

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2nd September 2015 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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

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

3954– Apologies for Absence: Dick Skidmore – District Councillor and Nigel Woollcombe-Adams – County Councillor.

3955 – Declarations of Interest: John Sommer declared a pecuniary interest in item 3965 – Affordable Housing.

3956 – Public Participation: None.

3957 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1st July 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. Jayne Cox noted that someone else had cut back the bush on Fry’s Lane – Minute 3944.

3958 – Matters Arising: None.

3959 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: None.

3960 – Footpaths and Highways: The Chairman reported that two lorries had become stuck in Back Lane, and another, on its way to the Wild Beer brewery, had become stuck at the Old Post Office. It was agreed that the Clerk should report any lorries reported as stuck in the village by Councillors to the officer at the County Council who had declined to install “No HGV” signs on the roads into Batcombe. The Chairman would speak to the Wild Beer Brewery to ask them to give clearer instructions to drivers making deliveries or to ask for smaller lorries to be used.

The Clerk had reported to Somerset Highways the broken fingers pointing to Batcombe on the fingerposts at the top of Combe Street in Bruton and at the junction of Portway Hill and Crows Hill. He had also reminded Somerset Highways about the broken fingerpost at the end of Back Lane by the Round House.

The Chairman noted that the soakaway at the bottom of Walter’s Lane was working effectively and that it was intended to slow the water coming down the lane during heavy rain storms, not stop it completely.

It was noted that the overhanging hedge at Westcombe Cottage was causing problems for passing tractors. The Clerk to write to the owner asking that the hedge be cut back.

Justin Witcombe and John Sommer reported that they would be strimming the footpath at the bottom of Mill Lane.

3961 – Allotments: After further consultation with the allotment holders, the Chairman withdrew his proposal to amend the allotment holders’ tenancy agreement.

3962 – Internet Provision: Henry Gibson of Field Internet was unable to attend the meeting as planned. The Chairman reported that Field Internet were planning a public meeting in Batcombe to gauge interest in the provision of high speed broadband delivered via a wireless network. A Saturday afternoon was felt to be the best time for such a meeting. Iona FitzGerald expressed concern over possible health issues, and the Chairman noted that questions such as this could be asked at the public meeting

3963 – Playground – Maintenance Report: An electronic copy of the report on the annual safety inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA in June had been sent to Councillors and paper copies were made available to those with limited internet access. There were no urgent items in the report and all the items were considered low risk apart from two – the overhead rings and the goal posts – which were considered medium risk because of their inherent nature. The report did make a number of recommendations: there was some rotting wood in the seat around the Horse Chestnut stump which should be replaced; the timber in the overhead gym rings is soft and needs to be monitored; there is a crack in the top bar casting on the frame of the basket swing which needs to be monitored; and the chains on the other swings are worn and should be replaced. It was noted that new chains had been purchased and were awaiting installation.

The report also noted that the timber supports for the multiplay were beginning to rot where they were covered by the play bark. The Clerk had contacted Mainstay Projects who installed the multiplay and they have stated that the rot is not a major problem and can be dealt with by treating the multiplay with preservative every six months. The Clerk was asked to add the state of the supports to the risk assessment and to obtain the details of appropriate child-friendly preservative from RoSPA.

The Clerk reported that since the safety inspection, the zip wire had been damaged. The spring had become attached to the unit that runs up and down the wire and a small section had broken off. It appeared safe to use and Mainstay Projects stated that it was fine to use and suggested leaving the spring for now as it was a major job to replace. The Clerk to ask Mainstay Projects to quote the cost of replacing the spring and to determine whether the zip wire had been guaranteed and for how long.

The mole(s) continues to be active. The mole repeller had been broken during the Fete weekend but had seemed to be moving the moles away before this. It was agreed to obtain two repellers to see if this will move the moles completely from the Playing Field.

It was noted that the willow in the willow structures was growing rapidly and Iona FitzGerald volunteered to prune it.

The Clerk reported that the Playing Field was in a good condition following the Fete given the very wet weather leading up to the event. The only problem was that an event had been held in the pub on the Sunday evening with the result that a large number of children had wanted to use the Playing Field when it was closed to allow the preparations for the Fete.

The Chairman had spoken to the landowner of the field next to the Playing Field regarding the strand of barbed wire had been placed across the gap in the Playing Field fence. The landowner stated that he had not placed it there. The Chairman had also left a message with the owner of the stock in the field but had not yet received a response.

3964 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: The Clerk reported that the appeal against the refusal of planning permission by the District Council for the replacement dwelling at Valley View Farm (to have been known as Batcombe Park) had been dismissed. The Planning Inspector had

essentially agreed with the Parish Council's response to the original application that as the new dwelling was outside the curtilage of the existing dwelling, it could not be considered a replacement dwelling - and so was new development in the open countryside, which was contrary to national planning policy except in exception circumstances.

