

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 5th May 2021 via Zoom, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

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

5049 – Election of Chairman and Chairman’s Acceptance of Office: Mary Comley chaired this item. Mary proposed David Stevens as Chairman and this was seconded by Janet Jones. There being no other nominations David was duly elected and thanked Mary for her two years as Chairman. A resolution allowing David to sign his Acceptance of Office before the next meeting was proposed by Janet Jones, seconded by Mary Comley and agreed. David Stevens chaired the remainder of the meeting.

5050 – Election of Vice Chairman: Janet Jones was proposed by David Stevens, seconded by Mary Comley and elected as Vice Chairman.

5051 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Justin Witcombe as he had no internet connection.

5052 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5053 – Public Participation: None.

5054 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7th April 2021 were agreed as a correct record, proposed by Janet Jones and seconded by Mary Comley. The Chairman to sign at a later date.

5055 – Matters Arising: Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages – work had begun on the new treatment plant and would take another two weeks. Allotments – The Clerk reported that it had proved difficult to sign a new lease for the allotments field because of the Covid restrictions but that the owners were happy for the lease to continue at the previous rent of £220 a year. They had asked the Parish Council to remind allotment holders to take away any rubbish from the field.

5056 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: Written reports had been received from the District and County Councillors and distributed to Parish Councillors.

The District Councillor noted that residents in Somerset would be allowed an indicative vote on the two proposals for unitary Councils but the decision would lie with the Secretary of State. He also noted that Mendip was considering hybrid meetings to allow members of the public to attend physical meetings remotely. And that there would be a closure of the A359 at Wanstrow in July. He also thanked Mary Comley for her help and advice over the last two years. Mary thanked Michael for his support as District Councillor. In response to a question, he stated that there were revised plans for the development in Evercreech that were an improvement but still contained too many houses.

5057 – Footpaths and Highways: The Clerk reported that following another HGV getting stuck at the junction at the top of Holly Hill, two residents had requested a weight limit sign which they felt would be more effective in stopping HGV drivers than the current signs which are only advisory. That Clerk had informed them that a weight limit sign cannot just be erected – the Parish Council would first have to apply to the County Council, requesting that they impose a Traffic Regulation Order; and when the Parish Council had made enquiries in 2007 about imposing a weight limit the County Council’s Senior Transport Planner at the time had informed the Clerk that Batcombe would be very unlikely to score sufficiently for an Order to be imposed. One of the residents had since requested a length limit but the District Councillor felt that would be very unlikely to be approved. The Clerk noted that he had had a response from Peter Green who stated that they were only responsible for their own lorries and not those of hauliers coming to their site. The Clerk had e-mailed the owners of the last lorry to get stuck, but had no response. The Clerk to contact the County Council to check if Batcombe would qualify for a weight limit and copy in the County Councillor. The Clerk was also asked to write to the Road Haulage Association. **Action: The Clerk.**

Mary Comley had e-mailed Somerset Highways regarding a number of potholes. Mary also volunteered to check on progress with the improvement to the ditches at the top of the Honeycliff Bridleway **Action: Mary Comley.** The Clerk reported that the PCSO had been to look at Mill Lane but could not see a problem. The Clerk had filled him in with the background to the issues there. Janet Jones reported that there would be an article in the Parish News reminding walkers to keep to official footpaths.

5058 – Playing Field - New Play Equipment: Installation of the new play equipment was complete and the safety inspection would be taking place shortly. Ian Sage was thanked for watering the new turf. It was agreed to delay the opening of the Playing Field until Saturday 15th May to allow the turf to bed in and to disable the cableway for the time being to protect the turf on the new mounds. Notices about the opening to go on the Parish Council website and the Batcombe Facebook page. **Action: The Clerk.**

The Clerk noted that the deadline for a first drawdown of funds from Viridor Credits was very close, so Sutcliffe Play had provided an interim invoice for four pieces of equipment. A payment request had been made to Viridor Credits who had paid Sutcliffe Play the previous Friday. The Parish Council would need to pay the VAT on this interim invoice. Viridor Credits had also sent a plaque for display in the Playing Field.

The Clerk also reported that the annual safety inspection due in June had been cancelled and that the new play equipment was insured from the day of this meeting. The Clerk also noted that the portable toilet being used by the installers of the play equipment had blown over in the recent high winds and there had been a small spillage of the contents. He had contacted Sutcliffe Play and it was hoped that the contractor who had supplied the toilet would clean up the mess when he collected it. Ian Sage noted that there was a mole active in the Playing Field.

Some concerns had been raised about the colour of the multi-play equipment, but these had been made before the dark green roof was in place.

