

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th December 2022 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: Michael Gay – District Councillor.

5327 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Peter Glaisher, Bryony Harling, the Clerk – Rob Sage. In the absence of the Clerk, the Chair took the minutes.

5328 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the increase in the Clerk's salary and pensions re-declaration as relatives of the Clerk. Tom Price declared an interest in the two planning applications for tree felling at Batcombe House.

5329 – Public Participation: None.

5330 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesdays 2nd November 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5331 – Matters Arising: The Chair reported that the Emergency Plan had been updated to reflect the current list of volunteers and would be passed to the Clerk for safe-keeping.

5332 – 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. Michael Gay reported that in the light of the Strep A infections, if parents were unable to get appointments at their GP, then pharmacists had antibiotics to treat it,

5333 – The King's Coronation: The Coronation of King Charles III will take place on Saturday May 6th 2023 and the following Monday will be an additional bank holiday. The Village Hall Trust had suggested setting up a village committee to co-ordinate plans for village events organised by village organisations. Bryony Harling had volunteered to be our representative on the committee and Jayne Cox will be backup as required.

5334 – Allotments: Allotment rents were due on November 1st. Six allotments have been paid for and three are vacant which leaves one allotment where the rent is owing.

5335 – Footpaths and Highways: Jayne Cox and Ian Sage reported that the Fingerpost Training course at Bridgwater on November 10th had focused almost entirely on health and safety issues and was of little practical use. All Councillors had passed the health and safety test. As the village is covered by the 60mph national speed limit and signs must be 1.2m away from the road for any work to be carried out on them without traffic lights, the course was to all intents and purpose of little value to the participants. It would have been useful to have known this restriction in advance as the participants would probably not have felt it worthwhile attending. The cost of professional sign repair was discussed at the training and costs were in the range £800 - £1,500. It was agreed that the clerk should see if any grants were available to fund professional sign repair – Michael Gay suggested contacting Spark. It was debated if this

could be a Parish Council project where donations were sought from the village if no grants were available. **Action: the Clerk.**

Jayne Cox reported that she had a list of all the roadside hedges in the Parish that needed attention and that some had been cut back. She and Clare Kingston would take photos of outstanding issues and talk to landowners to remind them of their responsibility in getting the hedges cut back. **Action: Jayne Cox and Clare Kingston.**

5336 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Alex Bown would lay the hedges on both roadsides of the Playing Field on Thursday 8th and Friday 9th December. All debris would be removed. It was noted that there was a hole in the hedge opposite the roundabout and it was hoped that Alex would be able to fill this when he laid the hedge.

The tree surgeon, Jody Osborne, would work on the Oak tree in the Playing Field on Friday December 9th. Tom Price will check if Jodie needs access to the field behind the Playing Field and if he does then Jayne Cox will contact the landowner on this. **Action: Tom Price and Jayne Cox.** Ian Sage has volunteered to store the wood from the tree and a decision will be taken later as to what to do with it.

The benches had been treated by Bryony Harling and Sharon Witcombe.

The Clerk had turned off the water in the Playing Field ahead of the freezing weather.

Clare Kingston asked about progress for the sign to remind parents of their responsibility to supervise their children in the Playing Field. It was agreed at the October meeting that the Clerk would get a sign made up by Mendip Signs. **Action: the Clerk.**

5337 – Planning Applications: No planning applications had been notified in time to be included on the Agenda. However, since the Agendas had been distributed, the Council had been notified of Planning Applications 2022/2328/TCA and 2022/2329/TCA, the felling of a sycamore and 2 ash trees at Batcombe House. Councillors were in favour of the applications and agreed to delegate the authority on them to the Clerk.

Notification of the felling of the Cherry tree at Donegal Cottage had also been received after the distribution of the Agendas. Councillors were in favour of the application and agreed to delegate the authority on it to the Clerk.

Planning Application Updates: Following the decision of the Council at last month's meeting to authorise the Clerk to make a decision on the recommendation regarding the application for Listed Building Consent for minor alterations to Romsey Cottage, the Clerk had recommended approval of the application after consulting Parish Councillors.

Planning permission and Listed Building Consent had been given for the alterations at Lodge Farm.

5338 - Review of the Parish Council's Connection with External Bodies: specifically, the Council's Membership of the Somerset Association of Local Councils and the Clerk's Membership of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

Membership of both of these bodies was very helpful in providing information and advice on matters relating to the work of the Parish Council and would make the Clerk's job more difficult if they were not available. Membership of SALC would cost around £115 in 2023 and paying for the Clerk's membership of the SLCC will cost a similar amount.

Councillors agreed to the continued membership of these two bodies.

