

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 6th September 2017 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, Dick Skidmore – District Councillor, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor, Karin Harwood and David Peake from the County Council’s Highways Department, Marc Norris from SSE Networks and 16 members of the public.

4373 – SSE Networks Stakeholder Engagement: The Chairman introduced Marc Norris from SSE Networks, noting that the invitation to attend the Parish Council meeting had followed a personal complaint by the Chairman after the power cuts in June.

Mr Norris explained that SSE Networks owned the power supply network and were responsible for keeping the lights on and for getting them back on after a power cut. He noted that one-minute power cuts were automatic resets when something touched a power line. He produced a large fuse used in the power supply and noted that it could be a long-winded process to identify a fault and get the power back on.

A survey of customers had shown that a priority was knowing what was happening and there was now a new national number to call – 105 – for information about a power cut. SSE Networks were also concerned about vulnerable customers and sought to provide emergency lights and an urn to make hot drinks in a power cut. They operated a Priority Service Register which pensioners and those with children under 12 months could sign up for. They also gave grants to help communities become resilient. Automatic compensation was payable if power cuts lasted longer than 12 hours.

Asked how many power cuts were due to “Acts of God” and how many to ageing equipment, Mr Norris was not able to provide an answer, but promised to do so. Mr Norris received a round of applause at the end of his presentation.

4374 – Apologies for Absence: Iona FitzGerald.

4375 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the discussion of the Clerk’s additional hours. Ian Sage declared an interest in the discussion of the use of the glebe field for affordable housing.

4376 – Public Participation: None.

4377 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 5th July 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4378 – Matters Arising: Westcombe War Memorial – the Clerk reported that the Westcombe War Memorial was now a Grade II Listed Building.

4379 – Footpaths and Highways: The Chairman introduced Karin Harwood and David Peake from the Highways Department of the County Council, noting that until last winter the road through Batcombe had always been included on the pre-salting network and that the withdrawal of this service left no road out of the village safe to use in icy weather.

Karin Harwood stated that 21% of the road network in Somerset received precautionary salting in anticipation of ice or snow, while the rest of the network was received post treatment where ice or snow had been present for 24 hours. The roads that were pre-salted were main roads and access routes to hospitals, large schools, communities of over 500 properties and communities of over 50 properties above 500ft. Following the difficulties with parked cars in Batcombe, it was realised that the road from Evercreech to the A359 should not have been included on the pre-salting network. As a concession, they had agreed to pre-salt from Evercreech as far as Spargrove Lane, but not noted that gritting involved driving a large lorry in the dark in difficult conditions that made reversing and turning difficult.

Karin Harwood added that the Parish Council could purchase salt bins which the County Council would fill and one-ton dumpy bags of salt could be left at certain locations. In response to the comment that volunteers could not salt the length of Hincombe Hill, Karin Harwood added that two-ton bags of salt could be given to local farmers. When pointed out that Hincombe Hill was used by the school bus and dangerous in icy weather, Karin Harwood stated that the bus operator should suspend the service when it was dangerous.

Karin Harwood offered to review the route through Batcombe and see if there was an alternative turning place other than the entrance to Spargrove Lane and the Chairman volunteered to accompany her. It was felt that there needed to be greater flexibility in the County Council's policy to reflect issues of local topography.

4380 – District and County Councillors Reports: The County Councillor, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper introduced himself; hoped that progress on the issue of gritting in Batcombe could be made and stated that he would come back to next month's Parish Council meeting.

4381 – Planning Applications: Planning Applications No: 2017/2086/FUL and No: 2017/2087/FUL. The construction of an agricultural building to be used for the accommodation and feeding of dairy cows, with associated external concrete aprons, slurry reception pit and hedge and tree planting. Lower Farm, Horsehill Lane, Batcombe – Full Applications. This was one building submitted as two applications (each for half the building). Bruno Cristofoli stated that the new building was needed so that both their herds of cows could be housed at Lower Farm. The building would be hidden from view and would be away from the river with the slurry going into tanks. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

4382 – Field Trip Music Festival at Gilcombe Farm: Following problems with noise during the Shindig Festival in May, concerns had been raised about the Field Trip Festival over the August Bank Holiday. Dominique and Andrew Curtis, the owners of the Batcombe Vale Caravan Park stated that they had had no problems with the Field Trip Festival, but had complained to South Somerset District Council about the Shindig Festival and had not been satisfied with the response. The Chairman reported that he had complained about the Field Trip Festival and had received a response. The District Councillor had asked the monitoring officer to get the music turned down. It was felt that the playing of live or recorded music until 4.00am was unacceptable. The Clerk to write to South Somerset District Council regarding the number of music festivals at Gilcombe Farm and the disturbance caused by them.

4383 – Affordable Housing: A response had been received from the Diocesan Board of Finance stating that the glebe field was currently subject to a tenancy and that the Board was not minded to sell. The Board added that the Endowments and Glebe Measure and the Charities Act required the Board to obtain best value in the disposal of any asset and so precluded a gift of glebe land. The Board did state that they would be prepared to consider an enquiry from a developer promoting affordable housing, where the disposal of glebe land met the requirements of the Endowments and Glebe Measure.

