

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2nd November 2022 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage and one member of the public.

5311 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Michael Gay – District Councillor. Peter Glaisher gave apologies as he would have to leave the meeting early.

5312 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5313 – Public Participation: Patrick Taylor noted that a small committee had provided two defibrillators in the parish, one at Westcombe Dairy and one in the porch of the Old School. The one in Westcombe Dairy was maintained by the Dairy but the one in the Old School porch had been maintained by the Village Hall Chairman who was now giving up this role. The maintenance of the defibrillator involved checking that it was working once a week and reporting this on a website. The defibrillator committee felt that the maintenance should be undertaken by a village organisation and asked if the Parish Council would take this on. There was a cost of £100 a year and the defibrillator committee were happy to continue fundraising. Councillors felt that, as the defibrillator was on Village Hall property that was used by the Village Hall Trust on a weekly basis for their bar while the Parish Council only met monthly, it would make sense for the Village Hall Trust to be responsible for the defibrillator. It was suggested that the defibrillator committee approach the Village Hall Trust.

5314 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 5 & 13th October 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5315 – Matters Arising: Local Community Networks – A response to the LCN consultation had been made on behalf of the Parish Council and the result of the consultation was awaited to see how Local Community Networks would work in practice.

PAYE Penalty – The Clerk reported that the appeal against the £100 penalty notice, for not sending in a PAYE return for the months when the Clerk wasn't paid, had been successful and the penalty had been cancelled.

5316 – 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. It was noted that the precept request for next year would be sent to the District Council as usual but paid by the new unitary council in April.

5317 – Allotments: Allotment rents were due on November 1st and all allotment holders had been sent a reminder. The Clerk reported that the rent for five of the allotments had already been paid. Peter Glaisher reported that one of the new allotment holders was giving up their allotment and this would mean that there were three vacant allotments, although one of the

existing allotment holders was interested in taking on a third allotment if they could erect a polytunnel on it. Peter to check with the allotment field owner whether this was acceptable. **Action: Peter Glaisher.** The Clerk reported that the allotments field hedge had been cut. One of allotment holders who had given up their allotment asked if they could leave their winter vegetables and crop them later. This was agreed provided there was no one wanting to take on the allotment.

5318 – War Memorial Garden: A quote of £5 a cut had been received from Kevin Gale to cut the grass around the war memorial while he is cutting the Playing Field grass and this was agreed. Tom Price reported that two sessions with volunteers had ensured that the garden was in a decent state for Remembrance Sunday. Thanks were noted to Libby Russell for donating suitable plants for the garden and to Jenny Humphreys for sending her gardener to help.

It was agreed that the maintenance of the garden should be continued on a volunteer based approach, with perhaps one session a quarter. Tom Price would put together a schedule. **Action: Tom Price.**

5319 – Footpaths and Highways: Sally Clarke had volunteered to help with the fingerpost painting and had been booked into the Fingerpost Training course at Bridgwater on November 10th along with three Councillors: Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher and Ian Sage.

5320 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that Gary Butler had cut back the inside of the Playing Field hedge. Jayne Cox reported having received a quote from Alex Bown to lay the hedges on both roadsides of the Playing Field of £700 each side. No other quotes had been received, but it was agreed to accept the quote from Alex Bown who was an award-winning hedge layer. Jayne to contact Alex Bown and the Clerk to inform the PCC that the hedge would be laid – hopefully in December before the school holidays. **Action: Jayne Cox and the Clerk.**

The tree surgeon, Jody Osborne, had booked Friday December 2nd to work on the Oak tree in the Playing Field [*Post meeting note – changed to Friday December 9th*]. He had suggested waiting until then as the tree should be dormant. Ian Sage volunteered to store the wood from the tree and suggested that a decision was taken later as to what to do with it. This was agreed.

Ian Sage reported that he had removed the long seat from the Playing Field to treat it and had attached the plaque in memory of Dominic Conway to the other seat. The benches needed treated and Clare Kingston stated that she and Sharon Witcombe would be doing this. **Action: Clare Kingston.**

5321 – 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 Application 2022/2084/LBC – an application for Listed Building Consent to repair the roadside boundary wall and make minor internal alterations at Romsey Cottage on Kale Street. There was a question of whether these alterations actually needed Listed Building Consent and rather than arrange an additional meeting the Parish Council agreed to delegate authority to make a decision on a recommendation for this application to the Clerk. Although the Parish Council had not been notified of it, there was an application for the felling of a Cherry tree at Donegal Cottage on Kale Street on the District Council's planning website. The Parish Council also authorised the Clerk to make a recommendation on this application in consultation with Parish Councillors.