A celebration of the new equipment would be held in the Playing Field on the Saturday afternoon of July 17th (Covid restrictions permitting). Children would be asked to enter a competition to design two plaques to go in the Playing Field, one saying *Please Look After Our Playing Field* and the other saying *No Dogs Allowed*. It was suggested that the celebration should be a bring your own picnic with music. The Clerk noted that the Parish Council had also promised to erect a plaque with the names of all those who had donated £100 or more. It was agreed that the Working Party should meet to agree the details of the celebration to be put in the parish magazine. **Action: The Working Party.**

Options for a replacement gate into the Playing Field to be looked into as part of the next stage of work on the Playing Field, along with a new mat for the cricket net – and it was suggested that any new gate should be self-closing. The Clerk noted that the money available for the additional work would only be known once the final invoice had been submitted to Viridor Credits and it was clear how much of the invoice they would pay. He would also need to contact Viridor Credits about the publicity for the celebration and would need to invite a representative of Viridor Credits to that event. Clare Kingston noted that an update was needed for the Mendip Lottery website. **Action: The Clerk.**

5059 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2021/0672/FUL Retrospective permission for the change of use from agricultural to ancillary residential and the erection of three outbuildings. Field House, Baileys Lane, Westcombe – Full Application. The three outbuildings were a carport, Air Source Heat Pump enclosure and a greenhouse. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval as there were no objections to the erection of the three outbuildings. The Council did feel that, given the prominent location, it would be better if the colour of the outbuildings had matched that of the dwelling. **Action: The Clerk.**

It was suggested that a reminder be placed in the parish magazine and on the website that planning permission was a legal requirement, and that it would help the Parish Council in making its recommendation if applicants could attend the Parish Council meeting at which applications were being considered. It was also noted that where the Parish Council were notified of development that had taken place without planning permission this would be passed onto the District Council.

It was reported that a new application for a tennis court at Rockwells House had been submitted to the District Council but the Parish Council had not yet been notified and the application had not yet been uploaded onto the District Council's website. It was hoped that this application could be considered at an in-person meeting, but this would depend on the consultation deadline.

Planning Application Updates.

None. The District Councillor left the meeting at this point.

5060 - Appointment of Staffing Committee: Mary Comley, Peter Glaisher and Janet Jones volunteered to be the members of the Staffing Committee.

5061 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives: Jayne Cox was appointed as the Parish Council's Village Hall Representative and the Clerk agreed to continue as the Heritage Room Representative.

5062 – Future Meetings: The Clerk noted that the legislation allowing Parish Councils to meet online would expire on May 7th and so all meetings after that date will need to be in person. As the Parish Council had no control over the number of members of the public attending, the Government had recommended that Councils do not meet until June 21st when all restrictions on meetings should be lifted and that the Council delegate their powers to the Clerk for this period. The Parish Council would need to approve the Annual Return in person by the end of June so that the Certificate of Exemption could be sent to the External Auditor, so the Clerk suggested holding a meeting on Wednesday 23rd of June and the July meeting a week later than usual on July 14th.

A Business Continuity Motion delegating the authority to make decisions to the Clerk in consultation with the Parish Councillors and based on an example provided by Justin Robinson of SALC, (copy attached to the Minutes) was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Peter Glaisher and agreed.

The following dates for meetings in 2021/22 were agreed:

23rd June 14th July 4th August 1st September 6th October 3rd November
1st December 5th January 2nd February 2nd March 6th April 4th May

Wednesday April 6th would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The Council normally meets at 8.00pm in the summer and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year.

5063 – Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters: It was agreed that Financial Regulations be reviewed at the October meeting; Standing Orders at the February meeting; and the Risk Management Policy, insurance cover and the Schedule of Assets at the March meeting. Other policies to be reviewed in the year before the next election.

5064 – Insurance Renewal: The Clerk noted that the Parish Council was two years into a three-year long-term agreement. Details of the insurance premium had not yet been received but would increase due to the insurance of the new play equipment. Renewal was due on June 1st and the Clerk would e-mail Councillors details of the premium when received.

5065 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2021: A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas and the Clerk briefly referred to the following notes that had been included with the Agendas.

The VAT Refund was £9 less than budgeted and the allotments rent was £15 more than budgeted. The £910 raised for new play equipment had not been budgeted for – this consisted of £600 from the Cricket Club, two £100 donations and regular small donations through the Mendip Lottery. As a result, receipts were £932 more than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting was £60 less than the budgeted figure as there was no increase in the price per cut. The cost of the electricity supply was £10 less than budgeted as a result of entering into a new electricity contract the previous year. The cost of the water supply was £10 below budget as the supply was kept turned off as a result of the coronavirus restrictions. Maintenance consisted of £125 for the molecatcher and £110 for cutting back the hedge. Overall maintenance was £265 less than budgeted – partly because no play bark was purchased this year. The cost of the play equipment was the Contributing Third Party payment of £5,897.60 paid to Viridor Credits, which was a condition of their grant. As a result, overall Playing Field payments were £5,548 more than budgeted – although without the payment to Viridor Credits they would have been £349 less than budgeted.

