

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

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

Minutes of the Remote Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Thursday 9th July 2020 via Zoom, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, and approximately 16 members of the public.

4885 – Meeting Procedure: The procedure for holding a meeting on Zoom was explained, noting it would only work if one person spoke at a time, so everyone apart from the Chairman and the Clerk would be muted and those wishing to speak were asked to raise a hand and unmute themselves. It was also noted that the meeting would be recorded for the purpose of taking the Minutes and the recording would be deleted once the Minutes were approved.

4886 – Apologies for Absence: Justin Witcombe. Michael Gay - District Councillor - gave his apologies but was able to join for the second half of the meeting.

4887 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared interests in the authorization of payments to the Clerk (item 4904) as relatives of the Clerk and in the planning application for Rockwells House (item 4892) as having use of the field for keeping cattle and for use of the grass. Janet Jones declared an interest in the broadband update (item 4894) as the broadband champion for the village.

4888 – Public Participation: None.

4889 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4th March 2020 were agreed as a correct record after changing the word “until” in the third paragraph of item 4875 to “untied”. The Chairman noted that the Minutes would be signed at a later date.

4890 – Matters Arising: Insurance Cover - The Clerk reported that the Council’s insurance cover had been renewed from June 1st with Came & Co at a premium of £349.22 – an increase of £11.51 on the previous year.

4891 – Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages: The work on the sewage treatment plant had not yet been undertaken and the coronavirus lockdown may have had an impact on this. The District Councillor had been in contact with Hastoes who informed him that their solicitor was dealing with the paperwork that will allow them to begin work. S & D Services had been instructed to ensure the tank is emptied regularly, and Justin Witcombe reported that this was done recently for the first time since the lockdown - resulting in a very bad smell. A neighbour expressed concern about the impact the work would have on her property, having seen plans showing that work would be undertaken close to her boundary. The Chairman offered to pass on the neighbour’s e-mail address to Hastoes so that they could keep her informed of what was happening and to speak to the District Councillor to find out the latest plans for the work.

4892 – Planning Applications: Resubmission of Planning Application No: 2020/0260/FUL Change of use of land and construction of tennis court with associated fencing and landscaping. Rockwells House, Batcombe – Full Application. The Chairman invited Fletcher Robinson of CPRE – Somerset to speak on the application. CPRE felt that the location of the

proposal tennis court was inappropriate next to the Conservation Area and would be highly visible, obstructing views of the village. CPRE also felt that the application would change the character of the field from agricultural to a garden extension and would detract from the rural nature of the area. The owners of Home Cottage also spoke to object to the proposal which they felt would break the natural boundary of the village, change the use of the field, block a footpath from Home Cottage to Mill Lane and impact the ecology of the field - and felt the tennis court should be contained within the garden of Rockwells House. The applicant responded by noting that they had discussed the application with their neighbours, had withdrawn the application after objections and had changed the planting around the tennis court and pulled it back into the garden. He also explained why it was not possible to include the tennis court in the existing garden and noted that the ecology report revealed that there was nothing special about this area of the field, that tennis courts were often allowed outside of existing gardens and were low level development.

Ian Sage noted that the Parish Council had in the past objected to development outside of the domestic curtilage. It was noted that the path from Home Cottage to Mill Lane was not on the definitive map and was not therefore an official right of way, although historically it had been a footpath. It was also noted that the garden at Rockwells had previously been extended into the field. After considerable discussion of the points already noted, Councillors voted to recommend refusal of the application by four votes to one with one abstention.

Planning Application No: 2020/1188/VRC Application to vary condition 2 (drawings) on previously approved 2018/0992/FUL. Lower Eastcombe Farm, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe – Full Application. It was noted that proposed changes below ground level would not have a visual effect externally and there were no objections to the modifications to the windows. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

Planning Application No: 2020/1189/FUL Proposed tennis court, swimming pool, greenhouse and associated groundworks in position of approved potting shed (application 2018/0992/FUL – not yet implemented). Lower Eastcombe Farm, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe – Full Application. Fletcher Robinson from CPRE Somerset noted that that whereas the previous application for a tennis court was in the immediate setting of the Conservation Area, this one was not and this made a significant difference. Jayne Cox and Ian Sage felt that, as this was on agricultural land, they had to recommend refusal to be consistent with the previous decision. The applicant noted that there was already consented development on this plot of land for a greenhouse and potting shed and the land had previously been an orchard for the farmhouse and not open countryside. Councillors voted to recommend approval of the application by four votes to two.

