

The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe

was held on Wednesday 8th April 2015 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.

Chris Wildridge, Chairman of the Parish Council presided. Five members of the Parish Council and the Clerk attended, together with Nigel Woollcombe-Adams, the County Councillor, Geoffrey Mackett from the Civil Contingencies Unit and a further 5 parishioners. There were apologies from Iona FitzGerald, David Stevens, the District Councillor, Liz Hunt and Anne and Michael Page.

Chris Wildridge **welcomed** parishioners to the meeting.

Minutes of the 2014 Annual Parish Meeting were read by the Clerk, agreed and signed.

There were no **Matters Arising**.

Chris Wildridge gave the **Chairman's Report** with the aid of a Powerpoint presentation and summarised what had happened over the previous four years of the Parish Council.

He noted that there had been 28 planning applications in the last year, compared to 16 the year before. Of these eighteen were for full or householder planning permission, of which eleven were approved, five refused, one withdrawn and one was awaiting a decision.

An application for a two storey extension at Cherry Tree Cottage next to Boords Farm was refused permission but allowed on appeal. The Parish Council had recommended refusal because of the impact on the Conservation Area and the limited parking on a blind corner.

An application to extend and convert the stables at Crows Hill to a residential dwelling was refused permission. This is the seventh application for a dwelling on this site since 2003 and the Parish Council had consistently recommended refusal as the site was well outside the development limits for Batcombe. The applicant had appealed against the refusal but the appeal had not yet been decided.

The District Council had served a planning enforcement notice on the owner of Ash Tree House in 2013 with regard to the photovoltaic cells being in breach of the planning permission. The owner had applied for planning permission for these solar panels but this was refused.

An application for a 74m wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm was refused permission. The Parish Council had recommended refusal, on the grounds of the impact on a largely unspoilt landscape containing a number of important heritage sites, at a meeting attended by 30 members of the public.

An application for a replacement dwelling at Valley View Farm to be known as Batcombe Park was also refused permission. The Parish Council had recommended refusal on the grounds that the new dwelling was too far from the curtilage of the existing dwelling to be a replacement and so had to be considered a new dwelling in open countryside, contrary to national planning policy. The Parish Council had received 38 e-mails objecting to the application and forty members of the public had attended the meeting at which it was considered.

The Chairman noted that David Stevens was not standing again as District Councillor in the forthcoming elections and thanked him for his work over the last four years and for his contributions on behalf of the Parish Council.

Liz Hollis was thanked for keeping the Parish Council informed of new music festivals at Gilcombe Farm and representing the Parish Council at meetings with South Somerset District Council. The Parish Council had asked that any new festivals have the same conditions relating to noise levels and management, as those imposed on previous festivals such as

Sunrise and Farmfest. Bruno Cristofoli continued to keep the Parish Council informed of events taking place at Pennysquare Barn.

The Parish Council continued to be very concerned about the state of some of the roads in and around the parish, and followed up complaints with Somerset Highways. Particular concerns were raised about the number of HGVs getting stuck in the village. After meetings with a representative of the County Council's Traffic Management department "No HGV" signs were placed at Cranmore but Parish Council's request for similar signs on the road past Batcombe Lodge had been declined as there was already a weight limit at the junction with the main road.

Justin Witcombe was thanked for collecting bags of de-icing materials offered by Somerset Highways and for his work with others unblocking the road gullies. John Sommer and Justin were thanked for their voluntary efforts in strimming the footpaths.

The Parish Council considered two applications for the diversion of public paths away from residential dwellings, one at Lodge Farm and another at Lower Eastcombe Farm. Jayne Cox was thanked for undertaking the role of Parish Path Liaison Officer.

Iona FitzGerald was thanked for applying for a grant for a picnic table from the County Councillors' Health and Wellbeing budget and Mainstay Projects were thanked for installing the table in the Playing Field. Moles continued to cause problems in the Playing Field throughout the year. Ian Sage and Justin Witcombe were thanked for organising new fencing along the south side of the Playing Field as were all the volunteers who helped with the work.

The Parish Council had been asked to consider leasing Coney Wood from the Woodland Trust by the grandson of the original donor of the Wood. After consideration by a Working Party, a parish meeting was called in November 2014 to determine whether there would be public support for taking on the lease and maintaining the Wood. Thirty local residents attended the meeting and indicated their support for the Parish Council taking on the lease. Following the meeting, the Parish Council agreed to consider taking on a 25 year lease but needed to take legal advice on the lease drawn up by the Woodland Trust.

