

The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe

was held on Wednesday 3rd April 2019 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.

John Sommer, Chairman of the Parish Council presided. Five members of the Parish Council and the Clerk attended, together with Dick Skidmore - the District Councillor, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper - the County Councillor and a further nine parishioners. Apologies were received from Wiff Cox and Chris Wildridge.

John Sommer **welcomed** parishioners to the meeting.

Minutes of the 2018 Annual Parish Meeting were read by the Clerk, agreed and signed.

There were no **Matters Arising**.

A **Motion to take the Minutes as read at future meetings** was put to the meeting and defeated, with two votes in favour and eight against.

John Sommer gave the **Chairman's Report** with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation.

Chris Wildridge was thanked for his service to the Council, having resigned as Chairman in September after seven years in that role and as a Councillor in March after almost nine years. Parish Council elections would take place in May if more than seven people were nominated. If less than seven were nominated the spaces would be filled by co-option.

The Parish Council's four-year plan, adopted four years previously, had aimed to tackle the issues of the Emergency Plan for the parish, the Playing Field equipment, affordable housing and broadband for the parish. The Emergency Plan was updated in 2018 with the details of volunteers who had come forward at a public meeting in September and adopted by the Parish Council in December.

The multi-play equipment in the Playing Field was rotting and would be kept in use as long as it was safe. A Working Party had been set up to replace this equipment and add some new items of play equipment. Quotes of £60,000 had been obtained to provide this equipment. £2,248 had been raised to date from donations and the Bingo Evenings organised by Clare Kingston and grants were being investigated.

A Housing Needs Survey in 2016 had revealed a housing need for eight households. A proposal to build five 3-bedroomed affordable houses and one open market house in Westcombe had been made by a local developer. A large number of people had attended the Parish Council meeting to consider the application. The Parish Council recommended refusal of the application when informed just before the meeting that it would be amended. The application was subsequently withdrawn.

The timetable for providing highspeed broadband by the Government backed Connecting Devon and Somerset had been delayed, but there was potentially a fibre to premises network provided by an independent supplier. Janet Jones was thanked for her work in promoting highspeed broadband.

Sunday November 11th 2018 was the centenary of the end of the First World War and Chris Wildridge laid a wreath at the War Memorial that Sunday on behalf of the Parish Council. The volunteers who tended the war memorial garden, keeping it in excellent order, were thanked.

There had been 15 planning applications in the last year, compared to 17 the year before. Of these seven were for full or householder planning permission, of which four were approved, one withdrawn and two were awaiting a decision.

Because of the disturbance caused by the 2017 Shindig Weekender, the Parish Council had objected to the application for the 2018 Shindig Weekender. South Somerset District Council reduced the hours that music could be played until from 4.00am to 2.00am, but after the organisers of Shindig appealed the later hours were re-instated. The Parish Council again made representations regarding the 2019 Shindig Weekender, when the organisers applied to increase the size from 6,500 people to 9,999 people. The application was refused, but the organisers appealed and obtained a licence - with a large number of conditions.

HGVs had become stuck at the junction on Holly Hill several times and so the Parish Council requested Somerset Highways to place No HGV signs at the Hedgestocks crossroads on the road from Bruton. This was done at the end of December.

Batcombe was still not included on the precautionary salting route. The Parish Council was investigating the cost of providing this service itself, but the County Council were not being helpful. Thanks were expressed to all those who help to clear the road out of Batcombe to the main road past Upton Noble following the snow in February.

Moles continued to cause problems in the Playing Field throughout the year and steps were being taken to deal with them. Thanks were given to Dominic Conway for taking on the cutting of the Playing Field grass and he had been awarded the contract again this year. Gary Butler was thanked for cutting back the willow structure.

Five of the ten allotments were vacant and if no more were rented the Council would need to decide if the allotments were financially viable.

The Parish Council made grants of £300 to the Village Hall Trust; of which roughly £150 paid for the cost of the Council's own meetings; £200 to the Parochial Church Council for maintenance of the churchyard; and £100 each to Mendip Community Transport and the Mendip Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Parish Council website continued to develop since being established six years previously with over 149,000 visits in that time. The Parish Council had its own dedicated e-mail addresses for the Clerk and the Chairman.

The Parish Council had increased its precept by £550 to £9,750 to help with the cost of replacing the multi-play equipment in the Playing Field. This was an increase of 6% in the precept, but because of an increase in Batcombe's tax base this resulted in a 4% increase in the component of Council Tax due to the precept. Darren Powell of Fraser & Co Accountants was thanked for undertaking the internal audit of the Parish Council.

District and County Councillors' Comments. Dick Skidmore stated that there was still a need for social housing in the parish and was saddened that no landowner had come forward to offer land for housing for local people. He noted that there were a lot of hardworking, dedicated people in the District Council. Cuts had taken place, but a bigger increase in Council Tax would be needed to maintain services. He also noted that Parish Councils did vital work, which wasn't getting any easier.

Nigel Hewitt-Cooper reported that the County Council had decided to go paperless and the move to using tablets instead of printed agendas would save £150,000 in four years. Children's Services, deemed inadequate in 2015, continued to improve. Council tax had risen by the maximum 2.99% with a further 3% for adult social care. 30% of Council Tax is spent on child social care and 40% on adult care and the aging population was a serious issue. The Council gritted over 720 miles of roads on a precautionary basis and the cuts made in the previous winter would be reviewed. An extra £9.9 million would be spent on maintaining roads.

There were no **Neighbourhood Watch Reports.**

Reports from the Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives. Justin Witcombe the Parish Council representative on the Village Hall Trust reported that the Big Draw evening for the Village Hall 100 Club would be a murder mystery evening. He also noted that there was a competition to design a garden for the land below the Jubilee Hall.

Rob Sage, the Parish Council's trustee for the Heritage Room noted that the Heritage Room was open on Saturday afternoons from 2.00pm for anyone interested in looking into the history of the village.

Batcombe 1894 – 2019. The Clerk gave a PowerPoint presentation on changes within the parish during the first 125 years of the Parish Council using photographs from the Heritage Room to illustrate this. The changes included the impact of cars, the arrival of electricity and water supplies, the loss of local shops and tradespeople, new development and the loss of some older buildings including Westcombe House. Also mentioned were the changes in agriculture and in education and the building of the first village hall and its replacement with the current building.

The Chairman thanked everyone for coming; and then closed the meeting.