

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 3rd March 2021 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 forty members of the public.

5019 – Apologies for Absence: Justin Witcombe, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper – County Councillor and one member of the public.

5020 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5021 – Public Participation: None.

5022 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd February 2021 were agreed as a correct record. The Chairman to sign at a later date.

5023 – Matters Arising: Ash Tree Cottages Sewage Treatment Plant – the Chairman reported that Hastoes had informed her that the tendering process for the replacement sewage treatment plant was complete and it was hoped that work would begin shortly. Mill Lane – the Chairman stated that correspondence had been received from two different parties and would be discussed at the next meeting.

5024 – Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2021/0222/FUL Erection of a dwelling of exceptional quality design. Valley View Farm, Hincombe Hill, Batcombe BA4 6AJ – Full Application. The Chairman invited members of the public to comment on the application. One spoke to support the application stating that it was an original and charming house of exceptional quality that could not be seen from the village and that one other resident also supported the application.

Ten people spoke to object to the application and made the following points: the location of the proposed replacement dwelling was well away from the built environment of the village in open countryside on top of a hill that will be visible on the higher ground surrounding the village; the precedent this would create for future development in the open countryside, particularly for large houses on top of hills, and the subsequent damage to the English countryside; the enormous size of the building which would make it stand out prominently; the design of the house which had traditionally been used for smaller buildings and was unsuitable for such a large building, and which was totally out of keeping with the vernacular buildings of Batcombe and the hills of the Mendips; the location of such a high building on top of a plateau when all other large houses in the area were built in the river valleys; the impact on an unspoilt landscape of exceptional historical and natural value and beauty, that would be changed forever by a huge building in an artificial landscape that would be impossible to screen; the ecological damage to an area of open countryside resulting from the creation of an artificial landscape and the impact on wildlife and biodiversity on the proposed site; the environmental impact of the materials needed to be produced and transported for such a large building; the increase in traffic on a dangerous corner, particularly during construction;

the light pollution that would result from such a large building in a prominent location and the detrimental impact this would have on the night sky; the visual impact of a building, out of keeping with the local farms and farmland, on the views from the surrounding higher ground, several footpaths and the road into the village from Bruton; the fact that the visual impact should not be restricted to views from footpaths; inaccuracies in the Design and Access Statement and in particular disappointment that the photographs taken of the site from surrounding locations had been taken from part way down the hills rather than from the higher ground; the fact that the Design Review Panel had not visited the site and so could not assess the impact on the landscape, particularly as they would have had to rely on the information provided by the applicant and his agents. Janet Jones and the Clerk reported comments on the application that had been made to them.

The District Councillor encouraged members of the public to make submissions on the planning application to Mendip District Council. It was noted that there was some confusion over the deadline for making submissions and the Clerk recommended that members of the public made their submission by the extended deadline he had been given of March 8th. The Chairman reported back on a series of questions she had asked the case officer.

Following discussion amongst the Parish Councillors, the Council agreed to recommend refusal of the application on the grounds that the proposed development did not meet the requirements of Paragraph 79(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework, as it was not of exceptional quality and would not significantly enhance its immediate setting or be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area. The Parish Council noted the following grounds for recommending refusal – the design and appearance of the property which was not in keeping with local buildings; the impact on the visual amenity of such a large building that would have a detrimental impact on a landscape of great beauty and can be seen from higher ground around the parish; the layout and massive nature of the building that undermined its ecological credentials; the impact on the Batcombe Conservation Area; the loss of trees to make room for an artificial landscape; the access onto a difficult corner on Hincombe Hill; and light pollution from such a large, prominent building. The Parish Council also noted that the appeal against refusal of permission for a similar building in this location had been dismissed and noted the Planning Inspector's comment that the "proposal would harm the character and appearance of the appeal site and the wider countryside".

Planning Application No: 2021/0210/HSE Proposed single storey boot room to South Elevation. Carrot Hill Farmhouse, Spargrove Lane, Batcombe – Householder Application. Parish Councillors had no concerns with the addition of a small extension to the house. However, concerns were raised about a number of additions to the property that had not received planning permission. These included the conversion of the garage to a room in the house, the addition of a tennis court and a wooden structure in the field below. After taking advice from the District Councillor, the Parish Council decided to leave the decision to the case officer while making the case officer aware of the concerns about the additions that may require retrospective planning applications.

