

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 9th January 2019 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, Dick Skidmore – District Councillor, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor and four members of the public.

4656 – Apologies for Absence: Chris Wildridge, Ian Sage and Wiff Cox.

4657 – Declarations of Interest: Jayne Cox declared an interest in the authorisation of the Clerk's salary and expenses as a relative of the Clerk. John Sommer declared an interest in the notification of the Tree Preservation Order.

4658 – Public Participation: Hennie Gosling reported that the sewage system at Ash Tree Cottages was broken and leaking. Justin Witcombe stated that the residents of Ash Tree Cottages had reported the problem to Hastoe Housing and to the Environmental Department at Mendip District Council. The District Councillor promised to chase up the issue with the appropriate officer in Mendip.

Members of the public present enquired about the planning application for affordable housing in Westcombe and the Chairman left the room while this was discussed. The Clerk noted that the application had been considered at an extraordinary meeting on January 2nd and that the letter distributed to residents informing them that the application would be considered on January 9th had not come from the Council and contained a number of errors. Asked why the Council had felt it necessary to call an extraordinary meeting, the Clerk noted that in the absence of the Chairman there were only three Councillors present and so there had been a danger of the Council being inquorate.

4659 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 5th December and 19th December 2018. These were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4660 – Matters Arising: Shindig Weekender Licence Application – Chris Wildridge had offered to attend the hearing regarding the licence application for the music festival on the Parish Council's behalf and this was agreed.

Defibrillators – Justin Witcombe reported that the group interested in raising funds to provide defibrillators in Batcombe and Westcombe had decided to act independently of the Parish Council, although they might ask the Parish Council to take on the maintenance of the defibrillators at a later date. Every four years the batteries and pads would need to be replaced and it was estimated that overall the maintenance would cost an average of £50-£60 a year per machine.

4661 – District and County Councillors' Reports: The District Councillor felt that the Parish Council had handled the extraordinary meeting about the affordable housing, which had been a difficult meeting, to the best of their ability. He noted that it was a rare occasion

when someone thanks those involved in public service as they need to be involved to understand a complex system. He added that the District Council was carrying on. The enforcement team were now up to strength and the planning team would be soon, but concerns about unitary status were having a negative effect.

The County Councillor reported that the retention of business rates would bring in £7 million across the county of which the County Council would see £1 - £1½ million. With a budget of £320 million this would not go far. He also noted that the public health settlement for Somerset had been reduced to £35 per head while the national average was £57 per head. The County Council had managed to balance the budget by making cuts of £15 million.

4662 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that only three allotment rents had been paid although two other allotment holders had promised to pay. A third allotment holder who rented two allotments wanted a guarantee that there would be no future problems with the water, but the Council could not guarantee this as the supply was a spring which also supplied a farm and could be affected by another drought. The number of vacant allotments raised a question about the long-term viability of the allotments. The Council decided to look at this again at the next meeting and asked the Clerk to advertise the allotments in the parish magazine and one notice boards.

4663 – Footpaths and Highways: The promised options available to the Parish Council regarding our paying for the pre-salting of the road had not been received from Somerset Highways. The Clerk to chase this up. Two one-ton dumpy bags of salt offered by Somerset Highways had been delivered – one at the top of Mill Lane and one on Hincombe Hill. The Clerk had been contacted by a resident who needed to get out of the village twice a week for cancer treatment and was concerned about being able to do so in icy weather. Justin Witcombe offered to visit the resident and see what could be done to help.

Justin Witcombe reported that a road sweeper had come through the village that day. Somerset Highways to be asked to ensure that the gulleys are clear.

The No HGV signs had been placed on the Hedgestocks crossroads and Mary Comley was thanked for chasing up Somerset Highways over this. Mary to thank Somerset Highways for their swift action.

4664 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: There were still no signs of molehills in the Playing Field. Someone had turned on the water in the Playing Field – probably children who know where the stopcock was. The new electricity contract was in place.

Grass Cutting Contract - The three quotes had been obtained for cutting the grass in the Playing Field and around the telephone kiosk. The Parish Council decided to continue with the services of Dominic Conway who had taken over the contract mid-season.

New Play Equipment – The members of the Working Party had been unable to meet before Christmas and hoped to do so before the next meeting in February.

4665 – Planning Applications: There were none to consider.

Planning Application Updates: A Tree Preservation Order had been placed on the tree on the site for affordable housing on Westcombe Stables Lane and the District Council had no objections to the proposed tree works at either Elm House on Kale Street or Little Court on Gold Hill.

The following alterations to the planning permission for the extension at Mole Cottage had been granted as non-material amendments: “alteration to the rear elevation to change a large picture window and separate external glazed door to an integrated steel framed glazed screen and double doors to the external courtyard”; and “proposed roof finishes including the green roof and standing seam zinc roofing is to be replaced with lead roofs”. Approval of details reserved by conditions 4-7 on this permission had also been given.

4666 – Review of the Connection with External Bodies - The Council’s Membership of the Somerset Association of Local Councils and the Clerk’s Membership of the Society of Local Council Clerks. The Clerk noted that membership of both of these bodies was very helpful in providing information and advice on matters relating to the work of the Parish Council and it was agreed to continue with membership of SALC and to pay for the Clerk’s membership of the SLCC.

4667 – Budget and Precept 2019/20: The proposed budget and precept for 2019/2020 had been considered at the previous two meetings and a decision deferred until the tax base for Batcombe was known. [The tax base being the number of Band D equivalent properties in Batcombe when taking into account the number of empty properties, various discounts (including 25% for single people) and the weighting of the different bands above and below Band D.]

The Clerk reported that Batcombe’s tax base for 2018/19 would be 215.2, which when revised for a 2% non-collection rate becomes 210.9. The revised tax base for 2018/19 was 201.59 and a higher tax base meant that the same increase in precept would produce a lower increase in Council Tax. The Council therefore agreed, as suggested in the budget, to increase its precept by £550 to £9,750 (an increase of 5.98%). This would result in a Band D property with no discounts paying £46-23 towards the precept, an increase of 4.12% in the component of Council Tax going to the Parish Council.

4668 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £75.00 Gary Butler – Cutting back the willow structure in the Playing Field.
- £996.72 The Clerk – Salary for 3rd Quarter.
- £140.77 The Clerk – Expenses for 3rd Quarter. (The total included £41 for the poppy wreath laid at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday.)

4669 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The Clerk reported that he had been informed by a resident with links to Bruton Town Council that the Town Council had recently considered an application for a hotel in Bruton High Street noted that had proposed to deal with the issue of car parking by providing a valet car parking service with cars being parked at Batcombe. Apparently this had not been considered a practical solution.

4670 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th February 2019 at 7.30pm in the Old School Rooms, Batcombe.

John Sommer
06/02/2019