

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2nd December 2020 via Zoom, commencing at 7.30pm.

Present - Councillors: Mary Comley – Chairman, Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher, Janet Jones, Ian Sage and David Stevens.

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, the District Councillor – Michael Gay and one member of the public.

4974 – Apologies for Absence: Apologies had been received from Justin Witcombe and Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor.

4975 – Declarations of Interest: None.

4976 – Public Participation: None.

4977 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 4th and 25th November 2020 were agreed as a correct record after a number of amendments to the Minutes of November 25th. Minute 4970: “- giving net funding of £53,078.40” was added to the first sentence. Also, in Minute 4970, at the beginning of the third paragraph, “David Stevens” was replaced by “The Parish Councillors”. Minute 4971, third paragraph, end of first sentence: “but this had not required planning permission” was replaced by “and he had been told that it did not require planning permission because it was a temporary structure”. The Chairman to sign at a later date.

4978 – Matters Arising: Sewage Treatment Plant – David Stevens noted that he would have appreciated feedback on the letters he had proposed be sent and the Chairman apologised for not having provided this.

4979 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: A written report from the District Councillor had been distributed to Councillors before the meeting. He added that no decision on the unitary bids would be made until the summer and that County Council elections could be delayed. Clare Kingston reported that she had been asked to pass on thanks for the new recycling scheme. Jayne Cox asked about clusters of parishes and the District Councillor stated this would be parishes getting together in Local Community Networks to discuss matters of common interest. This would be needed because in a unitary authority there would be fewer Councillors to deal with parishes’ concerns. It was noted that there was a need for flexibility in such groupings. A written report had been received from the County Councillor and distributed to Parish Councillors before the meeting.

4980 – Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages: The Chairman had sent a second letter to the Chief Executive of Hastoes and one to the landowner involved in the negotiations for the easement regarding a new pipe from the treatment plant and had received positive responses from both, but no further progress had been made. Concerns were expressed that agreement might not be reached and the Chairman volunteered to speak to the landowner after checking on the latest position with Hastoes. **Action: The Chairman.** A change in the residents’ contact with Hastoes was noted.

4981 – Footpaths and Highways: The Parish Council had received a complaint from the landowner of the field next to the Chapel carpark regarding the trees that were planted in the carpark to mark the Queen’s Silver Jubilee, which were apparently obstructing tractors working in the field, and the landowner would like the Parish Council to cut back the trees. The Clerk noted that the carpark was basically a large verge which belonged to Somerset Highways and which made the trees their responsibility – although the Parish Council had undertaken work on the trees in the past. It was questioned as to whether the trees were the responsibility of the Parish Council and how much they actually obstructed a tractor. The Chairman volunteered to speak to the landowner and to measure the clearance under trees. **Action: The Chairman.** The Chairman noted that Somerset Highways did not accept responsibility for trees planted on verges.

The Chairman reported that she had met with Charlie Higgins from Somerset Highways and a representative of the Mendip Bridleways and Byways Association to discuss the damage caused to the Honeycliff by the volume of water flowing down the track. Charlie Higgins stated that he hoped to be able to do some ditching at the top of the bridleway to reduce the flow of water down the bridleway and that then repairs to the bridleway could be considered.

The Chairman stated that the street sign for Back Lane had been demolished and that two fingerposts had been damaged and that she had reported the street sign to the District Council and the fingerposts to the County Council. It was noted that the project for local volunteers to maintain fingerposts had been put on hold because of the pandemic and that the County Council no longer repaired fingerposts.

Concerns were expressed about people pulling out of Back Lane onto Kale Street without giving way as the white lines had faded. The Chairman volunteered to report the concern to Somerset Highways.

Peter Glaisher noted that the bags of salt would be put back on the highway in Westcombe by the farmer who was storing them. It was noted that the salt bin on Hincombe Hill was full.

4982 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The molecatcher had caught two moles in the Playing Field and claimed that his equipment had been damaged whilst in the Playing Field and that if this happened again he would charge the Parish Council for the damage. It was noted that as a contractor he was responsible for the security of his own equipment. It was agreed that mole catching should be suspended until after the new play equipment had been installed. The Clerk noted that the electricity cabinet in the Playing Field still needed securing. **Action: The Chairman.**

New Play Equipment: The offer of the grant from Viridor Credits had been accepted and payment of the Contributing Third Party Payment of £5,897.60 had been made and acknowledged. For the installation of the play equipment to begin in March/April an order would need to be made at the Parish Council meeting on January 13th. The Chairman had visited various playgrounds where equipment from the three contractors had been installed and had distributed photographs by e-mail to Councillors. It was agreed to place details of the equipment offered by each company on the Parish Council website and ask people respond with their views. It was also agreed to place laminated copies of the images in the Playing Field on the weekend of December 12th and 13th between 1.30pm and 3.00pm so anyone with limited internet access could see details of the proposed equipment, with members of the Working Party available to answer questions. Details of guarantees for the new equipment would also be available on the website and as laminated copies. The Clerk to advertise this on the Batcombe Facebook page and to provide details for an e-mail to parents. **Action: The Clerk.**

