

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 6th June 2018 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

Present - Councillors: Chris Wildridge – Chairman, Mary Comley, Jayne Cox, Wiff Cox, Ian Sage, and Justin Witcombe.

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

[Note inserted at the following Parish Council meeting - *Prior to the meeting a resident of the parish approached the Clerk for permission to record the proceedings of the meeting. The Clerk consulted the Chairman, who spoke with the resident and explained the Council's policy and restrictions that would apply including a bar on filming any individuals other than councillors. The Chairman then started the meeting and failed to advise councillors and the residents present that he had acceded to the request.*]

4532 – Apologies for Absence: John Sommer and Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor.

4533 – Declarations of Interest: None.

4534 – Public Participation: None.

4535 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 9th May 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4536 – Matters Arising: The Vice Chairman expressed his thanks to the District Councillor for his assistance when he had to stand in and chair the previous meeting.

Music Festivals – The Chairman reported receiving a phone call thanking the Parish Council for their efforts in getting the noise management plan for the Shindig music festival in place. The Clerk was asked to write to South Somerset District Council thanking them for enforcing the noise management plan. The District Councillor noted that the lack of noise this year had partly been due to the wind direction although the festival had been handled better this year.

4537 – District and County Councillors' Reports: None.

4538 – Affordable Housing – Proposed Development in Westcombe: The Chairman summarised the background to the proposed development – the high price of housing in Batcombe and the Housing Needs Survey in 2016 that had shown a need for additional affordable housing – and outlined the rules he would conduct the meeting by. The potential developer of the site, Mr Pat Bridgeman, stated that he ran a small private building company that had been trading for 30 years and that this site suited how they worked. They had recently developed a similar site for affordable housing in Butleigh. He noted that Mendip Housing decided who could live there and these had to be local people.

Nigel Humphreys asked whether the Housing Needs Survey undertaken in 2016 was still valid. Anne Page noted that with the Ash Tree Cottages the Survey took place some years

before the houses were built and the District Councillor confirmed that the current Survey would be considered valid and the Parish Council would not get funding to do another one.

Richard Calver stated that he employed 40-50 people at Westcombe Dairy and was concerned that building the houses close to the rear of the cheese factory would result in complaints about noise and disruption from those living in the houses.

Peter Glaisher asked if the site was offered before the Housing Needs Survey was undertaken. The Chairman replied that the Parish Council were aware of land being offered for affordable housing but not its precise location. Peter Glaisher also asked if alternative sites had been sought and the District Councillor stated that local landowners were asked but no other sites were offered. Nigel Humphreys stated that he knew of a landowner willing to offer land who had not been approached. The Chairman asked him to provide the Clerk with details of this landowner and the land being offered.

Christine Gore felt that there were no amenities or transport in Westcombe to provide for additional housing. Asked why his proposal was for six houses Mr Bridgeman stated that the number was up for discussion. It was noted that the Housing Needs Survey had revealed eight households with a need for affordable housing.

Diana Carrington asked where the septic tank would go and the District Councillor noted that details such as drainage would be dealt with in the formal planning application.

Sheena Pool stated that not everyone was against the proposed housing. Mary La Trobe Bateman noted that Batcombe was a mixed community which she valued and was concerned that this could be lost. She expressed her thanks to Anne Page for helping to provide the Ash Tree Cottages in Batcombe.

Olivia Spenser asked if this was simply a proposal by Mr Bridgeman as the developer of the site and whether there were any other affordable housing proposals e.g. from a housing association.

Harriet Graham was in favour of affordable housing but was concerned about water runoff into the listed grotto at Westcombe Stables. Frances Graham felt two houses would be better than six.

The District Councillor noted that the conditions on affordable housing were strictly controlled. They could not be sold or the rent raised by more than a small amount each year. Mr Bridgeman noted that the land was gifted and his company funded the housing with no Government funding. He added that the specifications on affordable housing were higher than those on private housing and he would be looking to a 20-year return on the houses.

