

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th November 2018 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

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

4612 – Apologies for Absence: Chris Wildridge and Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor.

4613 – Declarations of Interest: None.

4614 – Public Participation: None.

4615 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd October 2018. These were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4616 – Matters Arising: 1918 Armistice Commemoration – The Clerk reported that the wreath had been purchased and that Chris Wildridge had agreed to lay the wreath. Justin Witcombe reported that a beacon would be lit at Pennysquare Barn on the evening of Remembrance Sunday and that he had been asked to light the beacon and look after it.

4617 – District and County Councillors' Reports: None.

4618 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that the allotment rents were due on November 1st and that two had been paid so far. Outstanding payments to be discussed at the next meeting. There were currently two vacant allotments. It was agreed to ask Gary Butler to cut the inside of the allotments field hedge as he had done in previous years. The owners of the field had the new lease that had been drawn up and it would need to be signed by the Parish Council when it had been returned.

4619 – Emergency Plan: The Clerk was updating the Emergency Plan with the names of those who had volunteered to help in an Emergency. The Community Emergency Management Team would co-ordinate the response to an emergency and it had previously been agreed that this Team should consist of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Clerk and one other who did not have to be a member of the Parish Council. Two suggestions were made as to who this fourth member of the Team should be. Justin Witcombe noted the names of two further volunteers who had offered to help in an emergency and reported that plans were being made to raise funds for a defibrillator.

4622 – Footpaths and Highways: As anticipated, given that the County Council had reduced the pre-salting network from 23 to 16 routes to save money, Batcombe not been reinstated on the pre-salting network. In addition, Evercreech had been removed as well, which meant that the Bruton-Evercreech road and the Evercreech-Westcombe road would not be salted this winter.

Justin Witcombe reported that he had received an offer of bins that could be used for salt bags. The Clerk to check with Somerset Highways as to whether these could be placed on the road verges. It was noted that Somerset Highways were no longer offering free salt bags and these had to be purchased at £4.75 each. It was noted that Bruno Cristofoli had snowplough but that Somerset Highways had not serviced it and so it could not be used in last winter's snow. The Clerk to check that it was able to be used in the coming winter. The Clerk was also asked to check with the County Council as to what a Parish Council could do, such as combining with other local parish councils to buy a salting machine that could be towed behind a 4x4 vehicle. A copy of the letter would go to the County Councillor. The Chairman offered to contact neighbouring Parish Councils affected by the change in winter service to ask what actions they might themselves consider taking.

The road past the Round House opposite Frys Lane had been closed due to subsidence under the road and the house, but the road had since been repaired and re-opened.

Another HGV had got stuck on Holly Hill and the police had to be called as the driver was in danger of doing some serious damage as he tried to extricate himself. Mary Comley had been in contact with the new technician at Somerset Highways responsible for No HGVs signs who was more optimistic about the provision of a No HGV sign at the Hedgestocks crossroads. The Council indicated that it would like signs at Hedgestocks and also on the Lodge Road and at Cranmore and discussed whether an alternative method of providing a sign could be considered if no action was taken by Somerset Highways.

4621 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The molecatcher had caught five moles in the Playing Field and there were currently no molehills. The molecatcher would monitor the Playing Field for further signs of moles.

The standing charge for the supply of electricity to the Playing Field had increased from 19.61p per day to 42.42p per day. As the Council used very little electricity this meant electricity bills would double. The Clerk would investigate the possibility of reducing the rate by entering into a contract with Southern Electric or another supplier and report back to the next meeting.

New Play Equipment – All three play equipment companies had now provided quotes for similar pieces of equipment (replacing the existing multi-play with a smaller multi-play and an accessible roundabout suitable for wheelchair use, and the additional of a basket seat swing and a pair of goals with basketball hoops). It was suggested that the Working Party should meet to consider the quotes and the next stage in the process. There would be a Bingo Evening to raise money for the equipment on Saturday December 1st and Clare Kingston asked for help with running the evening. Clare stated that she would be distributing a flyer for the Bingo Evening around the parish.

Members of the public present expressed concern at the cost of the new play equipment (the quotes ranged from £35,000 to £55,000) and why this was necessary only five years after the installation of the previous equipment. It was noted that the legs of the multi-play equipment were rotting and it would only be usable for a year or so. It was also noted that much of the cost was due to the required safety surfacing. The Clerk was asked to put an item in the parish magazine explaining the need to replace the equipment.

4622 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2018/2528/TCA Works to a tree in a conservation area – T1 Eucalyptus (E1) – Fell. Fir Tree Cottage, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a CA. The Eucalyptus was too large for a small garden and showing signs of disease and so the Parish Council recommended approval.

