

The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe

was held on Wednesday 2nd April 2014 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 27 parishioners. There were apologies from David Stevens, the District Councillor and Nigel Woollcombe-Adams, the County Councillor.

Chris Wildridge welcomed parishioners to the meeting.

Minutes of the 2013 Annual Parish Meeting were read by the Clerk, agreed and signed.

Matters Arising. Anne Page commented on climate change and Colin Pool on the state of the roads.

Chris Wildridge gave the **Chairman's Report** with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation. He began by noting that John Sommer had been co-opted onto the Parish Council to fill the place left by the death of Yvonne Sommer the previous year. Jayne Cox had taken on the role of the Council's Parish Paths Liaison Officer and Justin Witcombe the role of the Council's Village Hall representative, which had both previously been filled by Yvonne.

Nigel Woollcombe-Adams had been elected as our County Councillor the previous May, although the fact that he was the chairman of the District Council's Planning Board, which met on the same evening of the month as the Parish Council, meant he had not attended many meetings of the Parish Council.

The Chairman noted that the District Council did not currently have a Local Plan in effect. There had been 16 planning applications in the last year, compared to 14 the year before. Of these eight were for full or householder planning permission, of which five were approved, one refused and two were waiting a decision. An application to extend and convert the stables at Crows Hill to a residential dwelling was refused permission. The applicant had appealed but the appeal was dismissed as National Planning Policy was to avoid new isolated homes in the countryside. An application for a replacement bungalow at Hedgestocks was granted permission and the applicant had successfully appealed against a condition requiring it to have a slate roof.

The Parish Council was concerned over a fast-track system for householder planning applications that the District Council was trialling, which had meant that the Parish Council was informed of applications at the last possible moment without the possibility of extending the consultation period. 50 residents had attended the May meeting of the Parish Council when concerns about the "eco-house" being built behind Chapel Row were considered. The District Council had served a planning enforcement notice on the owner of this house in December with regard to the photovoltaic cells being in breach of the planning permission.

The Sunrise Festival was no longer being held at Gilcombe Farm and South Somerset District Council had reviewed the Premises Licence for Farmfest, imposing similar conditions to those on the Sunrise Festival. The Parish Council had been informed at the last minute of another festival at Gilcombe Farm planned for early September, but after the Council had requested similar conditions be imposed on this festival the application for a licence was withdrawn. Bruno Cristofoli continued to keep the Parish Council informed of events taking place at Pennysquare Barn.

Justin Witcombe was thanked for collecting de-icing materials from Somerset Highways, although these were not needed as a result of the mild winter. Jayne Cox was thanked for taking on the role of Parish Paths Liaison Officer and Justin Witcombe and John Sommer were thanked for volunteering to take part in the strimmer project organised by the County Council, which provided a strimmer for them to keep the footpaths clear of vegetation after the Parish Council had paid for their training.

Somerset Highways were thanked for work undertaken on Fry's Lane and Walter's Lane to alleviate the problems caused by water flowing down these tracks. The bridleway at Honeycliffe had been severely eroded by water flowing down it, but a joint approach by the Parish Council and the Mendip Bridleways and Byways Association had persuaded the County Council to spend £5,000 on repairing it. Unfortunately the newly repaired bridleway had been damaged by someone attempting to drive a tractor up it, but further repairs had been made.

The "Keep on the Grass" group completed its fund raising programme which meant that it was possible to go ahead with new multi-play equipment in the Playing Field, designed and built by Mainstay Projects, and also to install a zip wire. Iona FitzGerald and her colleagues in the group were thanked for their magnificent efforts. The equipment cost a total of £14,450 plus VAT of £2,890 which could be reclaimed as the project had been overseen by a Working Party of the Parish Council and the equipment purchased by the Council. The new equipment was officially opened at a tea party in July. Moles continued to be a problem in the Playing Field – seven were caught by a molecatcher in the summer, but more soon returned. The pollarded Horse Chestnut tree was cut down to the level of the seat around it as it was found to be rotting, and Ian Sage and Justin Witcombe were thanked for replacing the rotten vehicle gate.

The allotments were working well and half an allotment that had become vacant was leased to an existing allotment holder as no one else had expressed an interest in it. The lease of the allotments field was to be renewed for another five years. 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 each to Mendip Community Transport, the Mendip Citizens Advice Bureau and the Batcombe Children's Christmas Treat Committee. The Parish Council had increased its precept by £200 to £7,400, which was a 2.8% increase, but this had resulted in an 8.6% increase in the component of Council Tax resulting from the precept – due to changes in the calculation of the tax base.

The Parish Council website had had almost 20,000 visits in two years and the Clerk was thanked for his work in developing the enterprise page. Griff Williams was thanked for being the Parish Council's internal auditor, and it was noted that the Parish Council had new external auditors, Grant Thornton. The Chairman thanked those looked after the War Memorial, Sam Pick and Sam and John Cheshire.

Mary La Trobe Bateman asked if people should contact the Parish Council or the County Council over the state of the roads. The answer was both.

There were no District and County Councillors' Comments.

Neighbourhood Watch Reports. John Sommer noted that our PCSO Declan Quinn covered all the villages around Frome and so Batcombe did not see a lot of him. There had been reports of a number of non-domestic thefts from outbuildings in the area including thefts of oil, quad bikes and chainsaws. Residents were advised to keep everything locked away and asked to report suspicious activities to the police on telephone number 101. It would be helpful if the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators could be informed as well as the police.

Exhibition of Batcombe Enterprises. Chris Wildridge noted that there were a large number of enterprises in Batcombe as demonstrated by the number of displays in the Hall. He invited seven people to speak for two minutes each about their business. Joel Brightman was an osteopath who worked in Bradford on Avon and from home and treated dogs and horses as well as humans. Steve Gilbert spoke about Batcombe Financial Services, which had started in 1998 providing independent financial advice, and now had 800 clients spread over the country. Janet Jones spoke about the Batcombe Oil Consortium which had saved people in Batcombe money on buying oil by purchasing in bulk. Tom Fraser spoke about Mungo and Betsey furniture, located behind Westcombe Diary, who used recycled or native hardwoods in unique designs. Magnus Dennis was a photographer and film-maker, while his partner Floss produced willow structures

such as the one in the Batcombe Playing Field. Sam Pick had recreated with metal a courting candle he had found in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Katherine Read spoke about the Mendip Family Osteopaths who worked at Crows Hill and in Frome and who were all cranial osteopaths. Mary La Trobe Bateman was a freelance curator, while her husband Richard was a designer of structures from chairs to bridges. Anne Page noted that business for those providing accommodation was down because everyone thought Somerset was under water.

Questions from the Floor. Mary La Trobe Bateman asked if the Parish Council could organise a meeting to discuss the village shop and Michael Page commented on the rich colour of the wood in the Jubilee Hall.

The Chairman then closed the meeting.

*Chris Wildridge
8th April 2015*