Planning Application Updates: Listed Building Consent had been given for the alterations to the wall between Cherry Tree Cottage and Boords Farm required to undertake the rear extension to Cherry Tree Cottage.

4893 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The molecatcher had caught three moles in the Playing Field and there was currently no evidence of active moles, although the dry weather had meant their empty holes had appeared. The Playing Field had been closed throughout the lockdown with no weekly safety inspections taking place. The Government had permitted the use of outdoor play equipment from July 4th and the Playing Field had been opened from that date with appropriate warning signs in place regarding the need for social distancing, cleaning and hygiene. The Council confirmed this decision. Grass cutting had been taking place while the Playing Field was closed and Justin Witcombe was thanked for treating the picnic bench with wood preserver.

The annual safety inspection by RoSPA had taken place in June and all items were as usual rated low or medium risk, with the exception of the zip wire, which was rated high risk because of rot in the wooden supports. Ian Sage was thanked for immobilising the zip wire by removing the seat. A user of the Playing Field asked if the gate could be looked at because it had dropped and whether a spring could be placed on it to ensure it remained closed. It was noted that the gate was severely warped. Jayne Cox asked if the Playing Field hedge could be cut. The Clerk to arrange this. It was noted that the Playing Field hedge would be laid as part of the Playing Field improvements but that this did not mean it should not be cut back.

New Play Equipment: The total raised for the new play equipment was £10,632 at the end of the financial year (March 31st). The Parish Council decided to make a grant application to Viridor Credits by July 31st. For the grant application three comparable quotes were required. Quotes had been obtained from Redlynch Leisure, Sutcliffe Play and Wicksteed. Most items on the quotes were similar and did not need to be considered in detail at this stage. Each company had been asked to quote for two different pieces of multi-play equipment and so a decision was needed on which piece of multi-play equipment from each company to include in the grant application. After assurances that the equipment would fit in the space available it was decided to include the larger piece of equipment in each quote. Peter Glaisher noted that the new equipment should not interfere with the football pitch. Questioned as to whether the application could be completed by July 31st, the Clerk stated that it should be possible.

The District Councillor joined the meeting at this point and was asked if there was any update on the sewage treatment plant at Ash Tree Cottages and stated that it was still with Hastoes' solicitors.

4894 – Broadband Update: A company called Voneus were offering fast wireless broadband in Batcombe. Ian Sage declared an interest as he had received free broadband in return for allowing an antenna to be sited on one of his buildings. Janet Jones reported that Voneus had connected a limited number of properties in the village but were having some teething problems due to the topography of the parish and trees. The District Councillor noted that the company had installed broadband in Wanstrow and Trudoxhill and were farther ahead but had also had some teething problems. It was noted that more repeaters might be needed to overcome the topographical problems as line of sight was needed to each property.

4895 – Allotments: All allotment rents had been paid and the rent for the field had been paid to the owner. Advice from the National Allotment Society had been that allotment holders could continue to work their allotments during the lockdown provided they maintain social distancing and don't share tools. The current lease on the field would come to an end in April 2021 so the Parish Council agreed to ask the owners for a new four-year lease. The District Councillor noted that Wanstrow was about to rent a field for allotments and asked the Clerk for a copy of the lease used by Batcombe.

4896 – Footpaths and Highways: Patching followed by resurfacing had taken place on Saite Lane, Portway Hill, Holly Hill, Crows Hill, Copplesbury Lane and the road towards Bruton – but only as far as the bottom of Snakelake.

Concerns had been raised about visibility as a result of the verges not being cut – especially at the bottom of Vinings Hill – and about blocked gullies on Back Lane leading to flooding off the road. Both issues had been reported to Somerset Highways who responded to say that the verges in our area would be cut in the next two weeks and that Batcombe was due to have its gullies cleared this year, although this had been delayed by the coronavirus.