Planning Application No: 2021/0296/TCA Proposed works to trees in a Conservation Area: T1 and T2 (Cherry) - Fell. Church View, Batcombe BA4 6HD – Works/Felling Trees in a CA. The Parish Council recommended approval as the Cherry trees were clearly planted too close to the garden walls.

Planning Application No: 2021/0321/TPO TPO M182: T1 (Hornbeam) - Remove epicormic growth and crown lift. T18 (Maple) - Raise canopy to 2.0m. T24 (Maple) – Remove epicormic growth. T26 (Horse Chestnut) - Remove broken branches. T46 (Ash) - Remove adjacent decayed Elder. T51 (Oak) - Fell. T58 (Maple) - Fell. Batch Orchard, Back Lane,

Batcombe – Works/Felling of TPO Trees. The Parish Council recommended approval as the works to these trees with Tree Preservation Orders were considered necessary. Following the suggestion of a neighbour, the Parish Council decided to add a comment to their recommendation asking that care be taken with the crown lift of the Hornbeam that tree was already stressed.

The Parish Council considered how to respond to people mentioning possible developments without planning permission to Parish Councillors. After discussion it was agreed that any issues raised should be directed to the Clerk, who can check whether there was a planning issue and report those that were clear breaches of planning policy to the District Council. It was also agreed that this should be done outside of public meetings with results being reported to Councillors.

Planning Application Updates.

The District Council had had no objection to the proposed tree works at Little Court. And as noted at the previous month's meeting, planning permission for the garage at Greenacres on Baileys Lane in Westcombe had been granted, although no decision had yet been made on the house at Greenacres.

5025 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report: Ian Sage was thanked for repairing on of the junior swing seats that had been damaged, possibly as an act of vandalism. It was agreed to mention this on the Parish Council website, asking parents to be aware and report any incidents of vandalism to the PCSO. A resident reported that teenagers had been seen drinking in the Playing Field. The Parish Council accepted the quote from Dominic Comley to cut the Playing Field grass for the next year. His prices were unchanged from the previous year.

New Play Equipment: The Clerk reported that Sutcliffe Play had informed him that there had been an unavoidable delay of two weeks in the manufacture of the new play equipment but installation should now begin on April 6th (the Tuesday after the Easter bank holiday). It was agreed to close the Playing Field during the installation and while the remnants of the old equipment were removed as a digger would be needed to remove the larger items. When a date was arranged with the digger driver, the Clerk would put a notice on the Parish Council website and on the Playing Field gates.

5026 – Allotments: Ian Sage was thanked for removing the polytunnel frame and other unwanted materials from the vacant allotments. Both allotments had now been re-let at a reduced rent of £25 for this year. One of the previous allotment holders had paid her rent for the current year and the Clerk recommended the Parish Council reimburse her the £25 paid by the new allotment holder. The Parish Council felt that if this allotment holder had rented the allotment with the polytunnel frame and other rubbish left on it that she might like to donate the £25 towards the future tidying of the allotments. The Clerk to follow this up. The Clerk reported that the field owners had confirmed that they were happy to renew the lease but ask that the Parish Council ensures that the general areas of the field are well maintained. This is the joint responsibility of the allotment holders, but has slipped in recent years. It was suggested that if there were problems in future a deposit system might be introduced.

5027 – Annual Parish Meeting: The Parish Council decided not to organise an Annual Parish Meeting this year, but to hold a full Parish Council meeting in April to cover items not dealt with at this meeting.

5028 – A Neighbourhood Plan: The Chairman had suggested considering the possibility of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for Batcombe to protect the parish against developers.

However, it was noted that the experience of Norton St Philip suggested that a Neighbourhood Plan offered little protection against a determined developer. Another option suggested was designating the area An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, although this would involve a lot of work. The Chairman to explore the option of a Neighbourhood Plan with Mendip District Council.

5029 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors authorised the payment of £25 to the previous allotment holder if appropriate.

5030 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: The Clerk read an e-mail he had received from one of the residents present earlier in the meeting stating how impressed she was with what every member of the Council had said in regarding to the planning application for Valley View Farm: *“They all put forward their individual points of view in an extremely articulate fashion”*.

There was a discussion of the difficulties caused by one member of the Parish Council being unable to attend Zoom meetings and it was noted that face to face meetings were unlikely to resume until July at the earliest.

It was noted that there should be a celebration when the new play equipment had been installed and it was agreed to discuss this at the next meeting.

5031 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 7th April 2021 at 7.30pm via Zoom.

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