

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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## Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021 via Zoom, commencing at 7.30pm.

**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 sixteen members of the public.

**5003 – Apologies for Absence:** David Stevens, Justin Witcombe, and Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor.

**5004 – Declarations of Interest:** None.

**5005 – Public Participation:** None.

**5006 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021** were agreed as a correct record. The Chairman to sign at a later date.

**5007 – Matters Arising:** Precept – the Clerk reported that precept request had been submitted to Mendip District Council and acknowledged.

**5008 – Proposed Para 79 House at Valley View Farm:** Paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework allows a house to be built in the countryside if it is ‘of exceptional quality, in that it is truly outstanding or innovative, reflecting the highest standards in architecture’. It must also ‘significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area’. Four representatives of the planning agents Ridge and Partners LLP – Paul Fong - planning consultant, Digby Harris - architect, Austin Redman - architect, and a landscape architect – attended the meeting to talk about a proposal for a Para 79 house at Valley View Farm.

Paul Fong shared the Design and Access Statement for the house at Valley View Farm with those attending the meeting and explained the nature of a Para 79 House. He noted that the house had received the approval of a Design Panel as meeting the requirements of a Para 79 House including in the area of energy conservation and sustainable design. The house would be built on a butterfly design with four wings coming from a central body to maximise views from the house. The interior of the building would be of a gothic design to match the exterior and the landscape design would enhance the habitat surrounding the building.

In answer to questions about the Design Panel, Paul Fong stated that their approval did not mean that the Parish Council’s comments would not be taken into account and the normal planning procedure would be gone through. The Design Panel consisted of architects, landscape architects and other professionals who could provide an expert assessment of the design of a Para 79 House that most Council planning departments were not equipped to do. Paul Fong noted that not many Para 79 houses were approved by Design Panels as there was a very high bar.

Asked about construction traffic, Paul Fong stated that this would be dealt with under a Construction Management Plan that should be a condition of the planning permission.

Asked about the impact on views from around the village, Paul Fong noted that a full landscape and visual assessment had been done and was included in the Design and Access Statement. The landscape architect noted that the landfall would screen the house from the village and it would only be visible from higher ground. Paul Fong also noted that the intention was not to hide the architecture of the house.

Concerns were expressed that the Design Panel did not live in the village and the quality of the design was questioned, along with the need for a house in a location of outstanding beauty. It was suggested that the house should be built on the site of the original dwelling. Paul Fong noted that there would be a management plan to maintain the enhancement of the site which would be a condition of the planning permission. The applicant stated his view that the proposed building would significantly enhance the site and that he intended to live in the house with his family.

In response to a question from the Chairman the architect stated that the ground floor of the house would be approximately 4,000 sq. ft and 8,000 sq. ft on all floors. Jayne Cox raised a question of what the light pollution from the building would be. The Clerk stated that the Design and Access Statement would be placed on the Parish Council website and a note referring people to the website would be included in the parish magazine.

It was noted that the Parish Council would be consulted on the planning application by the District Council in due course. Paul Fong concluded by stating that he welcomed comments from the parish and at the request of the Chairman would see if he could arrange a site visit for a limited number of people. The District Councillor summarised the planning process, noting that only material planning issues would be considered. The applicant and his representatives left the meeting at this point.

**5009 – District and County Councillors’ Reports:** The District Councillor noted that the garage at Greenacres in Westcombe had been approved despite the Parish Council’s recommendation of refusal but the application for the house had not yet been determined. He would continue to represent Batcombe’s concerns with regard to large quarry applications and noted that the Planning Department in Mendip had a number of issues resulting from COVID-19. He stated that the District Council should not have a deficit on the coming year and no services would be cut. He noted that business grants were available from the Council. A written report had been received from the County Councillor and distributed to Parish Councillors before the meeting and the Chairman noted the main points in the report. She also reported that the County Councillor spoke up for Batcombe at the meeting regarding the application to open Bartlett’s Quarry. The District Councillor left the meeting at this point

**5010 – Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages:** The Chairman reported that the work to replace the sewage treatment plant had not yet been scheduled.

**5011 – Climate Emergency Community Fund Grant Application:** With the support of the District Councillor, the Chairman had made a grant application to the County Council’s Climate Emergency Community Fund for a grant of £45,600 for a professional report on biodiversity and water management/resilience in the parish. Details of the application had been distributed to Parish Councillors together with a quote for producing the report. The Chairman was waiting for further quotes to complete the application. The Parish Council formally approved the application on the understanding that there would be no cost to the Council. The Chairman would speak to the District Councillor about obtaining the additional quotes needed.

