

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 9th May 2018 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

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

4507 – Election of Chairman and Chairman’s Acceptance of Office: Chris Wildridge announced that as a result of a sudden illness he did not wish to stand again as Chairman. No other Councillor felt able to take on the role and, after a discussion in which it was noted that the Council would not be properly constituted without a Chairman, Justin Witcombe volunteered to be Vice Chairman and Chris Wildridge agreed to be Chairman on the understanding that Justin would chair meetings of the Council while he felt unable to do so. Chris Wildridge was proposed as Chairman by Ian Sage and there being no other nominations, Chris was duly elected and signed his Acceptance of Office.

4508 – Election of Vice Chairman: Justin Witcombe was proposed by Wiff Cox and there being no other nominations he was duly elected.

4509 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The Chairman asked for this item to be brought forward before he left the meeting. The District Councillor reported that a developer was prepared to provide low cost housing on the land in Westcombe that had previously been put forward and was waiting for contact from the District Council. John Sommer declared a pecuniary interest as the owner of the land and left the room for this item. The District Councillor asked that a letter be sent to the planning department at Mendip confirming that the Housing Needs Survey had been undertaken and that no other land had been offered. The Chairman then left the meeting and the Vice Chairman took the Chair.

4510 – Apologies for Absence: Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor.

4511 – Declarations of Interest: Justin Witcombe declared an interest in the discussion of the payment to the Village Hall Trust [Minute 4523] as a Village Hall Trustee.

4512 – Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2018/0849/HSE - Demolition of existing single storey extension and first floor roof. Construction of new single storey extension and dormer roof to existing dwelling. Mole Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe – Householder Application.

Planning Application No: 2018/0850/LBC - Demolition of existing single storey extension and first floor roof. Construction of new single storey extension and dormer roof to existing dwelling. Mole Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe – Listed Building Consent.

As the architect for these applications was present, the Council agreed to bring this item forward. The architect read a statement from the owners and offered to answer questions on the proposal. He noted that he had also been the architect for the extension to a neighbouring cottage. It was suggested that shutters/screening for the roof lights would help to reduce light

pollution and it was noted that the work could have an impact of Kale Street and would need to be carefully managed. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval with requests for screening/shutters for the roof lights and a construction management plan to minimise disruption.

Planning Application No: 2018/0929/TCA - Proposed reduction of limbs by 1-2 metres on a Cedar. Rockwells House, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area.

The Parish Council recommended approval to allow management of this important tree within the Conservation Area.

Planning Application Updates: The application for a detached double garage and adjoining ground floor studio and further studio space over the garage at Holly Hill House had been approved, although the Parish Council had recommended refusal of permission. The District Councillor noted that the plans had been amended to make the building look less domesticated and it could only be used as a studio. The Clerk stated that the Parish Council had not been sent a copy of the new plans and the District Councillor noted that the planning department was currently overstretched.

4513 – Public Participation: None.

4514 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4th April 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice Chairman.

4515 – Matters Arising: None.

4516 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: The District Councillor noted that the County Council’s proposal for a unitary authority had come as a surprise with District Council staff hearing about the proposal on the radio. He also noted that the District Council was already working with four other District Councils outside of Somerset to reduce costs.

4517 – Allotments: The Vice Chairman declared an interest as an allotment holder. It was agreed to ask Gary Butler to mow off the vacant allotments to keep the weeds under control.

4518 – Footpaths and Highways: The Vice Chairman noted that Somerset Highways had undertaken a repair in Back Lane and it was reported that the landowner would be addressing the problem of the spring running into the road there. Somerset Highways had informed the Parish Council that Quaperlake Street in Bruton would be closed for two evenings in June.

The Parish Council had received an apology from Alyn Jones, the Director of Economic and Community Infrastructure Operations at the County Council for the oversight in not responding to the letter from the residents of Kale Street regarding keeping the street clear for pre-salting lorries to pass. He had enclosed a copy of the letter he sent to the residents stating that Batcombe does not qualify for inclusion on the Pre-salting Network and that the winter gritting policy would be reviewed over the summer but he did not wish to raise expectations.

The meeting with the MP, David Warburton, in April had been a positive one with a good attendance of residents who made their concerns about the lack of pre-salting clear. David Warburton promised to do what he could to get the matter resolved recognising the problems caused by the topography of the village.

A request for a No HGV sign at the Hedgestocks crossroads had been made to Somerset Highways but there had been no response after an initial request for more information. Mary Comley volunteered to chase up the Highways officer concerned.

It was reported that the Mendip Bridleways and Byways Association had stated that they would not be giving up on the Honeycliff Bridleway as so much money had been spent on it and would be talking to local landowners about the damage caused by vehicles using it.

John Sommer reported that a new co-ordinator had been appointed to the volunteer strimmer project. It was also noted that no one came forward to report problems with the footpaths in the parish which limited the effectiveness of the project.

