

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of a Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2nd February 2022 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage and five members of the public.

5169 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: David Stevens and the District Councillor – Michael Gay. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chair, Janet Jones, chaired the meeting.

It was noted that Justin Witcombe had not given his apologies for this meeting and a concern was raised that he had not attended since the March 2020 meeting. It was noted that there were a number of mitigating factors. The Parish Council had not met between March 2020 and July 2020 because of the national lockdown. From July 2020 to May 2021 the Parish Council had held virtual meetings on Zoom and had accepted Justin's apologies on the grounds that he had no internet access. From June to December 2021 the Parish Council had met in person six times without Justin being present – although his apologies had been given and accepted at four of those meetings, and at one of the meetings he was advised by the Chairman to leave because of his personal circumstances.

5170 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5171 – Public Participation: None.

5172 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 5th January 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Vice Chairman.

5173 – Matters Arising: Precept for 2022/23 – The Clerk reported that Mendip District Council had confirmed receipt of the precept form.

Allotments – Peter Glaisher reported that he had organised a meeting of the allotment holders to consider how to keep the allotments tidy. An e-mail reminder would be sent regarding the unpaid rent from one allotment holder. It was hoped to advertise the vacant allotments on Facebook. If the vacant allotments were not rented, consideration would need to be made of what to do to keep them tidy.

5174 – District and County Councillors' Reports: Written reports had been received from the County and District Councillors and distributed to Parish Councillors. It was noted that the County Councillor had reported that he would not be standing at the May election to the new unitary Council.

5175 – Footpaths and Highways: Mary Comley reported that a group from the Mendip Byways and Bridleways Association had worked on the Honeycliff bridleway and it was hoped that the County Council would now repair it.

Concern was raised about the number of roadside hedges in the parish that were not being cut back and the problems this presented to vehicles attempting to safely pass pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Jayne Cox and Mary Comley volunteered to compile a list of problem

hedges and it was suggested that the Council should then write to the hedge owners. **Action: Jayne Cox & Mary Comley.**

Peter Glaisher had reported blocked gulleys on Westcombe Street to Somerset Highways. It was noted that there had been an emergency road closure on Westcombe Road. Concerns were raised about contractors leaving mud on the roads without warning signs and it was suggested that the PCSO be asked to speak to those responsible.

5176 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: There was currently no evidence of any mole activity in the Playing Field. Tom Price had offered to organise a group of volunteers to manage the willow structure in the Playing Field and had provided a risk assessment for this activity. The Parish Council gratefully accepted his offer.

The new gate would be installed when Ian Sage had some free time. He would look to obtain a new cricket mat and nets when these were next on sale. There was money left over from that raised for the Playing Field for a new seat but the question was where to place it.

The damaged sign acknowledging the donors for the new play equipment would be reviewed at the next meeting. Clare Kingston would treat the wooden seat when the weather was dry.

5177 – Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2021/2861/HSE – Demolition of single storey detached holiday let (noted as ‘cottage’), partial demolition and reinstatement of existing boundary wall, erection of single storey extension to rear of property. Partial demolitions and alterations south west gable. Formation of projecting first floor bay window. To Southeast elevation: enlarge door opening. To North West elevation: installation of window to first floor & roof light. Fell T3. Shortwood Farmhouse, Kale Street, Batcombe – Householder Application. The applicant spoke in favour of the application noting that the extension was of a similar size to the holiday let that would be demolished. One of the neighbours was concerned that the bay window would block the sun from their property. It was noted that the Conservation Officer had not been consulted despite the property being in the Conservation Area. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval, while noting the concern about the bay window, the lack of consultation with the Conservation Officer and the need to avoid a light shining through the new window on the gable end of the house directly down Kale Street into the eyes of drivers.

Planning Application No: 2022/0138/TCA – T1 - Sycamore: fell to ground level. T2 - Yew: reduce to approx. 4m in height. Little Court, Gold Hill, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a CA. The two trees were at the back of Little Court on the boundary with Batcombe House. The Sycamore had a heavy lean and was growing out of a retaining wall. The Yew was being reduced in height to be maintained as a topiary. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval as there were no objections to the proposed tree works.

Planning Application Updates: The application for tree works on two Goat Willows at Fir Tree Cottage had been approved by the District Council; and the application for prior approval for the conversion of a barn at Valley View Farm to a dwelling house had also been approved.

5178 – Adoption of New Standing Orders: The Parish Council adopted new Standing Orders based on new model standing orders produced by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to take into account recent changes in legislation in the areas of data protection, recording of local council meetings, electronic summons to meetings, transparency requirements and procurement. The Parish Council agreed a number of amendments to the model standing orders (to delegate business at an inquorate meeting to the Clerk, to allow a paper ballot for co-options, and to avoid having to review all the Council’s policies at the Annual Parish Council meeting), which had formed part of the previous Standing Orders.

5179 – Bank Reconciliation and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2022:

Janet Jones reported that she had checked the quarterly bank reconciliation prepared by the Clerk.

An updated projection on the current year's budget had been distributed with the Agenda. Receipts would be £12,545 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 £16,864 more than budgeted, due to the money spent on the new play equipment and the cost of the new gate that had not been included in the budget - most of this expenditure was the VAT that had been reclaimed. Grass cutting was £340 less than budgeted as the grass was not cut while the play equipment was being installed. 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 £92 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 projections for the expenditure on Grants and Other Items were likely to be as budgeted.

Overall, there was a projected deficit of £2,446 compared to a budgeted surplus of £1,915. This was due to the net expenditure on the play equipment after the VAT was reclaimed and to the cost of the new gate. However, the projected funds at the end of the year were £16,220 – around £4,700 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.

5180 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£112.00 The Society of Local Council Clerks – Clerk's membership.

£17.00 Jacque Clothier – The Parish Council tree for the Christmas Tree Festival.

The payment for the Christmas tree was authorised by a Section 137 resolution.

5181 – Other Business – matters of information only:

Parish Council Elections – The Clerk reported that the Notice of Election should be published on March 21st and that nomination papers should be hand delivered to the District Council Offices between 9.30am and 4.30pm from Tuesday March 22nd to Tuesday April 5th, (but no later than 4.00pm on Tuesday April 5th). Nomination papers would be available to download from the District Council's website once they had been revised by the Electoral Commission and candidates are advised to submit their papers as early as possible. A list of persons nominated would be published on the District Council website by 4.00pm on Wednesday April 6th.

The Clerk also reported that the Returning Officer had clarified his estimate of the cost of a contested election. The figure of £5,000 previously given was the maximum for a large parish with lots of postal votes and an expensive venue for the polling station(s). For a smaller parish like Batcombe a figure of £1,600 would be a more realistic estimate of the cost.

Annual Parish Meeting – It was agreed to hold the Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday April 6th and invite residents to come and hear what has happened over the last three years and ask any questions they had. Given the uncertainty with the pandemic, it was decided not to invite a guest speaker this year.

Local Community Networks – Pilot LCNs (groupings of parish and town councils) were being trialled with one based on Frome and another based on Bruton, Castle Cary and Wincanton. It was felt that the Parish Council was not suited to being grouped with town councils that the parish had little in common with.

Churchyard Wall – Mary Comley expressed concern that the retaining wall holding back the churchyard was moving.

5182 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 2nd March 2022 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.

David Stevens

2/3/22