

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 6th September 2023 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

Present - Councillors: Janet Jones – Chair, Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher and Tom Price.

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage.

5470 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Apologies were received from Bryony Harling due to a lack of child care, Clare Kingston who was ill, and Ian Sage who was working. Apologies were also received from Claire Sully, the Somerset Councillor, who had two other Parish Council meetings to attend that evening.

5471 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5472 – Public Participation: Jayne Cox read a letter from a resident of Ash Tree Cottages informing the Council that notices would be erected stating that there was residents' parking only in Ash Tree Cottages. At several recent events, a number of vehicles had parked in Ash Tree Cottages and the residents and their children needed to be safe.

5473 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 12th July, 19th July and 9th August 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5474 – Matters Arising: Annual Grants – acknowledgement and thanks for the grant had been received from Mendip Citizens Advice.

LCN – Jayne Cox attended the initial meeting of the Shepton Local Community Network in July. Somerset Cllr Philip Ham was elected Chair and Cllr Claire Sully Vice Chair. Issues discussed included planning, speeding, a lack of public transport and Batcombe's winter road issues. A link to the Minutes of the meeting had been distributed to Parish Councillors. The next meeting would be held on October 18th. A decision on who would attend would be made at the next meeting.

5475 – Somerset Councillor's Report: A written report from Somerset Councillor Claire Sully had been distributed to Parish Councillors.

5476 – Footpaths and Highways: Grit and determination – there had been no response from the Somerset Council on the issue of insurance for volunteer farmers willing to undertake winter gritting. Our Somerset Councillor was chasing this up but needed the lead person to talk to the Somerset Council's insurers. It was noted that the original discussion had been to have an agreement in place by the end of August. Jayne Cox reported that a parishioner who had previously worked for Somerset Highways had stated that this was a complicated task and would be difficult to do. Councillors expressed some scepticism about the scheme. There was a discussion about installing additional grit bins. There was a question of where these bins could go and who would spread the grit from them in icy weather. It was reported that Adrian Stevens was willing to have one at Rockwells but noted that this was only one bin for the whole of Crows Hill. It was felt that a bad weather plan was needed for the school and for elderly people needing to get out of the parish.

Bruton Roadworks – Somerset Highways had adopted a “one-hit” approach to roadworks in Bruton during August, mainly to improve the junction at the bottom of Coombe Street. This resulted in access to Bruton from Coombe Street being blocked for the first half of August and the High Street being closed at periods during the day after this. Issues with asbestos, a sink hole and an historic drainage system had held up the work.

Hincombe Hill and Eastcombe Lane Road Closures – a Road Closure Order would come into effect from September 14th for Hincombe Hill (from Eastcombe Lane to the A359) and for Eastcombe Lane (53 metres from the A359). This was to allow Openreach to access overhead and underground network for fibre cabling works. The work was expected to take three days from September 20th to September 22nd between the hours of 9.30am and 3.30pm.

Fingerpost Restoration – as noted at previous meetings, CPRE Somerset had offered a grant of £500 to help pay for the restoration of two fingerposts this year with more grants available in future years to restore more of the parish’s fingerpost. An initial quote of £885 + VAT had been received to restore the fingerpost by the Playing Field and alternative quotes would be needed for this and the fingerpost by the Old Post Office. Bryony Harling had distributed a list of suppliers suggested by the Somerset Council and it was agreed to obtain quotes from Somerset Forge, Read Agriservices and one other. **Action – The Clerk.**

Westcombe Footpath – It was reported that protective fencing around building work on Baileys Lane was swung back across the footpath while work was taking place onsite. The Clerk to report the issue to the Rights of Way Officer at the Somerset Council. **Action – The Clerk.**

5477 – Litter and Dog Poo Bins: Discussion had been deferred from the July meeting as the Clerk had not heard back from the Somerset Council. Concerns had been raised over a significant amount of dog poo being placed in the bin by the Playing Field, which had been found to be overflowing with litter on several occasions. The Clerk had been in contact with David Williams the Working Supervisor for *id verde*, the contractor Somerset Council used to empty litter bins. He stated that the litter bin outside the Playing Field was emptied weekly – and that they would consider a twice weekly collection if required. Mr Williams suggested placing a separate dog poo bin in the area, which *id verde* would empty once a week.

The Parish Council had considered the provision of dog poo bins in the past and decided not to provide them over concerns about the smell and the possibility that the Parish Council may eventually end up having to empty the bins. The Parish Council decided against a dog poo bin on these grounds. It was also agreed to keep an eye on the litter bin by the Playing Field and to put a note in the parish magazine about the decision on dog poo bins. **Action – The Clerk.**

5478 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Annual Safety Inspection – A link to the report of the RoSPA safety inspection had been distributed to Parish Councillors. Most items were of low/medium risk with the actual risk of items being the same or slightly higher than the innate risk for that type of item. The exceptions were the toddler swing which had significant wearing of the chains and the fact that the inspector was unable to inspect the cable attachments on the cableway because they are covered. The inspector recommended an annual inspection of the cable attachments, which would involve dismantling the cableway. As this would need to be done by the suppliers, the Parish Council agreed that no dismantling inspection was needed until the cableway was five years old as it was unlikely to have any significant wear at this stage.

