

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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## Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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

**Also Present:** The Clerk – Rob Sage; the District Councillor – Michael Gay; the County Councillor – Nigel Hewitt-Cooper and ten members of the public.

**4788 – Apologies for Absence:** Apologies had been received from David Stevens and Justin Witcombe.

**4789 – Declarations of Interest:** Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared interests in item 4799 the authorisation of the Clerk's salary and expenses as relatives of the Clerk.

**4790 – Public Participation:** A resident raised a query about the planning process for tree works.

**4791 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019** were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**4792 – Matters Arising:** Himalayan Balsam – The Clerk and Councillors had spoken to several landowners along the river about the spread of this invasive weed, who did not know what to do about it as sprays did not work. It was noted that it needed to be pulled up by hand when not in flower. It was noted that there were large numbers of people owning land along the river bank and so it was not practical to write to them individually. Instead an item would be placed in the parish magazine and on the website. **Action: The Clerk.**

Allotments – The leak from the water tank was getting worse and it was suggested that the water to the tank be turned off so that it could drained before the tap was replaced. The Chairman to ask her husband to look at the tap. **Action: The Chairman.**

Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages – The District Councillor had been in contact with the operations manager at Hastoes. The consultant's report had condemned the whole system. The land drain had been crushed and needed replacing and the tank was no longer working as a septic tank. Hastoes had only one quote for the work and they needed three. The District Councillor had offered to address Hastoes board meeting to explain how they had fallen short. The operations manager had been replaced and it was hoped that would speed things up. The District Councillor was waiting to hear back from the new operations manager and would make sure things happened. The Chairman noted she had contacted Hastoes on numerous occasions. A neighbour noted that she had reported the smell to the Environment Agency six months previously.

**4793 – Affordable Housing:** The land in Westcombe that had previously been offered for affordable housing had been sold in two lots – one to a local resident and one to an unknown purchaser. A Westcombe resident felt that the Housing Needs Survey undertaken by the Parish Council was out of date and another survey should be taken. It was noted that the survey was considered valid for five years and the Parish Council would not obtain a grant to

cover the cost of new survey. The need for affordable housing remained but no land had been offered for it. The need was queried on the basis that few Batcombe residents were signed up on the District Council's Housing Register. The County Councillor noted that people did not tend to sign up on the Register if there weren't houses available. It was noted that there were a number of single people looking for housing. Concerns were raised that a developer could put in a planning application for affordable housing with a Section 106 agreement that would expire after twenty years. It was noted that Section 106 agreements did not have time limits and that any planning application would be considered on its merits when submitted.

**4794 – District and County Councillors' Reports:** The County Councillor noted that measles was re-emerging and there was a drive to get people immunised. There was a school building programme and a drive for more foster parents. A local resident noted that you had to have a spare room to be a foster parent. The quay at Hinkley Point was now up and running and it was hoped this would relieve the traffic congestion in Bridgwater. The County Councillor was asked if a site visit to Hinkley Point could be arranged. The County Councillor noted that he had £2,000 for community projects in his parishes.

The District Councillor noted that Batcombe was very generous in its fundraising and the SHAPE lottery was up and running. There was a new plan for the bridleway at Higher Greenscombe which he had not yet seen. The Chairman noted that there had been an e-mail discussion about the surface of the bridleway where there would be vehicle access. The District Councillor noted that borrowing rates were at an historic low for Councils and that the projected shortfall in the Council's budget was to be addressed by buying investments.

Janet Jones noted that Truespeed would be bringing broadband to Batcombe from June 2020. Connecting Devon and Somerset had pulled the contract with Gigaclear and were looking for a new provider.

**4795 – Footpaths and Highways:** No information had yet been received from Somerset Highways about the Community Snow Warden Scheme aimed to encourage self-help within communities in winter weather. There had been a complaint about the overhanging hedges in Mill Lane and it was noted that the trees at the top of the lane were causing problems with the telephone lines to Mill Lane. Jayne Cox noted that traffic had problems with gates opening onto the highway at the bottom of Cockpit Lane and by Home Farm in Westcombe.