The Chairman then asked Parish Councillors for their comments. Mary Comley was concerned at the proposed layout of the site and felt the shared areas were likely to create conflict and didn't like the distance from the car park to the houses. Wiff Cox noted that there were shared areas at Ash Tree Cottages and that the residents there didn't have any problems. Justin Witcombe noted that the Housing Needs Survey had shown a need for eight affordable homes and that there was the potential for employees of the cheese factory to be housed there. Ian Sage noted that there was a strong need for affordable housing and was aware of additional housing needs that had not been included in the Housing Needs Survey. Mr Bridgeman noted that they had recently completed a similar site at Butleigh where a Housing Needs Survey had shown a need for seven affordable homes, but 28 people from the village had applied to be housed in the homes they had built. Jayne Cox noted that people were worried about Ash Tree Cottages before that was built but that had worked well.

The Chairman concluded by stating that there was strong support for the development in some form, while there were also some clear concerns about this particular site expressed by some in the room. The Parish Council had sought alternative sites but none had been offered, although the alternative site mentioned earlier would be looked into. He suggested that Councillors met with Mr Bridgeman to discuss further the points made at this meeting. Most members of the public left the meeting at this point.

4539 – Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control, Internal Auditor’s Report and Certificate of Exemption from a Limited Assurance Review: This and the following item were brought forward so that the Chairman could sign the Certificate of Exemption and Annual Governance Statement before leaving the meeting.

The Clerk reported his belief that the Council’s system of internal control was more than sufficient for a small Parish Council. The details were given in the Financial Regulations and included the budgetary process, the authorisation of all payments by the Council, the signing of cheques at Council meetings by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the internal audit.

The usual internal auditor was unable to complete the audit within the required timescale and thanks were expressed to Darren Powell of Fraser & Co Accountants who had undertaken the internal audit at short notice. Copies of the Internal Auditor’s Report had been tabled at the beginning of the meeting. The Internal Auditor had no recommendations to make to the Council.

Parish Councils whose annual income and expenditure were both less than £25,000 no longer had to send the Annual Return to the external auditor provided that they sent a certificate of exemption and published the Annual Return on their website by July 2nd. It was agreed that the Parish Council met the requirements for exemption and the certificate was signed by the Chairman.

4540 – Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2017//18: Copies of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return - the Annual Governance Statement - had been enclosed with the Agendas. Approval of the Annual Governance Statement was agreed and the Statement was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk. The Chairman then left the meeting and the remainder of the meeting was chaired by the Vice Chairman.

4541 – Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2018/0992/FUL Proposed conversion and change of use of redundant barn (sui generis) into a gym, games room and home office, ancillary to dwelling, with proposed detached garage, tennis court and greenhouse/potting shed. Lower Eastcombe Farm, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe – Full Application. As the applicant was present this item was brought forward. There were no objections to the proposals, the only concern raised being whether they would result in the applicant wishing to move the footpath that ran past the buildings. The applicant stated that he was happy with the current location of the footpath and asked if the footpath through Pugh’s Bottom farm could be sorted out so that more people would use it. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

Planning Application No: 2018/0985/HSE Proposed single storey rear extension, new porch, single storey side infill extension. Netherlea, Back Lane, Batcombe – Householder Application. As there were no objections to the proposals, the Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

Planning Application Updates: The District Council had no objection to the proposed works to the Cedar tree at Rockwells House. Planning permission and Listed Building Consent had been granted for the single storey rear extension and dormer roof at Mole Cottage, with shutters being suggested for the skylights as recommended by the Parish Council.

4542 - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): This item was brought forward so that the District Councillor could hear the Parish Council's response before leaving the meeting. The Clerk noted that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) had come into effect on May 25th, and the legislation had been amended so Parish Councils did not have to appoint a Data Protection Officer. The Clerk had undertaken a data audit of the data the Parish Council holds and processes and the legal basis on which this was done (based on a template provided by the SLCC) and copies had been distributed with the Agendas. The Clerk had also produced two privacy notices one to go on the website and one for Councillors (again based on templates produced by the SLCC) and these had also been distributed with the Agendas. The privacy notices were agreed.

The Clerk noted that there were other requirements of the GDPR which the Parish Council still needed to be implemented. In particular the Council needed to adopt a Data Retention Policy. The Clerk suggested producing a draft Policy for the September meeting. Concerns were raised that this would mean additional work for the Clerk and he was asked to monitor the amount of extra work done.