There were complaints during the lockdown from one of the landowners of cyclists using the footpath from Spargrove to Mill Farm along the river and some of them becoming abusive

when asked not to do so. The County Council Rights of Way Department had offered to place small no cycling signs at either end of the footpath and at the end of Bailey's Lane.

The same landowner had also reported children swimming in the river along the footpath and asked if the Parish Council would put up warning signs about the dangers of doing this.

Peter Glaisher noted that the grit bags placed in Westcombe had been removed for the summer and would be replaced in the winter.

Jayne Cox reported that she had spoken to Clare Haskins the Rights of Way Officer over concerns about the footpath through Pews Bottom Farm and had also spoken to the tenants at the farm who were happy for a working party to clear the permissive path. A resident of Eastcombe offered to help getting the footpath to Eastcombe through Pews Bottom Farm back in use.

4897 – Website Accessibility Check: The Clerk stated that a report on the Website Accessibility Check would be distributed when complete – there were a couple of checks still to be done. To date the Parish Council website met the required accessibility standards except in the following areas: subheadings on the website were not styled as headings; images did not have alternative text; and headings in the pdfs on the website were not styled as such. The first two were relatively simply to correct, but the third would take time given the number of pdf documents on the website. The Parish Council would need to publish an Accessibility Statement on the website by September 23rd this year and have a plan in place to correct the issues revealed in the Accessibility Check.

4898 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2020: A copy of the Financial Statements had been distributed with the Agendas and the following notes included on the Councillors' version of the Agenda were taken as read:

The allotments rent was £220 more than budgeted because all ten allotments are now rented and the five allotments that were vacant at the end of last year were subsequently rented for part of a year at £20 each. The £8,405 raised for the new play equipment during the year had not been included in the budget. As a result, receipts were £8,620 more than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting and trimming was one cut more than budgeted. The cost of the electricity and water supplies were as budgeted. Maintenance was £565 less than budgeted as no play bark was required and no repairs were needed. It consisted of £110 for hedgecutting and £75 for cutting back the willow. No money was spent on the play equipment apart from £21 in fundraising expenses – this was the TEN for bonfire party. Overall Playing Field payments were £5,032 less than budgeted, largely a result of the money budgeted for new play equipment not being hedge cutting spent by the end of the year.

The Clerk's salary and expenses were largely as budgeted, but the Clerk's membership of the SLCC increased by £20 as his salary was over £4,000. Training and Publications consisted of £75 in Councillor training and £86.40 for a new Minute binder. No audit fees were charged following the end of external auditing. The insurance premium increased largely as the result of a fee charge by the insurance broker. Election costs were £1,100 less than budgeted as there was no contested election. Photocopying was more than budgeted as this was eighteen months' copying. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted. Overall administration costs were £943 less than budgeted largely because there was no contest election.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted, except that the Community Council for Somerset no longer asked for a subscription. The expenditure on the allotments was £200 for the lease of the field, £70 spent on hedge cutting and £72 on sheeting for the vacant allotments

at the start of the year. As a result of the above, total payments were £5,972 less than budgeted, although £4,572 was money not yet spent on the new equipment.

Details of the earmarked monies for the allotments and the play equipment are also attached. At the end of the year there was £1,016 of allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. At the end of the year there was also £10,632 raised for the new play equipment.

The net result of the variations against the budget given above is a surplus of £10,394 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £4,202. This was largely a result of the £8,405 raised for new play equipment and the fact that no money was spent on play equipment during the year. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £21,532 in its funds, £16,790 more than anticipated in the budget. In addition to the surplus on 2019/20 the position at the start of the year was £2,195 better than anticipated when the budget had been set. Of these funds at the end of the year, £1,016 is set aside for the allotments, £10,632 for new play equipment and £77 for notice boards. This means that the Parish Council has funds totalling £9,807 that are not earmarked for specific items, (although it is envisaged that the £4,000 that had been intended for play equipment repairs would go towards the cost of the new play equipment). This is a sufficient reserve to cover the possible cost of a by-election during the coming year (which is the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure). SALC recommend that a Parish Council has reserves of between one-third and two-thirds of its precept, which with the current precept means the reserves should be between £3,320 and £6,640.

