

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 11th May 2022 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

Present - Councillors: Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher, Bryony Harling, Janet Jones, Clare Kingston, Tom Price and Ian Sage.

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

5212 – Election of Chair and Chair’s Acceptance of Office: In the absence of the Chairman, who had not stood in the recent Parish Council elections, Janet Jones chaired this item as the Parish Council Vice Chair. Ian Sage proposed Janet Jones as Chair. There being no other nominations Janet was duly elected and signed her Acceptance of Office. It was agreed that Janet should be referred to as the Chair rather than as the Chairman.

5213 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Michael Gay – District Councillor had given his apologies.

5214 – Councillors’ Acceptance of Office: All the elected Councillors signed their Acceptance of Office, witnessed by the Clerk.

5215 – Declarations of Interest: None. It was noted that Councillors had 28 days to complete their Register of Interests Declaration Form and return it to the District Council’s Monitoring Officer. The Clerk also reminded Councillors that they had 28 days from the election to return their election expenses form to the Returning Officer at the District Council, even if they had no expenses to declare

5216 – Election of Vice Chairman: Peter Glaisher was proposed by Janet Jones, seconded by Bryony Harling and elected as Vice Chairman.

5217 – Public Participation: None.

5218 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 6th April 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5219 – Matters Arising: Village Hall Premises Licence – following discussions at the last Parish Council meeting the representatives of the Village Hall Trust agreed to withdraw their application for a new Premises Licence, which had caused some concern among their neighbours. In fact, the Village Hall Trust agreed with the Licensing Department at Mendip to extend their existing premises licence to the Old School in addition to the Jubilee Hall without increasing the hours of licensable activities or allowing these activities to take place outside the buildings. This did cause some concern for one neighbour who contacted the Licensing Department and was told that the new premises licence had been granted because no one objected to it.

Land below the Telephone Exchange – the Chair and Mary Comley had visited the land and spoken to the owners who had placed a yurt, greenhouse and a compost loo on it. The Chair had told the owners that they were unlikely to obtain planning permission and would check with the Planning Department at Mendip as to what was allowed. Ian Sage noted that

planning permission was not needed for temporary structures provided they were moved within three months. Change of use would be required if the field was no longer being used for agricultural use.

5220 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: A written report from our District Councillor, Michael Gay, had been forwarded to Parish Councillors. It was noted that Clare Sully and Alex Wiltshire (both Liberal Democrats) had been elected as our County Councillors. In April 2023 they would become our Councillors on the new unitary Council when the District Council would cease to exist.

5221 – Allotments: There were two vacant allotments although an existing allotment holder had expressed an interest in one of these. Peter Glaisher to follow this up. Peter Glaisher had arranged for a gardener to trim and mow the communal areas of the allotments field at a cost of £90 and it was expected that the allotment holders would now be able to keep the field in good condition. The allotment holders would be reminded that this was their responsibility, as outlined in their allotment holder’s agreement with the Parish Council. The Council agreed to pay the £90 invoice while noting that individual Parish Councillors did not have the authority to commit the Parish Council to expenditure and that all such decisions should be made by the Council as a body.

5222 – Footpaths and Highways: A map giving details of the rights of way in the parish had been distributed to Councillors with the Agenda. It was noted that the Honeycliff Bridleway was being repaired by the Rights of Way Department at the County Council. A request had been received that the Parish Council contribute towards the cost of improving the track from Eastcombe Lane to Knoll Lane in order to provide a safe route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders from Batcombe to Wanstrow that avoided using the A359. It was agreed to consider the request at the next meeting when it was hoped that the person making the request would be able to attend to provide more details.

The Clerk noted that the Council had no Parish Paths Liaison Officer to liaise with the Rights of Way Department over issues with footpaths. Jayne Cox expressed her frustrations with dealing with the Rights of Way Department when she had been the PPLO. Tom Price volunteered to take on the role of PPLO. It was noted that the Parish Council had had volunteers who had undertaken strimming of the footpaths, but neither of these were now on the Parish Council. It was suggested that Tom Price undertake strimmer training and that the Parish Council consider buying its own strimmer – to be considered at the next meeting.

