

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th October 2020 via Zoom, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage, the District Councillor – Michael Gay and the County Councillor – Nigel Hewitt-Cooper for the first part of the meeting. One member of the public joined at item 4937.

4932 – Apologies for Absence: Apologies had been received from Justin Witcombe. The Clerk noted that the meeting would be recorded to assist with the Minutes and then deleted.

4933 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the item on the Clerk's salary as relatives of the Clerk.

4934 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 2nd September 2020 were agreed as a correct record after the addition of the fact that the District Councillor had given his apologies.

4935 – Matters Arising: Future Meetings - In light of the resurgence of the coronavirus and the increased restrictions imposed by the Government, it had been decided to follow the recommendations from the National Association of Local Councils and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to meet remotely for the time being.

Bartletts Quarry – The Chairman offered to attend the next meeting of the Torr/Colemans Liaison Group on October 21st on behalf of the Parish Council. It was noted that track sections for HS2 would be constructed at an Aggregate Industries site near Shepton Mallet. The District Councillor offered to ask for a briefing on the impact of the extra quarrying on the water table for Batcombe, given the high dependence on private water supplies in the parish.

4936 – District and County Councillors' Reports: A written report had been received from the County Councillor and distributed to Parish Councillors. Parish Councillors confirmed that they had received leaflets about the change to the recycling system and the County Councillor promised to forward information about the winter gritting. There was a discussion of what could be applied for under the Climate Emergency grant funding and ideas were welcomed. There were also grants for grassroots community groups, such as the Toddlers, Film Society and Lunch Club and the Clerk was asked to inform these groups of this opportunity.

The District Councillor drew attention to the Green Homes grants for insulation, etc. Bruton and Castle Cary had organised an online event for help with home improvements at a discount.

An application had been submitted for 129 houses on the site of the old Greencore factory in Evercreech and the District Councillor asked for comments on the impact on Batcombe. Parish Councillors were concerned at the impact on the doctors' surgery and the Coop in Evercreech and the additional traffic on one of the main routes out of Batcombe and increased difficulty in passing through Evercreech. The Chairman also suggested that a section 106 agreement could be used to improve the junction on the main road with provision of a

roundabout. Concerns were expressed that there was only housing and no other amenities on the site and that the old silk mill would be demolished. The District and County Councillors noted that it was difficult to refuse such applications in the current climate. It was suggested that the overwhelming effect of the development be alleviated by the provision of additional facilities, particularly for young people.

4937 – Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages: The Chairman noted that Hastoes needed to modify the treatment plant by putting an additional pipe under the neighbouring field. Hastoes solicitors needed to come to agreement with the solicitors of the landowners of the neighbouring field and this was proving difficult. It was suggested that the Parish Council write to Hastoes' Chief Executive to encourage them to move things forward and it was agreed that David Stevens should draft a letter to the Chief Executive explaining the situation.
Action: David Stevens.

4938 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that the allotment rents would be due on November 1st and allotment holders would be sent a reminder shortly with a note to keep their allotment fences tidy. The hedge and overgrown areas in the allotment field had been cut back and tidied up and so hopefully the owners of the allotment field will now agree to a new lease.

4939 – Footpaths and Highways: Another HGV had gotten stuck on the junction at the top of Holly Hill. The owner of the cottage on Holly Hill had suggested that larger signs are needed. The driver had apparently been told to ignore the No HGV signs at the Hedgestocks crossroads. A Westcombe resident had spoken to Wild Beer who stated that the large lorries should unload at Bath & West Showground and smaller lorries deliver to Westcombe.

Complaints had been received about overhanging hedges on Westcombe Hill which were making it difficult for agricultural vehicles to pass. Several branches have been broken off by passing vehicles and the Westcombe resident reported that she had moved broken branches. Peter Glaisher volunteered to speak to the owner of the overhanging laurel hedge on Westcombe Hill and to remove the broken branches by the War Memorial. **Action: Peter Glaisher.** The Chairman had been in contact with Somerset Highways and asked for supplementary plates on the No HGV signs at Hedgestocks. She also had permission to reproduce Somerset Highways overhanging vegetation diagram in the parish magazine.
Action: The Chairman.

The hedges on Mill Lane had been cut back by the owners of the fields on either side and Justin Witcombe had suggested that the Parish Council thanks them for having this down. Justin also trimmed the verges down the lane with the help of Tom Price and suggested that the Parish Council also sent Tom a letter of thanks. **Action: The Clerk.**

A complaint had also been received about dog walkers not keeping their dogs under control when using public footpaths near people's homes.

4940 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that moles had reappeared in Playing Field and it was agreed that the molecatcher should be asked to deal with them.
Action: The Clerk.

New Play Equipment: The A donation of £100 for the play equipment had been received from someone grateful for the work done removing the Himalayan Balsam.

Viridor Credits had made a pre-assessment visit in early September and the officer from Viridor Credits was positive about the Parish Council's application, but also noted that Viridor Credits had much less money to distribute than in the past so there was a possibility of only receiving a part grant. Viridor Credits had decided to consider applications for large grants separately from the main grants and so a decision on the Parish Council's application would

not be made until October 29th. This means that the result might not be known until after the November meeting when a meeting of the Working Party would need to be arranged.

The Chairman noted that the exercise class that had been using the Playing Field had decided to meet indoors over the winter.

