

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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## Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

**Also Present:** The Clerk – Rob Sage; the District Councillor – Michael Gay; and three members of the public.

**4802 – Apologies for Absence:** None.

**4803 – Declarations of Interest:** None.

**4804 – Public Participation:** None.

**4805 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019** were agreed as a correct record - after the substitution of the word “traffic” for “horse riders” in Minute 4795 - and signed by the Chairman.

**4806 – Matters Arising:** Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages – A former Parish Councillor asked that this be an Agenda item at future meeting and this was agreed. **Action: The Clerk.** The District Councillor noted that the residents of Ash Tree Cottages had been sent a schedule by Hastoes for the work in replacing the sewage treatment plant. Quotes for the work were due by November 24<sup>th</sup> and work was expected to be completed by December 24<sup>th</sup>. In the meantime, a local drainage contractor was making regular visits every 10 days to 2 weeks to empty the tank. The District Councillor had spoken to the District Council’s health department who were of the opinion that the entire system had been incorrectly installed with surface water piped into the system causing it to overload. The District Councillor promised to check that a decision had been made on November 24<sup>th</sup> and that work had begun on December and to keep the residents of Ash Tree Cottages informed. **Action: The District Councillor.** The District Councillor was thanked for his help in this matter.

**4807 – District and County Councillors’ Reports:** The District Councillor reported that he had visited Batcombe on several occasions, including the PACT meeting [see Minute 4815 below]. He had attended the District Council’s Audit Meeting and the Somerset Climate Emergency Meeting. He noted that proposals for footpaths and bridleways had been withdrawn to consult with horse riders on the bridleways.

**4808 – Allotments:** Justin Witcombe declared an interest as an allotment holder. The Clerk reported that rent on the allotments was due on November 1<sup>st</sup>. All allotment holders had been sent a reminder and four had paid so far. It was agreed to ask Gary Butler to cut the hedge in the allotments field. **Action: The Clerk.** No progress had been made on replacing the tap on the water tank **Action: The Chairman.** Justin Witcombe offered to contact the farmer who shared the water supply to ask him to turn off the water to the allotments. Justin also offered to arrange a supply of manure for the allotments. **Action: Justin Witcombe.**

**4809 – Footpaths and Highways:** Details of Somerset Highways’ pre-salting network had been published, and most of the cuts last year had been reversed, including the road from

Bruton to Evercreech. However, as the Parish Council had already been informed the road from Evercreech through Batcombe would not be salted.

Details of the proposed Community Snow Warden Scheme had been distributed with the Agenda. Councillors were unimpressed with the scheme which amounted to little more than training for volunteers to work on the highway and the supply of hi-vis vests to those who undertake the training. It was agreed to enquire about the supply of dumpy bags of salt and to ask for three bags this year to include one for Westcombe. The Chairman and Justin Witcombe volunteered to draft a response to Somerset Highways. **Action: The Chairman and Justin Witcombe.**

**4810 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report:** The lock on the electricity cabinet in the bus shelter had not yet been repaired. Ian Sage volunteered to speak to a local electrician who had offered to do the repair. **Action: Ian Sage.**

The Clerk reported that the overpayment on the electricity for the Playing Field had been corrected and the Parish Council had had a credit with Southern Electricity. However, since then the Parish Council had again been overcharged. The Clerk to chase this up with Southern Electric. **Action: The Clerk.**

**New Play Equipment:** The Bonfire Party at Pennysquare had been a great success despite the wet weather and grateful thanks were expressed to all those who had helped and had supported the event. £594 was taken in ticket sales and there was a profit of £88.80 on the bar. After expenses of £44.50 for food and £21 for the TEN, the Bonfire Party made a profit of £617.30. Jayne Cox had written a letter thanking everyone who had helped and supported the event and it was agreed this should go in the parish magazine on behalf of the Council. In addition, a note of the amount raised and thanks from Parish Council to everyone who contributed should also go in the magazine. **Action: The Clerk.** The Clerk reported that the total raised for the new play equipment was now over £7,000. Clare Kingston was organising another Bingo Evening on Saturday December 7<sup>th</sup> and it was agreed that this should be advertised in the Blackmore Vale.

It was agreed to obtain five quotes for the new play equipment to ensure the Parish Council had three quotes when applying for the grant for the new play equipment. The Clerk to draw up a specification for metal multi-play, inclusive roundabout, goal posts, nest swing, zip wire, cricket nets and safety surfacing that would extend to include the entrance to the Playing Field. The quotes to include the associated groundworks and the maintenance costs of the equipment. **Action: The Clerk.** Justin Witcombe offered to get three quotes for laying the hedge along the front of the Playing Field. **Action: Justin Witcombe.**

**4811 – Planning Applications:** The Clerk reported that the District Council had amended the consultation response form so that if the Parish Council recommended refusal it was asked to place its reasons within a list of material considerations. A copy of the new form had been distributed to Councillors with the Agenda.

