

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 6th March 2024 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 and three members of the public.

5558 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: None.

5559 – Declarations of Interest: Jayne Cox declared an interest in the discussion of grants to the Village Hall as a member of the Village Hall Trust.

5560 – Public Participation: Tim Chater noted that a Village Clear Up had taken place after the Coronation last year and was proposing another one for Good Friday (March 29th). Somerset Council's contractors *id verde* would be providing litter picking equipment and collecting the rubbish and the Village Hall Trust would be providing a soup lunch for the volunteers. Tim asked the Parish Council's permission to work on the willow structures in the Playing Field and the War Memorial garden. This would be on the basis of the risk assessment previously provided by Tom Price. It was noted that it was better to weave the willow rather than cutting it which could leave sharp spikes. Tom Price offered to check if the volunteers who had weaved the willow at the Coronation would be available on this date and to help with work on the War Memorial garden. On this basis, the Parish Council were happy for the Clear Up to include the willow structures and the War Memorial garden.

Tim Chater raised the subject of the Tourist Levy – a small charge on accommodation that raised funds for activities in the parish. Steve Gilbert had previously spoken to the Parish Council about the Levy. It was suggested that a levy of £1 a night could raise £2,500 a year from The Three Horseshoes. The Levy was law in Scotland but could only be done on a voluntary basis in England. There were suggestions for how the money could be used – such as for Rights of Way or for road drains. There were questions over how much it would raise, how it would be administered, and would it be legal for the Parish Council to be involved. The Parish Council were happy for Tim Chater to investigate further.

5561 – Other Matters: This item was brought forward as it concerned the Village Hall Trust and the Parochial Church Council, members of which were present. Peter Glaisher noted that the Parish Council provided a grant to the Village Hall Trust to allow village organisations to use the Old School for committee meetings without charge and asked if the Parish Council could also provide a grant for village organisations to hire items from the Village Hall Trust, such as tables, chairs and crockery, without charge. The Clerk noted that the Parish Council could only do things that it had the legal power to do and, while it had the power to support the Village Hall Trust, there was a question over whether it had the power to support other organisations – especially the Church. The Village Hall Trust Treasurer, Adrian Amiri, felt that such a grant would be a nightmare to administer or to evaluate what the cost would be. In light of the discussion, the Parish Council decided not to take the idea any further.

5562 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7th February 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. Ian Sage noted that two half ton bags of grit had been delivered to Portway Farm by Somerset Highways, not two one-ton bags.

5563 – Matters Arising: Allotments – One of the vacant allotments had been taken by a resident of Westcombe, who had been charged £25 for the remainder of this year. Further attempts would be made to contact the allotment holder who had yet to pay for the two allotments he held.

5564 – Somerset Councillors’ Report: A written report about the Somerset Council had been received from the Somerset Councillors and distributed to Parish Councillors.

5565 – Shepton Local Community Network: Peter Glaisher had attended the inaugural meeting of the Transport and Highways Subgroup of the Shepton LCN. The Subgroup was considering the employment of a Highways Steward for £50,000 to undertake routine maintenance on the highways in the LCN. If the Parish Council signed up for this, the Steward might be available one day a month and the Parish Council would pay pro rata. There was also the possibility of paying contractors for additional work. For example, drains were currently cleaned every two years and the Parish Council could pay for this to happen more often. Peter felt that there was a lot that was positive in the meeting, but there was a cost. The Subgroup would meet again in two months’ time. Peter would send around the e-mail he had received following the meeting to Councillors for discussion at a future meeting.

5566 – Footpaths and Highways: Drains – Jayne Cox noted that the drain by Westcombe Lodge was blocked with soil. Peter Glaisher stated that this was a universal problem with the drains. It was noted that the verges needed to be cut back. The members of the public present expressed concern about the difficulties in getting drains cleaned.