4941 – Planning Applications:

There were no planning applications to consider. The Clerk reported that an application had been received for tree works at the Parsonage which included the felling of multiple Ash trees infected with Ash dieback. After discussion, and noting that neighbours had not had an opportunity to comment on the application, it was agreed to hold an extra meeting on Thursday October 22nd at 8.15pm to consider this application.

Planning Application Updates:

The application for the construction of a tennis court with associated fencing and landscaping at Rockwells House had been withdrawn. The application for the erection of a two-storey and a one-storey extension at 2 Wickham Cottages had been approved and Listed Building Consent had been granted. The District Council had no objection to the felling of three Beech trees at 6 Kale Street; the Oak tree at Batcombe Village Hall; or the three Ash trees at Shortwood Farmhouse.

The Parish Council had been made aware of an application for the Conversion of Buildings and New Workshop and Offices at Alham Farm by the planning agent. As Alham Farm is in Evercreech parish, the Parish Council was not consulted by the District Council on this application. Evercreech Parish Council had recommended approval of the application.

4942 – Website Accessibility Check: The Clerk reported that the basic Website Accessibility Check had been completed and an Accessibility Statement published on the website by the September 23rd deadline. The Accessibility Statement included a timetable for correcting the issues revealed in the Accessibility Check. Some of these (such as ensuring that all images on the website have alternative text) were straightforward and had already been completed. Others (such as ensuring all pdfs published since September 2018 have properly styled headings) would be more time consuming. The Accessibility Statement and a copy of the Accessibility Check can be found on the Parish Council website. **Action: The Clerk.**

4943 – Clerk’s Salary: The Clerk reported that the National Joint Council for Local Government Services has reached agreement on new pay scales for 2020/21. The National Association of Local Councils and the Association of Local Council Clerks jointly recommended these salary scales for all Clerks with the standard contract of employment. Under the new pay scales, the Clerk’s salary would increase from £11.22 an hour to £11.53 to be backdated to April 1st 2020. This was a 2.76% increase. The Parish Council agreed the increase in the Clerk’s salary, which was in line with the Clerk’s Contract of Employment, with Ian Sage and Jayne Cox abstaining as relatives of the Clerk.

4944 – Budget Update: Janet Jones volunteered to undertake the quarterly bank reconciliation before the next meeting.

An updated projection on the current year’s budget had been distributed with the Agenda. Receipt of the precept and VAT repayment had been noted previously. The allotments rent would be £350 if all the allotments remain occupied. £39.50 had been received from the Mendip Lottery for the play equipment and a donation of £100 was received in September. Interest would be minimal.

With regard to payments, the projection for £14,000 for the new play equipment was a rough estimate – £10,632 had been raised for the equipment plus £4,000 of the Council's own money put aside. This didn't include any grants that might be received. Playing Field maintenance was likely to be lower than usual if the new equipment was installed. The recommended increase in the Clerk's salary meant this would be slightly higher than budgeted. Other administration expenses were likely to be as budgeted as were the grants. The budget included £200 for road salt but the County Council had provided this the previous winter without charge.

If the play equipment money was spent the Parish Council would a deficit of £12,000 on the year. This would give funds of £9,470 at the end of the year of which £996 would be earmarked for the allotments and £77 for notice boards.

The Parish Council was fortunate in having done the fundraising for the play equipment last year and having already received our precept for this year its income would not be affected by the coronavirus restrictions. The Council was also unlikely to have any significant additional expenditure arising from Covid-19. It had healthy reserves, which would allow the Council to consider the financial impact on residents when setting the precept for next year.

4945 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payment:

- £160.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in the Playing Field in September.
- £95.00 Gary Butler – Hedge Cutting and Strimming in the Allotments.
- £1,077.44 The Clerk – Salary for 2nd Quarter.
- £123.83 The Clerk – Expenses for 2nd Quarter.

4946 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: Unitary Council – it was noted that the County Council had proposed creating a single unitary council for Somerset and that the District Councils had produced a counter proposal based on two unitary councils for Somerset – East and West. The District Councillor reported that the Government had until March 1st to decide whether they would cancel the County Council elections which would be the first step in the process of establishing a unitary council.

Recycle More – it was noted that the Recycle More service would be launched in Mendip at the end of October and the service would use a new recycling container – a bright blue bag.

Planning System Review – it was noted that the Government were proposing major changes to the planning system and there were two consultations taking place. A briefing paper from Mendip District Council had been distributed with the Agenda. Planning for the Future was a white paper that would require a new Planning Act. The main proposal was the replacement of the current individual planning system with three predetermined zones (growth, renewal and protection) with a presumption in favour of development in the first two zones. The second consultation was about short-term measures to be introduced by December including the widening Permission in Principle and the relaxation of affordable housing requirements.

Remembrance Sunday – Avon & Somerset police had issued advice on Remembrance Sunday noting the responsibilities of the event organisers in the current situation. The Royal British Legion had told Avon & Somerset police that local Councils should be considered the event organiser as Remembrance Sunday was a civic event. However, it was likely that the local branch of the Royal British Legion would be the event organiser here in Batcombe.

4947 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: An extra meeting to be held on Thursday 22nd October at 8.15pm via Zoom with the next monthly meeting on Wednesday 4th November 2020 at 7.30pm via Zoom.

M Comley

4/11/20