The Clerk's salary was slightly more than budgeted as a result of a small increase in salary. The Clerk's expenses were less than budgeted. The cost of the Clerk's membership of SLCC was £12 more than budgeted as the increase in his salary placed him in the next salary band for membership fees. No training was undertaken as a result of the pandemic. Photocopying was slightly less than budgeted as Agendas were distributed by e-mail. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted and overall administration costs were £40 less than budgeted.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted. The expenditure on the allotments was £220 for the lease of the field and £95 spent on hedge cutting, which meant that allotments maintenance was £55 less than budgeted. £200 had been budgeted for winter road maintenance but was not required. As a result of the above, total payments were £5,243 more than budgeted, although without the payment to Viridor Credits (which came from the money raised for the new play equipment), total payments would have been £644 less than budgeted.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and the play equipment were given in the distributed accounts. At the end of the year there was £1,066 of earmarked allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. At the beginning of the year there

was £10,653 in the Parish Council accounts that had been raised for new play equipment. £5,897 of this money was used for the payment to Viridor Credits and a further £910 raised for the play equipment which meant that at the end of the year there was £5,666 earmarked for the new play equipment.

The net result of the variations against the budget given above was a deficit of £2,866 on the year instead of the budgeted surplus of £1,455. This is largely a result of the payment to Viridor Credits from the money raised for new play equipment and the additional money raised for the play equipment. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £18,666 in its funds, £10,690 more than anticipated in the budget. This was a result of money raised for the new play equipment and money budgeted for play equipment repairs in previous years that had not been spent. Of this £18,666 in funds at the end of the year, £1,066 was set aside for the allotments, £5,666 for new play equipment and £77 for notice boards. This meant that the Parish Council had funds totalling £11,857 that were not earmarked for specific items, (although it was envisaged that the £4,000 that had been intended for play equipment repairs will go towards the cost of the new play equipment). This left the Parish Council with effective reserves of £7,857 which should be sufficient to cover any unforeseen contingency and a contested by-election and was more than the maximum reserve recommended by SALC of two-thirds of the precept.

The payment to the Village Hall was queried as almost all meetings in the last year had been held online. It was noted that the payment was made before the extent of the lockdown was known and that it could be considered a donation to Village Hall funds.

Several Councillors indicated that they were happy to have their Agendas and Minutes delivered by e-mail and the Clerk stated that this was possible if Councillors signed a dispensation, which he would distribute. **Action: The Clerk.**

The Clerk was asked if he had done any extra hours over the last year and noted that he had done roughly 30 extra hours. The Clerk was willing to take part of the hours in lieu and to consider the remainder as his donation towards the play equipment. The Clerk to take payment for half the extra hours if it was not possible to take time in lieu.

5066 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2022: An updated projection on this year's budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that he had not yet received confirmation that this year's precept of £9,750 had been paid. A VAT claim for £76 for the previous year had been made, and another claim for the VAT of £12,467 on the new play equipment would be made once it had been paid. If all allotments were taken the rent this year would be £25 less than budgeted because of the rent refund from the previous year.

With regard to payments, the amount for the new play equipment was the VAT (to be reclaimed) plus the difference between the grant and the cost of the new equipment which was £3,358. The Clerk's salary would be £25 more than budgeted because of a small underpayment last year. The level of the Zoom subscription would depend on how long the Parish Council kept the subscription going. The insurance premium would increase because of the insurance of the new play equipment but the amount was not yet known. Photocopying would be reduced as no paper Agendas and Minutes were distributed to Councillors over the last year.

The projection showed a deficit of £1,510 on the year, as a result of spending money raised for the play equipment. This gave funds of £17,156 at the end of the year of which £1,020 would be earmarked for the allotments, £77 for notice boards and £2,308 for the Playing Field improvements. This would leave £13,751 of funds which weren't earmarked of which £4,000 was intended for the Playing Field.

5067 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the following payments:

Sutcliffe Play (South West) Limited - £7,218.60 – VAT on interim play equipment invoice.

T & E A Hollis - £220.00 – Rent of Allotments Field.

Dominic Conway - £80.00 – Grass cutting in March.

5068 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: Jayne Cox raised a concern about the surface of the Alham Lane which was outside the parish. Mary Comley had raised the issue with Somerset Highways who had promised to inspect the lane.

Janet Jones asked if Farmfest was happening this year. Mary Comley stated that it was going ahead on the weekend of 30th and 31st July. With closure of the A359 at Wanstrow at the same time there could be considerable disruption in Batcombe.

Clare Kingston reported that very large lorries were making deliveries to Westcombe Dairy which meant that everyone who parked along the street in Westcombe had to move their cars each time.

The Clerk reported that the bank reconciliations for each fourth quarter during the year had been verified by Janet Jones and this was confirmed by Janet.

5069 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 23rd June 2021 at 8.00pm in the Jubilee Hall. The Clerk noted that the meeting was being held in the Jubilee Hall as this allowed more space and it was not yet known what restrictions might be in place on June 23rd.

D J Stevens

21/7/21