It was also agreed to hold a meeting of the Working Party at 2.00pm on Saturday December 19th to consider the responses obtained and any issues with any of the quotes that need to be dealt with before making an order. A special meeting of the Working Party with all Parish Councillors would then be held on December 30th to make a recommendation to the Parish Council on which quote to accept. It was agreed to include the Chairman on the Working Party. The Clerk to e-mail Councillors with details of the dates agreed. **Action: The Clerk.**

It was noted that the cricket net would need refurbishing and the hedge laying at a later date, and that the Cricket Club had offered some money towards the Playing Field improvements. The District Councillor left the meeting at this point.

4983 – Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2020/2296/HSE Erection of two storey rear extension, rear facing replacement dormer and single storey rear extension. Refurbishment of existing house including wall treatment, windows and doors, new roof covering and landscaping. Greenacres, Baileys Lane, Westcombe – Householder Application.

It was noted that Greenacres was previously known as Cedar Lodge and the original small bungalow had already been significantly extended in 2004. Concerns were raised over the cladding on the building and the resulting visual impact of a property not in character with the neighbouring properties in Westcombe and with the increase in the footprint of the property which included covered decking extending beyond the property. The Parish Council decided to recommend refusal on the grounds of design and appearance and the impact on public visual amenity.

Planning Application No: 2020/2297/HSE Erection of a detached garage. Greenacres, Baileys Lane, Westcombe – Householder Application. Concerns were raised that the garage was of a different style to the house and whether a triple garage was appropriate. It was noted that it was very close to the road and was very high with the tower on top and would have an impact on houses opposite and would be better positioned behind the house. It was felt the garage should be considered in connection with the extension of the house. The Parish Council agreed to recommend refusal on the grounds of the overbearing nature of the proposal and the impact on the public visual amenity. It was also agreed to add an observation that the Council felt that both applications should be considered together.

Given the full Agenda for January with the play equipment decision to be made, it was suggested that the planning agents wishing to be speak about an application for a Para 79 house at Valley View Farm be asked to come to the February meeting instead. **Action: The Clerk.**

Planning Application Updates:

The application for the variation on conditions for the planning permission for works to the lower barn at Lower Eastcombe Farm had been approved. The District Council had no objection to the trees works at the Parsonage, which included the felling of multiple Ash trees infected with Ash dieback; the felling of the Goat Willow at 6, Kale Street; and to the felling of the three Ash trees with Ash dieback at Batcombe House. The District Council also had no objection to the felling of the Beech tree at the Old Barn, although the Parish Council had recommended refusal. The Clerk to ask for the reason for rejecting the Parish Council's recommendation. **Action: The Clerk.**

4984 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2022: The budget for the year ending 31st March 2022 and the forecast for the years 2021-2024 produced for the previous month's meeting were distributed with the Agenda. There were no changes to the budget except to note that a 2% increase in the Clerk's salary may have been a bit optimistic in light of the public sector pay freeze that had been announced.

The budget had been prepared on the assumption that the play equipment would be purchased in the current year. On this basis the budget predicted a surplus of £1,940 if the precept was unchanged at £9,950. This would leave £11,485 in the Parish Council's funds at the end of 2021/22. Given that around £1,000 of this would be earmarked for the allotments, this left the Parish Council with reserves that were above the higher limit suggested by SALC (that a parish council's reserves should be between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of its precept) which would allow some flexibility to spend more of the Parish Council's own money on the Playing Field if required.

A decision on the level of the precept was deferred until the January meeting when the Parish Council would have more details of the cost of the new play equipment and should know what the tax base for 2021/22 was. As the deadline for submitting our precept request was only two days after the January meeting the Clerk was authorised to make a decision on the precept after consulting available Parish Councillors is for any reason the Parish Council could not meet on January 13th.

4985 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £160.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in the Playing Field in November.
- £50.00 E Clarke – Catching 2 moles in the Playing Field.

4986 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: It was noted that the SALC AGM would take place on Wednesday 16th December and would be online.

Westcombe Telephone Kiosk – A proposal to use the kiosk as a lending library had been received and it was agreed to discuss this at the next meeting.

Water Resilience – The Chairman had received information from the District Councillor regarding applying for a grant for a water resilience plan and would circulate this to Councillors and would talk to the District Council regarding making an application. **Action: The Chairman.**

Press and Social Media Policies – It was agreed to discuss these policies at the March meeting.

4987 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 13th January 2020 at 7.30pm via Zoom.