

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 4th January 2017 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 four members of the public.

4240 – Apologies for Absence: None.

4241 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in item 4253 – authorisation of payment of the Clerk – as relatives of the Clerk. John Sommer declared a pecuniary interest in item 4249 – Affordable Housing.

4242 – Public Participation: None.

4243 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7th December 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4244 – Matters Arising: Allotments – The Clerk reported that one of the vacant allotments was about to be rented and there was someone interested in another one, but a third interested party had taken an allotment in Evercreech. There was therefore one allotment remaining vacant.

4245 – District and County Councillors' Reports: The District Councillor reported on the efforts of the County Councillor to get the salting of the road through Batcombe reinstated under the following item.

4246 – Footpaths and Highways: Proposal for a One Way System for Back Lane. Mr Niall Warry of Westcombe outlined a proposal for a one way system for Back Lane from the junction with the road past the Three Horseshoes to the junction with Kale Street, suggesting that this section of Back Lane be one way while the traffic on Gold Hill remained two way. In the discussion that followed Councillors noted that agricultural machinery would have difficulty in getting past Sunnyside and it was decided not to take the proposal any further.

The Chairman reported that the County Councillor had made every effort to get the decision not to presalt the road through Batcombe reversed, but without success. He noted that the new tarmac on Hincombe Hill was lethal in icy weather and felt that the decision to salt the road only as far as Westcombe was perverse. The Parish Council was unable to salt the road itself as it would not be covered by insurance and the Chairman encouraged people to e-mail the County Councillor with their concerns about the roads. The County Councillor's contact details to be put on the home page of the Parish Council website.

Jayne Cox reported that there was a burst pipe in Mill Lane and the residents wanted some grit for the lane. It was noted that there was a pile of grit at the top of the lane.

4247 – Playing Field: The problems caused by the continuing activities of the moles in the Playing Field would be discussed at the March meeting. The Clerk reported finding more broken glass from bottles in the Playing Field – the third time in recent months. Justin Witcombe reported that he had spoken to young people in the Playing Field, asking them not to do this. It was agreed to defer consideration of the issue to the next month.

Consideration of the contract for cutting the grass in the Playing Field was deferred to the item on the Budget and Precept below. It was noted that Mainstay Projects had promised to undertake the remedial work on the play equipment in the new year.

4248 – Planning Applications: There were no applications to consider but the Clerk reported that the Council had been notified of an application for works to a tree under a Tree Preservation Order at Batch Orchard that would need to be considered before the next meeting. It was agreed to meet for an extra meeting on Wednesday January 18th at 7.30pm.

Planning Application Updates: The application to remove the condition preventing the barn conversion at Batcombe Lodge from being occupied separately from the main house had gone to the Planning Board and the Chairman had attended to present the Parish Council's recommendation that the condition should not be removed. The Chairman reported that the case officer had presented technical reasons why the condition should not have been imposed and consideration of the application was deferred a month. The District Councillor noted that it was likely that two houses would be allowed but could not be sold separately.

The Clerk reported that the application to amend the planning permission for Carrot Hill Farmhouse to allow the retention of a plantroom outbuilding had been approved, despite the Parish Council having recommended refusal.

4249 – Affordable Housing: John Sommer left the room for this item. The Chairman felt that the parish meeting had gone well and that landowners needed to be approached to see if any would be willing to provide land for affordable housing. The District Councillor noted that the Mendip Housing Officer would prefer ten houses because that suited the Housing Association they worked with, while the Chairman reflected the Council's view that there was only a need for four. The Chairman to write an article for the parish magazine and the Parish Council website outlining the need for suitable land.

4250 – Annual Parish Meeting: This would take place on Wednesday 5th April. A decision on inviting a speaker was deferred to the next meeting.

4251 – Budget and Precept 2017/18: Details of the Budget for the year ending 31st March 2018 and a forecast for the years 2016-2020 had been provided with the Agenda for November's meeting. The Clerk reported that Batcombe's tax base for 2017/18 was 212.10, which had been revised to 207.86 to allow 2% for uncollectable Council Tax. (The tax base is the number of Band D equivalent properties in Batcombe when taking into account the number of empty properties, various discounts (including 25% for single people) and the weighting of the different bands above and below Band D.) Batcombe's tax base for 2016/17 was 201.19 and a larger tax base meant that each household had to pay less Council Tax to provide the same precept for the Parish Council.

Most items in the budget had been agreed in November; the exception being the cost of the grass cutting in the Playing Field. It was estimated that a weekly cut in place of the current fortnightly cut would cost an additional £800 a year. It was agreed to budget for additional grass cutting and increase the precept by £500 to £8,950. It was noted that raising the precept

by £500 to £8,950 (an increase of 5.92% in the precept) would result in a Band D property with no discounts paying £43.06, an increase of 2.52%.

Councillors were asked to provide the Clerk with suggestions as to who could provide alternative quotes for cutting the grass, noting that anyone taking on the contract would need to have public liability insurance.

4252 – Administration: At the September meeting it had been suggested that a g-mail account would provide a free e-mail address that could be transferred to a new Clerk. The Clerk reported that only personal g-mail accounts were free, with g-mail for work being charged for. It was suggested that the Council should set up a non-personal e-mail account – the Clerk to determine options for the next meeting, including an e-mail account from the providers of the Parish Council website.

4253 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£967.51	The Clerk – Salary for 3 rd Quarter.
£97.28	The Clerk – Expenses for 3 rd Quarter.

4254 - Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The Clerk reported that the District Council had adopted a Street Trading policy which required anyone wishing to sell something in a “street” to obtain a consent from the District Council. Should someone apply for consent to sell in Batcombe, the District Council would consult the Parish Council.

The Parish Council had received a copy of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Plan setting out priorities for the police, community safety and criminal justice services for the next four years, which was made available for anyone interested.

It was agreed to arrange a date for a coffee morning at which the free NHS Health Checks could take place at the next meeting.

4255 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 18th January 2017 at 7.30pm in the Old School Rooms, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
1st February 2017