

The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe

was held on Wednesday 13th April 2016 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.

Chris Wildridge, Chairman of the Parish Council presided. Six members of the Parish Council and the Clerk attended, together with Dick Skidmore, the District Councillor, Jane Birch from the Community Council for Somerset, Alison Ward from the Wessex Community Land Trust Project and a further 20 parishioners. There were apologies from Nigel Woolcombe-Adams, the County Councillor.

Chris Wildridge **welcomed** parishioners to the meeting. He also welcomed the District Councillor and the guest speakers.

Minutes of the 2015 Annual Parish Meeting were read by the Clerk, agreed and signed.

There were no **Matters Arising**.

District and County Councillors' Comments. Dick Skidmore stated that he visited eight parishes in his area and felt Batcombe was very fortunate to have a good team of Councillors and Clerk who took matters seriously. He sat on the Planning Board at Mendip and noted that the appeal against the refusal of permission for the wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm had been dismissed. He added that Mendip District Council had hoped to work with South Somerset to save money but South Somerset were not willing to do this. Mendip was working with five other authorities and shared buildings with the town council and the police to cut costs. He also stated that the District Council would receive little or no funding from central government by 2020 and would have to rely on business rates.

Chris Wildridge gave the **Chairman's Report** with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation.

He noted that a new Parish Council had been elected in May. Six of the seven places on the Council had been filled by Councillors standing again who were elected unopposed. The seventh place was filled by the co-option of Lucinda Edgell at the May meeting. At the June meeting the Council had adopted a four year plan aiming to tackle the issues of the Emergency Plan for the parish, the Playing Field equipment, affordable housing and broadband for the parish.

There had been 12 planning applications in the last year, compared to 28 the year before. Of these three were for full or householder planning permission, of which two were approved and one was awaiting a decision. The Parish Council had recommended refusal of the variation of a condition on the planning permission for Carrot Hill Farmhouse that would have allowed the dwelling to be constructed to Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes instead of Level 5.

Three appeals against the refusal of planning permission had been dismissed. These were to convert and extend the stables at Crows Hill to a single dwelling; for a 74m wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm; and for a replacement dwelling at Valley View Farm to be known as Batcombe Park - the Planning Inspector had agreed with the Parish Council's view that the new dwelling was too far from the curtilage of the existing dwelling to be considered a replacement.

The Parish Council had been asked to consider leasing Coney Wood from the Woodland Trust. However after careful consideration of the draft lease drawn up by the Woodland Trust and with guidance from a local solicitor and a local land agent the Parish Council decided not to proceed with the lease, which was felt to be too one-sided with the liabilities for the Parish Council outweighing the benefits.

The Parish Council were informed of one music festival at Gilcombe Farm – the “Shindig” festival in May 2016. The Parish Council had asked that this festival have the same conditions relating to noise levels and management, as those imposed on previous festivals at Gilcombe Farm and this was agreed.

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. Although proposals to place “No HGV” signs on the roads into Batcombe had not materialised, there were plans for direction signs to the Wild Beer brewery at Westcombe Dairy which could prevent some of the problems.

The Parish Council had been disappointed to learn that Somerset Highways had suspended its precautionary salting in Batcombe because of difficulties in passing parked cars in Kale Street. The road through Batcombe had been one of the few non A roads in the county to be salted in recognition of the difficulty of getting in or out of the village when all the roads were untreated. It was noted that the problem with the parked cars would create difficulties for emergency vehicles as well as gritting lorries.

Jayne Cox was thanked for her work as the Parish Path Liaison Officer, and John Sommer and Justin Witcombe were thanked for their voluntary efforts in strimming the footpaths.

Moles continued to cause problems in the Playing Field throughout the year. Iona FitzGerald and helpers were thanked for tidying up the willow structure in the Playing Field. Unfortunately the spring on the zip wire had broken, probably as a result of the zip wire being overloaded. For safety reasons the zip wire had to be immobilised and the Parish Council had instructed a company to repair the zip wire - but this had not been done at the time of the meeting.

The nest swing had to be dismantled when it was found that the frame could not cope with the forces resulting from large numbers of people using the swing at the same time. The frame was originally used for the toddler swing and it was proposed to return the toddler swing to this frame, have two junior swings in the large frame and purchase a purpose built frame for the nest swing - when the Council had sufficient funds.

All ten allotments were occupied. Two allotments had become vacant during the year and were rented to a new allotment holder in the village. The owner of the allotments field had expressed some concerns at the state of the field and the Parish Council had arranged for the hedges to be cut, compost heap tidied up, and rubbish removed.

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 four years previous with over 65,000 visits in that time. New Government legislation – *The Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities* – now required the Parish Council to publish a range on financial information on its website including financial statements, budgets, audit reports and any items of expenditure over £100. The Government had provided grants to help Parish Councils comply with the requirements of the Transparency Code and the Parish Council obtained a grant of £250 to purchase a laptop so that it was no longer reliant on the Clerk’s personal computer.

Iona FitzGerald was thanked for obtaining a grant for a new notice board from the County Councillor’s Health and Well-being budget and the Parish Council had decided to replace the notice boards on the churchyard wall and in Westcombe.

The Parish Council had increased its precept by £500 to £8,450 to cover increased maintenance costs in the Playing Field, the repair of the wall around the Batcombe War Memorial, and to provide a sufficient reserve in case of a contested bye-election.

Griff Williams was thanked for undertaking the role of the Council’s internal auditor and examining the Parish Council’s accounts.

Asked a question about the provision of high speed broadband, the Chairman noted that the proposal for wireless broadband was not being taken forward. BT had promised improvements, but these seemed to be only slight improvements on the existing service.

Neighbourhood Watch Reports. There was nothing to report.

Reports from the Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives. Justin Witcombe the Parish Council representative on the Village Hall Trust reported that the Big Draw evening for the Village Hall 100 Club had consisted of a pig racing night that had raised £2,198 to be shared between the Village Hall Trust and the Forever Friends Appeal at the Bath Royal United Hospital.

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

Questions from the Floor. Mike James noted that there was a magnificent selection of trees in the area that were threatened by disease. He suggested a community project to plant broad leaf trees to ensure their survival and asked anyone interested to contact him at Top O Hollow. Hennie Worthington felt that a lot of people didn't know about the suspension of the gritting the previous month and suggested that notices should be put through letter boxes.

Housing Needs Survey. Jane Birch noted that the Community Council for Somerset was a 90 year old charity set up to help rural communities work better. The Housing Needs Survey was needed because of the shortage of affordable housing for local people and a population that was getting older. The Community Council would design a bespoke survey for Batcombe that would ask questions about affordable housing and housing for older people. The Survey, funded by a grant from Awards for All, would be delivered to each household in the parish with additional copies for people with a connection to the parish. The surveys would be analysed in confidence by the Community Council and the Parish Council would receive a report of the analysed data.

Alison Ward noted that Community Land Trusts were not for profit organisations set up to benefit the community. Community Land Trusts can own land and other assets that are important to the community and can protect them for future generations. Community Land Trust projects included allotments, post offices, pubs and shops. Anyone in the community can be a member of the Trust and they are one means of providing affordable housing. Asked who funds the land and the housing, Alison Ward stated that a Housing Association would buy the land and then transfer it to the Community Land Trust, and the Housing Association would build the housing.

The Chairman thanked Jane Birch and Alison Ward and then closed the meeting.

Chris Wildridge

5th April 2017