

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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## **Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023 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, Somerset Councillor Claire Sully and four members of the public.

**5427 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence:** None.

**5428 – Declarations of Interest:** Bryony Harling declared a pecuniary interest in the planning application for Herb Cottage.

**5429 – Public Participation:** None.

**5430 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023** were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**5431 – Matters Arising:** Coronation Mugs – A consignment of Coronation mugs for Buckland Newton Primary School in Dorset was delivered to Batcombe by mistake. The company providing the mugs organised their collection and delivery to Buckland Newton but the Parish Council was then billed for the delivery to Buckland Newton. The Clerk contacted FedEx to sort this out. When Buckland Newton opened the delivery, they discovered 12 mugs with “Batcombe Parish” on them. They posted these mugs to us and declined an offer to pay the postage. Ian Sage reported that mugs had been delivered to everyone on the list of those aged over 66 and those who had made a significant contribution to the life of the parish, apart from one couple. It was agreed to offer the extra mugs on Facebook for donations as well as to some additional volunteers.

Field below the Telephone Exchange – The Chair reported that she had not heard from the enforcement officer regarding the field below the telephone exchange.

**5432 – Somerset Councillor’s Report and the Shepton Local Community Network:** A written report from Somerset Councillor Claire Sully had been distributed to Parish Councillors. It was noted that the first meeting of the Shepton Mallet Local Community Network would take place on Tuesday July 31<sup>st</sup> at Pilton Village Hall. The Parish Council had been asked to nominate a Councillor representative to attend the meeting. Concern was raised over the closure of the stroke services at Yeovil Hospital. There had been a consultation which no one appeared to have been aware of. The Somerset Councillor offered to ask who had been consulted.

**5433 – Footpaths and Highways:** A meeting had been arranged by the Somerset Councillor with representatives of Somerset Highways and was attended by the Chair, Ian Sage and Bryony Harling. The possibility of volunteers spreading grit in the winter was discussed – Batcombe would be the pilot for a community self-help project under the title of “Grit and Determination”. The main issue was the question of insurance and Jeremy Fry from Somerset Highways and Claire Sully would be looking to including insurance in a volunteer agreement, but the Parish Council would need this confirmed in writing. Ian Sage was looking into the grit spreaders that

Longleat used on their estate. It was agreed to place additional grit bins in the parish and their location would need to be agreed with Charlie Higgins from Somerset Highways. Highways would deliver 5 tons of salt to the parish and Charlie Higgins would arrange a survey of Hincombe Hill. Claire Sully would be writing up notes of the meeting and arrangements would need to be sorted by the end of August.

Claire Sully was enthusiastic about the possibility of an agreement between the Parish Council and Somerset Council to deliver gritting in the parish and noted that Jeremy Fry had the backing of leaders in the Council to make it work. She noted that appropriate training to use the equipment would be needed and there would be a list of volunteers willing to do the gritting - not just one person. Claire also noted that communication would be important to manage expectations – it would be important to report when and where the gritting had been done. Ian Sage noted that the Parish Council would need to fund the project. There was a question of whether salt would only be provided for the pilot project.

It was reported that the entrance to the footpath off Bailey's Lane was being blocked by building work. The Clerk was asked to write to the owner.

An application had been made to CPRE Somerset for a grant to help pay for the restoration of the fingerposts and confirmation had been received that CPRE Somerset had set aside £500 for the repair of two fingerposts in Batcombe this year. The restoration of the fingerposts to go on next month's Agenda.

It was noted that Hincombe Hill would be closed for five days at the end of the month for gully work at the telephone exchange.

**5434 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report:** Confirmation had been received that the annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June.

Thanks were expressed to the volunteers who worked on the willow structures in the Playing Field as part of the Big Help Out after the Coronation. The work had been done very well with no sharp cut-off stems left sticking out.

Ian Sage reported that the bench at the bottom of the Playing Field had been replaced after being treated with preservative. Steve Comley was thanked for repairing the water pipe in the Playing Field shelter. Ian Sage had repaired the broken cricket stump in the cricket net. Peter Glaisher was thanked for placing dirt in front of the cricket net to level out the surface.

Clare Kingston reported that people using the pub were leaving their children unsupervised in the Playing Field and some were running through the hedge. It was noted that there was a notice about parental responsibility for supervising their children in the Playing Field.

Jayne Cox reported that the bin outside the Playing Field had been filled to overflowing twice in recent weeks and she had emptied it once herself. The Clerk stated that the issue had been reported to the Somerset Council and more frequent emptying in the summer requested. The Clerk was asked to check how frequently the bin was emptied. **Action – The Clerk.** Much of the litter in the bin was dog poo bags and it was agreed to put the issue of a dog poo bin on the next Agenda.

The Clerk reported that the Fete Committee were willing to contribute no more than £200 to the cost of the electricity for the Annual Fete. He also reported that the Parish Council had received a refund of £83.39 on last year's electricity supply as a result of the Government's discount scheme. The Parish Council agreed to continue paying for the electricity supply to the Playing Field provided the Fete Committee contributed £200 to the cost.

