

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th February 2024 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

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

5543 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Tom Price, who was unwell, and Ian Sage, who was at a business meeting.

5544 – Declarations of Interest: The Chair declared an interest in the authorisation of payment for the Parish Council's photocopying to News from the Parishes as the magazine's editor.

5545 – Public Participation: None.

5546 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 10th January 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, after noting the spelling of Pugh's Bottom.

5547 – Matters Arising: Precept – In light of the decision taken at the January meeting to increase the precept by the same amount as the increase in the tax base so that there would be no change in amount of Council Tax resulting from the precept; the precept had been increased by £150 to £10,075, an increase of 1.51% (the tax base had increased by 1.52%).

LCN – Clare Kingston reported on the Shepton LCN meeting held in January, the Minutes of which had been distributed to Parish Councillors. There was a focus on the financial difficulties of the Somerset Council largely resulting from the increases in care costs. Clare noted that town councils were increasing their precepts significantly to cover services Somerset Council was likely to cut and parish councils may need to pay for items such as clearing drains. The meeting also discussed flooding in Shepton Mallet and Highways and Traffic issues including to possible provision of a Highways Steward for the LCN. There would be a meeting of a Highways and Traffic Subgroup on Monday February 26th at 2.00pm in the Mendip Hub which Peter Glaisher volunteered to attend. The date of the next LCN meeting had been changed to Monday 11th March, 7.00pm in the Council Chamber at Shepton Mallet and Jayne Cox had volunteered to attend this meeting.

5548 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2024/0154/HSE - Alterations to fenestration, utilisation of garage as office space. Pastoral, Kale Street, Batcombe. Householder Application.

The applicant stated that PvC windows would be replaced by aluminium ones with less divisions. There would be larger sliding glass doors and wood cladding would be added to make the building appear more contemporary and improve insulation. The garage which was too small for a car would be converted to an office for the applicant who works from home. The Parish Council had no objections to the proposed changes and decided to recommend approval.

Planning Application Updates: There was nothing to report.

5549 – Somerset Councillors’ Report: No report had been received from the Somerset Councillors.

5550 – Footpaths and Highways: Road Closures – Hincombe Hill would be closed from Monday February 19th for five days while drainage works are undertaken. The road would be closed for 24 hours a day with no access for emergency vehicles. In addition, Back Lane and the road in front of the Round House would be closed for 6 hours on Wednesday February 14th (9.30am to 3.30pm) to allow Openreach to replace telephone poles. Holly Hill had also been closed to allow Openreach to repair a cable, although notification of the closure had not been received until the work was almost complete.

Footpath Obstruction – the Parish Paths Liaison Officer for Bruton Town Council had reported an obstruction on Footpath SM 2/18 to the Rights of Way Officer. The footpath was accessed by the double gate by the Old Chapel and the gate was secured by two mechanical fastenings, baler twine and barbed wire making it impossible to open. He had also reported that the fingerpost footpath sign had been broken off and at the other end of the footpath (the gate opposite Coney’s Wood) both fingerposts point walkers along SM 2/17 (the footpath up to Ash Tree Cottages). The Clerk to write to the landowner, reminding him of the need to ensure easy access to the footpath.

The Clerk reported that two 1 ton bags of grit had been delivered to Portway Farm and the grit bin at Hincombe Hill filled by Somerset Highways. Somerset Highways to be asked if they would install the safety barrier on Hincombe Hill this financial year if the Parish Council and/or landowner paid for it. A fallen tree from Coney Wood had been cleared by a neighbouring landowner. There was an issue with overhanging trees on Westcombe Hill and Jayne Cox was asked to provide photographs of the trees so the correct landowner could be approached about the issue. Peter Glaisher had spoken to the landowner about the issue with the footpath to Spargrove and the landowner had promised to look into what could be done. A pothole on Holly Hill had been reported by a local resident.

