

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 8th January 2020 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, Michael Gay – District Councillor, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor and one member of the public.

4833 – Apologies for Absence: David Stevens.

4834 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in item 4847 (the authorisation of the Clerk’s salary and expenses) as relatives of the Clerk.

4835 – Public Participation: None.

4836 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4th December 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4837 – Matters Arising: Staffing Committee – the Clerk reported that the Staffing Committee would arrange a date in February to undertake the Clerk’s Annual Appraisal. Minute Book – the Clerk reported that a new Minute Book binder would cost £72.79 plus VAT and he was authorised to purchase this.

4838 – Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages: The District Councillor reported that he had spoken to the surveyor in charge and the design for the new plant has been agreed within Hastoes and the neighbouring landowner would be having a meeting with the structural engineer and the landowner to go over the works to be done. It was hoped to get the works done in February, although the question of additional compensation to the landowner could be a matter of dispute. The surveyor had now spoken to Justin Witcombe and the District Councillor hoped to develop the relationship between Hastoes and their residents.

4839 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: The District Councillor reported that he had heard nothing further about the possible development at Valley View Farm. Somerset County Council were again arguing for a unitary authority while the District Councils had suggested working in close collaboration instead. Concerns were raised that a unitary authority would be more distant and there would be fewer Councillors.

The County Councillor noted that the Library in Shepton Mallet would not be moving, that the County Council was holding workshops on the climate emergency and was promoting dementia support and volunteering. He asked if David Peake had been in contact regarding the lack of gritting in the parish and was informed he had not.

4840 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that the rent for eight of the ten allotments had now been paid and the two remaining allotment holders had promised to pay by bank transfer. The Chairman reported that no progress had yet been made on replacing the tap on the water tank.
Action: The Chairman.

4841 – Footpaths and Highways: The Chairman had been in contact with Upton Noble School about safe access to the school in icy weather and was waiting to hear back from them. She had also spoken to the Parish Meeting Chairman at Upton Noble and they would like a dumpy bag of salt. The District Councillor promised to look into this as Upton Noble was part of his Ward. **Action: The District Councillor.** Ian Sage was thanked for taking delivery of four dumpy bags of salt and delivering two to Batcombe and two to Westcombe.

4842 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: Ian Sage was thanked for correcting the repaired lock on the electricity cabinet so that it would close. His offer to put a metal lock on the top of the cabinet was accepted. **Action: Ian Sage.**

Further evidence of moles in the Playing Field was noted and that Justin Witcombe had volunteered to speak to the molecatcher. **Action: Justin Witcombe.** Gary Butler had been asked to cut back the willow structure.

New Play Equipment: Clare Kingston was thanked for organising the Bingo Evening in December. While fewer people had supported the evening this year, it still raised £502 after expenses (food and advertising). Donations and fundraising for the new play equipment now totalled £8,280. This total didn't include monies that have been promised but not yet received – including the grant from the County Councillor's budget that had been delayed by the period of election purdah and £500 promised to Peter Glaisher.

The Clerk reported that six play equipment suppliers had been asked to provide quotes for the new play equipment. Revised quotes had been received from the three suppliers who had previously provided quotes and two further supplies had visited the Playing Field and would be providing quotes. It was agreed that the Working Party (including all Parish Councillors) would meet on Monday February 3rd to consider the quotes before the next meeting. **Action: The Clerk.**

4843 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2019/3048/TCA Works to Trees in a Conservation Area: T1 - Cherry tree, fell. 6 Kale Street, Batcombe. The application was to fell the Cherry tree in front of 6 Kale Street to clear BT phone wires and create more light at the front of house. The Parish Council recommended approval as there were no objections to the felling of the tree.

Planning Application Updates: The District Council had no objection to the felling of the Holm Oak and the Monterey Cypress at The Old Barn. The Tree Officer had visited the site, inspected both trees and concluded that neither was worthy of a Tree Preservation Order. He stated that the Holm Oak was not in a very good physiological condition or of an aesthetically pleasing appearance.

4844 – Annual Parish Meeting: The Chairman suggested focussing on recycling as the topic of interest at the Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday April 1st. This was felt to be appropriate as a new recycling system would come into operation in July. The District Councillor offered to find a speaker from the Somerset Waste Partnership. **Action: The District Councillor.**

4845 – Website Accessibility Audit: *The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018* required the websites of parish councils to comply with the international WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standard by September 23rd 2020. The Parish Council does not have to comply with sections of the accessibility standard if these would place a disproportionate burden on the body. However, it does have to produce an accessibility statement explaining how accessible the website is and why the requirements that have not been complied with would be a disproportionate burden.

In order to produce the accessibility statement, the Parish Council has to check the website for accessibility problems. The Parish Council agreed that hiring an accessibility expert to undertake an accessibility audit of the website at a typical cost of £1,300 a day would be a disproportionate burden (as the audit could cost the equivalent of an entire year's precept) and so opted for a basic accessibility check to be done by the Clerk. **Action: The Clerk.**

4846 – Budget and Precept 2020/21: The proposed budget and precept for 2019/2020 had been considered at the November meeting 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 2020/21 would be 216.9, which when revised for a 2.5% non-collection rate became 211.48. The revised tax base for 2019/20 was 210.9 and a slightly higher tax base meant that the same increase in precept would produce a slightly lower increase in Council Tax. The Council therefore agreed, as suggested at the November meeting, to increase its precept slightly by £200 to £9,950 (an increase of 2.05%). This would result in a Band D property with no discounts paying £47-05 towards the precept, an increase of 1.77% in the component of Council Tax going to the Parish Council. **Action: The Clerk.**

4847 - Authorisation of payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£1,021.02 The Clerk – Salary for 3rd Quarter.

£97.79 The Clerk – Expenses for 3rd Quarter.

4848 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: It was agreed to defer the review of the Emergency Plan for a month to March.

The Chairman reported that the bridleway at Honeycliff had been washed out into the road. A local contractor was providing a price for repairing the bridleway and it would be seen if the Rights of Way department of the County Council would pay for the repair.

It was noted that there were very bad potholes at Snakelake on the South Somerset side of the border, while those on the Mendip side had been repaired. The Chairman offered to report the potholes. **Action: The Chairman.**

4848 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 5th February 2020 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Janet Jones

5/2/20