

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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**Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.**

**Present - Councillors:** Janet Jones – Chair, Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher, Clare Kingston, Tom Price and Ian Sage.

**Also Present:** The Clerk – Rob Sage and eight members of the public.

**5586 – Election of Chair and Chair’s Acceptance of Office:** Janet Jones was proposed by Peter Glaisher and seconded by Clare Kingston. There being no other nominations, Janet was duly elected as Chair. The Chair signed her Acceptance of Office.

**5587 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence:** None.

**5588 – Declarations of Interest:** None.

**5589 – Election of Vice Chairman:** Peter Glaisher was proposed by Janet Jones, seconded by Bryony Harling and elected as Vice Chairman.

**5590 – Public Participation:** None.

**5591 – Planning Application:** Planning Application 2024/0590/FUL – Installation of solar arrays. Lower Eastcombe Farm, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe – Full Application. The application was for seven rows of solar panels with twenty panels in each row to be located in the field to the south west of Lower Eastcombe Farm. The Chair and Peter Glaisher had visited the site and noted that the field could be seen from fields on Valley View Farm but otherwise was not visible to public view. Concerns were expressed about a precedent being created. The applicant stated that the arrays were not in the Conservation Area and were small for personal use. Concerns were expressed about the use of agricultural land for solar arrays. The applicant noted that the building roofs at Lower Eastcombe Farm were unsuitable for solar panels. As there were no planning reasons to object to the application, the Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

**Planning Application Updates:** The applications to fell a Willow tree at Provis and a Birch tree at Sunnyside had been approved. As had the applications to thin a limb of a Cedar tree at Rockwells House; to pollard a Goat Willow at Netherlea; and to fell a Cypress at Lower Farm.

The Enforcement Officer had informed the owners of Mill Cottage that they should apply for planning permission for the skylight installed, but had informed the Chair that if they did not apply no action would be taken as the skylight was considered to be permitted development. It was felt that the Enforcement Officer had missed the fact that Mill Cottage was in the Conservation Area. The Chair volunteered to speak to the Enforcement Officer.

Concerns were raised about the skip at the top of Mill Lane that was felt to be damaging the kerb and needed lights at night as it was close to the road. The Clerk to write to the owners. Concerns were also raised about the driving of the workers at Mill Cottage as they left work.

**5592 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024** were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**5593 – Matters Arising:** Allotments – The Clerk stated that there was one vacant allotment and the allotment holder who had yet to pay for the two allotments he held had been given a month to pay. The rent for the lease of the allotments field was due and the Clerk noted that the lease was due for renewal in 2025 and the Parish Council would have to consider whether to continue with the lease given that there were effectively only four allotment holders. The question of whether polytunnels on the allotments required planning permission was raised and it was confirmed that this was not required.

**5594 – Somerset Councillor’s Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN):** No report had been received from the Somerset Councillor.

Jayne Cox reported on the LCN meeting held on April 29<sup>th</sup> in Croscombe Village Hall. Jayne stated that the same issues – housing and enforcement of planning – were brought up again and the police had not attended for the third meeting. Jayne felt that there was no positive feedback and it was not clear if the Somerset Council were listening to what was being said at the LCN. The next meeting would be the AGM at Shape Mendip.

Peter Glaisher reported on the latest meeting of the LCN Highways and Traffic Subgroup which he felt was more positive with parishes working together to address issues such as HGVs, so the problem was not just pushed onto the next village, and drains, so that it was not just individual drains being looked at in isolation but the issues of drains as a whole. Peter noted that the Highways Steward was not discussed at this meeting. Peter would receive an e-mail with the Agenda for the next meeting of the Subgroup before the meeting.

It was agreed to write a letter to Philip Ham, the Chair of the Shepton LCN, expressing the Parish Council’s concern that the LCN involved a lot of talk and little action. A draft letter to be circulated.

**5595 – Tourist Levy:** It had been agreed at the last meeting to discuss the setting up of a Working Party to consider how a levy on tourist accommodation would work. Tom Price was willing to be a member of the Working Party. Tim Chater to be asked if he would chair it. It was noted that the idea needed the support of the pub. There were questions over who would decide where the money would be spent and where the money would be held. The Clerk to check if the Parish Council can hold funds for a tourist levy.

**5596 – Footpaths and Highways:** Jayne Cox reported a large amount of dog poo on Walters’ Lane. The hedge at Laburnum Cottage in Westcombe had been cut back. The gates between land belonging to landowners off Holly Hill had been washed away. The Clerk was asked to write to the landowners.

**5597 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report:** The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June. The Clerk reported that the moles had moved on without the need to employ the molecatcher. Clare Kingston stated that she would paint the swings when the weather improved.

**5598 - Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters:** Staffing Committee – Janet Jones, Peter Glaisher and Bryony Harling volunteered to continue as members of the Staffing Committee. The Chair would conduct an annual review with the Clerk, which had been overlooked in previous years.

Additional Hours - the Clerk reported that he had worked 14 hours less than he was paid for in the year 2023/24, although these had already been made up with extra hours worked in April.

**5599 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives:** It was agreed that Jayne Cox should continue as the Village Hall Representative and that the Clerk should continue as the Heritage Room Representative.

**5600 – Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters:** It was agreed that Financial Regulations be reviewed at the June meeting; Social Media Policy and policy for dealing with the press at the July meeting; complaints procedure at the September meeting; Emergency Plan at the October meeting; budget to be considered at the November meeting; membership of other bodies to be reviewed at the December meeting; Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February meeting; and the Schedule of Assets, Risk Management Policy and insurance cover to be reviewed at the March meeting in time for the preparation of the Annual Report and renewal of the insurance.