5339 - Employment Matters - the Clerk's Salary and Pension Re-declaration - The National Joint Council for Local Government Services had reached agreement on new pay scales for 2022/23, which consisted of a flat rate increase of £1,295 across all pay scales (pro rata for part time employees). This would mean the Clerk's salary increasing from £11.73 an hour to £12.73 an hour (an increase of 8.525%) backdated to April 2022. The agreement also included the permanent addition of an extra day's leave to the annual entitlement (pro rata for part-time employees) from April 2023. The National Association of Local Councils recommended that these salary scales were paid to all Clerks with the standard contract of employment. The Parish Council agreed the increase in the Clerk's salary, which was in line with the Clerk's Contract of Employment, and the additional day's leave. The Clerk's contract currently entitled the Clerk to twenty-five working days leave per year (pro rata for part time employees) plus normal bank and public holidays plus two extra statutory days. The Clerk's contract would need to be amended with the agreement to the extra day's leave.

Every three years the Parish Council has to re-declare to the Pensions Regulator that it has no staff enrolled in a pension scheme. This was done by the Clerk on 28th November. The level of the Clerk's salary means that the Parish Council is not automatically required to operate a pension scheme.

5340 - Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2024 – The updated budget for the year ending 31st March 2024 was agreed. The changes from the budget distributed with last month's Agenda were that the cost of the hedge laying had been included in the current year's projection rather than next year's budget and that the budget for Playing Field maintenance had been increased from £250 to £750 to cover the potential cost of additional tree work in the Playing Field. Please see the notes included with last month's Agenda for all other details of the budget.

The effect of these two changes is a much larger deficit of £4,825 this year and a smaller deficit of £75 next year. The reserve at the end of next year will also be slightly smaller at £11,400 – which is still a significant reserve.

A decision on the level of the precept is usually left to the January meeting when the level of the tax base for 2023/24 and thus the impact of the precept on Council Tax is known. A decision in principle was made, just in case the Council could not meet in January, that the precept should be unchanged.

5341 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field in November.
- £50.00 SALC – Two Councillor Training Sessions.

5342 - Other Business – matters of information only.

Consultation on Constituency Boundary Changes - The final consultation on boundary changes to the parliamentary constituencies had closed on December 5th, which meant that the Parish Council was unable to comment. The reason for the boundary changes was to create constituencies of roughly equal size in terms of population - between 69,724 and 77,062 people. The number of constituencies in the South West would increase by 3 to 58.

Under the proposed boundary changes, Batcombe would be part of a new Frome constituency which would stretch from Combe Hay and Claverton just south of Bath to Bruton and would include Radstock, Midsommer Norton, Rode, Gurney Slade, Frome and Evercreech but not Shepton Mallet nor Brewham.

Wanstrow and Cloford Community Parish Plan – Tom Price had noted that Wanstrow were updating their community parish plan and had distributed a copy of their current plan from 2009. (See <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/WanstrowClofordPP> for details). He wondered if Batcombe should consider something similar at a future date as a way to pro-actively communicate with the Parish, be a guide for future projects (such as revamping finger-post signs) and be a 5-year plan that could be passed on to future councillors.

Michael Gay detailed the background to the setup of the plan from 2009. It was very much a way of engaging with the community and had got people thinking about what they wanted. It was linked to documenting the history of Wanstrow and a history group that was setup at the time is still active. It was very much a community activity not just a Parish Council activity. Copies of the plan were sold! About three years ago it was felt that the plan should be updated but then covid struck. Some funding was obtained from Somerset Council but then there is a need to report in their format which was not ideal. A budget of £2,500 was allocated from Wanstrow Parish Council. The group that runs it is not chaired by a Parish Councillor and it is seem very much as a community project.

Janet Jones noted that the Wanstrow 2009 plan was very comprehensive and that a lot of work must have gone into producing it as it ran to 76 pages. Peter Glaisher had asked that no decision be made on agreeing to such a document at this meeting and it was agreed that it should be parked for now. It could await the decision on LCN's and be put on the agenda for March as a potential discussion item at the April Parish Meeting.

Storage of Deeds – The Clerk had received a letter from NatWest to say that there were no longer going to hold items in safe custody. The Council would therefore need to make a decision by March about what to do with the deeds for the Playing Field and the War Memorial Garden which are currently stored in the Frome NatWest bank. Ian Sage asked if the documents were registered with The Land Registry. Janet Jones wondered if they could be stored in the Heritage Room. The Clerk to investigate both these matters. **Action: the Clerk.**

Grit – it was not known if Mary Comley had been asked to request grit bags from her contacts in Somerset Highways as per last month's Minutes. If free bags were not available, it was suggested buying grit from a builders' merchant. **Action: the Clerk.**

Cutting of the willow in the Playing field – to be an agenda item next month so that the Council can agree to reduce the height / spread.

5343 - Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th January 2023 at 7.30pm in the Old School.

Janet Jones
4/1/23