – Apologies for Absence: John Sommer, who was unwell.

3783 – Declarations of Interest: None.

3784 – Public Participation: None that would not be considered under items to follow.

3785 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1st October 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3786 – Matters Arising: None.

3787 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2014/2127/FUL – Demolition of existing dwelling and outbuildings (one retained) and replacement dwelling with conversion of traditional barn into cottage. Valley View Farm, Batcombe – Full Application.

The Clerk outlined the planning process, noting that the District Council had a target of eight weeks to consider the application and that during that period the Parish Council had a 21 day period to consider the application, which the current meeting fell within. He also noted that concerns had been raised that there had been a delay in placing the plans for the application on the District Council website and that no public notice regarding the application had been displayed. The District Councillor responded, apologising for the delay in putting the plans on the website, which was due to staff shortages, and noting that the public notice had been displayed that day, meaning members of the public had 21 days to comment on the application. The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had been sent a copy of the plans prior to the application and these had been displayed at the July meeting.

The applicant, Mr Simon Waterfield, then spoke in support of his application, stating that it was a building of exceptional quality with the same footage as the existing building but moved to a new site which related to an existing farmyard. He also stated that there would be limited visibility of the new building which conformed to current District Council policies.

The Clerk then summarised 38 e-mails the Parish Council had received from 47 local residents objecting to the application. The main objections to the application related to the location of the proposed replacement dwelling well away from the built environment of the village in open countryside on top of a hill that would be visible on the higher ground surrounding the village; the change of use from agricultural land to residential and the precedent this would create for future development in the open countryside, resulting in a curtailment of the English

countryside; the size of the building; the design of the house which was felt to be out of keeping with the vernacular buildings of Batcombe; the visual impact of a building out of keeping with local farmland; the impact on an unspoilt landscape of exceptional historical and natural value and beauty; the potential impact on local wildlife; the misleading nature of the description as a replacement dwelling when the dwelling would not occupy the same site as the buildings it is replacing; the fact that a replacement building on the site of the current building would have much less impact on the landscape; and the loss of potential business premises in the buildings being demolished.

Nine local residents then spoke against the application, noting that many of the gardens in the village street were higher than the houses and the new dwelling would be visible from them; that the building did not relate to the vernacular buildings of the village and would turn the countryside into suburbia; that Batcombe was a combe with its buildings within the valley; that the loss of the countryside was a high price to pay for a house for one family; that there would be considerable construction traffic in building the house; that this would create a precedent for building many more houses in the open countryside; and asking why such a large building was necessary. One resident felt that it would be a beautiful house that most of those objecting would not be able to see; and another felt that the Parish Council had a very poor grasp of planning policy. The Clerk noted that in all previous applications for replacement houses the District Council had required the replacement house to be sited within the curtilage of the existing house.

After careful consideration the Parish Council decided to recommend refusal on the grounds that the distance of the new dwelling was too far from the existing buildings to be considered a replacement dwelling and so had to be considered as a new dwelling in open countryside, contrary to national planning policy. In addition the size, location and design of the building, which was out of keeping with the character of the village and the surrounding countryside, would have a detrimental impact on a largely unspoilt landscape of great natural and historic value. The Council felt that a replacement dwelling within the curtilage of the existing buildings would be acceptable.

Planning Application No: 2014/1579/HSE – Remove existing conservatory and replace with two storey extension. Loft conversion. (Amended plans.) Little Acre, Batcombe – Householder Application. The Clerk noted that the proposed two storey extension had been reduced to a single storey extension with an additional single storey extension to the rear of the building and that the walls appear to be of stone or reconstituted stone rather than the white horizontal fibre cement clapboard cladding originally proposed. The owner of the neighbouring property was concerned that the title of the application still stated that it would be a two storey extension. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval on condition that it was a single storey extension and that the materials used for the external walls were similar to the reconstituted stone of the existing building.