The lease of the allotments field was renewed for a further five years and all ten allotments were occupied. One allotment had become vacant and was rented to a new allotment holder in the village. It was proposed to have regular meetings to improve communications between the allotment holders and the Parish Council.

The Parish Council made grants of £300 to the Village Hall Trust; of which roughly £100 paid for the cost of the Council's own meetings; £200 to the Parochial Church Council for maintenance of the churchyard; and £100 each to Mendip Community Transport and the Mendip Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Parish Council website continued to develop since being established three years ago with over 42,000 visits in that time. Minutes of past Parish Council meetings could be downloaded from the site in addition to the Agenda of the next or most recent meeting and various other documents the Council was required to publish. There was a list of planning applications and their status with a link to the District Council's planning portal where more information about applications could be obtained. Local news and events in the parish were updated weekly and there were pages on the allotments, the Playing Field and the history of the parish as well as useful links to local organisations. 28 Batcombe enterprises had entries on the website.

An increase in the tax base for Batcombe meant that the Parish Council was able to increase its precept by £548 to £7,948 without any increase in the component of Council Tax due to the precept. The Chairman noted that historically the Parish Council finances had been run on a shoestring and that there were limited reserves. He felt that it would be necessary for the new Council to consider over its term making prudent financial provision a priority.

Griff Williams was thanked for undertaking the role of the Council's internal auditor and examining the Parish Council's accounts. The Council's external auditors were Grant

Thornton, although the system of external audit was coming to an end, with the Parish Council being required to publish its accounts on its website instead.

The Chairman concluded by noting that in May there would be elections for the Parish Council and the District Council. The Chairman thanked all those who had served on the Council over the last four years and especially Liz Hollis, who was not standing for re-election, for her support and advice.

District and County Councillors' Comments. Nigel Woollcombe-Adams noted that he did not get to Batcombe Parish Council meetings very often as they clashed with meetings of the Planning Board. He commented on problems with the County Council's Children's Services, noting that Ofstead inspections had found these inadequate on two occasions. He also commented on the lack of buses, despite the County Council spending £2.5 million on subsidies and on the number of potholes. He noted that the Council was sharing buildings with other bodies to save money and that a Rivers Board was being set up that would be funded by the county as a whole.

Neighbourhood Watch Reports. There was nothing to report. Liz Hollis noted that the new PCSO was covering an increased area.

Reports from the Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives. Justin Witcombe the Parish Council representative on the Village Hall Trust thanked Juliet Davies for her work as the Bookings Clerk and noted that Bruno Cristofoli had stood down as Village Hall Chairman and Griff Williams had taken on the role. He reported that the Big Draw evening for the Village Hall 100 Club would include music by local band Skillad and from DJ Iona's disco.

Rob Sage, the Parish Council's trustee for the Heritage Room noted that the Heritage Room was open on Saturday afternoons from 2.00pm to 5.00pm for anyone interested in looking into the history of the village.

There were no **Questions from the Floor.**

Batcombe Emergency Plan. Chris Wildridge introduced the Emergency Plan, noting that the 42 hour power cut in February 2014 had prompted a review of the existing Emergency Plan produced in 2008 and this had since been updated.

Geoffrey Mackett from the Civil Contingencies Unit spoke about the role of the Unit in preparing for emergencies such as terrorist attacks, cyber attacks, widespread flooding, severe weather conditions, large scale transport accidents, fuel shortages and human and animal epidemics. He also noted the importance of community resilience so that local communities were prepared for an emergency with an Emergency Plan, a store of emergency equipment and training and that there were grants available to support parishes in this. Questions were asked about the problems of closing the hills in icy weather to prevent accidents and about a generator for the Village Hall.

Preb Mark Ellis spoke about pastoral care for everyone in the parish that was shared between the clergy and lay leaders, and the need to know who was vulnerable and who was able to help.

Robert Jones spoke about the importance of having a plan as there is never a convenient time for an emergency. It was important that the plan was known to people in the parish and particularly who to contact in an emergency. The Jubilee Hall could act as a rest centre.

The Chairman thanked Geoffrey Mackett, Mark Ellis and Rob Jones and then closed the meeting.

Chris Wildridge
13th April 2016