

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th October 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, Nigel Woollcombe-Adams – County Councillor and Jane Birch from the Community Council for Somerset.

3973– Apologies for Absence: Dick Skidmore – District Councillor.

3974 – Declarations of Interest: John Sommer declared a pecuniary interest in item 3978 – Affordable Housing and Justin Witcombe declared an interest in the same item. Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in item 3984 – authorisation of the Clerk’s salary and expenses – as relatives of the Clerk. Iona FitzGerald declared an interest in item 3982 – proposed felling of trees at Ivy Wall House.

3975 – Public Participation: None.

3976 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 2nd September 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3977 – Matters Arising: Coney Wood – Justin Milward from the Woodland Trust had responded to the Parish Council’s decision not to proceed with the lease of Coney Wood at this time by stating that the Woodland Trust’s legal team had concluded their investigation into the disputed area of land and were not aware of any legal grounds sufficient to support a valid title claim by the neighbouring landowner and so considered the matter closed. Justin added that the Woodland Trust would be keen to proceed if possible, and so would keep the file open, but do no more unless they heard positively from the Parish Council. The landowner in dispute with the Woodland Trust had informed the Council that the matter was in the hands of his solicitors and that he did not consider it closed. Iona FitzGerald stated that she would put an item on the Batcombe Facebook page thanking people who had expressed an interest in helping manage the Wood.

Internet Provision – Field Internet would be holding a public meeting on Saturday October 11th in the Jubilee Hall to gauge the response to their plans to bring ultrafast broadband by wireless technology to Batcombe. Iona FitzGerald noted that there was some concern about the wireless technology and asked if BT were likely to bring fast broadband via fibre optic cable to the village. The Chairman stated that BT only brought cables to cabinets and there were no cabinets in Batcombe as everyone was connected directly to the exchange. The County Councillor noted that the District Council had given BT money to connect remote villages and were very disappointed with their response.

3978 – Affordable Housing: It was agreed to adjourn the meeting so that John Sommer could remain and hear the presentation from Jane Birch, the Community Involvement Officer at the Community Council for Somerset, regarding the process of undertaking a Housing Needs Survey. The Community Council would create a bespoke survey for the parish based on what has been successful in other Somerset communities, after discussing with the Council

the questions it would contain, which could include ones about people wanting to downsize as well as affordable housing. The Community Council would print the survey, which would be delivered to the Parish Council for distribution to every household in the parish. Replies would go to the Community Council so they would remain confidential. The Community Council would then input and analyse the data in discussion with the local authority's housing officers and produce a full report for the Parish Council. The cost of doing this was £2,418, which could be covered by an Awards for All grant. The Community Council would help in applying for the grant, for which they had so far had a 100% success rate.

On the resumption of the meeting John Sommer left the room and it was agreed to apply for the Awards for All grant to undertake a Housing Needs Survey.

3979 – District and County Councillors' Reports: The County Councillor reported on a number of issues relating to the County Council. These included the establishment of a Rivers Board as a precepting body to fund flood prevention. This would have to be sanctioned by the Government and the precept was likely to be 1% of Council Tax. There were concerns at the high price of electricity from the proposed new power station at Hinckley Point. The County Council faced a £27 million shortfall that would result in cuts to services – there were concerns at whether the Council's contractors could afford to pay the living wage. Small improvement schemes were available to address highways issues. Devolution was being considered by Devon and Somerset County Councils together with Plymouth, Torbay and the District Councils. Children's Social Services were improving and £6 million had been found to employ more social workers, although these were not easy to find. County Councillors were again able to offer grants of between £250 and £2,000 for minor works relating to the health and wellbeing of communities.

After giving his report the County Councillor left the meeting, as did Justin Witcombe.

3980 – Footpaths and Highways: The Clerk had reported the fact that a number of lorries had become stuck in Batcombe to the officer at the County Council who had declined to install the "No HGV" signs on the roads into Batcombe. Another officer had responded and, after an exchange of e-mails in which it was pointed out that it was physically impossible for HGVs to drive through the village, he came to see for himself and met with the Chairman and the Clerk. This appeared to be a positive development with the officer recognising the unique problems in Batcombe and having left to consider how best they could be addressed.

The County Council had responded to the reported damage to the finger posts, noting that while they were responsible for the maintenance of all traffic signs including finger posts - precedence was given to regulatory and warning signs; and, due to their current workload and the need to prioritise safety works above everything else, they had limited resources to dedicate to the restoration of finger posts. As a result they were suggesting to Parish Councils that they might like to take ownership of the repair and maintenance of finger posts in their area. This would mean the Parish Council taking responsibility for appointing contractors and arranging for the signs to be painted, repaired or replaced. Any contractor used would need to be trained to carry out work on the highway and to have the necessary insurance and licences to work there. The Clerk to ask the County Council if there was a budget that would be transferred with this responsibility.

