

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 5th June 2019 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, the District Councillor – Michael Gay (from item 4736) and one member of the public.

4734 – Apologies for Absence: Apologies had been received from Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, the County Councillor and from Michael Gay, the District Councillor who expected to be late.

4735 – Declarations of Interest: David Stevens declared an interest in item 4748 – Annual Grants from the Parish Council – as a volunteer for the Citizens Advice Bureau. Justin Witcombe declared an interest in the same item as a member of the Village Hall Trust and in item 4739 – Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages as a resident of the cottages.

4736 – Public Participation: Chris Wildridge asked that item 4716 of the Minutes of the last meeting be amended to reflect his understanding of what had been said about how quickly a member of the public could expect a response after contacting the Council.

Chris Wildridge expressed concern that the issue of the sewage treatment plan at Ash Tree Cottages was not an Agenda item. Justin Witcombe stated that the issue was in hand and that he had forwarded a copy of correspondence from Hastoes showing that they were aware of the problem and were planning to deal with it. (The problem was that the outflow pipe had silted up causing the treatment plant to back up and not work properly. Hastoes will replace the outflow pipe and overhaul the treatment plant and hoped this would solve the problem. If not, they would need to replace the plant.) The Chairman stated that the residents of Ash Tree Cottages felt that process was being made. Justin Witcombe stated that a copy of the e-mail had been forwarded to the new District Councillor. The District Councillor arrived at this point and promised to take the matter forward with Hastoes.

Chris Wildridge expressed concern that the lack of response from Somerset Highways to the request for details of the options the Parish Council had to undertake its own salting of the road through Batcombe had not been an item on the Agendas of the previous two meetings. It was noted that this was included in item 4741 of the current Agenda.

4737 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 8th May 2019. These were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4738 – Matters Arising: Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages – this had been covered under Public Participation (item 4736 above). Electricity Network Upgrade. This had gone very smoothly and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks had taken great efforts explain what was happening and cause the minimum of disruption. The Clerk to write to SSEN and thank them.

4739 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: The District Councillor stated that it was a great honour to be District Councillor and intended to attend Parish Council meetings and to work with residents and businesses. He was currently in training and would then sit on the Audit Committee and the Scrutiny Committee and would shadow the Cabinet member for Transformation. The Scrutiny Committee had quarterly meetings and in August would call in Connecting Devon and Somerset regarding the provision of high-speed broadband. He would welcome and questions the Parish Council had and it was suggested that this be an Agenda item for the next meeting.

Asked to explain the terms he had used, he noted that the idea of Transformation was to change procedures to save money without reducing performance. Scrutiny looks at areas of the Council’s working independently of the Cabinet, and Audit checks that the outcome of plans are being met. Asked if Mendip’s budget would stay in the black, he stated that the Government cuts to Council funding meant that this would not be possible over the next four years, although Mendip was in a better position than the County Council. The challenge for the District Council was to provide services without going into debt.

4740 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that three people from Wanstrow had rented vacant allotments at a reduced rent of £20 for the remainder of this year, which left only one vacant allotment. Justin Witcombe indicated that he knew someone who might be interested in the vacant allotment. Michael Gay was thanked for promoting the allotments in Wanstrow and Justin was thanked for the work he had done tidying up the former compost heap and the vacant allotments.

4741 – Footpaths and Highways: A copy of the map giving details of the rights of way in the parish was taken to be placed in The Three Horseshoes. The Clerk would investigate the possibility of placing a map on the Parish Council website and whether there were still copies of the map promoting some of the footpaths in the parish.

Ian Sage reported a problem during the recent Shindig music festival with festival goers who had parked in Portway Hill and then walked in the dark across fields without footpaths to get to the festival. After this was reported security from the festival had come out to investigate. Concerns to be reported to the Shindig organisers and to South Somerset District Council, with regarding to people walking through crops, leaving litter behind and potentially leaving gates open.

It was noted that the reduction in the pre-salting network was being reviewed over the summer and that our County Councillor had promised to chase up Somerset Highways with regards to the options that the Parish Council has in doing its own salting. The District Councillor stated that a petition could be used to obtain time with the portfolio holder at the County Council and it was noted that, when he was Chairman, Chris Wildridge had had a meeting with the portfolio holder but nothing had come of this. It was felt that all options had been tried, but the County Councillor would be asked to maintain the pressure on the County Council and on David Peake, the officer who had not responded to the request for options. It was also suggested that the Parish Council could ask for some free bags of salt given the particular situation of the village.

4742 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June. Justin Witcombe reported seeing an adult using the zip wire.

The Playing Field Working Party would be meeting on June 11th to consider fundraising for the new play equipment. David Stevens and Peter Glaisher offered to approach local

companies to see if they would be willing to sponsor the new equipment. The Chairman offered to investigate the possibility of a horse ride to raise money. It was noted that the profits on the teas at the Open Gardens at Batcombe House would be split between the new play equipment and the defibrillators.

4743 – Planning Applications: Planning Application 2018/0450/FUL – Removal of caravan adjacent to outbuilding and conversion of outbuilding to create staff accommodation, single storey extension to outbuilding as amended by revised drawings received on 29 April 2019. The Three Horseshoes, Batcombe – Full Application. The applicant had given his apologies for not being able to attend the meeting. The Parish Council had considered the original application in April 2018 and had recommended approval with a request for a condition that the accommodation should be ancillary to the pub (i.e. not be allowed to be sold or occupied separately). The amended drawings showed a different internal layout and a pitched roof on most of the extension to match that on the outbuilding. The Parish Council agreed to repeat its recommendation for approval with a condition that the accommodation be ancillary to the pub.