5223 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that the annual safety inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June or July.

Ian Sage reported that the new bench for the Playing Field agreed at the last meeting was ready for collection and volunteered to collect it. The bench would need to be bolted to a plinth to insure it was not removed. He also reported that Read Agriservices had provided the parts for the bench to be installed in the bus shelter. He would also install the new pedestrian gate to the Playing Field when he had time available. The Parish Council agreed that Ian was a competent person to undertake maintenance in the Playing Field.

It was noted that hazelnut bushes had been planted to fill the gaps in the Playing Field hedge as agreed at the last meeting.

A request had been received from the Cricket Club to use the cricket net in the Playing Field for practice. It was noted that children using the Playing Field should have priority but this should not be a problem if the practices took place in the evening. The Clerk to check the insurance.

5224 – Planning Applications:

Planning Application Nos: 2021/2873/FUL & 2021/2874/LBC – Erection of 1 single storey 2-bedroom dwellinghouse following the demolition of 2 agricultural buildings. Creation of new access to highway and division of the site into 3 parts. Highfield, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe. Full Application & Listed Building Consent. Concerns were raised about the new access from the field directly onto the A359. Access from the new dwelling would be onto Eastcombe Lane but was likely to result in additional traffic exiting Eastcombe Lane onto the A359 at a junction with poor visibility. Concerns were also raised that, as the access onto Eastcombe Lane was at the same point as the access to the proposed bridleway providing a safe route for horse riders and walkers to Wanstraw avoiding the A359, a future owner of the property might obstruct access to the new safe route. The Parish Council decided to recommend refusal on the grounds of access and highway safety.

Planning Application No: 2022/0758/HSE – Erection of part two storey, part single story extension on site of existing single storey extension (to be demolished) and replacement of mono-pitched roof with a dual pitched roof. Mill Cottage, Mill Lane, Batcombe. Householder Application. A neighbour on Mill Lane expressed a number of concerns about the proposed extension: the extension was so close to the road hedge that there was a danger of pushing the supporting bank into the lane; the property had a drainage problem with effluent being discharged into the lane following heavy rain and the additional size would increase the amount of runoff into the property's cesspit; and there was an issue with parking at the property. The Parish Council decided to recommend refusal on the grounds that the drainage and sewage issues with the property needed to be addressed in any proposal to extend it further and noting the issues with access for the properties lower down the lane.

Planning Application Updates: The application to vary the drawings for the planning permission for staff accommodation at The Three Horseshoes had been approved.

5225 - Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters: Staffing Committee – Janet Jones, Peter Glaisher and Bryony Harling volunteered to be the members of the Staffing Committee.

Additional Hours - the Clerk was reported that he had worked no additional hours in the year 2021/22.

5226 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives: It was agreed that Jayne Cox should continue as the Village Hall Representative and that the Clerk should continue as the Heritage Room Representative.

5227 – Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters: It was agreed that Financial Regulations be reviewed at the June meeting; Social Media Policy and policy for dealing with the press at the July meeting; complaints procedure at the September meeting; Emergency Plan at the October meeting; budget to be considered at the November meeting; membership of other bodies to be reviewed at the December meeting; Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February meeting; and the Schedule of Assets, Risk Management Policy and insurance cover to be reviewed at the March meeting in time for the preparation of the Annual Report and renewal of the insurance. It was also agreed that the Parish Council's Code of Conduct should be reviewed at the January meeting in the light of a new model Code of Conduct.

5228 – Insurance Renewal: The Council's insurance was due for renewal on June 1st, but the insurance brokers Came & Company had not yet provided any three quotes for renewal of insurance – there had been a delay resulting from their request to split the values of the new

play equipment into play equipment and sports equipment. The Council agreed to allow payment of the premium before the next meeting.

