

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th September 2022 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage.

5279 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Michael Gay – District Councillor who had a District Council Scrutiny Board meeting.

5280 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5281 – Public Participation: None.

5282 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 6th July and 3rd August 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5283 – Matters Arising: Allotments – Peter Glaisher reported that two allotments had been let for £9 each for the remainder of the year. One was vacant and the other had been given up by an allotment holder who had been unable to use his allotment. It was noted that there were a pair of allotment holders working two allotments having only paid for one and this would need to be sorted. Another allotment holder was giving up their allotment in November and this would then be vacant. The allotment holder to be reminded that allotments should be returned to the state they were in when first taken on. Gary Butler would be asked to cut the inside of the hedge. An offer had been received to lay the hedge and this would need to be put to the field owner.

Audit – The External Auditor’s report had been received and there were no matters of concern to report to the Parish Council. The Notice of the Conclusion of the Audit and a copy of the External Auditor’s Report would need to be published.

Annual Grants – acknowledgement and thanks for the grants had been received from Mendip Citizen’s Advice (in the form of a handwritten card), Mendip Community Transport and the Village Hall Trust.

5284 – District and County Councillors’ Reports: Written reports had been received from our District Councillor Michael Gay and our County Councillor Claire Sully and had been forwarded to Parish Councillors.

5285 – Local Community Networks (LCNs): Jayne Cox and Clare Kingston had attended a meeting of the Mendip Rural Parishes Liaison Group on behalf of the Parish Council. They felt more at home with this group than with the pilot LCNs because they were more rural communities but also felt that Batcombe was unique because of the issues our parish faced.

A consultation paper on the future role of the LCNs had been received and distributed to Parish Councillors. Local Community Networks would act as committees of the new unitary council. The paper contained three options for the allocations of parishes to LCNs. The options were for 18, 17 or 10 LCNs across Somerset. For the first two options Batcombe

would be in the same group of parishes centred on Shepton Mallet. In the third option Batcombe would be in a larger LCN based around Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury. Parish Councillors agreed to meet as a Working Party on Wednesday September 14th to consider the proposals for LCNs further and to produce information for the parish magazine to inform residents of the proposed LCNs and the consultation on them.

5286 – Footpaths and Highways: Mendip Area Highways had asked the Parish Council to check the contents of the roadside salt bins in our parish and let them have our requirements for salt bin refilling by the end of September. It was noted that there was only one bin at the top of Hincombe Hill that was half full. It was also noted that the roads were not suitable for bins and that a supply of bags would be appreciated if available and it was felt that grit would be better than salt.

Fingerposts – The Clerk had been in contact with the County Council regarding restoration work on fingerposts. Volunteers are limited to preparation and painting works on fingerposts while any more specialised restoration would need to be undertaken by qualified contractors. Volunteers need to attend a training course provided (and paid for) by the County Council before they can work on the fingerposts. Work undertaken by contractors will need to be managed and paid for by the Parish Council. The County Council didn't know when they would be running another course for volunteers but it was agreed to join the waiting list. Two or three volunteers would need to take the course as all work on fingerposts has to be undertaken by pairs of volunteers as a minimum. **Action – The Clerk.**

Clare Kingston asked that people remove the weeds from the gulleys outside their properties. It was agreed to place a notice in the parish magazine asking people to clear their gulleys and to cut back their hedges as winters was approaching.

5287 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Ian Sage was thanked for replacing the damaged plaque acknowledging the contributors to the new play equipment. The replacement sign had cost £35 from Mendip Signs. It was agreed to ask Gary Butler to cut back the inside of the Playing Field hedge.

Planning permission had been granted for the tree works to the Oak tree damaged in a storm. The Playing Field would need to be closed while the work took place. The seat under the tree would need to be removed and this would be an opportunity to work on the bench turning over the existing wood. The other benches in the Playing Field needed treating with varnish and there was a volunteer prepared to do this.

Annual Safety Inspection – The report of the RoSPA safety inspection had been distributed to Parish Councillors. Most items were of low/medium risk with the actual risk of items being the same or slightly higher than the innate risk for that type of item. The inspector had noted rot in the gateposts and in the seat under the Oak tree, wear in the chains of the toddler swing, protruding growth in the willow structure, a trip hazard in the cricket net and a finger entrapment hazard in the roof of the multi-play. None of these posed a significant risk.

The one item given a high risk rating was the cableway. This was because the inspector could not be certain there wasn't a defect without dismantling the cableway. He recommended a dismantling inspection every year to check the cable. Given that the cableway had only been installed the previous year and the inspection would need to be carried out by the installer to avoid invalidating the insurance, the Parish Council felt that there was no need to inspect for five years.

Annual Fete – Following concerns over whether the PCC's insurance would cover the Fete as the PCC were not in charge of the Fete, the Fete Committee had obtained their own insurance, although the cover for the Fete was limited to an attendance of 250. It was noted that there were probably more than 250 people at the Fete – but this was considered to be an issue for

the Fete Committee. The Playing Field had been inspected on the Tuesday after the Fete and was in a good condition with everything cleared away. The Playing Field grass was showing signs of wear and there was some subsidence over one of the mole runs as a result of the dry soil and footfall in the Playing Field. It was noted that the bin outside the Playing Field was left overflowing and it was agreed that a future condition for the use of the Playing Field would be that the bin should be emptied.

