

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: [clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk](mailto:clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk)

## **Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 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, Somerset Councillor Claire Sully and three members of the public.

**5406 – Election of Chair and Chair’s Acceptance of Office:** Janet Jones was proposed by Peter Glaisher and seconded by Tom Price. There being no other nominations, Janet was duly elected as Chair.

**5407 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence:** None.

**5408 – Declarations of Interest:** None.

**5409 – Election of Vice Chairman:** Peter Glaisher was proposed by Bryony Harling, seconded by Clare Kingston and elected as Vice Chairman.

**5410 – Public Participation:** Sharon Witcombe stated that there were 16 parents and children interested in joining a child eco-group. They would like to use the Playing Field as a hub for making bird boxes and bug hotels and would also like to plant wildflowers in the triangle and bank by the multi-play equipment. It was clarified that the children would take any bird boxes home but the bug hotels could be left in the Playing Field. Sharon was willing to maintain the wildflower area and bug hotels. The Parish Council was happy for this to go ahead – to be reviewed after a year.

**5411 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023** were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. Clare Kingston had missed the meeting because of the change of time and it was noted that while attendance and apologies were recorded in the Minutes, non-attendance was not.

**5412 – Matters Arising:** Coronation Mugs – Ian Sage had produced a list of residents over 66 and some volunteers. The Chair had added a few names and promised to circulate the list to Councillors. It was agreed to distribute the mugs on the Sunday at the picnic lunch. A note indicating that the mugs were being given for residents’ contribution to parish life would be included with the mugs.

**5413 – Somerset Councillor’s Report:** Claire Sully reported that the first meeting of the Local Community Networks (LCNs) would take place in June and parishes were encouraged to send a representative, which could be the Clerk, and other community groups could attend. The first meeting would elect a chair and be thinking about priorities including a name. Local venues would be used, so the LCN could meet in Batcombe. Claire also reported that the first meeting of the Somerset East (Mendip) planning board had taken place online. There were some changes to the rules on public participation and it was hoped communication would improve.

**5414 – Allotments:** The rent for the allotments field was due and there was one vacant allotment, although an existing allotment holder might be interested in taking this on. The car parts were still in the field but had been tidied up along with the rest of the communal area.

**5415 – Footpaths and Highways:** Concerns were expressed that the proposed meeting with Somerset Highways had not taken place and that the summer would quickly be over without a resolution to the problems of access during icy weather, particularly for the school bus. It was noted that issue with the gully on Hincombe Hill had not been addressed, nor had the question of insurance for farmers undertaking gritting as volunteers.

It was noted that where there was an issue with a footpath, it was the landowner's responsibility to deal with it. A concern was also raised that green lanes were apparently being downgraded to footpaths.

**5416 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report:** The Clerk noted that the annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June. For an extra £30 RoSPA were offering a template to help with the Council's weekly inspections. It was agreed to purchase the template.

As part of the Big Help Out on the Bank Holiday Monday after the Coronation, volunteers were willing to tackle the willow structure in the Playing Field. The organiser had produced a risk assessment and would provide a list of volunteers who had taken part to satisfy the Council's insurers. The Parish Council agreed to the willow weaving taking place, provided everything was woven in and no sharp cut-off stems were left.

It was noted that the laid hedge was shooting. The replacement of the low bench and the painting of the swing frame were items waiting to be done when the Councillors who had volunteered had time. **Action – Ian Sage and Clare Kingston.**

**5417 – Planning Applications:** None.

**Planning Application Updates:** The application for minor alterations to Romsey Cottage, including the repair of the boundary wall, had been approved, as had the application for the erection of an outbuilding at Mill Cottage. The Chair was waiting for a response from the case officer with regard to the application to insert windows in the east elevation of Church Barn and asked if the Somerset Councillor could contact the case officer.

The Chair noted that the enforcement officer had asked to be reminded to look again at the field below the telephone exchange and the six months had now passed. Concern was raised about a garage extension in the Conservation Area that had no planning permission. The Chair to contact the enforcement officer about both issues. **Action – The Chair.**

**5418 - Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters:** Staffing Committee – Janet Jones, Peter Glaisher and Bryony Harling volunteered to continue to be the members of the Staffing Committee.