A discussion on whether the Parish Council should be more proactive in seeking land for affordable housing was deferred to the next meeting.

4384 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The Parish Council had received a request from a local resident to allow a small children's party to take place in the Playing Field with a bouncy castle. After checking with the insurers and the Chairman the Clerk allowed the request on condition that the resident confirmed that the bouncy castle provider was insured and signed a disclaimer absolving the Parish Council for any responsibility for any accidents on the bouncy castle.

The concrete slab covering the stopcock by the bus shelter has been broken and Justin Witcombe volunteered to replace it. The amount of graffiti in the bus shelter was increasing with some in pen as well as in chalk. The lock to the electricity cabinet in the bus shelter had been broken some years ago but a second lock opened by a standard meter key had prevented access. This had now been forced open on a number of occasions. It was agreed to obtain a clasp and padlock to secure the cabinet.

Mainstay Projects had undertaken some of the repairs they offered to make to the multi-play apparatus. The broken upright had been replaced with a new timber and a supporting timber has been attached to the corner post that was rotting. The Clerk was asked to contact Mainstay Projects to see when the remaining repairs would be undertaken. Volunteers were needed to apply the wood preservative to the play apparatus in the Playing Field.

The Playing Field was left in a good state after the Annual Fete, although it took a little longer than anticipated to clear up the Field. Thanks were given to Ian Sage for replacing the tap in the bus shelter for the Fete (it had been removed to prevent it being left on). The Clerk had purchased a new chain to immobilise the zip wire during the Fete. The metal frame attached to the bottom of one of the goals was broken in two places and become buckled. Ian Sage had removed it for repairing. (The frame allows the goal net to be lift up so the grass can be cut.)

Ian Sage noted that new hardwood timber to replace the rotten wood in the seat around the tree stump would cost £250. To be discussed at the next meeting.

The mole continues to be active.

4385 – Planning Application Updates: Listed Building Consent had been granted for the masonry works to the elevations at Batcombe Lodge and Planning Permission had been granted for the alterations to Spring Cottage. The Clerk reported that notification of an application for a two-storey building including a garage at Holly Cottage, Westcombe had been received and would be considered at the next meeting if an extension to the deadline could be obtained.

The Clerk reported that the appeal against the District Council's decision to refuse planning permission for the conversion of the stables at Crows Hill to holiday accommodation had been allowed.

4386 – Administration: The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had a new dedicated e-mail address - clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk – that was provided as part of the hosting package for the Parish Council website. The Chairman had also activated a new e-mail address for Parish Council business chairman@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk and this e-mail should be used in place of the previous one for the Chairman.

At the request of the Chairman the Clerk had produced a record of hours worked over the year to 31st March 2017, which showed that he had worked an extra 17½ hours over the year, largely as a result of extra meetings in July and August 2016. As there had been no meetings in August of the current year, the Clerk requested that the extra hours from 2016/17 be taken off as time in lieu in 2017/18 and left the the room while this was considered. The Chairman provided the following Minute of the discussion: “In considering [the Clerk’s] request it was agreed that the allowing 17½ hours time off in lieu could not easily be reconciled with the pattern of his time commitments from October 2016 to March 2017. In this instance it was agreed to pay the Clerk for the additional hours at the 2016/17 hourly rate. It was also agreed that the Clerk should provide the Council with the details of hours worked each month no later than the May meeting in 2018. If additional hours were worked from April 2017 to March 2018 year it would be easier to organise time off in lieu between May 2018 and the end of the financial year in March 2019.” The Clerk returned to the room and was advised of the decision and the request to provide early notification of any additional hours worked in the current financial year.

4387 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: John Sommer reported to the meeting that he had checked the bank reconciliation prepared by the Clerk for the quarter to 30th June.

An update on the budget had been enclosed with the Agendas, and this showed the accounts for the previous year, the budget for the current year, receipts and payments to date in the current year and a projection for this year based on the receipts and payment to date. The Clerk reported that total receipts for the year were projected to be approximately £60 less than the budgeted figure because there would be two vacant allotments in November.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was £50 more than budgeted because of the extra cost of attending the annual inspection. The projection for the expenditure on Administration was £90 more than budgeted because two years of the Clerk’s membership of the SLCC were paid in the current year and the cost of internet protection for the Parish Council laptop had not been budgeted. The projection for the expenditure on Other items was £395 more than budgeted because the Health and Well-being grant received the previous year had been spent on a new notice board.

Although the projected surplus was £685 compared to a budgeted surplus of £1,276, the healthier position at the start of the year meant that the projected funds at the end of the year were around £6,640 – £860 better than expected when the budget was made. The Clerk noted that around £1,200 of the figure would be earmarked for the allotments.

4388 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments.

- £109.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in July.
- £60.00 Gary Butler – Hedge cutting in allotments field.
- £22.99 water2business – Water supply to the Playing Field (January to July).
- £19.29 SSE – Electricity supply to the Playing Field (April to July).

The above were retrospective authorisations as payment had been required in August.

- £151.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass and hedge cutting in August.

4389 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: Jayne Cox noted that Councillors needed to speak up at meetings.

4390 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th October at 8.00pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
4th October 2017