Ian Sage had spoken to the farmers at Pugh’s Bottom Farm about the water flowing onto Hincombe Hill. They had attempted to dig down to the pipe under the road but it was too deep. They had spoken to someone from Somerset Highways who said that Highways could dig down to the pipe when they came to clear the drains on Hincombe Hill as they would have a mechanical digger. The Chair had been contacted by someone who felt that the farmers should be thanked for their work spreading grit during the recent icy weather. It was felt that if the problem was not dealt with when Somerset Highways did the drains, then Ian should approach the farmers again and update the Parish Council at the next meeting.

5551 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that moles were active in the Playing Field again – around the swings and the safety surfacing for the basketball hoop. It was agreed to leave the moles for the time being and consider them again at a future meeting.

The Parish Council had received an apology from the Contract Supervisor at *id verde*, who empty the litter bins for the Somerset Council. Apparently, there had been a change of schedule and the litter bin by the Playing Field had been missed off the new schedule. The overflowing bin had now been emptied and the Parish Council had placed notes in the Parish News and on Facebook asking people not to put dog waste in the litter bin and not to leave litter by the bin when it is full.

Clare Kingston stated that she would paint the swings when the weather was drier. She also asked about the wood from the Playing Field tree that had been reduced in size and was being stored at Portway Farm. It was agreed to consider what to do with the wood at the September meeting.

5552 – Review of Standing Orders: The Parish Council is required to review its Standing Orders annually. New Standing Orders, which can be downloaded from the Parish Council website, were adopted in February 2022, based on model Standing Orders provided by the National Association of Local Councils. No amendment to these Standing Orders was considered necessary at the time of the meeting.

5553 – Annual Parish Meeting: The Annual Parish Meeting would take place on Wednesday April 3rd at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall (with a short Parish Council meeting beforehand at 6.45pm). Suggestions for a speaker(s) were considered and it was proposed to have a panel of farmers to answer questions about local farming and inform residents about current issues in farming such as impact of the new grant scheme. Jayne Cox suggested that a speaker from Lackham College could facilitate the discussion and volunteered to see if he would be available for the Annual Meeting.

5554 – Bank Reconciliation and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2024: The bank reconciliation for the third quarter prepared by the Clerk was checked by the Chair before the meeting.

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

Receipts were projected to be approximately £1,400 more than the budgeted figure because of the VAT claim made in the current year rather than the previous one and the unbudgeted receipts for the contributions to the Coronation mugs and electricity for the Playing Field. Allotments rent would be less than the full £350 due to the vacant allotments.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was likely to be around £1,000 less than budgeted, as the maintenance budget was unlikely to be spent; the cost of the electricity supply would be less than expected following a refund from SSE at the start of the year; and the grass cutting would be £155 less than budgeted unless an extra cut is needed this winter.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration would be around £150 more than budgeted, due to a higher than expected increase in the Clerk's salary. Some other items were slightly more than budgeted but this was balanced by there being no bank custody fee.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants was likely to be as budgeted. Other expenditure was likely to be £300 more than budgeted largely because of the cost of the Coronation mugs, balanced by the fact that nothing had been spent on allotments maintenance. The net cost of the Coronation mugs was £200 after contributions.

Overall, there was a projected surplus of £1,876 compared to a budgeted deficit of £75. This was largely due to the VAT claim received in the current year instead of the previous one and the underspend on the maintenance budgets for the Playing Field and allotments. The projected funds at the end of the year were around £12,500 of which approximately £1,000 would be earmarked for the allotments. This was a reserve well in excess of the recommended two thirds of the precept – although it might be prudent in light of the uncertain financial position of the Somerset Council.

5555 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

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| £46.76 | The News from the Parishes – Photocopying for 2023 |
| £41.19 | Water2business – Water supply to the Playing Field (six months) |
| £112.00 | Society of Local Council Clerks – Clerk's Membership for 2024. |

5556 – Other Business – matters of information only: the crime report for January showed that no crime had been reported in Batcombe that month.

The Chair suggested thinking about which footpaths the Parish Council should prioritise for improvement for a future meeting.

Peter Glaisher reported that the Church would be organising a village tidy-up for the 29th March.

5557 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th March 2024 at 7.30pm in The Old School.

Janet Jones

6/3/24

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