

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 4th November 2015 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, Dick Skidmore – District Councillor and three members of the public.

3987– Apologies for Absence: None.

3988 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest as relatives of the Clerk.

3989 – Public Participation: Sandy Hamilton and Henrietta Worthington expressed concerns about the proposal to supply wireless broadband to Batcombe by Field Internet. Henrietta stated that she had been told by Field Internet that they would not be going ahead with the project. The District Councillor stated that the District Council were holding meetings to facilitate the provision of broadband to the village. The Chairman noted that at meetings he had attended in Wanstrow BT stated that there was no intention to upgrade the 850 exchange and that while Wanstrow had been quoted £92,000 to connect the Wanstrow cabinet with fibre optic cable from the Upton Noble exchange, there was no cabinet in Batcombe. He also expressed concern at the content of some of the Facebook pages that had been published with information regarding the provision of broadband to Batcombe, and noted that the Parish Council would like to facilitate the provision of broadband in the parish if possible.

3990 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7th October 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3991 – Matters Arising: Affordable Housing – The Clerk reported that the application form for the Awards for All grant had been completed after the last meeting and sent to Jane Birch at the Community Council for comments and advice.

The Clerk also reported that he had received a letter from Hastoe Housing informing the Parish Council of a vacancy in one of the three bedroomed houses at Ash Tree Cottages. In line with a standing instruction he would be reminding the District Council and Hastoe Housing of the need to fill the vacancy according to the terms of the Section 106 agreement. The District Councillor also offered to contact the Housing Department and Hastoes.

3992 – District and County Councillors' Reports: The District Councillor offered apologies for being unable to attend previous meetings of the Parish Council due to a number of conflicting meetings and stated that he had been elected to fill a last minute gap. He noted the effort being put into the provision of broadband by the District Council and that a number of local District Councils were reported combining jobs to save money, although a unitary Council was not an option at present.

3993 – Allotments: The Clerk noted that the allotment rents had become due on November 1st and so far the rent for four allotments had been paid. There was one vacancy and this had

been advertised in the parish magazine and would be allocated at the next Parish Council meeting. The Chairman reported that no allotment holders had attended the informal meeting he had organised. Further meetings would be organised in May and October next year for allotment holders to raise any issues concerning the allotments.

3994 – Footpaths and Highways: The Parish Council had been informed us that Gunnings Lane in Upton Noble would be closed from 16th November for 7 days to enable sewer connection works to be carried out.

There had been response yet from the County Council regarding the “No HGV” signs and the Clerk was asked to remind the officer concerned. The Chairman reported that a lorry had become stuck in Portway Hill and as a result he had had a conversation with the Wild Beer Company suggesting that they might pay for direction signs to their brewery and this suggestion had been put to the County Council.

Somerset Highways were offering ten 20kg bags of de-icing material and the Chairman volunteered to collect this from the Frome depot at Manor Furlong.

The Council had received a letter from the owner of Westcombe Cottage responding to the Council’s letter about the overhanging hedge, who would have appreciated a discussion with the Council before receiving a letter. The Chairman had visited the owner and reported that the problem was caused by vehicles parking in the road opposite Westcombe Cottage.

Justin Witcombe noted that the road past Batcombe Lodge was being repaired.

3995 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Ian Sage reported that a replacement spring for the zip wire could be obtained at a lower price than quoted by Mainstay Projects and that the replacement could be undertaken by volunteers, saving the quoted labour costs. However, the Council’s insurers required that the work be undertaken by someone with the technical accreditation to install, alter and inspect a zip wire and suggested the Council ask a play equipment company to undertake the work. The Clerk reported that the spring was now broken in several places. It was agreed to immobilise the zip wire. Lucinda Edgell volunteered to obtain a quote from a play equipment company for the repair of the zip wire.

Ian also expressed concerns about the nest swing that was moving in the ground. It was agreed to have the frame of the swing assessed by a structural engineer and Ian would ask Read Agriservices to undertake this. Ian also expressed concern at whether the advice from the insurers meant that volunteers would not be able to replace the chains on the junior swing or apply the wood preservative to the multi-play equipment. The Clerk to check this with the insurers.

3996 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2015/2516/TCA - Proposed pruning of T1 Maple (twin-stemmed) – remove major (left hand) stem above old wound (decayed), reduce (right hand) stem to appropriate points to balance remainder of tree; T2 Chilean Pine – fell (dead); The Old Barn, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval as there were no objections to the proposed tree works given that one tree was decayed and the other dead.

Planning Application Updates: The Chairman reported on the hearing regarding the appeal against the refusal of planning permission by South Somerset District Council for the proposed wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm. The appeal had been ruled invalid by the Planning Inspector, as the pre-application consultation arrangements had not met the necessary requirements.