5229 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2022: The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31st March 2022 had been verified by the Chair before the meeting and was reported to the Council.

A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas and the Clerk went briefly through the details. The VAT Refund was £12,650 more than budgeted because of the VAT on the new play equipment that was reclaimed. The allotments rent was £70 less than budgeted because two allotments were vacant at the end of the year. The £66 raised for new play equipment came from the Mendip Lottery Fund. As a result of the VAT claim on the play equipment that had not been included in the budget, receipts were £12,545 more than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting and trimming was £340 less than the budgeted figure because no cuts were undertaken while the play equipment was being installed and a free cut was provided by a potential new contractor. The cost of the electricity supply was £24 more than budgeted as SSE doubled the standing charge. The cost of the water supply was £14 more than budgeted as the turf for the new play equipment needed watering. Maintenance consisted of £110 for hedge cutting, £15 for wood preservative, £65 for the molecatcher and £275 for tree work on the trees near the cricket net. Overall maintenance was £270 more than budgeted – although the level of maintenance needed is always difficult to predict. No annual inspection was required as an inspection was included in the cost of the new play equipment.

The grant for the new play equipment from Viridor Credits of £58,976 was paid directly to Sutcliffe Play South West and so does not appear in the Financial Statements. The Parish Council paid £15,823.60 for the new play equipment, most of which was the VAT on the equipment which was then claimed back. The net cost to the Parish Council was £3,357. There were also £150 in expenses for the opening celebration for the new equipment. The new gate cost £985.43 of which £164.24 was VAT which was claimed back. Overall Playing Field payments were £16,832 more than budgeted, because of the cost of the play equipment and new gate that were not included in the budget.

The Clerk's salary was slightly more than budgeted but his expenses were £100 less than budgeted. The £115 cost of the Zoom subscription had not been budgeted for, but no training had been undertaken or publications purchased in 2021/22. There was a £113 increase in the insurance premium because of the cost of insuring the new play equipment. Photocopying was £63 less than budgeted as paper copies of the Agenda and other papers were not distributed during the pandemic and fewer copies were distributed afterwards. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted and overall administration costs were £14 more 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 £75 spent on hedge cutting, which was £75 less than budgeted. £25 was spent reimbursing part of an allotment rent and £17 was spent on a Christmas tree for the Christmas Tree Festival. As a result of all the above, total payments were £16,814 more than budgeted, largely because of the purchase of the new play equipment and the new Playing Field gate.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and the play equipment were given on the back of the Financial Statement. At the end of the year there was £1,026 of allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. The remaining play equipment money in the Parish Council accounts at the end of the year was £1,404 of which £824 has since been spent on the cricket net, mat and stumps.

The net result of the variations against the budget outlined above is a deficit of £2,354 on the year instead of the budgeted surplus of £1,915. This was due to the spending of the money raised for the new play equipment in previous years on the play equipment and the new Playing Field gate. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £16,312 in its funds, £4,851 more than anticipated in the budget. This is due to the fact that the Parish Council did not have to spend any of the £4,000 of its own money it had put aside for the new play equipment. Of the funds at the end of the year, £1,026 is set aside for the allotments, £1,404 was set aside for new play equipment and £77 for notice boards. This means that the Parish Council has funds totalling £13,806 that are not earmarked for specific items, (although £4,000 of this total had been intended for the new play equipment). This means that the Parish Council has sufficient reserves to cover the cost of the contested election and a by-election during the coming year (which is the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure). SALC recommend that a Parish Council has reserves of between one-third and two-thirds of its precept, which with the current precept means the reserves should be between £3,300 and £6,600.

The Clerk reported that he had been in contact with the internal auditor, Griff Williams, who had been asked if he could complete the audit by the June meeting.

