

# **The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe**

## **was held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2013 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.**

Chris Wildridge, Chairman of the Parish Council presided. Six members of the Parish Council and the Clerk attended, together with further 29 parishioners. There were no apologies.

The Chairman **welcomed** parishioners to the meeting. He also welcomed the guest speaker, Tom Calver from Westcombe Dairy, and our County Councillor, Gloria Cawood.

It was noted that the **Minutes of the 2012 Annual Parish Meeting** had been published on the Parish Council website, but the feeling of the meeting was that they should be read by the Clerk, after which they were agreed and signed.

**Matters Arising.** Olivia Spencer asked for an update on the Torr Works quarry and Liz Hollis reported that the quarry would go down in levels and be monitored by the Environment Agency who would have to give approval before beginning the next level. Liz added that the deepening of the quarry should not affect Batcombe but we should keep an eye on it. Robert O'Farrell was impressed that the pothole in the lay-by in front of the church he had reported at last year's meeting had been repaired a week later. Gloria Cawood noted that the change to the parliamentary constituency would not be going ahead, but the changes to the County Council divisions would, with Batcombe becoming part of the new Mendip South Division.

Chris Wildridge gave the **Chairman's Report** with the aid of a Powerpoint presentation. He began by noting the sad death of Yvonne Sommer in March. Yvonne had served on the Parish Council since 2007, showing dedication in maintaining the footpaths and bridleways in the parish through her role as the Parish Paths Liaison Officer, and contributing to the life of the village through her work as the Parish Council's representative on the Village Hall Trust and on the Children's Christmas Treat Committee. The Chairman added that her loss to the village would be deeply felt and as a mark of respect the Parish Council had postponed the start of the process of finding a successor until earlier that evening.

He also noted that Bryan Mead had moved from village in the previous year, after serving on the Parish Council for five years and playing a large part in the establishment of the allotments at Eastcombe. Bryan was thanked for his service to the Council. His place on the Council had been filled by the co-option of Justin Witcombe in September.

The Chairman noted that Gloria Cawood, who was standing down at the election in May, had been Batcombe's County Councillor for twenty years. He reflected on her dedication to the parishes in her division that had been shown by her frequent attendance at Parish Council meetings and expressed the hope that the person elected to represent Batcombe in the new Mendip South Division would show a similar commitment.

On planning the Chairman commented on the national context, noting that the District Council did not currently have a Local Plan in effect and that in the draft Local Plan there would be no housing development in Batcombe. He felt that it was important for the future of the parish that there should be the possibility of sensitive and appropriate development.

There were 14 planning applications in the last year, compared to 30 the year before. Of these eight were for full or householder planning permission, of which six were approved and two were waiting a decision. The application for a two storey extension at Holly Cottage in Westcombe had been allowed on appeal after being refused permission. However the applicants had re-applied for a single storey extension, which was approved and built. An application for significant alterations to Rockwells House had been objected to by neighbours and the Parish Council had recommended refusal, after which an amended application that took into account

the majority of the objections had been approved. An application for Listed Building Consent to convert the coach house at Westcombe Stables had been refused and had gone to appeal.

There were a small number of complaints about noise from the Sunrise Festival at Gilcombe Farm and the wet weather meant that mud on the main road was a problem. As in the previous year there was more of a problem with Farmfest later in the year, which was an older festival and so had fewer restrictions on it. It had been hoped to make a joint representation to South Somerset District Council about Farmfest with Bruton Town Council, but the Town Council had decided to act on its own. Bruno Cristofoli continued to keep the Parish Council informed of events taking place at Pennysquare Barn, although there were some concerns about a charity event called Bodstock taking place there.

The Parish Council continued to be concerned about the state of some of the roads in the parish, particularly about the road from Westcombe to Stoney Stratton where the resurfacing had caused significant problems with loose gravel and blocked gullies. Snow, ice and rain also caused problems and meetings were held with Somerset Highways staff to address problems caused by water flowing from Fry's Lane, Walter's Lane and off the footpath at the bottom of Back Lane, and remedial works were scheduled for the coming year. The volunteers who helped to clear up the debris washed into the roads were thanked.

The Chairman showed pictures of the damage caused to the Honeycliffe Bridleway by water erosion and the repairs made after the Parish Council had arranged a meeting with Somerset Highways and County Council Rights of Way staff. He noted that no further repairs to the bridleway would be undertaken and asked that drivers of 4x4 vehicles observe the restrictions on use of the bridleway.

The allotments were working well and an allotment that had become vacant was leased to an existing allotment holder as no one else had expressed an interest in it. Moles were causing a problem in the Playing Field. The Parish Council made grants of £300 to the Village Hall Trust; £200 to the Parochial Church Council for maintenance of the churchyard; and £100 to Mendip Community Transport. The Parish Council had increased its precept by £100 to £7,200 in order to ensure it had sufficient reserves.