Hincombe Hill – it was noted that while the road had been closed to work on the drains, fencing had been erected in the gap in the hedge above Pugh’s Bottom Farm and the culvert under the road had been partially dug out with a promise from Somerset Highways to come back and complete the excavation of the pipe. The Clerk was instructed to write to Charlie Higgins at Somerset Highways thanking him for the work that had been done and mentioning the promise to return and complete the excavation of the culvert under the road.

Road Closures – in addition to Hincombe Hill that had been closed for five days, Back Lane had been closed for a day to replace telephone poles and Moor Lane was closed to allow repair of the lane where it had slipped into the stream running alongside. It was noted that it was the MP who had encouraged Somerset Highways to prioritise the repair as the lane was the only access to Thornhill, whose residents ran a business from home.

Overhanging Hedge – A local resident had reported that the hedge at The Parsonage was overhanging and causing an issue for users of Gold Hill. Peter Glaisher volunteered to contact the Diocese of Bath & Wells who owned the property.

Footpath Obstruction – the concern about access to Footpath SM 2/18 via the gate by the Old Chapel had been passed onto the landowner and there was currently no issue with access, but it suggested that this might be an issue again in the summer when livestock were being kept in the field.

5567 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that moles were still active in the Playing Field and it was agreed to employ a molecatcher to deal with them.

Kevin Gale had undertaken a cut of the Playing Field in February after being asked by the Clerk to keep an eye on the grass due to the mild weather and the fact that no cut was made in November.

5568 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: There were no updates to report.

5569 – Review of Schedule of Assets: An updated copy of the Schedule of Assets had been distributed with the Agenda. The only changes from the last time the Schedule was updated in 2023 were that the deeds of the Playing Field and War Memorial Garden were stored in the Heritage Room instead of with the NatWest Bank and that the filing cabinet had been located in the Jubilee Hall basement. As a result, the value of the Parish Council's Assets was unchanged at £62,857, although it was noted that the values given were mainly the purchase price with no account being made of depreciation or increase in value.

5570 – Review of Risk Management Policy and Insurance Cover: A copy of the Risk Assessment and Management document had been distributed with the Agenda. This was essentially the same as the previous year's document as there had been little change in the risks to the Council, apart from a reduction in the risk of coronavirus transmission. The Insurance Policy was due for renewal in June and the Parish Council was currently two years into a long-term agreement with BHIB Councils Insurance.

5571 – 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. The Clerk had invited our MP Sarah Dyke but she was already attending a Parish Council meeting that evening. He had also invited the Somerset Councillors. Jayne Cox had asked if a speaker from Lackham College could attend to facilitate a discussion about the issues currently facing farming, but they were all booked that evening. Jayne had also asked the head of the local Ramblers Association but that evening was his 70th birthday. There was a discussion about what to do on the evening. With one or two potential exceptions, most farmers were reluctant to be the centre of attention and to be asked to answer questions. There was the possibility of a new film from Bruno Cristofoli of historical material and the Chair was willing to chair a discussion. It was agreed to hold a meeting at 7.00pm the following Wednesday to work out what to do at the Annual Parish Meeting. This was not a meeting of the Parish Council and so was not subject to the usual restrictions on meetings of the Council.

5572 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payment:

£90.00 Mr K Gale – Grass cutting in February.

5573 – Other Business – matters of information only. Ash Tree Cottages – the Chair reported a complaint about parking in front of the entrance to the cottages and it was noted that the sign indicating that parking was for residents only had been moved inside the cottages drive.

A resident reported that someone had cut down the shrubs in her garden and had initially thought that the Parish Council was responsible.

Inspector Matthew Reed of Mendip Neighbourhood Policing had asked if the Glastonbury Festival had had any impact on the parish that his team could help with, but it was not felt to be an issue.

Councillors agreed to meet informally on Wednesday March 13th to make arrangements for the Annual Parish Meeting. The Clerk gave his apologies.

5574 – Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 3rd April 2024 at 6.45pm in The Jubilee Hall, before the Annual Parish Meeting at 7.30pm.

Janet Jones

3/4/24