

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th January 2015 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.

3818 – Apologies for Absence: David Stevens – District Councillor.

3819 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared interests in items 3831 and 3833 as relatives of the Clerk.

3820 – Public Participation: None.

3821 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd December 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3822 – Matters Arising: Allotments – the Clerk reported that he had obtained two estimates for the cutting of the hedge in the allotments field and as authorised by the Council had accepted the lower estimate. The hedge had now been cut back satisfactorily.

3823 – District and County Councillors' Reports: The District Councillor had e-mailed to state that he had nothing to report other than that he was waiting to hear what action the applicant at Valley View Farm would take. The applicant was apparently concerned that the application had not been taken to the Planning Board, although the decision under delegated powers was in line with the District Council's adopted policy. The Clerk was asked to thank the District Councillor for his report.

3824 – Footpaths and Highways: Somerset Highways had reported no further problems with their salting lorries passing parked cars in Batcombe since the issue was highlighted on the Parish Council website.

Dog Mess. The Chairman had received a phone call from a resident reporting piles of dog mess on the footpath from the Village Hall past the churchyard. There were also reports of dogs in the Playing Field and of dogs worrying sheep in Burnel. The Chairman would place a note about dogs in the parish magazine.

It was noted that "No HGV" signs had been placed at Cranmore. No response had been received from Rob Davey in the County Council's Traffic Management department about the siting of a similar sign on the road into Batcombe past Batcombe Lodge, although it was noted that there was a weight limit where the road came off the main road. It was also reported that a lorry had got stuck attempting to get into Westcombe via Lower Alham, had to be hauled out by a recovery vehicle and had lost its fuel tanks in the process.

Consultation on the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2. The Clerk reported that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), which determined how the County Council managed and improved the public rights of way network, had been adopted in 2006. The

County Council had now reviewed this Plan and intended to replace it with RoWIP2 - to last until 2024. Jayne Cox, as the Parish Path Liaison Officer, agreed to look at the draft RoWIP2 to see if the Parish Council should make any comments, which it had until 10th March to do.

3825 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that there were some new molehills in the Playing Field, but it was decided to leave it until the Spring before taking any further action. Iona FitzGerald had spoken to the landowner of the field around the Playing Field who had asked that the new fence not be erected until the end of March to allow grass seedlings in the field to come on. It was proposed to undertake the work on the weekend of March 21st & 22nd.

Health and Wellbeing Grant. Iona FitzGerald was thanked for obtaining a grant of £525 for a picnic seat in the Playing Field from the County Councillor’s Health and Wellbeing budget. The proposed picnic table was of solid oak construction costing £420 with £70 delivery and Anthony Greenhalgh of Mainstay Projects had offered to install the picnic table for the remainder of the grant. The Parish Council agreed to meet the cost of any materials for securing the picnic table. It was agreed that the picnic table should be placed immediately in front of the shelter and padlocked in place, although it could be removed for the Fete.

3826 – Planning Applications: An application for Listed Building Consent for remedial works, alteration of rear elevation and internal improvement works at 1, Sunnyside had been received too late to be placed on the Agenda and would be considered at the next meeting. The Chairman reported that he had been contacted by the neighbour of the applicant concerned that work would be beginning before Listed Building Consent had been received. The Clerk was asked to contact the case officer.

Planning Application Updates: The Clerk reported that planning permission for the solar panels on the roof of Ash Tree House had been refused.

The application for planning permission for the replacement dwelling at Valley View Farm had been refused. The case officer had decided that, as the replacement dwelling was outside of the domestic curtilage of Valley View Farm, it would result in the encroachment of new residential development into the open countryside. He had also felt that the conversion of the existing farm buildings was not sensitive or sympathetic to the original character of the existing building and noted that the ecological assessment was out of date.

The reserved details on the application at Lodge Farm for a porch extension and lobby had been approved. These covered external walling, stone for window surrounds, finishes and rainwater goods.

The description for the application for extensions at Little Acre (application number 2014/1579/HSE) had been amended to “Convert existing conservatory, single storey rear extension and conversion of double garage into ancillary living accommodation. Loft conversion. (Amended Plans Received 01.10.2014 Amended Description 5.12.2014)”. The Parish Council had had until December 26th to comment on the amendment, but given that it was only the description that had been amended, and the need for this amendment had been noted by the Parish Council, the Chairman had decided not to call an additional meeting. The application had subsequently been approved.

3827 – Coney Wood: The Chairman reported that he had received a phone call from a local farmer claiming that the small section of Coney Wood north of the road was part of his farm. The Chairman had reported this to the Woodland Trust who were unaware of any dispute over the ownership of the land which had been recorded with the Land Registry. The Clerk noted that the lease should not be taken out if there was any doubt about the ownership of the land.

For the Woodland Trust to draw up a lease for the Parish Council to consider, the Parish Council needed to decide whether it wished to consider a 25 year lease or a 999 year lease. The Parish Council also needed to confirm that the Heads of Terms drawn up by the Woodland Trust were acceptable. After discussion it was agreed to consider a 999 year lease with the proviso that the lease included a get-out clause should a future Parish Council wish to terminate the lease. It was noted that a final decision on the lease would not be made until the new Council had been elected in May. After further discussion the Heads of Terms were considered acceptable as a basis for taking the lease forward provided that the get-out clause was included in the lease and subject to taking legal advice on the lease.

