

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 4th October 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, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor (for part of the meeting) and two members of the public.

4391 – Apologies for Absence: Dick Skidmore – District Councillor.

4392 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the authorisation of the Clerk’s salary. Ian Sage declared an interest in the repair of the seat in the Playing Field. John Sommer declared an interest in the planning application for Holly Cottage.

4393 – Public Participation: None.

4394 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 6th September 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. Administration – it was made clear that the Clerk was only being asked to provide a record of hours once for the preceding year

4395 – Matters Arising: Pre-salting in Batcombe – concerns were raised over the manner in which the County Council officer had addressed the issue of problems the school bus would face in icy weather at the last meeting. The Clerk was asked to write to the County Councillor expressing concern over the casual manner in which the question of school transport was dealt with.

SSE Networks – The Clerk reported that he had received an e-mail from Marc Norris from SSE Networks answering the question he had been unable to do at the last meeting. He reported that 27.5% of unplanned faults were due to ageing equipment and wear and provided a long list of the remaining causes of these faults.

Gilcombe Farm Music Festivals – The Clerk reported that he had received a response from the Licensing Department noting that the Shindig and Field Trip music festivals had one-off licences for each festival and if they applied again for a licence the Parish Council could make a representation. Farmfest had an annual licence, which could be reviewed – but only because of problems with Farmfest, not with the other festivals.

4396 – Parish Council Vacancy: The resignation of Cllr Iona FitzGerald after the last meeting was formally noted. The Clerk reported that the notices of a vacancy on the Parish Council had been published on the website and on the parish notice boards, and that provided no one claimed a by-election, the vacancy could be filled by co-option at the November meeting.

4397 – District and County Councillors Reports: None.

4398 – Footpaths and Highways: The Clerk reported that following last month's meeting, Karin Harwood, the County Council Service Manager who had attended the meeting, had stated – in an e-mail to a resident who had complained about the gritting of the road – that Somerset Highways would attempt to grit for five runs to the Old Rectory on Gold Hill, but would terminate this route if cars were parked inappropriately.

The Chairman felt that it was inappropriate for an officer to respond to an e-mail addressed to the County Councillor. Concerns were raised that the proposal from the County Council would not help with the problem of the school bus getting up Hincombe Hill. It was noted that Batcombe was “a different world” to Wincanton and often had ice and snow when Wincanton did not. It was also noted that Hincombe Hill was especially difficult to negotiate in icy condition since the re-surfacing. Clare Kingston reported seeing the school bus in difficulties on the icy road and wouldn't let her children go on it in icy weather. Suggestions for self-help from the County Council were also felt to be inappropriate and it would be difficult and dangerous for volunteers to salt the whole of Hincombe Hill.

The County Councillor arrived during this discussion. He stated that he had thought progress was being made as a month ago there was no gritting in Batcombe and there would now be a route into the village that was pre-salted. The Chairman noted that this would not help the residents of Kale Street or allow the school bus to get to Upton Noble, and that any gritting in Batcombe was outside the County Council's policy. Mary Comley noted that she had worked for Somerset Highways for thirty years and that Batcombe had always been gritted and that no drivers had reported problems with parked cars. The Chairman stated that if the County Council re-instated the gritting through Kale Street, the Parish Council would deal with the problem of parking in Kale Street.

The Clerk reported a complaint that the white lines had not been re-instated at the junctions around the Round House following resurfacing and this made the junction with poor visibility even more dangerous. The Clerk to contact Somerset Highways.

4399 – Affordable Housing: A discussion on whether the Parish Council should be more proactive in seeking land for affordable housing was deferred to the next meeting.

4400 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: Ian Sage had volunteered to replace the wood in the seat around the tree stump that is rotten. He also offered to provide hardwood for the seat at a cost of £250. The Clerk to take advice on whether the Council could legitimately make this payment to a Councillor.

The Clerk noted that volunteers were needed to apply the wood preservative to the play apparatus in the Playing Field. To be discussed. The mole continues to be very active. To be discussed at the next meeting.

Clare Kingston stated that she would be running a Bingo Evening in November in aid of play equipment for the Playing Field. She suggested that the Parish Council apply to the Tesco Bags of Help scheme for funding for the play equipment and this was agreed. Clare stated that she had had trouble in getting suggestions of things to raise money for at the Bingo Evenings and would appreciate help with this.

4401 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2017/2364/HSE Erection of a two storey building which incorporates a garage at ground floor and a balcony. Holly Cottage, Westcombe – Householder Application. The Clerk read a statement from the applicants responding to the concerns of the owner of the neighbouring Beech Cottage that the excavation required for this building would undermine the foundations of his garage. The Parish Council decided to recommend refusal as the plans provided did not give sufficient

detail to be able to determine the relationship of the proposed building to the surrounding buildings and the existing ground level.

Planning Application Updates: None.

4402 – External Auditor’s Report: The external auditor Grant Thornton had returned the Annual Return having completed their audit. No matters had come to their attention “giving cause for concern that the relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met”. However, they did wish to bring to the attention of the Parish Council that the Internal Auditor had ticked “Yes” to the internal control objective relating to petty cash while the Parish Council did not operate a petty cash system. The External Auditor stated that the Internal Auditor should have ticked the “Not Covered” box and the Parish Council should have spotted and corrected this in their review of the Internal Auditor’s Report.

The Clerk noted that this was the last year that Grant Thornton would be the Parish Council’s External Auditors. Although there would be an external auditor in future, the Parish Council would no longer need to send the Annual Return to them, as publishing the Annual Return and the other information required under the Transparency Code on the Parish Council website would be considered sufficient.

4403 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments.

£109.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in September.

£1,163.31 The Clerk – Salary for 2nd Quarter.

£132.75 The Clerk – Expenses for 2nd Quarter.

The Clerk’s salary included the additional hours in 2016/17 agreed at the previous meeting. Payment of the audit fee was not authorised as no invoice had been received.

4404 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: Jayne Cox reported that she had caught three trail bikers using the Honeycliff bridleway who claimed that they had been told in the pub that they were allowed to use it. A piece to be put in the parish magazine stating that vehicles were not allowed to use the bridleway.

4405 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 1st November at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Chris Wildridge
1st November 2017