The Clerk reported that Somerset Highways were offering Parish Councils de-icing materials once again this year. Somerset Highways had produced their Winter Services leaflet and the road through Westcombe and Batcombe was included on the pre-salting network this year.

A resident of Mill Lane had reported that the hedge trimmer had demolished the No Through Road sign at the top of Mill Lane. The Clerk had reported this to Somerset Highways.

3981 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that the spring on the zip wire was now broken in two places. Mainstay Projects had stated that the zip wire was no longer under guarantee and noted that the equipment could be damaged if used by two adults (or several children). Mainstay quoted a price of £520 plus VAT to replace the spring. It was agreed that the spring should be replaced. Ian Sage offered to find an alternative quote for the work and this was agreed, provided the insurers were satisfied. It was also agreed that a notice should be placed by the zip wire stating that it should only be used by one person at time.

It was reported that Justin Witcombe had purchased two new mole repellents and was working on means of preventing them being damaged. It was agreed that Justin should be re-imbursed the cost of the mole repellents.

The Chairman had contacted both the landowner of the field next to the Playing Field and the owner of the stock in the field regarding the strand of barbed wire that had been placed across the gap in the Playing Field fence, and both stated that they had not placed it there. It was noted that the post had moved since the new fencing had been installed, and that previously the straining post had become detached. Ian Sage volunteered to look at what could be done to straighten the post.

Iona FitzGerald stated that the willow would be pruned when the leaves had come off. The Clerk reported that RoSPA had stated that any proprietary preservative could be used on the multi-play unit. The Clerk was asked to purchase the preservative and Iona volunteered to assist in its application.

The Clerk reported that he had found the tap in the bus shelter turned on. It was felt that the installation of a drain under the water fountain would encourage children to use that rather than the tap. It was noted that the goal nets needed to be tied to the goalposts.

3982 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2015/2156/TCA - Proposed felling of a Crab Apple Tree. 1 Sunnyside, Gold Hill, Batcombe – Felling trees in a Conservation Area. The application stated that the tree was overgrown and taking all the light from a small garden and the Clerk reported the immediate neighbour was in favour of the tree being felled. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval as there were no objections to the proposed felling.

Planning Application No: 2015/2194/TCA - T1 Purple Leaf Plum - fell to ground level; T2 Goat Willow - fell to ground level; Ivy Wall House, Back Lane, Batcombe – Felling trees in a Conservation Area. The application stated that the Purple Leaf Plum was dying and the Goat Willow was restricting the growth of one of a pair of trees by the Village Hall entrance. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval as there were no objections to the proposed fellings.

Planning Application Updates: A hearing regarding the appeal against the refusal of planning permission by South Somerset District Council for the proposed wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm would take place on October 20th and it was agreed that the Chairman should present the Parish Council's view as requested by the group opposing the turbine.

Approval of the reserved details in the Listed Building Consent for 1 Sunnyside, relating to materials and finishes of external and internal surfaces, had been granted.

3983 – Employment Matters: The Clerk's appraisal had taken place on September 24th and a report distributed to Councillors. The report noted that the Clerk's contract of employment

had not been re-issued when the Clerk's hours were increased to seven per week in 2014 and it was agreed that a new contract of employment should be issued with the correct number of hours. The report also noted that the Clerk would like to undertake the Certificate in Local Council Administration when time allowed and suggested that the Council fund the fees for this course when taken.

The Clerk had suggested that it may be appropriate for the Council to purchase its own laptop, given that most communication with the Council was now electronic and there was a grant available to help Councils purchase IT equipment so they could comply with the Transparency Code. It was agreed that the Clerk should apply for the grant for a Council laptop. The Chairman had produced a specification for a variety of software packages for the Council computer, including a remote application hosting service run by a company called Microshade. It was agreed to invite Microshade to the next Council meeting so that they could explain their service.

3984 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £51.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in September.
- £957.96 The Clerk – Salary for the 2nd Quarter.
- £94.90 The Clerk – Expenses for the 2nd Quarter.
- £35.00 The Information Commissioner – Data Protection Registration.

It was agreed to pay the annual Data Protection Registration fee by Direct Debit. As the Financial Regulations only allowed the payment of utility bills by Direct Debit, it was agreed to suspend the Financial Regulations to allow this payment and to amend the Regulations the next time they were reviewed. The Clerk noted that this would simplify an annual payment and the risk of the Information Commissioner or the bank making an error in the Direct Debit was low and covered by the Direct Debit Guarantee.

3985 - Other Business - Matters of Information: Allotments – The Clerk noted that the allotments rents were due on November 1st and a reminder had been placed in the parish magazine along with a note asking anyone who wanted to go on the waiting list for an allotment to contact the Clerk. The Chairman asked the Clerk to inform the allotment holders that he would be available for an informal meeting with them in The Three Horseshoes on Wednesday 21st October to discuss any issues regarding the allotments.

3986 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th November 2015 at **7.30pm** in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
4th November 2015