4519 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The annual safety inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June. It was noted that there were 10 bags of playbark left from last year and it was agreed to place these around the multi-play apparatus and to order more if the inspection recommended it. It was also agreed to leave the repair of the small hole in the decking until after the inspection report had been received.

The cutting of the grass had been delayed by poor weather but had now begun. Moles continued to be a problem and it was agreed to catch the moles. Wiff Cox volunteered to get a price from a local molecatcher.

The Chairman and Ian Sage had discussed the cost of obtaining suitable timber to repair the seat around the rotten stump and their recommendation was that it would be simpler to remove the seat and the stump and buy a seat to be placed elsewhere in the Playing Field. This would leave a space that could be used for the nest swing when funds allowed the purchase of a new frame. Their recommendation was accepted. Two quotes had been obtained for removing the stump one for £50 to grind out the stump and one for £100 to remove it and level off the ground. It was agreed to go with the second quote to provide a level surface for the nest swing.

There would be an open meeting in The Three Horseshoes on May 19th for parents to suggest ideas of what they would like in the Playing Field.

4520 – Variation of Premises Licence Application – Wild Beer Brewery: The Wild Beer Co had applied for a variation of their premises licence for the brewery in Westcombe to extend the area it covered to the area behind Alshilla Cottages. The Council decided not to make a representation.

4521 – Music Festivals at Gilcombe Farm: The appeal to the Magistrates Court by the organisers of the Shindig Weekender music festival had not taken place as a consent order had been signed by South Somerset District Council re-instating the hours of recorded and live music as in the application (i.e. up to 4.00am). Instead a number of further conditions were added to the premises licence with the aim of preventing public nuisance from occurring. Details of these conditions were given in Appendix One of the Shindig Noise Management Plan distributed to Councillors.

The organisers of the Field Trip festival had withdrawn their premises licence application having decided to “move on to pastures new”. It was reported that the conditions imposed on the Shindig festival may have been a factor in this decision.

A representation had been made regarding the premises licence application for the One Love festival at Gilcombe Farm from Friday August 31st to Sunday September 2nd 2018. As the hours applied for music to be played until were not as late (2.00am on the Saturday and Sunday mornings and midnight on the Sunday evening), the representation only asked for noise limits that would prevent local residents being disturbed in the early hours of the morning and that South Somerset District Council would undertake to ensure that the noise was monitored and complaints dealt with effectively and promptly. As the organisers of this

festival had agreed to accept the same conditions as those imposed on the Shindig Weekender, it was agreed to withdraw the representation.

4522 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives: It was agreed that Justin Witcombe should continue as the Village Hall Representative and that the Clerk should continue as the Heritage Room Representative.

4523 - Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment and Administrative Matters: Staffing Committee – The Vice Chairman, John Sommer and Wiff Cox volunteered to be the members of the Staffing Committee to consider any complaints against or grievances by the Clerk and this was agreed.

Additional Hours - the Clerk was reported that he had worked an additional two hours in the year 2017/18 and it was agreed that these two hours should be taken as time in lieu during 2018/19.

Clerk's Salary - The National Joint Council for Local Government Services had reached agreement on new pay scales for 2018/19 and 2019/20 and the National Association of Local Councils and the Association of Local Council Clerks had jointly recommended the salary scales for 2018/19. Under the new pay scales, the Clerk's salary would increase by 2% from £10.739 to £10.953 an hour from April 1st 2018. This increase was agreed.

Hire of Old School – As a trustee of the Village Hall, the Vice Chairman left the room for this item and the meeting was chaired by John Sommer. The Clerk had recommended an increase in the annual amount the Parish Council paid the Village Hall Trust for the hire of the Old School and Jubilee Hall for its meetings as the current £100 a year no longer covered the cost of all the meetings. It was noted that the Parish Council also paid the Village Hall a grant of £150 to allow village organisations free use of the Old School for committee meetings. It was decided to raise the matter with the Village Hall Trust and see if they were satisfied with the current arrangement. It was also agreed to pay the invoice from the Village Hall Trust for the hire of the Jubilee Hall for the meeting with the MP.

4524 - General Data Protection Regulation Matters: The Clerk noted that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) would come into effect on May 25th. It was agreed to make the Clerk the person responsible for compliance with data protection law and he was asked to produce a data audit for the June meeting.

4525 – Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters: It was agreed that Data Protection be reviewed at the June meeting (see Minute 4524 above); Financial Regulations be reviewed at the July meeting; Standing Orders at the September meeting; Complaints Procedure and Code of Conduct at the October meeting; 2019/2020 Budget to at the November meeting; Media Policy and Social Media Policy at the December meeting; Freedom of Information, membership of SALC and payment of Clerk's subscription to SLCC at the January meeting; Risk Management Policy and insurance cover at the February meeting; and the Schedule of Assets at the March meeting.

4526 – Insurance Renewal: The Council had entered into a three-year agreement with Came & Company two years previously. The premium had increased from £280 to £291.20 as a result of the index linking of the sums insured.