The Chair had attended a Planning Forum at the District Council and had asked about the field below the telephone exchange and was advised to write to the Planning Department with the

concerns about the structures erected in the field – the greenhouse, toilet and yurt – and whether these would be considered to be permanent structures.

Planning Application Updates: The application for the extension and alterations to Mill Cottage had been approved by the District Council after revised plans had been submitted which the Parish Council had no opportunity to comment on.

5322 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update for Year Ending 31st March 2023: The bank reconciliation for the first quarter of the year had been checked by the Vice Chair and was reported to the 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 £425 more than the budgeted figure because of the VAT to be reclaimed on the new benches in the Playing Field and the strimmer which had not been included in the budget.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was roughly £1,700 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. It was noted that if the hedge laying was undertaken in the current year this would be an additional £1,400 expenditure on the Playing Field.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was likely to be £250 more than the budgeted figure. While the Clerk's salary was likely to increase significantly (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), insurance costs had increased and more than budgeted had been spent on Councillor training, the cost of the Parish Council election was less than expected.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants were likely to be as budgeted. Other expenses were likely to be around £1,200 more than budgeted because of the £629 contribution towards the improvements to the Jubilee Lane track to Wanstrow and the cost of the strimmer and protective equipment.

Overall, there was a projected deficit of £3,425 compared to a budgeted deficit of £730. As noted above, this was mainly due to the expenditure on the new benches, the contribution to the Jubilee Lane and the cost of the strimmer. The projected funds at the end of the year would be around £12,900, of which approximately £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments. This reserve was well in excess of the recommended two-thirds of the precept – although this would be reduced if the laying of the Playing Field hedge took place in the current year.

5323 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2024: A budget for the year ending 31st March 2024 had been distributed with the Agendas, along with a forecast for the years 2023-2026. The Parish Council needed to maintain sufficient reserves for a possible by-election which could cost a couple of 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 increases in line with inflation and was an opportunity for the Council to review its expenditure. The budget had been produced on the assumption that the laying of the Playing Field hedge would take place in the year 2023/24 but the position at the end of that year would be now different if this was undertaken in the current year.

An unchanged precept and no other additional expenditure would result in reserves of £11,900 at the end of 2023/24 of which around £1,000 would be earmarked for the allotments. The forecast for the years 2023-2026 indicated deficits of around £200 in 2024/25 and £600 in

2025/26 if the precept remained unchanged and there was no additional expenditure. This would leave the Council with relatively high reserves which would need to be justified.

There followed a discussion about the high cost of the electricity and the need to inform the Fete Committee of this as the electricity supply was only used for the Fete. It was noted that it was likely that there would be more tree work needed in the Playing Field and so the budget for maintenance should be increased. It was suggested that Mary Comley be asked to request grit bags from her contacts in Somerset Highways. If free bags were not available, it was suggested buying grit from a builders' merchant.

It was agreed that a decision on the level of the precept would not be made until the tax base for 2023/24 had been determined in January so that the impact of any increase on Council Tax would be known.

5324 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in October).
- £110.00 Gary Butler – Cutting the Playing Field hedge.
- £75.00 Gary Butler – Cutting the allotments field hedge.
- £25.00 SALC – Councillor Training.

5325 – Other Business – matters of information only:

Register of Interests - The Clerk reported that the District Council had now processed Parish Councillors' Declaration of Interests' forms and these can now be downloaded from on the Mendip District Council website and would shortly be added to the Parish Council website as well. Councillors were reminded that any changes in the declared interests should be notified to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days.

Bus services – Clare Kingston reported on a meeting about bus services in the county. Buses were not being used enough and without subsidies would not continue. It was noted that Mendip Community Transport provided the Slinkybus for people without private transport or a local bus service.

Emergency Plan – The Chair and Bryony Harling were working on updating the list of volunteers in the Emergency Plan. **Action: the Chair and Bryony Harling.**

Overhanging hedges – Jayne Cox was going around the parish to check on any overhanging hedges. **Action: Jayne Cox.**

5326 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday December 7th at 7.30pm in the Old School.

Janet Jones
7/12/22