4543 – Allotments: One of the four vacant allotments had been taken and in line with previous practice, the rent had been reduced to £20 for the remainder of the year until November. The owners of the allotments field had expressed concern about the state of the allotments field. Thanks were expressed to Justin Witcombe and Dominic Conway who had strimmed off the vacant allotments and mown the communal grass areas. The nettles over the former compost heap had been sprayed and it was suggested that the wooden rubbish in this corner of the field be burnt. The Clerk to ask the owners' permission for a bonfire. The owners have been asked if they wish to renew the lease, which comes to an end next April.

4544 – Footpaths and Highways: The Parish Council was waiting to hear if the MP had made any progress in getting Batcombe re-instated on the pre-salting network. Justin Witcombe stated that he would pick up the remaining salt bags left on the sides of the road.

Somerset Highways had stated that they would look into the request for a No HGV sign at the Hedgestocks crossroads sometime in June. The Clerk noted that the Chairman had suggested that the Parish Council should erect its own sign but it was agreed to wait until a response had been received from Somerset Highways.

There were no volunteers to take on the role of the Parish Council's Parish Paths Liaison Officer.

4545 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The annual safety inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June.

A small group of parents had meeting to consider what needed doing in the Playing Field. They would like to see a new frame for the nest swing, new goal nets and the goal mouths levelled and were prepared to raise funds for this. A meeting with Councillors would be arranged to discuss these ideas.

Ian Sage was thanked for removing the remains of the seat around the tree stump and Scrump was thanked for removing the stump. The Clerk to include a note of thanks to Scrump with the payment for this work.

Wiff Cox reported an offer from a local molecatcher to deal with the moles for £20 a mole. As the molecatcher had no public liability insurance, the Clerk was asked to check with the insurers as to whether this would be covered by the Council's insurance. It was suggested that after the moles had been caught that a contractor be employed to bust the burrows.

Gardens of Avalon had withdrawn from the contract to cut the grass in the Playing Field (and around the telephone kiosk in Batcombe) due to the late payment (by a couple of days) of the invoice for the grass cutting in April. This was a result of the later than usual meeting date in May and of one of the two signatories being unavailable for a few days. Dominic Conway had quoted £80 a cut for a fortnightly cut of the Playing Field and this was accepted with alternative quotes to be sought at the end of the season. Dominic had provided a copy of his public liability insurance.

4546 – Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2017/18: Copies of Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return – the Statement of Accounts – had been enclosed with the Agendas, along with a copy of the Financial Statements, considered at the previous meeting, showing how the figures in the Statement of Accounts had been derived. Approval of the Statement of Accounts was agreed and this was signed by the Vice Chairman. It was noted that there was a large variation in boxes 6 (All other payments) due to the money have been spent on War Memorial garden wall and the Housing Needs Survey in 2016/17.

4547 – Annual Grants from the Parish Council: It was agreed to provide the budgeted grants of £300 to the Village Hall (to pay for the Parish Council's own meetings and for the committee meetings of other village organisations) and £200 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard. It was also agreed to give two grants of £100 (as budgeted) to Mendip Community Transport under the section 137 power, and to the Mendip Citizen's Advice Bureau.

4548 – Additional Bank Signatory: Following the resignations of Lucinda Edgell and Iona FitzGerald there were only two Councillors who were bank signatories – the Chairman and John. It had been agreed to add Mary Comley to the authorised bank signatories and her name was being added to the bank mandate. It was felt appropriate to have another signatory in case of illness or absence and Justin Witcombe had volunteered. A resolution to add Justin Witcombe to the authorised bank signatories was agreed.

4549 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£59.00	Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in May.
£23.05	SSE – Playing Field Electricity – January to April.

These payments were authorised retrospectively as payment had been required before the meeting. Councillors also authorised the payment of the grants agreed in Minute 4547.

4550 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The Vice Chairman suggested that more Councillors should undertake Chairmanship training so that they would feel able to chair meetings of the Parish Council. He also asked that the Emergency Plan be discussed at a future meeting.

4551 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th July at 8.00pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
4th July 2018