**5601 – Insurance Renewal:** The Parish Council's insurance was due for renewal on June 1<sup>st</sup> and the Council was two years into a three-year long-term agreement with Aviva Insurance organised via our insurance brokers (formerly known as BHIB Ltd but now Clear Councils, a trading style of Clear Insurance Management Limited). The insurance premium was £624.94, a reduction of £2.60 on the previous year's premium.

**5602 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024:** The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 was verified by the Chair and reported to the Council.

A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas and the Clerk went briefly through the details. Receipts were £1,392 more than the budgeted figure because the VAT claim for £1,003 (which included the VAT on the cricket mat and nets, the new benches, the strimmer and the hedge laying) was made in 2023/24 rather than the previous year and because of the unbudgeted contributions to the Coronation mugs and the electricity for the Playing Field. The allotments rent was £115 less than the full £350 due to the vacant allotments and the fact that two allotments had not been paid for by the end of the financial year.

Playing Field expenditure was £991 less than budgeted, as the maintenance budget was largely unspent and the cost of the electricity supply was less than anticipated following a refund from SSE at the start of the year. The grass cutting was £70 less than budgeted, while the water supply was £50 more than budgeted (following a leak) and the annual inspection £42 more than budgeted (due to the purchase of an inspection template).

The expenditure on Administration was £102 more than budgeted, due to a higher than expected increase in the Clerk's salary. Most other items were close to budget, although the increase in the Clerk's salary was balanced by less spent on training and there being no bank custody fee.

The expenditure on Grants was as budgeted. Other expenditure was £189 more than budgeted due to the cost of the Coronation mugs, which was balanced by the fact that nothing had been spent on maintenance of the allotments or the strimmer.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and other items were given on the back of the Financial Statement. Although only £235 of allotments rent was received, the fact that there was no expenditure on maintenance meant that there was a £15 surplus on the allotment funds at the end of the year compared to a £56 deficit the year before. This left £985 of allotments money at the end of the year of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May.

The net result of the variations against the budget outlined above was a surplus of £2,016 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £75. This was largely due to the VAT claim, the underspend on maintenance in the Playing Field and the fact that the cost of the electricity supply for the Playing Field was less than expected. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £12,657 in its funds, £3,276 less than anticipated in the budget. This was a result of spending available funds on the Playing Field in 2022/23 which meant that Parish Council funds

at the start of the year were lower than when the budget had been set. £985 was set aside for the allotments and £77 for new notice boards, meaning that the Parish Council has funds totalling £11,595 that were not earmarked for specific items. This meant that the Parish Council had sufficient reserves to cover the cost of a by-election during the coming year. SALC recommended that a Parish Council had reserves of between one and two-thirds of its precept, which with the current precept meant the reserves should be between £3,360 and £6,720.

The Clerk noted that the internal auditor, Griff Williams, was able and willing to undertake the audit again this year, which needed to be completed by the June meeting of the Parish Council.

**5603 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025:** An updated projection on this year’s budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that he had received notification from the Somerset Council that they had paid the 2024/25 precept of £10,075. This had been increased from the budgeted figure as the increased tax base meant that there would be no increase in the Council Tax if the precept was increased by £150. The VAT repayment of £165.84 had also been received. The projection assumed one vacant allotment.

With regard to payments, most items were expected to be as budgeted. The grass cutting was likely to be less than budgeted as there had been no increase in the price per cut. The Westcombe notice board was being refurbished instead of replaced and so the cost was likely to be less than budgeted. Overall, the projection was for a deficit of £212 instead of the budgeted deficit of £760 – largely as a result of the increased precept and lower than budgeted cost of the grass cutting. This would give funds of £12,445 at the end of the year of which around £1,000 would be earmarked for the allotments.

**5604 - Authorisation of Payments:** Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £180.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in April).
- £220.00 T & EA Hollis – Annual rent of the allotments field.
- £624.94 Clear Insurance Management Ltd – Insurance Premium.
- £15.00 Somerset Playing Fields Association – Subscription.
- £25.00 Somerset Association of Local Councils Ltd – Replacement cheque.

**5605 – Other Business** – matters of information only. There was an issue with ivy on the corner by the telephone kiosk in Westcombe. There was a request to turn the water on in the Playing Field. The attempted theft at the milk station was noted. It was suggested that an advert be placed in the magazine for the wood from the Playing Field – it was noted that this was core wood rather than logs and would need to be sawn up by whoever purchased it. The Clerk was asked to write to Bruno Cristofoli and Richard Calver thanking them for their contributions to the Annual Parish Meeting. The box hedge in the War Memorial Garden needed cutting back or replacing. It was suggested that the War Memorial Garden should go on the next Agenda to consider raising funds to redo it. It was noted that the Horticultural Society had provided funding for someone to deal with the hedge at the church. Jayne Cox had received an offer of £50 for the old pedestrian gate from the Playing Field and it was suggested advertising it to see if a higher offer might be forthcoming.

**5606 - Dates of Future Meetings:** The following dates were agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council during the coming year, mostly on the first Wednesday of each month:

5 <sup>th</sup> June	3 <sup>rd</sup> July	7 <sup>th</sup> August	4 <sup>th</sup> September	2 <sup>nd</sup> October	6 <sup>th</sup> November
4 <sup>th</sup> December	8 <sup>th</sup> January	5 <sup>th</sup> February	5 <sup>th</sup> March	2 <sup>nd</sup> April	7 <sup>th</sup> May

The August meeting would only be held if there were planning applications to consider. The date in April would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The Council to meet at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year.