

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2nd November 2016 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, and one member of the public.

4208 – Apologies for Absence: Dick Skidmore – District Councillor.

4209 – Declarations of Interest: None.

4210 – Public Participation: None.

4211 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 5th October 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4212 – Matters Arising: Housing Needs Survey – The parish meeting to consider the results of the Housing Needs Survey had been booked for 2.30pm on Saturday 26th November in the Jubilee Hall. The Chairman and the Clerk to meet to organise the meeting. The prize hamper would be presented at the meeting and Councillors volunteered to contribute various items to the hamper. The Chairman and Iona FitzGerald would meet with the Housing Officer at Mendip District Council to consider the next step.

NHS Health Check – The project co-ordinator had welcomed the Parish Council's acceptance of the offer to hold a health check. It was agreed that a date in January would be suitable and to arrange this at the next meeting.

4213 – District and County Councillors' Reports: None.

4214 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that four allotments had become vacant at the beginning of November. One had already been taken and interest had been shown in a second which left two vacant. The Chairman noted that it would be important to manage the vacant allotments in the interest of the other allotment holders.

4215 – Footpaths and Highways: The Clerk reported that Somerset Highways had informed him that the Winter Service leaflet, which would confirm whether the winter salting of the road through Batcombe would be re-instated, would be distributed shortly. Justin Witcombe volunteered to collect 10 bags of 20kg of de-icing materials from the Highways Depot in Frome.

The Parish Council had been notified that the road from Westcombe to Batcombe would be closed for three days from November 14th 2016 to allow for patching works to be carried out on the road. The road would be closed from below the entrance to Bailey's Lane to the Round House opposite the junction with Back Lane.

Public Path Diversion Order – Restricted Byway SM 2/1 past Lodge Farm. The County Council's Rights of Way team had confirmed that the Order had now been made diverting the restricted byway away from the residential dwellings at Lodge Farm.

The Chairman had attended the Mendip Parish Forum in October when there had been a presentation from the County Council on a number of initiatives relating to Rights of Way to mitigate the reduction in resources available. The Chairman's report on the meeting had been distributed with the Agendas and he noted that the Parish Council had the power to levy a precept to repair footpaths and bridleways - and could do this to repair the bridleway at Honeycliff if it was damaged again.

The Chairman had received a complaint about hedge trimmings on the road from Batcombe to the A359 junction at Upton Noble. It was noted that while the owner of the hedge had a responsibility not to litter the highway most hedge trimmings were small and did not remain on the road for more than a day.

4216 – Playing Field: The Clerk reported that the mole remained active in the Playing Field. The lockable cap over the water tap in the bus shelter had not been removed again since being taped up and Ian Sage had since removed the tap. The Clerk reported a number of minor acts of vandalism in the Playing Field: broken bottles behind the bus shelter; graffiti in chalk inside the bus shelter and the stripping of peeling paint from one of the legs of the swings. It was agreed to monitor the situation.

Iona FitzGerald had reported that Anthony Greenhalgh from Mainstay Projects could not spare the time to come to a meeting to consider his proposals for repairs to the zip wire and multi-play, and so the Clerk had spoken to him on the phone to clarify what he was proposing. The proposal to replace the rotting legs on the fort with painted steel legs was gratefully accepted. It was also agreed that the toddler swing should remain in the frame that had housed the nest swing and money be raised for a purpose built frame for the nest swing. More investigation of the problems with the zip wire was felt to be necessary – the Clerk to consult with Ian Sage over the response to Mainstay Projects. It was noted that there was no point in creosoting the legs of the fort if they were to be removed. Creosote was not appropriate for the wood above ground and Ian Sage would obtain an appropriate wood preserver.

4217 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2016/2437/HSE – Demolition of existing garage and retaining wall. Erection of new utility room and cycle store, rebuilding of retaining wall. Replacement of windows to east and south elevations. The Cottage, Holly Hill, Batcombe. Householder Application. The Council decided to recommend approval as there were no objections to the proposals and creation of additional parking spaces by rebuilding the retaining wall farther from the road might alleviate the parking problems on the junction by the Old Post Office.

Planning Application Updates.

The Chairman reported that the application to convert and extend the stable at Crows Hill for use as holiday accommodation had been refused permission at a meeting of the Planning Board despite the case officer's recommendation for approval. The Chairman had spoken against the application questioning whether the "stables" had ever been used to house horses and so could not be considered to be redundant and whether in terms of building regulations the case officer was competent to make the statement that the building was suitable for conversion. He noted that the applicant stated that the building was used for "equestrian purposes", which suggested it had not been used as a stable.

