

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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Minutes of a Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 3rd November 2021 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The County Councillor – Nigel Hewitt-Cooper and two members of the public.

5122 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: The District Councillor, Michael Gay.

5123 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5124 – Public Participation: None.

5125 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 6th October 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. The Chairman also signed the Minutes of the September meeting that had been agreed at the last meeting.

5126 – Matters Arising: Integrated Care System – Virginia Membrey had spoken to Pippa Taylor about raising this issue at the defibrillator meeting on November 17th but it had been decided that this would not be appropriate.

5127– District and County Councillors’ Reports: Written reports had been received from the District and County Councillors and distributed to Parish Councillors.

The County Councillor addressed a number of concerns that Parish Councillors had about the approval of planning applications for Carrot Hill Farmhouse in his role as the Vice Chair of the District Council’s Planning Board.

The most recent application for a barn, stables, yard and entrance drive at Carrot Hill had been sent by the case officer to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Board because the Parish Council had recommended refusal and the District Councillor was away. Both the Chair and Vice Chair had agreed with the case officer that there was no valid reason to refuse the application.

The County Councillor noted that equestrian use was a valid use of agricultural land. The fact that the applicant might not have any horses and might use the barn and stable for domestic purposes was a matter for enforcement. He also noted that the fact that part of the application was retrospective was not an issue in determining the application.

He noted the concern about the extension of the domestic curtilage but the fact that the tennis court may previously have been built on agricultural land was not relevant to this application but was a matter for enforcement. The previous behaviour of the applicant with regard to planning was not a relevant planning consideration. It was noted that there were only three enforcement officers for the whole of Mendip.

The County Councillor promised to speak to the District Councillor about the issue and was thanked for attending the meeting and listening to the Council’s concerns. He left the meeting at this point with the two members of the public.

5128 – Electoral Arrangements for the new Unitary Council: It was noted that the Government had not yet made a decision on the number of Councillors on the new unitary Council or on whether elections would take place in 2022 or 2023.

5129 – Allotments: The Clerk noted that the allotment rent had become due on November 1st and he had sent a reminder to the allotment holders. There would be two vacant allotments and these had been advertised in the parish magazine. It was noted that the allotment holders were responsible for the upkeep of the communal areas in the allotment field, but that this had been done by Dominic Conway – and the Council would need to keep an eye on this. The Parish Council authorised the cutting of the allotments field hedge. **Action: The Clerk.**

5130 – Footpaths and Highways: Recent heavy rain had caused a landslip on Hincombe Hill and there was now a steep drop directly from the roadside into the river. Somerset Highways had been informed and had placed bollards on the roadside. Mary Comley volunteered to contact Somerset Highways. **Action: Mary Comley.**

Mary Comley was thanked for reporting the issue with the “water feature” on Kale Street. Somerset Highways had responded to state that a filter drain had been ordered and would be installed.

An issue with the drains at the bottom of Cockpit Lane being blocked after heavy rain washed debris down the lane had been reported to Somerset Highways – who had dealt with the issue.

The Mendip Byways and Bridleways Association (MBBA) had reported an issue with Fry’s Lane behind Longleat Cottage. The surface of the lane was disturbed when the owners of Longleat Cottage erected a wall and has not been restored. It was now very muddy and a hazard for horse riders using the lane. Apparently, the owners have agreed to the work but it has not yet been done. Jayne Cox volunteered to speak to the owners. **Action: Jayne Cox.**

5131 – Playing Field: The mole catcher had caught two small moles in the Playing Field at a cost of £65. She noted that because of the existing runs other moles were likely to move in.

The quote for the tree works on the trees overhanging the cricket net and tree in the corner of the Playing Field had increased to £255 + VAT for the tree works and an additional £25 for making the planning application. It was agreed to go ahead with the work for this price. **Action: The Clerk.**

The Clerk reported that he had been unable to switch electricity supplier. Switching appeared to have been suspended as a result of the rapid rise in electricity prices and he had been unable to contact the person undertaking the switch in suppliers.

It was reported that one of the volunteers willing to treat the wooden bench in the Playing Field was unwell, but the bench would be treated when she had recovered.