Mendip District Council had approved the proposed alterations and extension of the existing utility/cloakroom at Batcombe Lodge and had not objected to either the felling of the Crab Apple tree at 1 Sunnyside or the Purple Leaf Plum and the Goat Willow at Ivy Wall House.

The application for a certificate of lawfulness had been approved for the change of use of an agricultural building to a C3 Use 4 bedrooomed dwelling with integral carport off an existing hardstanding area and access at Bailey's Lane. Prior approval for change of use of the agricultural building to a dwelling house (Class 3) had been granted in July, and this decision confirmed that the plans submitted were permitted development under that approval.

3997 – Emergency Plan: The Chairman reported on a meeting he had had with the Village Hall Trust Committee. The Trust had agreed to the Village Hall being used as a control centre during an emergency. The Chairman had informed them of grants available for a defibrillator. The Trust were also making provision for a generator to be used to provide power for the Jubilee Hall during an emergency. The Chairman stated that he would ask Rob Jones to undertake a paper exercise to test the Emergency Plan. It was noted that HMRC would not allow the Parish Council to claim back VAT on items purchased for another organisation.

3998 – Social Media Policy: It was agreed to defer this item to the following meeting.

3999 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: The Vice Chairman confirmed that he had verified the bank reconciliation for the 2nd Quarter that had been prepared by the Clerk.

A statement of receipts and payments comparing the budget for the current year with a projection based on receipts and payment to date had been distributed with the Agendas. The four columns showed the accounts for the previous year, the budget for the current year, receipts and payments to date in the current year and a projection for the current year. The Clerk noted that the material variations against the budget would be: 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 of repairing the zip wire); iv) the uncontested election (which meant the cost has been reduced from an estimated £1,000 to £145); v) photocopying (larger than budgeted because no bill had been received since August last year); and vi) no money would be spent on Coney Wood. These variations gave a projected surplus of £120 on the year, despite the increased maintenance costs, largely due to the election not being contested. This left the Council with projected funds of £5,325 at the end of the year, of which approximately £950 would be earmarked for the allotments.

4000 – Administration: *The Computer Grant* - As the model of laptop being purchased had to be stated when applying for the grant for the Transparency Code compliance, the Clerk had been waiting for some advice on an appropriate computer before applying.

Microshade – The Clerk had obtained a quotation from Microshade for their file hosting service. There would be an initial cost of £100 and then a monthly fee of £31.60 or £39.60 if they hosted the Scribe 2000 accounting package. As this would total £379.20 a year or £475.20 with Scribe 2000, it was agreed that it would not be a cost-effective means of ensuring business continuity for the Parish Council. The Clerk noted that if the Council had its own laptop, business continuity could be ensured through a regular back up onto a secure password-protected hard disk, stored in a separate location to the laptop, which would cost around £80.

Scribe 2000 Accounting – This was an accounts package produced for Parish Councils that appeared to produce many of the reports required by a Parish Council. The Clerk had obtained a quote of £145 a year for this package, which was £50 less than the usual price for a small Parish Council. The Council agreed to a year's evaluation of the package.

4001 – Budget and Precept 2016/17: A budget for the coming year and a forecast for the next three years had been distributed with the Agendas. The budget was based on the projected figures for the current year with small increases for inflation, and a larger increase in the maintenance budget for the Playing Field due to the extra expenses of maintaining the new equipment. This gave a surplus of £950 on the year with no significant increase in the precept.

However, it was noted that there were a number of additional items not included in this budget. If the grant application was unsuccessful, a laptop computer with the necessary software plus the Scribe 2000 accounting package would cost around £500. The low wall on the road boundaries of the war memorial in Batcombe needed repointing and it was felt this should not be left for another year. The Clerk reported that a new notice board was needed to replace the one of the churchyard wall and the noticeboard in Westcombe needed repairing. The Clerk estimated that all three items would cost roughly £2,000 in total.

The Clerk had added the £2,000 of extra expenditure into the budget for the following year in the three-year forecast. This gave a deficit of £1,000 on the coming year, but with small increases in the precept in the following years, the Council would have sufficient reserves to cover the cost of a contested election in 2019. It was agreed to obtain estimates of the work on the war memorial wall and the noticeboards and to defer the setting of the budget and precept for 2016/17 to the next meeting.

4002 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £96.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in October.
- £151.32 The Parish News – Photocopying (from August 2014).
- £22.22 SSE – Electricity for the Playing Field.
- £145.82 Mendip District Council – Costs of Parish Council Election.

4003 - Other Business - Matters of Information: Bus Consultation – The Clerk stated that a consultation was being undertaken over the proposed reduction in bus services in the Frome area. The Chairman noted that he had been unable to attend a meeting organised by Mendip Community Council regarding additional services they could provide with a new minibus, and hoped to inform the Council of the details at a later meeting.

4004 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 2nd December 2015 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
2nd December 2015