Planning Application Updates: The appeal against the decision to refuse permission for the two storey extension at Cherry Tree Cottage had been allowed, as the Planning Inspector had concluded that the extension would not be unacceptably overbearing on Boords Farm. The Inspector also felt the extension would not be visible from the road so the character of the Conservation Area would be preserved and while noting the concerns about parking felt that the road at this point was reasonably wide. The Chairman expressed his disbelief at the Inspector's comments, but noted that there was no appeal against the Inspector's decision.

The District Council had decided that prior approval was not required for the proposed change of use of an agricultural building off Bailey's Lane to a dwelling house as "The proposal is development permitted by Class MB of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted

Development) (Amendment and Consequential Provisions) (England) Order 2014 ...”. The Clerk noted that under this new legislation the District Council have only to consider transport and highway impacts, noise impacts, contamination risks, flooding risks and whether the location or siting of the building makes it otherwise impractical or undesirable for the building to change from agricultural use to use as a dwelling. As this was an application for permitted development the Parish Council was not consulted and had no influence on the decision. The Chairman felt this new legislation would cause concern as it was likely to lead to more agricultural buildings being converted to dwellings without consultation.

The application for a wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm had been refused permission by South Somerset District Council on the grounds that “the proposed wind turbine, by reason of its scale, size, form, location and prominence in this unspoilt rural landscape would result in significant harm to landscape and visual amenity to the detriment of the rural and historic character of the locality” and “would result in substantial harm to the character and setting of the historic assets; namely Durslade Farm, Whaddon House and Henley Grove Farm, all grade 2 listed, given their close relationship to the turbine”. It was noted that the applicant could appeal against the decision.

The reserved details in the planning permission for Carrot Hill Farm House had been approved. Prior approval for an extension at 6 Kale Street had been refused as this house was within the Batcombe Conservation Area and so planning permission would be required.

The District Council had had no objections to two applications to fell trees within the Conservation Area – a Cherry tree at Millards Hill House and a Lawsons Cypress and a Yew at Batcombe House. The Clerk noted that the Parish Council had not been consulted on these applications. Iona FitzGerald, who was the agent for both applications, noted that she had asked the tree officer why the Parish Council had not been consulted and he stated that the Council should have been consulted. The Clerk to contact the tree officer asking that the Parish Council is consulted on such applications in future.

3788 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: The County Councillor noted that there was a limit on the number of permitted developments under the new legislation (see above) of three per site. He apologised for not having attended more frequently due to the clash of dates with the District Council Planning Board. There was nothing specific to report in relation to Mendip South but he noted there was a proposal to set up a Somerset Rivers Board of which the District and County Councils would be members and which was likely to be self-precepting. He reported that the County Council finances were not good with a £31 million gap that needed to be closed, but a recent audit had given a good report except for Children’s Services. The Minister of Transport was being lobbied for improved roads and it was hoped to find extra money for villages with weak broadband. The Chairman thanked him for his report.

3789 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that the new allotment holder was happy to take over the vacant allotment from March 1st and the Chairman noted that the allotment holders who had been using this allotment would be vacating it. The Chairman had arranged an informal meeting of the existing allotment holders to discuss the allocation of the allotments in the Three Horseshoes on Wednesday November 12th to address the concerns of the allotment holders. The Clerk noted that the allotment rents were now due.

3790 – Footpaths and Highways: Sam Pick asked if anything had been done about the milestone on Walter’s Lane. The Clerk reported that the milestone had been struck at some point by an agricultural vehicle and so was leaning to one side but was secure and in no danger

of falling. Sam felt that the stone was in danger of being struck again. The Clerk was asked to contact Somerset Highways. It was noted that this milestone was not listed.

The resurfacing of the road from Stoney Stratton to Westcombe had been postponed. The Clerk reported that Nick Sommer had contacted Somerset Highways and had been informed that the road would be resurfaced from the 10th to 12th December when the road would be closed during the day. It had originally been hoped to do the resurfacing at night but there was no room for the necessary lights.