Peter Glaisher reported that he had spoken to the family of Dominic Conway about placing a bench in the Playing Field in his memory and they were in favour of this idea. It was agreed to consider this at the next meeting when the cost of a bench had been researched.

Ian Sage reported that the new gate for the playing field had been delivered to the wrong depot would be delivered shortly. He noted that it would fit between the wooden posts of the existing gate and just needed someone to dig out a hole for the workings and concrete it in. Ian would also sort out the refurbishment of the cricket net. **Action: Ian Sage.**

5132 – Planning Applications: There were no applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: Listed Building Consent had been granted for the internal and external alterations at South View on Kale Street.

5133 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2022: Janet Jones reported that she had checked the quarterly bank reconciliation.

An updated projection on the current year's budget had been distributed with the Agenda. A claim for the VAT on the new play equipment had been made but not yet received. Receipts would be approximately £12,500 more than budgeted because of the VAT claimed on the new play equipment, which had not been included in the budget.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was roughly £16,500 more than budgeted, due to the money spent on the new play equipment and the cost of the new gate that was not included in the budget, most of which was the VAT that had been reclaimed. Grass cutting was likely to be a little less than budgeted (depending on the number of cuts required later in the year). Maintenance was likely to be more than budgeted as it would include the cost of the tree works to be done.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was likely to be £130 more than the budgeted figure. While the Clerk's expenses and photocopying costs were likely to be less than budgeted, the cost of the Zoom subscription had not been budgeted and the insurance premium was larger than budgeted because of the new play equipment being insured. The projection for the expenditure on Grants and Other Items were likely to be as budgeted.

Overall, there was a projected deficit of £2,650 compared to a budgeted surplus of £1,915. This was due to the net expenditure on the play equipment after the VAT is reclaimed and the cost of the new gate. However, the projected funds at the end of the year were £16,000 – around £4,500 better than expected when the budget was made. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure would be earmarked for the allotments

5134 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2023: A budget for the year ending 31st March 2023 had been distributed with the Agendas, along with a forecast for the years 2022-2025. The budget had been produced with the assumption that the next Parish Council election would take place in 2022 although no decision had yet been made on this. The Council needed to maintain sufficient reserves for a contested election and a possible by-election which could be several thousand pounds.

The Clerk noted that the budget and the forecast were produced on the basis of taking the projected figures for this year (apart from one-off expenditures) and adding small increases and was an opportunity for the Council to review its expenditure. The possibility of providing for winter maintenance of the roads was raised. It was decided to consider the future of the Parish Council as an item on the next meeting's Agenda.

If a contested election were to take place in 2022 along with the refurbishment of the cricket nets, then an unchanged precept and no other additional expenditure would result in a deficit of under £1,000 in 2022/23 and surpluses of around £1,000 in the following years. This would leave the Council with relatively high reserves.

It was agreed that a decision on the level of the precept would not be made until confirmation of the repayment of the VAT on the new play equipment had been received and the tax base for 2022/23 had been determined in January so that the impact of any increase on Council Tax would be known.

5135 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in Playing Field in October.

£65.00 Mole Catcher – two moles caught in the Playing Field.

The mole catcher had been paid in cash and the Clerk was reimbursed for this payment.

5136 – Other Business – matters of information only:

Come and Meet Batcombe – Mary Comley and Jayne Cox volunteered to man the Parish Council table at this event on Sunday November 21st. The Clerk to provide a “crib sheet” of what the Parish Council does. **Action: Mary Comley, Jayne Cox and the Clerk.**

Christmas Tree Festival – Mary Comley and Peter Glaisher volunteered to decorate a Christmas tree for the festival on behalf of the Parish Council. The Clerk to inform the organiser that the Parish Council would decorate a tree. **Action: Mary Comley, Peter Glaisher and the Clerk.**

Review of Financial Regulations – It was agreed that the Parish Council should consider adopting new financial regulations based on a model produced by NALC at the next meeting. The Clerk to prepare a draft of the regulations. **Action: The Clerk.**

Mary Comley reported that a rider had been thrown from her horse because of gunfire from one of the local shoots. Mary volunteered to approach the shoots for accurate information about where and when they would be shooting so that horse riders could avoid these areas. **Action: Mary Comley.**

5137 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 1st December 2021 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.

D J Stevens

1/12/21