The Clerk reported that the Executive County Officer of SALC was willing to meet with the Chairman and the Clerk to discuss the future management of the Wood and would help with drawing up of Terms of Reference for a working party if the Council decided on this route for managing the Wood.

3828 – Emergency Plan: Thanks were expressed to Nick Sommer who had updated the existing emergency plan and a copy had been distributed to Councillors with the Agenda. It was noted that this was still a draft: some details needed to be checked, including confirmation that volunteers were willing for their names to appear in the Plan and there were some unfulfilled roles. It was suggested adding the opening times of local hospitals be added to the Plan, and that some of the information that did not include personal details be placed on the Parish Council website. It was also suggested that the Emergency Plan should be the theme for the Annual Parish Meeting. The Chairman noted that Mr Arish Turle had joined the Working Party as a representative of the Parochial Church Council and that he had found some volunteers with experience of military planning who were willing to test the Plan as a paper exercise. He also hoped that, with the involvement of the PCC and the clergy, the Plan could evolve to include the protection care of the vulnerable in the parish.

3829 – Recording of Council Meetings: The Clerk reported that under new legislation – Openness of Local Government Bodies 2014 – members of the public now had the right to record Parish Council meetings. A copy of a policy on the recording of Council meetings produced by the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) had been distributed with the Agenda and this was adopted by the Parish Council. It was noted that the Parish Council might need to make its own recording of its meeting should meetings be recorded by others.

3830 – Annual Parish Meeting: It was agreed to postpone the Annual Meeting until Wednesday 8th April to avoid a clash with a church event in the week before Easter. It was also agreed that theme of the Annual Meeting would be the Emergency Plan.

Consultation on Parish Polls. The Clerk reported that the Government was planning to modernise parish polls. Currently these could be called by 10 electors present at a parish meeting or by a third of those present if this was less than 10 and could cost a parish several thousand pounds.

3831 – Terms and Conditions of the Employment of the Clerk: The Clerk reported that the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) had agreed a recommended increase in the pay scales for Clerks of 2.2% from January 2015 and a one-off payment in compensation for the increase not being backdated to April. Pro rata the one-off payment for the Clerk came to £18.92. The increase in salary and the one-off payment for the Clerk were agreed.

3832 – Budget and Precept 2015/16: An updated budget for the coming year and forecast for the next three years had been distributed with the Agendas. The cost of the Clerk's salary

and the grass cutting in the Playing Field were now known and less than anticipated but there was the additional cost of new fencing for the Playing Field. There were still a number of unknowns including the cost of a possible contested Parish Council election.

The District Council had informed the Parish Council that it would receive a Council Tax Support Grant of £71.28 in the coming year, compared to £73.10 in the current year, and that the tax base for Batcombe for 2015/16 was 206.09, compared to 191.88 in the current year and 202.86 in the previous year. The Clerk noted that the increase in the tax base meant that the Parish Council could increase its precept to £7,948 without any increase in the component of Council Tax due to the precept. The Chairman felt that the Parish Council was running a budget with little leeway should there be a contested election followed shortly by a by-election and proposed increasing the budget to £7,948, the maximum possible without increasing the Council Tax component of the precept. This was agreed.

3833 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £45.00 Gary Butler – Hedge cutting in allotments field.
- £956.22 The Clerk – Salary for 3rd Quarter plus £18.92 one-off payment.
- £135.71 The Clerk – Expenses for 3rd Quarter.

3834 – Other Business - matters of information only: The Chairman reported a phone call from a local landowner concerned that people were walking over his field where there was no footpath and damaging his gate when he locked it. Jayne Cox noted that the PCSO was dealing with the matter, which had been recorded as criminal damage.

Justin Witcombe noted that many of the road drains were blocked causing some flooding. Now that the hedge cutting had been done, he was clearing the drains.

John Sommer reported that the pedestrian gate to the Playing Field was not closing. Iona FitzGerald noted that Mainstay Projects had looked at the gate several times. It was felt the problem may have been caused by children swinging on the gate.

Liz Hollis reported that another event had been proposed for Gilcombe Farm. Liz was authorised to represent the views of the Parish Council in line with its response to previous events at Gilcombe Farm in that similar controls to those on previous events should be placed on any future events.

The Chairman reported that the proposed meeting on broadband provision at Wanstrow last year had not happened, but another meeting was planned in January which he would attend. Concerns were raised about guarantees of broadband for business users, which would leave limited broadband for other users.

The Clerk reported that the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities would come into effect in April. This would require the Parish Council to publish a range of information on its website, including the Agenda and associated papers for a meeting three clear days before that meeting. The Clerk noted that ensuring that the publication of these papers in compliance with data protection legislation would be time consuming.

It was reported to the meeting that the bank reconciliation for the Parish Council's accounts for the quarter from October to December 2014 had been prepared by the Clerk and checked by Liz Hollis.

3835 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th February 2015 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
4th February 2015