The Clerk reported that Rob Davey from the County Council's Traffic Management department had not yet come back to the Parish Council with a date for a new site meeting to consider the position of the "No HGV" signs on the roads into Batcombe. The Council had been informed of the closure of Bindon Lane in Witham Friary for one day on 17th November for a bridge inspection.

Car Parking: It was noted that this was an ongoing problem.

3791 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that there had been no more molehills in the Playing Field. Justin Witcombe and Ian Sage were thanked for placing low barriers in the gaps in the Playing Field fence to keep badgers out, but the Clerk reported that one of these had already been crushed. Ian offered to replace the barrier. Justin stated that the chain link fence along the bottom of the Playing Field needed replacing. It was agreed to look into replacing the fencing and removing the gaps at the same time. Iona FitzGerald reported that Anthony Greenhaugh from Mainstay Projects would look at the pedestrian gate to see how it could be made self-closing. Iona also reported that she had made an application to the County Councillor's Health and Well-being budget for a new seat for the Playing Field.

3792 – Noise: The Chairman had received a number of complaints about noise from Pennysquare Barn on the weekend of the Bodstock Music Festival. The owner of Pennysquare stated that whenever there were events on at Pennysquare he would listen for noise in the village and if there was loud music go and ask for it to be turned down. He also noted that he had been woken in the middle of the night by someone complaining about noise from Pennysquare when there was no event taking place there.

3793 – Coney Wood – an update from the Working Party: The public meeting to consider the possible lease of Coney Wood would be held the following Saturday. The Chairman noted that the decision would remain with the Parish Council. The Clerk noted that as this would be a long term commitment a full risk assessment would need to be done.

3794 – Emergency Plan – an update from the Working Party: A working party consisting of the Chairman, the Clerk, Arish Turle from the PCC and Nick Sommer had meet to consider the Plan and Nick Sommer was working on updating the document. He would like to include Parish Councillors' mobile numbers.

Power Cuts - There had been a number of small power cuts recently and the Chairman proposed that the Parish Council write to SSE seeking an assurance that the power supply would be maintained over the winter. This was agreed.

3795 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: Liz Hollis verified the bank reconciliation produced by the Clerk for the second quarter and this was then reported to the Council.

A statement of receipts and payments comparing the budget for the current year with a project based on receipts and payment to date had been distributed with the Agendas. The Clerk noted that the material variations were the same as those reported at the previous budget

update: the new vehicle gate for the Playing Field had not been included in the budget (as it had been expected to have been paid for in the previous year); that the water supply would be over budget as there would be three bills in the current year and only one the previous year; and that the change in the Clerk's tax code meant that no PAYE would be paid. It was noted that the Parish Council should have funds of around £4,700 at the end of the year of which approximately £980 would be earmarked for the allotments.

3796 – Parish Website: The Parish Council had upgraded the website earlier in the year to be able to include a calendar on the website. The calendar had proved disappointing and time consuming to keep up to date so the Parish Council agreed to return to the basic package which would be £7 a month less than the upgraded package.

3797 – Budget and Precept 2015/16: A budget for the coming year and a forecast for the next three years had been distributed with the Agendas. Given the number of unknown factors in the budget including the cost of new fencing for the Playing Field and whether or not the lease of Coney Wood would go ahead it was agreed to defer the setting of the budget and precept for 2015/16 to the next meeting.

3798 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£96.00	Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting for October.
£21.96	SSE – Electricity supply for the Playing Field.

3799 – Other Business - matters of information only: The Clerk reported that at the Village Hall AGM, those wanting a village shop had presented a petition asking to use the Old School as their shop, but it had been explained that the Charity Commissioners would not allow the conversion of the Old School to a shop while it was being used as a community building.

3800 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 3rd December 2014 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge

3rd December 2014