Additional Hours - the Clerk was reported that he had worked 8 additional hours in the year 2022/23, which would be carried over into the current year.

**5419 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives:** It was agreed that Jayne Cox should continue as the Village Hall Representative and that the Clerk should continue as the Heritage Room Representative. The Clerk noted that the Heritage Room was now opening on Saturday afternoons again.

**5420 – Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters:** It was agreed that Financial Regulations be reviewed at the June meeting; Social Media Policy and policy for dealing with the press at the July meeting; complaints procedure at

the September meeting; Emergency Plan at the October meeting; budget to be considered at the November meeting; membership of other bodies to be reviewed at the December meeting; Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February meeting; and the Schedule of Assets, Risk Management Policy and insurance cover to be reviewed at the March meeting in time for the preparation of the Annual Report and renewal of the insurance.

**5421 – Insurance Renewal:** The Parish Council’s insurance was due for renewal on June 1<sup>st</sup> and the Council was one year into a three-year long-term agreement with Aviva Insurance organised via their insurance brokers BHIB Ltd. The insurance premium was £627.54, an increase of £40.41 on the previous year’s premium. The increase was due to increasing costs and the fact that generally in the insurance world the level of premiums had not kept up with the level of claims.

**5422 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023:** The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 was verified by the Chair.

A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas and the Clerk went briefly through the details. No VAT Refund had been claimed in 2022/23 as an additional claim for refund of the VAT on the new play equipment had been made the previous year. A claim for just over £1,000 had been made in the current year. The allotments rent was £21 less than budgeted because several allotments were vacant during the year and some discounted payments were received for allotments rented for part of the year. £52 was raised for maintenance of the new play equipment from the Mendip Lottery Fund. Interest rates showed a small increase from the minimal level of the previous year. As a result of no VAT claim being made, receipts were £114 less than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting and trimming in the Playing Field was roughly as budgeted. This was an increase on the previous year’s figure when no cuts were undertaken while the play equipment was being installed. The cost of the electricity supply was £309 more than budgeted as the Standing Charge increased from £21.35 a quarter to £1.2321 per day (£112.43 a quarter). This was part of an industry wide move to transfer costs from the unit cost to the standing charge, but had a greater impact on the Parish Council’s costs as little electricity was used in the Playing Field. The Clerk was asked to inform the Fete Committee of the cost of the electricity and ask if they wished to contribute towards the cost. If not, the Parish Council would consider disconnecting the supply. **Action – The Clerk.**

The cost of the water supply was slightly less than budgeted and a drop on the previous year when the turf for the new play equipment needed watering. Maintenance consisted of £110 for hedge cutting, £70 for two signs (one a replacement), £44 for a new stopcock and £660 for tree work on the Oak tree. Overall maintenance was £634 more than budgeted – although the level of maintenance needed was always difficult to predict. The annual inspection was £10 more than budgeted due to additional items to inspect.

The cost of the new cricket net, mat and stumps was £126 less than budgeted. In addition, there were two unbudgeted items using money raised or put aside for the Playing Field. £1,014 was spent on new benches – the GWR bench in memory of Dominic Conway and the bench in the bus shelter – and £1,680 was spent on laying the Playing Field hedge. All these costs included VAT which would be claimed back. Overall Playing Field payments were £3,533 more than budgeted, because of the cost of the hedge laying, new benches and tree work.

The Clerk’s salary increased more than expected because of an 8% pay rise (negotiated nationally and agreed in line with the Clerk’s Contract of Employment). This meant that the Clerk’s salary was £297 more than budgeted. The Clerk’s expenses were roughly as budgeted. The Zoom subscription was no longer required as in-person meetings had resumed. Training of new Councillors following the election cost £140 - £65 more than budgeted but in previous