**4796 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report:** The meeting of Councillors in the Playing Field following the last Parish Council meeting agreed that the multi-play apparatus was no longer safe to use and so it was removed the following Wednesday. Removal revealed that all the supporting posts apart from the central one under the bridge were seriously rotten. Ian Sage was thanked for removing the equipment. It was noted that the supports were made from Ash which was not the best wood for this purpose. Concerns had been raised over the reason why the equipment deteriorated so quickly but it was felt better to look forward rather than back at mistakes that had been made.

A local electrician had offered to replace the locks on the electricity cabinet in the bus shelter. Ian Sage to follow up. **Action: Ian Sage.** The tap from the bus shelter would be replaced for the Fete each year and the electricity tripping was felt to be due to overloading. The anchor point for the picnic bench can be dealt with when the concrete slabs are placed under the table. **Action: Justin Witcombe.**

Justin Witcombe had proposed that the Playing Field hedge be laid, which would make the play equipment visible from outside the Playing Field and so less likely to be vandalised in future. It was noted that as a Councillor Justin could not be paid to do this work himself. It was agreed that the hedge laying should be undertaken as part of the Playing Field improvements.

**New Play Equipment:** The Clerk reported that the total raised for the new play equipment had reached £4,800. Clare Kingston had made an application to the SHAPE Mendip lottery on behalf of the play equipment and to other local grant making bodies and was proposing another Bingo Evening in December. It was noted that the wooden supports for the zip wire were beginning to rot and if additional money was raised this could be replaced as well.

**Bonfire Party at Pennysquare:** Paul Merron had undertaken a risk assessment which he gave to the Chairman. He would also inform the fire brigade of the event. A Temporary Event Notice would be needed from Mendip District Council and everyone in the village should be informed of the fireworks. It had been decided to hold the party on Sunday November 3<sup>rd</sup> as schools were having an INSET day the following day. Paul would arrange training for the volunteers, buckets of water on the site and first aid equipment. Vehicles would be excluded from the field and Paul would supervise the bonfire building. The Chairman to arrange a meeting with Justin and Sharon Witcombe and Peter Glaisher to organise details of the event. **Action: The Chairman.**

**4797 – Planning Applications:** Planning Application No: 2019/2283/TCA – Proposed Works to Trees in a Conservation Area: Reduce Magnolia to a 6ft pole (T1), reduce Apple tree by 2 metres all over. Coombe Cottage, Batcombe. There were no objections to the proposed tree works and so the Council agreed to recommend approval.

**Planning Application Updates:** The District Council had no objections to the application to reduce the crown of the damaged walnut tree at Millards Hill House.

**4798 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update:** Janet Jones reported to the meeting that she had checked the bank reconciliation prepared by the Clerk for the quarter to 30<sup>th</sup> June.

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 5<sup>th</sup> September 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 £4,000 more than the budgeted figure because of the donations and fundraising for the new play equipment that was not included in the budget. The allotments rent would also be £220 more than budget because all the allotments are now taken and the vacant allotments were leased during the current year. In a normal year the rent of all ten allotments would bring in £350.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was roughly £5,500 more than budgeted. This was because the budget had only included as expenditure on the play equipment the £572 that had then been raised and the £4,000 from the Parish Council funds put aside for this. Grass cutting is likely to be more than budgeted depending on the number of cuts required later in the year. Overall maintenance was likely to be around £200 less than budgeted as no play bark would be needed.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was likely to be £1,000 less than the budgeted figure because the parish council election was uncontested and cost only £97.50 instead of the £1,200 budgeted for a contested election. Most other items of administration were projected to be roughly as budgeted although the insurance was £40 more than the budgeted figure.

The projection for the expenditure on grants was £40 less than budgeted as the Community Council no longer asked for a subscription. Other items was £50 more than budgeted because of additional expenditure on the allotments.

Overall the projected deficit of £4,620 was close to the budgeted deficit of £4,200. However, the healthier position at the start of the year means that the projected funds at the end of the year are around £6,520 – £1,800 better than expected when the budget was made. This is

largely due to the fact that the election was not contested. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure will be earmarked for the allotments

**4799 - Authorisation of payments:** Councillors authorised the following payment:

£160.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in September.

£1,021.02 The Clerk – Salary for 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter.

£116.59 The Clerk – Expenses for 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter.

**4800 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only:** None.

**4801 – Date and Time of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019 at **7.30pm** in the Old School, Batcombe. The earlier start time was noted.

M Comley  
6/11/19