

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Notes from a Consultative Meeting of Batcombe Parish Councillors held on Wednesday 26th May 2021 via Zoom, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

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

A1 – A Note on the Meeting: The Clerk noted that the legislation allowing Parish Councils to meet online had expired on May 7th and had not been renewed by the Government, who also advised that Parish Councils should not meet in person until after June 21st. The Parish Council had therefore delegated the authority to make decisions to the Clerk in consultation with Parish Councillors, which was the purpose of this meeting.

The Clerk also noted that the meeting would be conducted as a normal Parish Council meeting with members of the public being allowed to comment on planning applications and then Councillors discussing each application and coming to a decision on how to advise the Clerk. The only difference being that legally the decision would be made by the Clerk. As in previous meetings members of the public would be asked to speak once and for a maximum of three minutes (at the discretion of the Chairman).

A2 – Declarations of Interest: None.

A3 – Public Participation: None.

A4 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2021/0950/FUL Construction of tennis court with associated fencing and landscaping. Rockwells House, Batcombe – Full Application.

The application was outlined by Janet Montgomery of Brimble Lea on behalf of the applicant. She noted that extensive dialogue had taken place with Mendip District Council to address concerns raised regarding previous applications and the tennis court had been re-orientated by 90° to reflect the historic field boundaries with the majority of the court within the existing garden area. The Chairman noted that Parish Councillors had visited the site.

Three members of the public spoke to object to the proposal, expressing concerns at the impact on the Conservation Area, as the tennis court extended into an agricultural field, having an impact on the ecology of the field and a significant visual impact from across the valley and as walkers approached the village. It was also claimed that the garden had already been extended into the field. Fletcher Robinson from CPRE Somerset noted that the location was a highly sensitive one and disagreed with the Conservation Officer's view that the proposal would not impact on the Conservation Area and neighbouring historic buildings.

Six members of the public spoke in support of the proposal, noting that other tennis courts had been allowed on agricultural land including one neighbouring this field and extensive mitigation factors had been included in the proposal to reduce the impact. It was also noted that there would be no lighting on the tennis court. The applicant noted the mitigation factors taken, including planting trees and burying the electricity cable and that it was only a small sliver of a field being taken for the tennis court.

After discussion Parish Councillors advised the Clerk to recommend approval as they felt that the applicant had made great efforts to address the objections to the previous application and had modified the application sufficiently for it to be approved. Parish Councillors still had some concerns about the encroachment on agricultural land, but did not feel that these were sufficient to recommend refusal. Parish Councillors did recommend that the Clerk ask for a number of conditions to be placed on the planning permission when granted: to exclude the installation of external lighting on the tennis court to protect the natural environment from light pollution; to prevent any further incursion onto the field for any domestic or gardening purposes; and to protect the trees being planted to shield the tennis court.

Planning Application Nos: 2021/0782/HSE and 2021/0783/LBC – Reconfigure the ground floor plan with minor demolition work and new internal partition walls to improve internal rooms and circulation. Enlarge the opening in the facade of the single-storey extension to allow better circulation and connections to the garden, while providing an improved dining/family space that respects the existing building. Raise parapet of single-storey extension to create appropriate fall to improve existing rainwater drainage conditions. Add 2 bedrooms and bathrooms into the upper storey of the barn/workshop. On the north elevation, reinstate the historically infilled opening and replace like for like the existing neglected shop front window. Reconfigure and replace existing PVC SVP with a cast iron version on the south elevation. On the south elevation of the barn, reinstate the historically infilled opening and install a metal-framed window to match the existing metal window above. In general, replace all rotten windows of the main house with like for like timber framed windows to match existing. Elm House, Kale Street, Batcombe – Householder Application and Listed Building Consent.

The Chairman noted that Parish Councillors had visited the site and spoken to the applicant regarding the proposals. The applicant felt that it was a sensitive application. Parish Councillors advised the Clerk to recommend approval as the proposed alterations and modifications were felt to be very sympathetic to the listed building.

Planning Application No: 2021/1085/TCA T1 – Ash – Fell. T2 – Willow – reduce by 25%. Provis, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a CA. Parish Councillors advised the Clerk to recommend approval as the Ash tree was dead and Willow trees need constant attention.