A number of informal meetings had been organised by the Parish Council Chairman to co-ordinate the activities being organised by village groups and individuals to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The Jubilee weekend had been a great success with a full programme of events enjoyed by all who had attended. A commemorative Jubilee token with the Diamond Jubilee logo on one side and a picture of Batcombe Church designed by Brendan Cox on the other side was given to children in the parish. The cost of the tokens was met by contributions from the Parochial Church Council, the Mums and Toddlers, the Luncheon Club, the Film Society, the Women's Institute, the Children's Christmas Treat Committee and the Parish Council. The Parish Council's own contribution to the Jubilee was to replace the Playing Field gate that was badly worn after 80 years of use, with a new oak gate constructed in the style of the existing gate.

The Parish Council website had become operational a year ago and so far had had 5,000 visits. The Clerk was thanked for his work in developing the website and suggestions for further developments would be welcomed. Griff Williams was thanked for taking on the role of the Parish Council's internal auditor.

Liz Hollis reported that she was attending Quarry Liaison Meetings twice a year on behalf of the Parish Council. These gave the quarry company an opportunity to advise parishes what was happening in the quarries. Liz had also attended meetings with South Somerset District Council before and after the Sunrise Festival. This Festival was no longer taking place at Gilcombe Farm, but a smaller festival was planned for September.

Iona FitzGerald reported on the fundraising for the new play equipment in the Playing Field. Stalls in the rain at the Sunrise Festival had raised £650, while the sponsored walk which had

involved 40-50 children on the only sunny day in May had raised over £1,600. A willow weaving day had been held in March with 40-50 people being shown what to do by Floss and Magnus, and the willow in the structures should start sprouting soon. Iona thanked everyone who had put in time and effort raising funds. There were drawings on display of the equipment it was planned to install in May or June, which incorporated a bridge designed by Richard La Trobe Bateman. Iona encouraged people to come to the Auction of Promises to raise the remaining funds needed.

**County Councillor's Comments.** Gloria Cawood noted that she had been County Councillor for 20 years and reflected on what had been done in Batcombe during that time, which included the building of the Jubilee Hall, the sign to stop lorries coming through the village, the County Council spending money on the bridge at Alham to prevent the recurring flooding, the fundraising for the Playing Field and the establishment of the allotments with a grant from the County Council. Gloria noted that she was not standing again as County Councillor and stated that it had been fantastic to represent the parish over that time.

**Neighbourhood Watch Reports.** Liz Hollis noted that there were three Neighbourhood Watch representatives in the parish, Dot Cox in Kale Street, John Sommer in Westcombe and herself in Eastcombe. Paul Edwards had been replaced as our PCSO by Declan Quinn. The main problems in the area were thefts of Landrovers, quad bikes and heating oil. Residents were asked to report suspicious activities to the police on telephone number 101. Other concerns were speeding in villages and congestion at Upton Noble due to inconsiderate parking.

**Questions from the Floor.** Graham Sage expressed concerns that the road from Westcombe to Stoney Stratton had been resurfaced with low grade tar and gravel that had lifted, and that Baileys Lane had been resurfaced twice within a few months. Jo Webber aired the idea of a community shop in Batcombe, for which funding would be available, and asked anyone who was interested to contact her. Robert O'Farrell asked if the house behind Chapel Row was being built in accordance with the planning permission granted.

Gloria Cawood stated that Batcombe had a super Parish Council and that it had been a pleasure to come to meetings. She added that the death of Yvonne Sommer was very sad, and thanked the Council for making her welcome. The Chairman noted that the Parish Council was a team effort, supported by the Clerk.

**Cheese Making (and Beer Brewing) in Westcombe.** Chris Wildridge introduced Tom Calver from Westcombe Dairy, who stated that they had been making cheese in Westcombe since 1890 when cheese was made from the milk of 10-15 cows on the Brickell family farm. The company had expanded with the growth of supermarkets and had been producing large quantities of cheese up to the early 1990s. Finding that they could not compete against larger firms, they then decided to go back to old-style cheddar cheese production based on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century methods of Henry Cannon and his daughter Edith. Tom noted that he had worked as a chef in London, but had come back to help sell cheese and had been drawn into production.

About 18 months previously the company had started making Ricotta, a low fat cheese made from the whey produced in making cheddar cheese. They also produced aged Caerphilly, which has a history of being produced in Somerset, using the same unpasteurised milk used for their Cheddar. Tom noted that their best cheeses went to London restaurants.

Tom added that when Baytree Foods had left Westcombe, the Wild Beer brewery had replaced them. He felt beer and cheese went well together. The brewery used hops from the United States and Australia for a fruity taste to the beer. Tom had provided samples of the cheeses and beers produced in Westcombe during his talk.

The Chairman thanked Tom Calver for his talk and Gloria Cawood for coming to her last meeting as County Councillor and then closed the meeting.

*Chris Wildridge  
2nd April 2014*