**5012 – Footpaths and Highways:** Concerns were raised over a number of issues in Mill Lane at the last meeting and the Clerk had written to one of the residents regarding these

issues. A response had been received from these residents stating that their chickens were now penned; that they did not consider their parking to be an issue; that there were no problems with their septic tank and that it was only water running down the lane. The Parish Council agreed to take no further action at present.

The Chairman had sent photos of the reported issues on Knoll Lane with heavy rain following the joint project between Wanstrow Parish Council and the Mendip Byways and Bridleways Association. The pipe under the highway had been blocked by silt coming down the lane and there had been a danger of flooding which was now resolved. The complaint had been forwarded to the Parish Council as Councillors in Wanstrow were under the mistaken impression that the lane was in Batcombe. The Chairman also noted that the issues with the bridleway at Greenscombe were ongoing.

**5013 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report:** Planning permission would be required for the work on the trees in the Playing Field. The tree surgeon would charge an extra £25 to obtain planning permission or the Parish Council could apply itself. There was no fee for tree applications. It was agreed that the Clerk should make the planning application. **Action: The Clerk.**

**New Play Equipment:** A quarterly update on progress had been made to Viridor Credits and accepted. The order for the new play equipment had been placed with Sutcliffe Play South West and the Parish Council were waiting to hear when it will be installed (which should be sometime in March/April). Ian Sage and Peter Glaisher would cut back the hedge in the Playing Field before the equipment was installed.

It was reported that a number of dogs were seen in the Playing Field and this was felt to be due to the fact that the gate did not close properly. A new gate would be considered once the play equipment was installed.

**5014 – Planning Applications:**

There were no planning applications to consider. There was a report of a wooden structure being built in woods near Churchbridge Lodge and a query as to whether or not it needed planning permission.

**Planning Application Updates:**

The County Council had refused planning permission for the re-opening of Bartletts Quarry while Torr Works Quarry was still open.

**5015 – Budget Update for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021:** An updated projection on the current year's budget had been distributed with the Agendas. The allotments rent would be slightly less than budgeted as the vacant allotment would be let at a small discount. A total of £784.50 had been received for the new play equipment/Playing Field refurbishment - £84.50 from the Mendip Lottery for the play equipment; a donation of £100 received in September; and a further £600 donation from the Cricket Club.

With regard to Playing Field expenses, the cost of the grass cutting, electricity and water supply and annual inspection should all be slightly less than budgeted. The cost of maintenance should be slightly more than budgeted because of the cost of the tree works. The cost of the play equipment was the Contributing Third Party payment of £5,897.60 to Viridor. The invoice for the new play equipment would be due in the next financial year and most would be paid directly by the grant from Viridor Credits.

The increase in the Clerk's salary meant this would be slightly higher than budgeted, but the Clerk's expenses were lower. Membership of the SLCC was higher than budgeted because the Clerk's salary rose above £4,000 last year which put his membership up a price band. The

Zoom subscription was an unbudgeted expense resulting from the pandemic, but photocopying would be less than budgeted as paper copies of Agendas and Minutes, etc were not being distributed. Other administration expenses were likely to be as budgeted. Grants were as budgeted and the maintenance of the allotments was likely to be lower than budgeted. The budget had included £200 for road salt but this had not yet been required - the County Council had provided salt last winter without charge.

There was a projected deficit of £3,350 on the year as a result of spending money raised for the play equipment in previous years on the CTP payment. This gave funds of £18,180 at the end of the year of which approximately £5,530 would be earmarked for the new play equipment and around £1,045 for the allotments.

**5016 - Authorisation of payment:** Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £112.00 Society of Local Council Clerks. This was the Clerk's subscription.
- £34.99 The Clerk. To reimburse internet security for the Parish Council laptop.
- £20.38 water2business. Water supply to the Playing Field.

**5017 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only:** Allotments – the Clerk reported that two of the allotment holders had given notice that they no longer wish to rent an allotment and the first two people on the waiting list were willing to take these on. One of these allotments had the frame of a polytunnel left by a previous allotment holder and the new allotment holder did not wish to take this on. Ian Sage offered to remove the polytunnel and some garden waste of the other allotment. The Clerk noted that the lease on the allotments field would come to an end in April and that he had sent the field owners a new lease to sign.

Concern was raised over the state of the verge near the junction with Eastcombe Lane and the Chairman volunteered to look at it. Jayne Cox raised a concern about the amount of litter being left on the sides of the road.

Peter Glaisher volunteered to put the Parish Council Agenda in the Westcombe notice board.

Residents near the church raised concerns over the impact of the Voneus antenna on the church tower on their wi-fi. Janet Jones stated that she had reported the issue to Voneus who felt that the problem was not with their antenna. Janet recommended that the residents talk to Voneus directly.

**5018 – Date and Time of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 at 7.30pm via Zoom.