The Council had been notified of an appeal against the refusal of planning permission by South Somerset District Council for the proposed wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm with a deadline of August 21st if the Parish Council wished to modify its representation on the original application, but it had been felt that the Council did not need to meet to consider this appeal as it was unlikely to add anything to its original representation that would have any impact on the appeal.

The application for the installation of photovoltaic panels of the roof of Chandlers House made on 18th March 2013 had been "finally disposed of", which meant that no further action would be taken and the application removed from the local planning authority register. The Parish Council had recommended approval of this application but the conservation officer was strongly opposed given the prominent position of the roof in the Conservation Area.

Prior Approval had been granted for the change of use of the agricultural building on Baileys Lane to a dwelling house as this was considered permitted development under new Government legislation [The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended)]. The Parish Council was not consulted over Prior Approval determination.

3965 – Affordable Housing: John Sommer left the room for this item and Justin Witcombe declared an interest. The Chairman noted that there were nine affordable homes in the parish – the four Ash Tree Cottages built by Hastoe Housing and five former Council houses/bungalows now belonging to Aster Homes.

The Clerk reported that the Community Council for Somerset would undertake the required Housing Needs Survey to determine if there was a need for more affordable housing in the parish. The Community Council had quoted a price of £2,418 to undertake the Survey which included a 15% discount as the Parish Council was a member of the Community Council. However the representative of the Community Council had informed him that Awards for All provided grants for Councils undertaking these surveys. The Community Council representative would also be willing to attend a Parish Council meeting to discuss the process of undertaking a survey. The Parish Council did not want to waste the time of the Community Council representative and so suggested that a visit be deferred until it was known if the Parish Council would receive a grant.

3966 – Coney Wood: As agreed at the previous meeting, Ian Sage consulted a local land agent over the proposed lease of Coney Wood. The land agent gave his guidance free of charge, but noted that the Council would need formal legal advice if proceeding with the lease. A paper produced by the Chairman and Ian following discussions on the guidance given was enclosed with the Agendas.

Councillors were unanimous that the lease could not go ahead while there was a dispute over the ownership of a section of the Wood and it was felt that the lease was too one-sided with the liabilities for the Council outweighing the benefits of taking on the lease. It was agreed to inform the Woodland Trust that the Council could not proceed with the lease at the present moment in time. The Chairman had spoken to Oliver Moberly who understood the Council's position. Iona FitzGerald volunteered to speak to those who had supported the idea of leasing

the Wood and the Chairman stated that he would write a piece for the parish magazine. Ian Sage thanked Chris Eden for providing his guidance free of charge.

3967 – Parish Website – Batcombe Enterprises: The Council considered whether it had any liability should any of the enterprises advertised on its website provide a poor service. The Clerk noted that there was a disclaimer on the Enterprise pages of the website stating that the Parish Council takes no responsibility for the information provided on those pages which had been provided by the enterprises concerned or taken from their websites.

3968 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: John Sommer reported to the meeting that he had checked the bank reconciliation prepared by the Clerk for the quarter to 30th June.

An update on the budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that there was very little change from the position reported at the May meeting. As reported then the expected variations against budget were: i) a larger VAT refund (because of the VAT on the new picnic table purchased with the Health and Well-Being grant in the previous year); ii) the cost of the new fencing in the Playing Field (which had been expected to be part of the previous year's expenditure); iii) the Playing Field maintenance (due to the cost of the playbark); and iv) the uncontested election (which meant the estimated cost had been reduced from around £1,000 to perhaps £150). The Clerk noted that the District Council did not present the bill for the election until the end of the year.

This gave a projected surplus of £450 on the year - largely due to the fact that the election was not contested – with funds of £5,750 at the end of the year. The Clerk noted that there were a number of items the surplus could be spent on.

3969 – External Auditors' Report: The Clerk reported that the external auditors Grant Thornton had returned the Annual Return and there were no matters that gave cause for concern or which they wished to draw to the attention of the Council. The Annual Return and external auditors' report were presented to Councillors for inspection. The Clerk also reported that the notice of the conclusion of the audit had been published on the parish notice board.

3970 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £192.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting and hedge trimming in August.
- £25.54 BWBSL – Water bill for Playing Field (Bristol Water).

The following payments were authorised retrospectively as payment could not wait until the September meeting:

- £81.60 Playsafety Ltd – Annual safety inspection of the Playing Field.
- £96.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in July.
- £18.76 SSE – Electricity bill for the Playing Field.

3971 - Other Business - Matters of Information: John Sommer noted that Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution were offering grants to support community resilience projects in their network area.

Justin Witcombe reported that a large pile of dog mess had been left by the Playing Field before the Fete. There was also a significant amount of dog mess being left at the bottom of Walter's Lane. The Chairman volunteered to put a piece in the parish magazine.

3972 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 7th October 2015 at 8.00pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
7th October 2015