A5 – Playground – Opening Celebration Arrangements and Exercise Classes: The Chairman noted that he had received acceptance of the invitations sent to the District Councillor, County Councillor and Chris Wildridge. He had also spoken to Rob Gore who would provide ice-cream. Clare Kingston was going to speak to someone from Mendip Times about the Opening. Clare had painted the swings and would paint the bus shelter and the seat. Details of the competition to design signs for the Playing Field had gone in the parish magazine with a closing date of June 21st and it was hoped the winning entries would be available for the meeting on June 23rd. Final details of the wording on the plaque were deferred to the meeting on June 23rd but a decision would need to be made then so that an order could be made with Mendip Signs. Clare Kingston would check with the person contacting the live music that they would be available for the Opening.

Concerns had been raised by parents about the safety of the roundabout which rotated very freely and it was felt that there was a danger of a child being hit by the upright bar on it. It was noted that parents needed to supervise their children especially when groups of children of different ages were using the roundabout. The Clerk was asked to talk to Sutcliffe Play to see if anything could be done to address these concerns. A question was also raised about adding a net to the basketball hoop, but it was noted that this was not provided for health and safety reasons. It was agreed to unlock the cableway so that it could be used.

Ian Sage had researched new cricket mats and would send an e-mail to Parish Councillors with details. Janet Jones and Mary Comley stated that they were planning to plant some plants on the bank by the new play equipment. Peter Glaisher reported that a local resident had offered to provide a quote for making a new gate for the Playing Field. It was noted that the gate would need a closing mechanism. Rupert Smith-Bingham noted that he had a previous Playing Field gate that he would be willing to return and would send a photograph of it. Clare Kingston reported that a couple of local residents were willing to re-weave the willow structures.

Concerns had been raised about commercial exercise classes being held in the Playing Field and whether the Parish Council should allow this. Similar classes had been held in the Playing Field the previous summer when few venues were available, but the current situation was felt to be different as other facilities were available and the classes could potentially obstruct the use of the new play equipment by children. The Clerk to inform the instructor that the Parish Council felt it would be better if the classes were held elsewhere.

The Clerk reported receiving an invoice from Sutcliffe Play for the remaining costs of the new play equipment and that he had asked Sutcliffe Play to amend the invoice slightly to fit more closely with the categories in the grant offer from Viridor Credits. He would send the revised invoices to Viridor Credits for payment in the hope that they would pay the full grant. The Parish Council would then need to pay the remaining cost of the play equipment and the VAT on these invoices.

A6 – Insurance Renewal: The Clerk reported that insuring the new play equipment had resulted in an increase of £102.44 in the Parish Council’s annual insurance premium, although the insurers had waived the additional premium for the remainder of the current year until the renewal date of June 1st. Due to closeness of the renewal date, it was agreed that the Clerk should pay the premium by bank transfer from his own account and then be reimbursed. This would avoid having to close the Playing Field if the Parish Council was uninsured for a period.

A7 - Authorisation of payment: Councillors noted the following payment:
Came & Co - £463.71 – Insurance premium due June 1st.

A8 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only: Mary Comley noted that she needed to ask Somerset Highways when the ditches at the top of Honeycliff bridleway would be dug out to prevent water flowing down the bridleway. Mary also reported that the kissing gate by Ash Tree Cottages had been damaged by a company working on the sewage treatment plant. The company had offered to pay for the repair but the landowner had claimed the gate was not his responsibility. Mary would follow this up.

Janet Jones noted that hard standing had appeared in the field next to Wickham Cottages and queried whether it needed planning permission. The Clerk was asked to find out if planning permission was required.

Clerk noted that the internal audit had been completed for the year ending 31st March 2021. The Parish Council will need to approve the Certificate of Exemption from External Audit, the Annual Governance Statement and the Accounting Statements for the year 2020/21 at its next meeting. This has to be done by June 30th and cannot be delegated to the Clerk, so the meeting on June 23rd would have to be in person, even if lockdown restrictions were not lifted on June 21st. The Parish Council would need to complete a risk assessment and meet in the Jubilee Hall which would allow adequate ventilation and social distancing.

David Stevens noted that the issues of HGVs would need to be considered at the next meeting. It was noted that there were considerable delays in planning issues being considered by the Planning Board. Concerns over the future of the village pub and whether it would reopen were raised.

A9 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 23rd June 2021 at 8.00pm in the Jubilee Hall.

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