Planning Application No: 2019/2485/LBC – Extension to existing residential dwelling, associated demolition works and associated internal alterations. Donegal Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe. This application was for some minor changes to an already approved application and the Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

Planning Application No: 2019/2570/TCA – Proposed works to tree/s in a Conservation Area: Eucalyptus (T1) Pollard to 3m. Stockley Cottage, Back Lane, Batcombe. The Parish Council recommended approval as there were no objections for the pollarding of a Eucalyptus.

Planning Application No: 2019/2585/TCA – Works to trees in a Conservation Area: T1 Holm Oak, fell and replace. T2 – Monterey Cypress, fell and replace. The Old Barn, Batcombe.

The Parish Council decided to recommend refusal on the grounds that the Holm Oak was an important tree within the Conservation Area and could be preserved with appropriate tree work undertaken. There was no objection to the felling of the Monterey Cypress.

**Planning Application Updates:** The Chairman had reported that an application would be made to redevelop Valley View Farm at some point. There were no details yet of the application.

The District Council had had no objection to the tree works at Coombe Cottage – reducing a Magnolia to a six-foot pole and reducing an apple tree by 2 metres all over.

The application for approval of details on Listed Building Consent 2019/0679/LBC at Church View House, Church Farm had been refused as the applicant had failed to provide sufficient details for the new windows and doors. (This was permission for the conversion of an outbuilding for ancillary use.)

**4812 – 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> 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 5<sup>th</sup> October in the current year and a projection for this year based on the receipts and payment to date. The Clerk reported that there was very little change on the update provided at the last month's meeting (see Minute 4798 for details) except that an additional £1,900 had been received in donations for the play equipment.

**4813 – Budget and Precept 2020/2021:** A budget for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and a forecast for the years 2019-2023 had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk noted that the next Parish Council election would take place in 2023/2024 and so did not appear in the forecast but the Council needed to budget to have sufficient reserves to pay for a contested election at that time as well as any other contingencies such as a by-election, likely to cost several thousand pounds.

The VAT refund would be around £80 as no major works had been undertaken this year. (If the play equipment was purchased this year there would be a very large VAT refund but that would be part of the funding for the play equipment.) The allotment rent would be £350 if all the allotments were rented out.

The cost of the grass cutting was likely to be similar that projected for this year depending on the number of cuts required and any increase in the price per cut and the figure for equipment maintenance was reduced as there was no longer a need to purchase play bark. The budget did not include money or grants raised for the play equipment, as these would not affect the precept unless the Council decided to make a larger contribution than the £4,000 already put aside.

The budget included a 2% increase in the Clerk's salary. Other expenditure on administration was likely to be similar to the current year. The Clerk noted that budget was an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants. £200 had been included for winter road maintenance which was enough for a bag of salt for Hincombe Hill.

The budget had been prepared on the assumption that the play equipment will have been purchased this year. On this basis the budget predicted a surplus of £1,255 if the precept was unchanged at £9,750. This would leave £7,775 in Council funds at the end of 2020/21. Given that around £1,000 of this will be earmarked for the allotments, this left the Council's reserves around the higher limit suggested by SALC (that a parish council's reserves should be between  $\frac{1}{3}$  and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of its precept) and should be sufficient to cover the cost of a by-election.

This would allow some flexibility to spend more of the Parish Council's own money on the Playing Field if required.

Looking at the forecast for the years 2019-20223, with no increases in the precept in these years, the Council would still have surpluses sufficient to build up reserves for the next election year.

It was felt to be prudent to continue with a gradual increase in the precept. A decision on the level of the precept was deferred until the January meeting when the tax base for 2020/21 had been determined, so that the impact of any increase on Council Tax could be estimated.

**4814 - Authorisation of payments:** Councillors authorised the following payments:

£80.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in October.

£21.00 Mary Comley – TEN fee for the bonfire party.

£152.60 The Parish News – Photocopying over the last eighteen months.

**4815 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only:** Discussion of how to proceed with the Clerk's Annual Appraisal and the relationship of the Heritage Room and the Village Hall Trust to be included on the next Agenda.

A local resident had raised a concern about dog excrement left on the side of the road and the danger to children who stepped out into the road to avoid it. A local resident was thanked for removing the rubbish left on the Bruton road at the top of Snakelake Hill.

The Chairman to enquire about the wreath that was used at last year's Act of Remembrance on Remembrance Sunday and consider whether it should be laid again this year. **Action: The Chairman.** It was noted that the net from the goal in the Playing Field was being stored at Portway Farm.

Complaints had been received about fireworks that had been let off at a children's party in the Village Hall. It was noted that the Village Hall Trust has a no fireworks policy. Complaints had also been received about a large red Transit van parked in the church lay-by and in the Village Hall car park.

The PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meeting had taken place in Batcombe Jubilee Hall attended by the local policing team and representatives from the villages south of Frome. Concerns about speeding and dangerous driving in the parish had been raised at the meeting by the Parish Councillors attending.

**4816 – Date and Time of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

M Comley

4/12/19