4527 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2018: The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31st March 2018 was verified by John Sommer and reported to the Council.

A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas and the Clerk summarised the main points of the notes that had been included with the Agendas. The allotments rent was £140 less than budgeted because four allotments were vacant. However, the fundraising for new play equipment had not been budgeted for and so receipts were £440 more than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting in the Playing Field was less than budgeted as additional cuts were not undertaken but more than the previous year due to very mild weather during the first half of the winter. The cost of the electricity supply was similar to the previous year but the cost of the water supply was lower than the previous year when the tap in the shelter had been left running. The cost of maintenance was less than budgeted - £222 was paid for playbark, £75 for wood preservative and £75 for cutting back the willow. In the previous year £594 had been paid for the repair to the zip wire. The annual inspection was more than budgeted as it had been agreed to accompany the inspector. As a result the Playing Field payments were £260 less than budgeted, although it was noted that it was difficult to budget accurately for maintenance costs as these vary from year to year.

The Clerk's salary was slightly higher than budgeted because of payment for extra hours worked in the previous year. The Clerk's expenses were slightly less than budgeted. The Clerk's membership of SLCC for 2017 was paid for by the Clerk and reclaimed in his expenses while his 2018 membership was paid directly by the Council – as a result the cost of two years' membership appeared in the financial statements for 2017/18 while none appeared for 2016/17. The cost of internet protection for the Parish Council laptop had not been included in the budget. No training or publications were purchased, but audit fees were due because the donations received the previous year took the Council's income above £10,000. No bill was received for photocopying in 2017/18. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted and overall administration costs were £70 more than budgeted.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted and the expenditure on the allotments was £200 for the lease of the field and £60 spent on hedge cutting. £318 of the £395 grant for new notice boards was spent on a new notice board on the churchyard wall. This did not appear in the budget as when the budget was produced it had been assumed the grant would have been spent in the previous year. The notice board in Westcombe was repaired by a local resident and no costs were claimed. As a result of the above, total payments were £100 more than budgeted.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and the grants for different items were given on the back of the Financial Statement. At the end of the year there was £968 of allotments money of which £200 would pay for the lease of the field in May, leaving £768 until the rent is paid in November. Other earmarked monies in the Parish Council accounts at the end of the year were the £572 raised for new play equipment and the remaining £77 of the grant money for new notice boards.

The net result of the variations against the budget given above was a surplus of £1,620 on the year instead of the budgeted surplus of £1,276, which is largely a result of the money raised for new play equipment. (A surplus was budgeted to help cover the cost of a contested Parish Council election in 2019.) At the end of the year the Parish Council had £7,575 in its funds, £1,800 more than anticipated in the budget. Of this £968 is set aside for the allotments, £572 for new play equipment and £77 for notice boards. This meant that the Parish Council had funds totalling £5,960 that are not earmarked for specific items.

The Clerk reported that the internal auditor would be unable to complete the audit by the deadline of the end of June and so another internal auditor would need to be found at short notice. The Vice Chairman offered to approach his accountant.

4528 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2019: An updated projection on this year’s budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that this year’s precept of £9,200 had been received. The VAT repayment would be less than budgeted as it had been anticipated that the seat in the Playing Field would have been repaired last year. A VAT claim for £176.88 for the year up to March 2018 will be made shortly. With no interest being shown in the allotments, the rent was likely to be less than the budgeted figure.

This gave a projected deficit of £1,180 on the year – compared to a budgeted deficit of £1,000, mainly due allotments rent being less than expected. This gave projected funds of £6,395 at the end of the year of which £900 will be earmarked for the allotments and £572 for play equipment. It was noted that both the budget and projection included a figure of £2,000 for repair of the multi-play equipment, which was based on an estimate of £4,000 spread over two years, but that the actual cost and when it is paid could vary significantly.

4529 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£291.20	Came & Company – Insurance premium.
£108.43	Somerset Association of Local Councils – Affiliation fees.
£200.00	T & E A Hollis – Rent of allotments field.
£100.00	Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in April.
£8.00	Batcombe Village Hall Trust – Hire of Jubilee Hall for meeting with MP.

4530 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The local branch of the Royal British Legion was organising two short First Aid courses on a Saturday morning and had offered a place on each to a Parish Councillor. Jayne Cox and Mary Comley volunteered to attend the courses.

Volunteers were requested for a Parish Council team at a Quiz Night organised by the Village Hall Trust.

4531 - Dates of Future Meetings: The following dates were agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council during the coming year, most being the first Wednesday of the month:

6 th June	4 th July	1 st August	5 th September	3 rd October	7 th November
5 th December	9 th January	6 th February	6 th March	3 rd April	8 th May

The August meeting would only be held if there were planning applications to consider. The meeting in January would be on the 2nd Wednesday to avoid Christmas and the date in April would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The date of the May meeting was provisional as this would depend upon the date of Parish Council elections (usually the first Thursday in May). The Council to meet at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year (apart from April).

Chris Wildridge
6th June 2018