**5435 – Planning Applications:** The Somerset Councillor stated that, if the Parish Council did not agree with the case officer's recommendation on any application, then they should contact her. She also asked to be sent details of the Parish Council's recommendations. The Somerset

Councillor also noted that the enforcement department only had three people working in it and there were two vacancies. Issues should always be reported to enforcement but the demands on the officers mean that they do not always follow up contraventions of planning if they are not doing any harm. Claire Sully left the meeting at this point.

Planning Application 2023/0802/FUL – Conversion of Long Barn to a single replacement dwelling (Class C3) following the demolition of The Cottage and associated works. Lodge Farm, Batcombe – Full Application. Planning permission and Listed Building Consent for the demolition of The Cottage and associated works to the main building and outbuildings had been granted in 2022 and the conversion of the Long Barn would provide guest accommodation and a gym. The Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

Planning Application 2023/0934/HSE – Erection of rear single extension. Herb Cottage, Chapel Row, Batcombe – Full Application. As one of the applicants, Cllr Bryony Harling left the room while this application was considered. The application was for a single storey extension providing a dining/family room at the rear of the cottage. The other applicant stated that the cottage was too small for their growing family and the extension would provide more room for their children. The neighbour at the Old Forge expressed a number of concerns about the proposed extension principally the loss of her view and the disruption that would be caused by the building work, but also the impact on the Conservation Area and drainage onto the driveway between their properties. The loss of a view and disruption during building work were not considered to be material planning considerations and so the Parish Council decided to recommend approval.

**Planning Application Updates:** The application for the erection of an outbuilding at Mill Cottage following the demolition of two existing outbuildings had been approved by the new Somerset Council. The application for the erection of an outhouse study at Little Acre had also been approved, although the Parish Council had recommended refusal. The planning website did not have the case officer's report so there was no indication why the application was approved. The Clerk to e-mail the case officer and ask for the reason for approval. **Action – The Clerk.**

New plans had been submitted for the application to insert windows in the east elevation at Church Barn. The new plans added a door and widened two of the windows. The Parish Council had been waiting for the Conservation Officer's report before making a recommendation. In light of the amended drawings, it was decided to recommend refusal because of the impact on the Conservation Area and the surrounding listed buildings from the east elevation no longer preserving the impression of an inward facing courtyard farm. The Clerk to note on the response that Parish Council had no objection to some windows in the east elevation provided the number and size of the windows preserved the character of an inward-looking barn. **Action – The Clerk.**

**5436 – Review of Financial Regulations:** As the current Financial Regulations had been adopted in December 2021, no amendments were felt to be necessary.

**5437 – Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control, Internal Auditor's Report and Certificate of Exemption from a Limited Assurance Review:** The Clerk reported his belief that the Council's system of internal control was more than sufficient for a small Parish Council. The details were given in the Financial Regulations and included the budgetary process, the authorisation of all payments by the Council, the signing of cheques at Council meetings by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the internal audit.

Griff Williams was thanked for undertaking the role of Internal Auditor. Copies of the Internal Auditor's Report had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Internal Auditor had no recommendations to make to the Council.

The Clerk noted that the Parish Council's gross annual income and expenditure were both under the £25,000 limit which meant that the Parish Council could certify itself as exempt from a limited assurance review by the External Auditor. The Chair and the Clerk then signed the Certificate of Exemption that had to be sent to the External Auditor by the end of the month.

**5438 – Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2022/23:** Copies of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return - the Annual Governance Statement - had been enclosed with the Agendas. Approval of the Annual Governance Statement was agreed and the Statement was signed by the Chair and the Clerk.

**5439 – Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2022/23:** Copies of Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return – the Statement of Accounts – had been enclosed with the Agendas, along with a copy of the Financial Statements, considered at the previous meeting, showing how the figures in the Statement of Accounts had been derived. Approval of the Statement of Accounts was agreed and this was signed by the Chair, having previously been signed by the Clerk as the Responsible Financial Officer. It was noted that there were significant variations (of more than 15%) in boxes 3 and 6 between the figures for last year and those for the previous year. In box 3 this was due to the VAT refund on the new play equipment and the new gate of £12,631 in the previous year. In box 6 this was due to the payment of the VAT on the new play equipment and the additional cost of the play equipment above the value of the grant from Viridor Credits in the previous year less the cost of the new benches, hedge laying and election last year.

**5440 - Authorisation of Payments:** Councillors authorised the following payments:

£180.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in May).

**5441 – Other Business – matters of information only:** Citizens Advice – the four Citizens Advice organisations in Somerset – Citizens Advice Mendip, Taunton, Sedgemoor and South Somerset – had decided to merge and from October 1<sup>st</sup> would become Citizens Advice Somerset. This was partly in response to the new unitary council and partly to provide a stronger basis for the Citizens Advice centres in Somerset in the light of ever-increasing demand on their services.

Parking – A local resident asked about issues to do with poor parking and was advised to speak to the PCSO.

**5442 – Date and Time of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 8.00pm in the Jubilee Hall (as there was an event being held in the Old School).

*Janet Jones*  
12/7/23