5288 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: The applications for planning permission and Listed Building Consent for a bungalow at Highfields had been withdrawn. The application to vary the drawings for the staff accommodation at The Three Horseshoes and the application for a single storey extension at Giles Cottage had been approved. Planning permission and Listed Building Consent had been granted for the alterations to the annex at Kings Hayes.

An application for prior approval to convert an agricultural building on land opposite Higher Greenscombe to a dwelling house had been refused. The Parish Council had considered an application that was approved last year to add cladding and a concrete pad to this building.

The application for the erection of a dwelling of exceptional quality at Valley View Farm had been withdrawn after the Conservation Officer had recommended refusal because of the impact on St Mary's Church, the other listed buildings in Batcombe and the Conservation Area.

5289 – Effective Communication: This followed discussion at the July meeting on effective communication and avoiding the excessive use of emails. It was agreed that the use of "reply all" to group emails should be avoided where the response does not need to be sent to all and that e-mails should only deal with one subject. The use of a What's App group and a Dropbox to be investigated although not everyone was familiar with these.

5290 – Review of the Parish Council's Complaints Procedure: A copy of the Council's Code of Practice for Handling Complaints had been distributed with the Agendas and was available to download from the Parish Council website. Adopted in 2003 and last amended in 2011, the Code of Practice is based on a model produced by the National Association of Local Councils. The procedure is only for complaints about the actions of the Parish Council as a body, as complaints about the Clerk should be dealt with by the Staffing Committee in accordance with the Clerk's Contract of Employment; and complaints against individual Councillors for breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct should be made to the District Council's Monitoring Officer. The Council agreed that there was no need to amend the current Complaints Procedure.

5291 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: The checking of the bank reconciliation produced by the Clerk, was deferred to the next meeting.

A projection for the current year's receipts and payments based on expenditure to date had been distributed with the Agendas. Receipts were projected to be approximately £400 more than the budgeted figure because of the VAT to be reclaimed on the new gate, cricket net and benches in the Playing Field which had not been included in the budget.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was roughly £1,600 more than budgeted, due to the money spent on the new benches that had not been included in the budget, higher than expected maintenance costs because of the tree works required, and higher than expected electricity costs.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was likely to be £100 less than the budgeted figure. While the Clerk's salary was likely to increase (the employers had offered

what is in effect an 8.5% increase in the Clerk's salary from April 2022 and the trade unions were considering this) and insurance costs had increased significantly, the cost of the Parish Council election was over £500 less than expected.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants were likely to be as budgeted. It was noted that the distributed accounts had not included the £629 contribution towards the improvements to the Jubilee Lane track to Wanstrow. Overall, this would mean that Other expenses were likely to be around £700 more than expected

Overall, there was a projected deficit of around £2,250 compared to a budgeted deficit of £730. As noted above, this was due to the expenditure on the new benches, tree works in the Playing Field, higher than expected electricity costs, an expected increase in the Clerk's salary and the contribution to the Jubilee Lane - balanced by the lower than expected election costs. As a result, the projected funds at the end of the year would be around £13,760 – around £1,500 less than expected when the budget was made. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure will be earmarked for the allotments. With the cricket net and new benches, all the money raised for the Playing Field has now been spent, although there is still the £4,000 of the Parish Council's own money that was put aside for the Playing Field.

5292 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in August).
- £35.00 Mendip Signs – Replacement sign for the Playing Field.
- £114.28 Somerset Association of Local Councils – Affiliation fee.
- £65.00 Somerset Association of Local Councils – 3 x New Councillor training.
- £240.00 PKF Littlejohn LLP – Audit fee.

5293 – Other Business – matters of information only:

External Audit – the Parish Council's external auditors are appointed by SAAA Ltd for a five year period with the next period running from 2022/23 to 2027/28. The Parish Council could opt out of this central appointment process by contacting SAAA Ltd before the end of October - but the Council would then need to appoint its own external auditors by the end of November 2022. The Council decided not to opt out.

War Memorial – for as long as anyone could remember the War Memorial garden, which belonged to the Parish Council, had been looked after by the owners of the neighbouring properties who had a connection with the Royal British Legion. Peter Glaisher reported that there was now only one person looking after the garden who would appreciate additional help. The Chair reported an offer from a local resident to pay their gardener to attend to the garden. It was also noted that the Horticultural Society had offered to give £100 to the Volunteer Group for this and other projects and that the Volunteer Group could work on the garden before the Remembrance Service in November. It was also suggested that the contractor who cut the Playing Field grass be asked to cut the small area of grass around the War Memorial.

Ash Trees – Concern was raised about Ash trees on Hincombe Hill. It was noted that it was the landowner's responsibility to ensure that trees next to the highway were safe.

Playing Field – Ian Sage proposed a small plaque should go on the new bench in memory of Dominic Conway. It was suggested that a warning sign of a children's play area to go on the road outside the Playing Field should be investigated.

5294 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday October 5th at 8.00pm in the Old School.

Peter Glaisher

5/10/22