The inspector also noted rot in the gateposts, which was not a safety issue as the gateposts do not support the self-closing gate although they are of historic value as they hold the plaques noting the dedication of the Playing Field as a King George V Playing Field. The inspector also noted rot in the seat under the willow arch and strimmer damage to the posts supporting the overhead rings, which could accelerate rot in these posts. He also noted bowing in the picnic table, a trip hazard in the cricket net and recommended a planned maintenance programme to

control growth in the willow tunnel. None of these issues posed a significant risk, other than protruding growth in the willow tunnel which needed regular checking.

Annual Fete – As last year the Fete Committee had obtained their own insurance for the Fete rather than assuming that they would be covered by the PCC's insurance. The Fete Committee paid £200 towards the cost of the electricity supply as requested and agreed to empty the litter bin outside the Playing Field. The Fete Committee may wish us to keep the electricity supply, as the hire of a generator was likely to cost more than £200. The Clerk had asked Gary Butler to cut back the inside of the Playing Field hedge before the Fete. The Playing Field was left in a good condition after the Fete and there were no problems with the electricity supply this year (which may be a result of new cables being used to connect the supply.)

It was reported that John Wiltshire had offered to cut the outside of the Playing Field hedge free of charge. It was also noted that the sign acknowledging those who had contributed to the new play equipment had had a name scratched out – it was decided to take no action for the time being.

5479 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: The application for a driveway, turning and parking area at Stonecot had been approved by the Planning Board and the application for a single storey rear extension at Herb Cottage had been approved. The application to vary the drawings for the planning permission granted for the coach house at Kings Hayes had also been approved, although the Listed Building Consent for this work was still being considered.

The Somerset Councillor had asked for a list of the Parish Council's concerns over planning. These mainly concerned enforcement and there were particular issues over the field next to the telephone exchange and an extension on Kale Street. There was also a concern about case officer's report on the Little Acre application not being published on the Council website.

5480– Review of the Parish Council's Complaints Procedure: A copy of the Council's Code of Practice for handling complaints had been distributed with the Agenda and can be downloaded from the Parish Council website. This had last been amended in 2011, and was based on a model produced by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). This procedure was only for complaints about the actions of the Parish Council as a body. Complaints about the Clerk should be dealt with by the Staffing Committee in accordance with the Clerk's Contract of Employment; and complaints against individual Councillors for breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct should be made to the Somerset Council's Monitoring Officer. The Parish Council had only received one complaint since the Code of Practice was adopted in 2003 and it was felt that there was no need to amend the current Complaints Procedure.

5481 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: The bank reconciliation for the first quarter had been checked by the Chair and reported to the meeting.

A budget update had been distributed with the Agendas. This consisted of four columns of figures showed the accounts for the previous year, the budget for the current year, receipts and payments to 31st August and a projection for the current year based on expenditure to date.

Receipts were projected to be approximately £1,500 more than the budgeted figure, with £900 of this due to the VAT on the new gate, cricket net, benches and hedge laying in the Playing Field reclaimed at the beginning of the current year instead of the previous one. There was also £297 in donations for the Coronation mugs and £283 in contributions to the cost of the electricity - £200 from the Fete Committee and an £83.39 rebate from SSE.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was about £90 more than budgeted, due to the increase in the grass cutting cost and the extra cost of the annual inspection (due to the provision of a template for the weekly inspections).

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was roughly as budgeted. The insurance premium was slightly higher than budgeted, but there was no longer a bank custody fee. The Clerk's salary was likely to increase but no figures have yet been agreed for the current year's salary.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants was likely to be as budgeted. Other expenses including those of the allotments were likely to be around £450 more than budgeted. This was due to the £509 cost of the Coronation mugs less the cost of cutting the war memorial grass which at £5 a cut would be less than budgeted. The net cost of the Coronation mugs came to £212 when the donations were taken into account.

Overall, there was a projected surplus of £880 compared to a budgeted deficit of £75. This is mainly due to the larger than expected VAT claim as noted above. As a result, the projected funds at the end of the year were £11,524 – around £110 more than expected when the budget was made. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure will be earmarked for the allotments.

5482 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £270.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field and War Memorial in August.
- £60.00 Gary Butler – Hedge cutting in the Playing Field.

The following payments were authorised retrospectively; payment having been required before the meeting:

- £147.00 Playsafety Limited – RoSPA Playing Field safety inspection.
- £180.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field and War Memorial in July.
- £59.99 water2business – Water supply to Playing Field.

5483 – Other Business – matters of information only: PCSO – the Clerk stated that he would be meeting the new PCSO, Louise Perry, the following week and asked if there were any issues to bring to her attention. There was a report of hare coursing in the parish.

Mendip Local Plan – under the new Somerset Council the Mendip Local Plan Parts I & II remain in force for determining planning applications in the former Mendip Area. However, a judicial review has required Somerset Council to strike out and reconsider five housing sites in the Local Plan Part II. As a result, the Council was commencing a limited update to the Local Plan Part II. The rest of the Local Plan, including the other housing sites in Part II, was unaffected.

5484 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th October 2023 at 8.00pm in The Old School.

4/10/23
Janet Jones