Planning Application 2019/1073/FUL – Remove existing derelict building and replace with new agricultural store. Lower Farm, Horsehill Lane, Batcombe – Full Application. The applicant had given his apologies for not being able to attend the meeting. The application was to remove the existing shed in the orchard opposite Lower Farm and replace it with a new larger implement store. There were no objections to the proposal and the Parish Council recommended approval.

Planning Application 2019/1136/HSE – Erection of a rear single storey extension. Cherry Tree Cottage, Batcombe BA4 6HD – Householder Application. Cherry Tree Cottage was the cottage next to Boords Farm and a letter of support for the application had been received from the owner of Boords Farm, provided that the boundary wall between the properties was retained or repaired. The Parish Council recommended approval with the addition of a note regarding the wall.

Planning Application Updates: The Clerk reported that there had been no objection from the District Council to the pollarding of the Maple tree at South View on Kale Street.

The Clerk also reported that the conversion of a storage building at the entrance to Batcombe Vale Farm to a single residential unit had been deemed to be permitted development under the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. The Parish Council was not consulted on applications under this Order and the District Council could only object on the grounds of contaminated land or inadequate access.

4744 – Review of Financial Regulations: Standing Orders require the Parish Council's Financial Regulations to be reviewed annually. It was agreed that no changes were needed to the Financial Regulations or to the various figures in the Regulations that were set by the Parish Council.

4745 – Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control, Internal Auditor's Report and Certificate of Exemption from a Limited Assurance Review: The Clerk reported his belief that the Council's system of internal control was more than sufficient for a small Parish Council. The details were given in the Financial Regulations and included the budgetary process, the authorisation of all payments by the Council, the signing of cheques at Council meetings by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the internal audit.

Griff Williams was thanked for undertaking the role of Internal Auditor. Copies of the Internal Auditor's Report had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Internal Auditor had no recommendations to make to the Council.

Parish Councils whose annual income and expenditure were both less than £25,000 no longer had to send the Annual Return to the external auditor provided that they sent a certificate of exemption and published the Annual Return on their website by July 2nd. It was agreed that the Parish Council met the requirements for exemption and the certificate was signed by the Chairman.

4746 – Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2018//19: Copies of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return - the Annual Governance Statement - had been enclosed with the Agendas. Approval of the Annual Governance Statement was agreed and the Statement was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk.

4747 – Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2018/19: Copies of Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return – the Statement of Accounts – had been enclosed with the Agendas, along with a copy of the Financial Statements, considered at the previous meeting, showing how the figures in the Statement of Accounts had been derived. Approval of the Statement of Accounts was agreed and this was signed by the Chairman. It was noted that there was a significant variation in boxes 3 (Total other receipts) between the figures for 2018/19 and the previous year. This was due to £1,676 being raised for new play equipment in 2018/19 compared to £572 the previous year.

4748 – Annual Grants from the Parish Council: It was agreed to provide the budgeted grants of £300 to the Village Hall (to pay for the Parish Council's own meetings and for the committee meetings of other village organisations) and £200 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard. After some discussion of alternatives, it was also agreed to give, as in previous years, two grants of £100 to Mendip Community Transport - under the section 137 power - and to the Mendip Citizen's Advice Bureau.

4749 - Authorisation of payment: The Clerk noted that following the Parish Council election there was only one Councillor who was a signatory on the bank account. As a result of problems with the new online method of amending NatWest bank mandates, the new signatories authorised at the previous meeting could not yet sign cheques. As a result it was agreed to suspend Financial Regulation 6.4 to allow the Clerk to sign cheques (the Clerk had to be a signatory to receive bank statements). The following safeguards were also agreed that the Clerk should only sign cheques in the presence of a Councillor authorised to sign cheques and that this Councillor should initial the cheque stub and invoice.

Councillors then authorised the following payments:

£160.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in May.

£15.00 Somerset Playing Fields Association – annual subscription.

4750 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The Somerset Association of Local Councils was offering training for new Councillors that was also suitable as a refresher for other Councillors. The Clerk to book four places at the training session in Nunney Village Hall for Janet Jones, Mary Comley, Peter Glaisher and Jayne Cox. The training would cost £25 for each Councillor, but with four attending one place would be free.

A parishioner had raised a concern about the status of the Heritage Room. The Clerk reported that it had originally been planned that the Heritage Room would become a charitable Trust,

like the Village Hall Trust. However, it was then decided that it would be simpler for the Heritage Room to come under the umbrella of the Village Hall Trust who own the actual room. The Parish Council's interest in the Heritage Room was that it stored many significant records of the parish including past Minutes of the Parish Council. The Parish Council had no financial liability as the Heritage Room was funded by donations. The Clerk to respond to the parishioner concerned.

Justin Witcombe reported that various works to the area below the Jubilee Hall were being donated in memory of Juliet Davies. The Clerk added that the wall at the bottom of this area would be rebuilt in memory of Henry Sage.

4751 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 3rd July at 8.00pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

M Comley
3/7/19