The Clerk stated that the internal auditor had noted that the financial statements were slightly misleading in that the £21,532 shown in Parish Council funds at the end of the year included £10,632 that had been raised for the new play equipment.

4899 – 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 had confirmed 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 distributed with the Agendas. The Internal Auditor had recommended that the Clerk keep a register of income to record the money raised for the play equipment and the rent paid for the allotments.

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 September 1st. It was agreed that the Parish Council met the requirements for exemption and the certificate would be signed later by the Chairman.

4900 – Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2019//20: Copies of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return - the Annual Governance Statement - had been distributed with the Agendas. Approval of the Annual Governance Statement was agreed and the Statement would be signed by the Chairman and the Clerk later.

4901 – Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2019/20: Copies of Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return – the Statement of Accounts – had been distributed with the Agendas, along with a copy of the Financial

Statements showing how the figures in the Statement of Accounts had been derived. Approval of the Statement of Accounts was agreed and would be signed by the Chairman later. It was noted that there were significant variations (more than 15%) in boxes 3, 6 and 9 between the figures for last year and those for the previous year. In box 3 this was due to the money raised for the new play equipment being £8,405 in 2019/20 compared to £1,676 in 2018/19. In box 6 this was due to the cost of the grass cutting being £1,280 in 2019/20 compared to £980 in 2018/19. In box 9 this was due to the removal of the multi-play equipment (purchase value £9,450) from the Schedule of Assets when it was removed from the Playing Field.

4902 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2021: An updated projection on this year's budget had been distributed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that this year's precept of £9,950 had been received. The VAT repayment had also been received.

The Clerk commented on the financial impact of Covid-19 on the Parish Council, noting that fortunately the fundraising for the play equipment had been done the previous year and having already received the precept for the current year the Council's income would not be affected by the coronavirus restrictions. There was also unlikely to be any significant additional expenditure arising from Covid-19. The Parish Council had healthy reserves, which would allow the Council to consider the financial impact on residents when setting the precept for the following year.

4903 – 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. 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. Peter Glaisher suggested increasing the grant for churchyard maintenance but it was decided to keep to the budgeted amounts.

4904 - Authorisation of payments: Councillors authorised the following payments in addition to the grants agreed in the previous item:

- £1,021.02 The Clerk – Salary for 1st Quarter.
- £112.66 The Clerk – Expenses for 1st Quarter.
- £112.89 Somerset Association of Local Councils – Affiliation fee.
- £90.60 Playsafety Ltd – Annual safety inspection of the Playing Field.
- £320.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in May & June.

The following payments had been made since the lockdown began and were authorised retrospectively:

- £1,021.02 The Clerk – Salary for 4th Quarter (*of the 2019/20 financial year*).
- £97.79 The Clerk – Expenses for 4th Quarter.
- £75.00 E Clarke – 3 moles caught in the Playing Field.
- £349.22 Came & Company – Insurance Premium.
- £220.00 T & E A Hollis – Rent for Allotments Field.
- £320.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in March & April.

4905 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The Clerk's annual appraisal had been postponed for the time being because of the coronavirus restrictions. The Clerk reported that he had worked no additional hours during 2019/20 and that recommendations for the 2020/21 salary rates for the Clerk were unlikely to be made before August

Peter Glaisher passed on a message from the landlord of The Three Horseshoes that people needed to be encouraged to use the pub or that it would be lost. Peter offered to put an article in the parish magazine encouraging people to use the pub.

A local resident asked if it would be possible to install dog litter bins as people were putting dog waste into people's rubbish bins. Jayne Cox noted that the hedge at Mill Lane was an issue. The Chairman offered to discuss this with Jayne and see if it could be sorted before the next meeting.

4906 - Dates of Future Meetings: While it was uncertain when the Parish Council could meet in person again, the following dates were provisionally agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council from September, most being the first Wednesday of the month:

2 nd September	7 th October	4 th November	2 nd December	13 th January
3 rd February	3 rd March	7 th April	5 th May	

Wednesday April 7th would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. It was also noted that when meetings did start again, they might have to be held in the Jubilee Hall to ensure adequate social distancing.

M Comley

2/9/20