Planning Application No: 2018/2681/TCA Proposed works to trees in a conservation area – T1 Sycamore – Crown Lift to 25 feet. T2 – Bay – Fell. T3 and T4 – Reduce on top x 1.5-2 metres. Elm House, Kale Street, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a CA. The neighbours noted that the Sycamore was a large tree overhanging their garden and undermining their wall and they would welcome any reduction in its size. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval of the tree works.

Planning Application Updates: The District Council’s Tree Officer had apologised for “some hiccups in Office routines” which meant that not all consultations had been sent out recently and promised that the Parish Council would receive consultations for works on protected trees in future.

4623 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: Mary Comley reported to the meeting that she had checked the bank reconciliation prepared by the Clerk for the quarter to 30th September.

An update on the budget had been enclosed with the Agendas, and this showed the accounts for the previous year, the budget for the current year, receipts and payments to date in the current year and a projection for this year based on the receipts and payment to date. The Clerk reported that total receipts for the year were projected to be approximately £90 less than the budgeted figure because there were likely to be two vacant allotments in November and the VAT reclaimed had been less than expected.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was likely to be £2,000 less than budgeted as the £2,000 budgeted for repair of the multi-play might not be spent if it was decided to replace the play equipment (and if the repairs were undertaken they might be deferred to next year). Grass cutting and trimming included £110 for hedge cutting and was likely to be around £200 more than budgeted due to the change of contractor. Maintenance up to 31st October consisted of £60 for the molecatcher and £120 for the removal of the stump. Overall maintenance was likely to be around £200 less than budgeted because no play bark was purchased this year.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was likely to be £50 more than the budgeted figure because of the cost of two encrypted flash drives to back up the Council laptop, which had not been budgeted for. The projection for the expenditure on Other items was £425 less than budgeted because the new contractor did not charge separately for cutting the grass around the telephone box and £400 had been budgeted for the Armistice 100 Commemoration but the Council had only spent £41.

If the £2,000 budgeted for the repair of the multi-play was not spent this year, there would be a surplus of £1,400 instead of the budgeted deficit of £1,005. Together with the healthier position at the start of the year this meant that the projected funds at the end of the year were around £8,950 – £3,550 better than expected when the budget was made. However, this was only because nothing was likely to have been spent on the play equipment this year – but it would be needed next year. The Clerk noted that around £1,000 of the figure would be earmarked for the allotments and £572 for new play equipment.

4624 – Budget and Precept 2019/20: A budget for the year ending 31st March 2020 and a forecast for the years 2018-2022 had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk noted that the next Parish Council election would take place in 2019 and the Council needed to budget to have sufficient reserves to pay for a contested election as well as other contingencies such as a by-election. The figure of £1,200 for the cost of the election was an estimate based on the fact that the last contested election eleven years previously cost £933.

The VAT refund would be around £80 as little major works have been undertaken during the current year and the allotment rent would also be less than £350 if one or more allotments remained vacant.

The cost of the grass cutting would depend on the quotes to be obtained, but the budget included a similar cost to that projected for the current and a figure of £750 for equipment maintenance. If the Council decided to replace most of the equipment in the Playing Field this would probably not be needed. The Parish Council had previously decided to budget £4,000 over two years for repairs to the multi-play equipment. If this equipment was replaced the £4,000 could be put towards the cost of the new equipment along with the £572 raised at last year's Bingo evening.

Assuming that the Council spent £4,572 on new play equipment and had a contested election that cost around £1,200 then there would be a deficit on the year of £4,200 – assuming a precept of £9,750. This would leave £4,740 in the Council's funds at the end of 2019/20. Given that around £900 of this would be earmarked for the allotments, this would leave the Council with reserves around the lower limit suggested by SALC. This assumes that the money obtained from fundraising and grants was sufficient to cover the cost of what the Council decided to do in the Playing Field.

It was decided to make a decision on the budget in principle at the December meeting and to make a final decision on the precept at the January meeting when the tax base should be known.

4625 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £80.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in October.
- £100.00 Mrs E E Clarke – Five moles caught in the Playing Field.
- £42.80 SSE – Electricity for Playing Field (July to October).

4626 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: It was reported that the statue by the footpath along the river at the bottom of Mill Lane had been vandalised. A large pothole on the side of the road to Bruton just past the Hedgestocks crossroads was reported.

The Clerk noted that the Parish Council would have been in existence for 125 years in 2019 and offered to do a presentation on the history of the parish over the last 125 years using photographs from the Heritage Room at the Annual Meeting in April. This was felt to be a good idea and would be formally discussed at the next meeting.

4627 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 5th December 2018 at 7.30pm in the Old School Rooms, Batcombe.

John Sommer
05/12/18