The application for a Lawful Development Certificate for an activity in breach of the planning condition requiring the occupants of Cedar Lodge, Westcombe to be employed in agriculture had been approved, lifting the agricultural tie on the dwelling. The single storey extension at Honeycliff Cottages had also been approved by the District Council.

4218 – 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 Clerk reported in his Agenda notes that Receipts were projected to be approximately £1,000 more than the budgeted figure because of the donations of £1,081 for the war memorial wall repairs, and it was likely that there will be a couple of vacant allotments at the end of the year reducing the rent received.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was likely to be £1,000 over budget because of the repair to the zip wire (expected to have been paid in the previous year), the cost of the fencing repair, and the additional safety inspection following repairs to the play equipment.

The projection for expenditure on Administration was £350 under budget. Although an additional £115 had been paid to the Clerk (for extra hours) and the Audit fees of £120 were not budgeted for (as grants received in 2015/16 had taken receipts over the £10,000 limit at which fees are charged) - the purchase of the Parish Council laptop and software had been budgeted for in this year but actually purchased at the end of last year, and it had been decided not continue with the accounts software.

Under Other items - as a result of additional expenditure on the allotments; the cost of the Frome bus pilot; the repair to the War Memorial wall being £1,000 over budget; purchasing two new notice boards instead of repairing the one at Westcombe; and the remaining cost of the Housing Needs Survey – the projection was £3,300 over budget (although the majority of the additional expenditure was covered by the donation for the war memorial wall and the grant for the Housing Needs Survey received the previous year).

Although the projected deficit was £3,380 compared to a budgeted deficit of £500, the healthier position at the start of the year (as a result of the grants for the Housing Needs Survey, new notice board and laptop) meant that the projected funds at the end of the year were around £4,500 – only £280 lower than the expected figure when the budget had been made. Approximately £1,100 of this figure would be earmarked for the allotments.

4219 – Budget and Precept 2017/18: A budget for the year ending 31st March 2018 and a forecast for the years 2016-2020 had been enclosed with the Agendas and were projected onto a screen at the meeting. The Clerk noted that the next Parish Council election would take place in 2019 and the Council needed to budget to have sufficient reserves to pay for a contested election as well as other contingencies such as a by-election. The figure of £1,200 for the cost of the election was an estimate based on the fact that the last contested election ten years previously cost £933.

The Clerk noted that, in the budget for 2017/18, the VAT refund will be around £250 but there would be no Council Tax Support Grant in 2017/18. The allotment rent may be less than £350 if one or more allotments remain vacant, but this does not affect the budget as this money is earmarked for the allotments. The Clerk had included an increase of £300 in the precept which with increases of £250 in the following years would provide sufficient reserves to cover the Parish Council election in 2019, but noted that an additional expenditure would require an increase in the precept to maintain the same level of reserves.

The Clerk noted that he had not yet received a quote for the Playing Field grass cutting in the coming year from the current contractor. The Parish Council had received requests for more frequent cuts of the Playing Field grass and it was agreed to ask the current contractor if cuts could be made every 10 days. The Clerk noted that the £500 for Playing Field maintenance

was a nominal sum to cover minor repairs based on past experience, and anything major would either need to be paid for from reserves or wait until money could be raised.

The Chairman asked the Council to review the level of its grants as they had been unchanged for some years and it was decided to keep them at the current levels.

It was decided to accept the figures in the budget, but to defer a decision on the precept until the costs of the cutting of the Playing Field grass were known.

4220 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £100.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass and hedge cutting in October.
- £21.04 SSE – Electricity for Playing Field.
- £52.19 Mendip Community Transport – Frome bus pilot in September.

The Clerk reported that the Data Protection Registration fee of £35 had been paid to the Information Commissioners Office by Direct Debit. Ian Sage noted that there would be a bill for the new fence posts in the Playing Field to come from Read Agriservices.

4221 - Other Business - Matters of Information Only: Justin Witcombe to see Richard Mitchell regarding the repair of the finger post at the end of Back Lane. Ian Sage noted that there was a problem with the overhanging hedge at Westcombe Cottage. The Chairman to speak to the owner, but noted that the hedge did not overhang by a great amount and there was also a problem with cars parked on the opposite side of the road. There was also a problem with overhanging branches on Westcombe Hill.

4222 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 7th December at 7.30pm in the Old School Rooms, Batcombe.

Chris Willdridge
7th December 2016