years the training budget had not been spent. The insurance premium was £117 more than budgeted. (The Parish Council's three-year agreement with Hiscox Insurance arranged by Came & Co had come to an end and the new premium quoted was double the previous year's premium. The Parish Council therefore accepted an alternative quote from Aviva arranged by BHIB Ltd which provided a similar level of cover at a much lower price.) A fee of £240 was charged by the external auditors as the cost of the new play equipment had put the Parish Council's expenditure the previous year above the £25,000 limit requiring an intermediate audit. The cost of the contested election was £976, which was £524 less than budgeted. Photocopying was £43 less than budgeted as few paper copies of the Agenda and papers were being distributed. The cost of the bank custody fee was £7 more than budgeted as payment for part of the current year was included – up to the point when bank custody of the Parish Council deeds ceased. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted. Overall administration costs were £152 more than budgeted.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted. The expenditure on the allotments was £220 for the lease of the field; £90 for cutting the grass in the allotment field and £75 spent on hedge cutting - overall £15 more than budgeted. There were unbudgeted costs of £629 as a contribution to the cost of the Jubilee Lane (access for walkers and horse riders to Wanstrow); £438 on a strimmer and protective equipment to trim the footpaths; and £61 on paint for the telephone kiosk in Westcombe. As a result of all the above, total payments were £4,827 more than budgeted, largely because of the new benches, hedge laying and tree work in the Playing Field and the contribution to the Jubilee Lane project and the strimmer. It was agreed that Tom Price should be registered as the Parish Paths Liaison Officer to provide insurance whilst strimming. **Action – The Clerk.**

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and the play equipment were provided on the back of the Financial Statement. At the end of the year there was £970 of allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. All the remaining money raised for the play equipment had now been spent – the accounts showed £600 going to the cricket net and the remainder going towards the cost of the new benches.

The net result of the variations against the budget outlined above was a deficit of £5,671 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £730. This was due to the spending of the money raised for the new play equipment and the money put aside by the Parish Council for improvements to the Playing Field. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £10,641 in its funds, £4,537 less than anticipated in the budget. This is a result of spending available funds on the Playing Field and elsewhere as noted above. Of the funds at the end of the year, £970 was set aside for the allotments and £77 for new notice boards, meaning that the Parish Council had funds totalling £9,594 that were not earmarked for specific items, (although £2,761 of this total consisted of funds that had been intended for the new play equipment). This meant that the Parish Council had sufficient reserves to cover the cost of a by-election during the coming year (which was the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure). SALC recommended that a Parish Council had reserves of between one-third and two-thirds of its precept, which with the current precept meant the reserves should be between £3,300 and £6,600.

The Clerk reported that he had been in contact with the internal auditor, Griff Williams, who had been asked to complete the audit by the June meeting.

**5423 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024:** An updated projection on this year's budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that he had received notification from the Somerset Council that they had paid the 2023/24 precept of £9,925. The VAT repayment would be £904 more than budgeted as no claim had been made in 2022/23.

The claim had now been made. The projection assumed one vacant allotment and the receipt of £200 in donations towards the Coronation mugs.

With regard to payments, most items were expected to be as budgeted. The cost of the Coronation mugs was an extra expense not included in the budget. The grass cutting had increased by £10 a cut, so was likely to be £110 more than budgeted (if the same number of cuts were done). The insurance premium was £28 more than budgeted but there would be no bank custody fee as the bank no longer keeps items in safe custody. Overall, the projection was for a surplus of £373 instead of the budgeted deficit of £75 – largely as a result of the VAT refund. This would give funds of £11,014 at the end of the year of which around £1,000 would be earmarked for the allotments.

**5424 - Authorisation of Payments:** Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £180.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in April).
- £220.00 T & EA Hollis – Annual rent of the allotments field.
- £627.54 BHIB Ltd – Insurance Premium.

**5425 – Other Business – matters of information only:** None.

**5426 - Dates of Future Meetings:** The following dates were agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council during the coming year, mainly on the first Wednesday of each month, although the June, July and January meetings would be held on the second Wednesday:

14 <sup>th</sup> June	12 <sup>th</sup> July	2 <sup>nd</sup> August	6 <sup>th</sup> September	4 <sup>th</sup> October	1 <sup>st</sup> November
6 <sup>th</sup> December	10 <sup>th</sup> January	7 <sup>th</sup> February	6 <sup>th</sup> March	3 <sup>rd</sup> April	1 <sup>st</sup> May

The August meeting would only be held if there were planning applications to consider. The date in April would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The Council to meet at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year (apart from April).

*Janet Jones*  
*14/6/23*