5230 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2023: An updated projection on this year's budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that this year's precept of £9,925 had been received. The VAT repayment would be slightly less than budgeted and £82.55 for the year up to March 2022 would be claimed shortly.

With regard to payments, the cost of the cricket net and mat was less than budgeted and the photocopying was also likely to be less than budgeted. Overall, the deficit of £600 on the year was likely to be less than budgeted (unless there were any unexpected costs during the year). The deficit would be due to the likely election expenses. This would give funds of £15,713 at the end of the year of which £1,000 would be earmarked for the allotments.

5231 – Change of Bank Mandate: The Parish Council should only make payments by cheques (or standing orders) signed by two members of the Council (normally after authorisation at a Council meeting). The Clerk has to be a signatory in order to receive bank statements but should not normally sign cheques. The other signatories were Mary Comley, David Stevens and Janet Jones which meant that only one Councillor was a signatory after the start of this meeting. It was agreed that Peter Glaisher, Bryony Harling and Clare Kingston should be signatories in addition to the Chair. A resolution to this effect was proposed by Tom Price, seconded by the Chair and passed.

Given that, until the new mandate came into effect, there was only one Councillor who could sign cheques, the Clerk suggested that a resolution be passed allowing the Clerk to sign cheques provided this was done in the presence of one of the new signatories who would initial the cheque stub and the invoice to confirm that the correct payment was being made. This resolution was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Bryony Harling and passed.

5232 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in April).
- £220.00 T & EA Hollis – Annual rent of the allotments field.
- £135.83 Read Agriservices – Parts for Playing Field bench.

The Clerk noted that he had received an estimated bill for the electricity supply to the Playing Field of £92.72 and would contact SSE to give an accurate reading. Given that all electricity companies had increased their standing charges it was agreed to remain with SSE as the electricity supplier.

5233 – Other Business – matters of information only:

Beacon – The owner of the beacon had been asked if it could be used and had agreed. Tom Price was asked if he could provide a risk assessment. It was noted that a flyer outlining the events for the Jubilee was to be distributed.

Launch of the South East Somerset Pilot Local Community Network – Local Community Networks (LCNs) were seen as a way of groups of parishes working together under the new unitary authority. Jayne Cox volunteered to attend the launch of the pilot scheme based in Bruton, Castle Cary and Wincanton.

Councillor Training – Details of training for new Councillors provided by the Somerset Association of Local Councils had been distributed to Councillors. Councillors to let the Clerk know which courses they would like to attend. The Parish Council would pay the cost of the courses.

Fingerposts – The damaged fingerpost from the junction at the end of Back Lane was being stored in the Round House which was now being sold. It was agreed the fingerpost should be moved to Portway Farm. Another damaged post had been stored at Top O' Hollow and it would be seen if this was still there. Before the pandemic there had been a project for volunteers to repair and repaint fingerposts. The District Councillor to be asked if this was still in place.

Dogs – it was noted that a dog walker from Evercreech was walking multiple dogs that were not under control and it was suggested that this was an issue for the PCSO.

Westcombe Telephone Kiosk – this was in need of painting and Peter Glaisher volunteered to do this with the help of a volunteer.

Grit bags in Westcombe – it was recommended that these be stored until the winter.

Human waste – Jayne Cox reported finding human excrement on the footpath from Portway to Copplesbury Lane.

Outgoing Parish Councillors – the Clerk was asked to send a note to each of the former Parish Councillors thanking them for their contributions to the Parish Council.

5234 - Dates of Future Meetings: The following dates were agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council during the coming year, on the first Wednesday of each month:

1 st June	6 th July	3 rd August	7 th September	5 th October	2 nd November
7 th December	4 th January	1 st February	1 st March	5 th April	3 rd May

The August meeting would only be held if there were planning applications to consider. The date in April would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The Council to meet at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year (apart from April). It was agreed that future meetings should be held in the Old School.

Janet Jones

1/6/22