

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2nd December 2015 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage.

4005 – Apologies for Absence: None. [Justin Witcombe gave his apologies after the meeting.]

4006 – Declarations of Interest: None.

4007 – Public Participation: None.

4008 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4th November 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4009 – Matters Arising: Affordable Housing – The Clerk reported that the grant application form had been sent to Awards for All after comments and advice from Jane Birch at the Community Council.

It was noted that the vacancy at Ash Tree Cottages had been allocated to a Batcombe family in accordance with the Section 106 agreement.

4010 – District and County Councillors' Reports: None.

4011 – Allotments: The Clerk noted that the rent for seven and a half allotments had been paid with the holders of one and a half allotments yet to pay. The vacant allotment had been advertised in the parish magazine but no one had applied for it.

The Chairman reported that he had received an e-mail from the owner of the allotment field expressing concern at the state of the communal areas in the field and of some of the allotments. The Chairman proposed calling a meeting of the allotment holders as soon as possible in the New Year to address these concerns. It was noted that the allotment holders were responsible for the maintenance of the communal areas and that the continued availability of the allotments depended on the good will of the owner of the field. The Clerk to draft a summons to the meeting for the allotment holders.

4012 – Footpaths and Highways: Somerset Highways had requested that the Parish Council inform residents of the need to park responsibly so as to allow the salting vehicles access through Batcombe. They had had difficulties with parked vehicles last year and again over the weekend of November 21st/22nd. The Clerk had placed a notice in the parish magazine and on the website. The main difficulties were reported to be in Kale Street. The salting lorry had further problems the previous weekend due to a van left for several days in the road outside the Church.

The Chairman had attended a meeting with an officer from the County Council and a representative of the Wild Beer Company to consider direction signs for HGVs to the brewery.

The Wild Beer Company would contribute the cost of the signs while the County Council organised the meeting of the statutory requirements and the contractor. It was noted that the County Council's budget for signs had been exhausted and so there would be no progress on the "No HGV" signs for Batcombe until the next financial year.

4013 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that the Council's insurers were happy for volunteers to replace the chains on the swings in the Playing Field and to apply wood preservative to the play equipment – it was just the maintenance of the zip wire that required someone with a technical accreditation because of the high risk of injury to a child.

Gardens of Avalon had quoted £50 a cut for cutting the Playing Field grass next season and £9 a cut for the area by the telephone kiosk. The Council agreed to accept the quotation.

Quotations from Vita Play had been received for various repairs and new items in the Playing Field and it was agreed to discuss these quotations under the Budget item [Minute 4017 below].

4014 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: The District Council had not objected to the proposed pruning of the Maple and felling of the Chilean Pine at The Old Barn.

The Clerk reported that the District Council had not objected to the proposed pruning of a Eucalyptus at Rockwells House, but that the Parish Council had not been consulted on the proposed tree works. The Clerk was asked to remind the District Council to consult on all tree works in the Conservation Area.

4015 – Social Media Policy: A model Social Media Policy, adapted for Batcombe Parish Council, had been distributed with last month's Agenda, and it was noted that the increasing use of social media such as Facebook meant that it was advisable for the Council to have a Social Media Policy. Adoption of the Social Media Policy was agreed. The Clerk's role as webmaster for the Parish Council website was confirmed.

4016 – Audit Procurement: The Clerk reported that from 2017 the Parish Council would no longer have to submit an Annual Return to an external auditor. However, the Council would still have to complete and publish the Annual Return and would have to have an auditor appointed in case there were questions from electors to be resolved. The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 required the Parish Council to either appoint an auditor through a "sector led body" or opt out and appoint their own auditor locally. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the Society of Local Council Clerks and the Association of Drainage Authorities had set up a sector led body which would appoint an auditor for the Parish Council unless the Council opted out by 31st January 2016. The auditor would be appointed for five years and there would be a setup fee that was likely to be less than £100. The cost of the Council appointing its own auditor would probably be more than this as a statutory appointment process would have to be followed. The Council decided not to opt out.

4017 – Budget and Precept 2016/17: A budget for the coming year and a forecast for the next three years had been distributed with the previous month's Agendas. The Clerk noted that the budget showed a surplus of £950 with no additional expenditure except on Playing Field maintenance and no significant increase in the precept. The forecast included an estimated £2,000 of additional expenditure on the War Memorial wall, on new and repaired notice boards, and on computer equipment and software, giving a deficit of £980 next year, but modest increases in the precept would allow for small surpluses in the following years to

maintain a reserve sufficient to meet the cost of an election in 2019. He added that the acceptance of the quote for the grass cutting added approximately £50 to the next year's payments and should be taken from the surplus and added to the deficit.

The Clerk reported that he had obtained an estimate for the work on the War Memorial wall of £600; that a new notice board for the churchyard wall would cost £450; that he had asked for a quote to repair or replace the Westcombe notice board that had not yet been received and that a grant for a computer costing £300 had been applied for.

The Clerk also reported that the District Council had set a deadline of January 25th for the submission of next year's precept and would inform the Parish Council of the tax base for the parish on December 15th.

A copy of the quotation from Vita Play for items in the Playing Field had been e-mailed to Councillors before the meeting. However, as it was not on the Agenda no decisions could be made until the January meeting. Vita Play had agreed to extend the period of the quotation until January.

The Chairman tabled a paper listing potential capital expenditure by the Parish Council, based on the items discussed at the previous meeting and on the quotations provided by Vita Play.

Vita Play had quoted £495 for the repair of the zip wire. It was agreed the repair should be undertaken with the quotation to be confirmed at the next meeting.

It was agreed that the basket swing should be removed from the existing frame. Ian Sage volunteered to do this. A new frame and adequate safety surfacing would cost around £3,500 and the possibility of fundraising for this would be considered.

The Clerk was asked to clarify whether the quotation for the War Memorial wall was just for repointing or for digging out and rebuilding the wall. It was noted that the local branch of the Royal British Legion might be willing to help fund this work.

The Chairman proposed a £500 increase in the precept for next year and again for the following years to meet the additional costs faced by the Parish Council. The Clerk to produce a new budget when the tax base was available showing the impact of the increased precept on the Council Tax. The precept would be set at the January meeting in the light of this information.

4018 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payment:

£90.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in November.

4019 - Other Business - Matters of Information: None.

4020 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th January 2016 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
6th January 2016