

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 4th September 2024 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage; Somerset Councillor Rob Reed; and eleven members of the public.

5643 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Clare Kingston.

5644 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5645 – Public Participation: A suggestion of the need for a speed limit had been placed on Facebook. Several residents expressed concerns at the increasing volume of traffic and speeding in the village and the dangers this presented to children and animals. A speed limit was not felt to be the answer, due to the number of signs and difficulties of enforcement, but it was felt that something needed to be done. Suggestions included signs at either end of the village asking people to drive carefully, cutouts of children on the side of the road and an information campaign asking people to drive responsibly. It was noted that the Parish Council had arranged for a speed survey in 2008 which had shown that speeds were not as high as people thought and the Parish Council could explore the cost of a new survey. It was also noted that diversions and verges not being cut were adding to the problem. An issue with parties in the road in Kale Street obstructing traffic was also raised.

5646 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 3rd & 17th July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5647 – Matters Arising: Action Table – The actions listed on the Action Table from the last meeting were checked and the following points noted:

Mill Cottage – Bryony Harling had spoken to the person who had the address of the owners of Mill Cottage who would pass on the concerns of the Parish Council but was not prepared to divulge the address. A letter to be written and left at Mill Cottage. Concerns about the driving of the builders employed at Mill Cottage to be added to the other issues.

Westcombe Footpath – Jayne Cox had spoken to the owner of the land about the state of the footpath.

War Memorial Garden – Tom Price had spoken to the resident interested in helping with a plan for the War Memorial garden.

Playing Field Gate and Wood – Jayne Cox reported that the old Playing Field gate had been sold for £50 and the wood from the tree in the Playing Field had also been sold for £50, which she passed to the Clerk to bank.

Annual Grants – Thanks had been received from the Friends of Batcombe Church for the grant of £500 to their clock fund. The restoration of the Church Clock should begin in September. Thanks had also been received from Mendip Community Transport and Citizens Advice Somerset for their grants of £100 each.

Allotments – The Clerk reported that a resident was interested in one of the allotments held by the allotment holder who had not yet paid for his two allotments. Peter Glaisher reported that the vacant allotment at the top of the allotments was overgrown. It was suggested that this allotment be cut off and sheeted over. The Chair and Peter Glaisher to look at it.

5648 – Somerset Councillors’ Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): Written reports for August and September from Councillor Claire Sully had been received and distributed to Parish Councillors. Councillor Rob Reed noted that the opportunity to add footpaths to the definitive map would run out in 18 months and asked if Councillors knew of any footpaths not on the map.

5649 – Footpaths and Highways: Peter Glaisher reported that the bridleway at Honeycliff was now impassable due to water flowing down the bridleway and dangerous for anyone using it. The proposal to reinstate the pond at the top of the bridleway to reduce the amount of water flowing down the bridleway would not go ahead as the owner of the land did not want it done. The Clerk to contact Rights of Way to report the dangerous state of the bridleway.

Most verges had been cut but a resident had raised concerns about those that had not been cut. The Chair had reported this to the Somerset Council online and received the response that “the problem was not big enough for us to plan work in to fix it at this time”. The Chair would speak to the resident who was concerned about the verges.

The Clerk had received information about the Enhanced Highway Maintenance pilot being run by the Somerset Council too late to go on this meeting’s Agenda. To be placed on the next month’s Agenda. A request had been received from Somerset Council to tell them how full the grit bin was. The Chair and Peter Glaisher to check and report to the Clerk.

Following the earlier public discussion the Clerk to check with the Highway Engineer the cost of a new speed survey and to put a summary of the history of the Parish Council’s response to speeding in the parish magazine. The Chair would speak to the PCSO about the parties in the road on Kale Street and ask for advice on speeding.

5650 – 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 had previously 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. Ian Sage volunteered to find replacements for the toddler swing chains.

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. It was noted that one of the plaques was missing and the Clerk was asked to include an item in the parish magazine asking if anyone had seen the missing plaque.

Peter Glaisher and Tom Price were thanked for cutting the inside of the Playing Field hedge. It was noted that John Wiltshire had cut the outside of the Playing Field hedge without charging and the Clerk was asked to write and thank him.

There had been a report of wasps around the willow structure in the Playing Field. The Clerk had taped off the willow structure and erected a warning sign while Jayne Cox arranged the visit of a pest controller at a cost of £50. The wasps were not nesting in the Playing Field but were attracted by the willow and were themselves attracting hornets. The expert recommended the removal of the willow structure. It was agreed to remove the willow. The Clerk to note this in the parish magazine and place it on the Agenda of the next meeting.

Litter Bin – The Clerk reported that Somerset Council were planning to introduce charges for the emptying of litter and dog waste bins not on Council land from April next year. The charges would be around £7.82 + VAT per collection. Fortunately, although the Playing Field litter bin was purchased by the Parish Council and placed by the entrance to the Playing Field, the fact that it was placed on the verge which belongs to the Somerset Council meant that the Parish Council would not be charged for collections.

Annual Fete – The Clerk thanked the Chair for undertaking the hand-back of the Playing Field from the Fete Committee on the Bank Holiday Monday. A combination of rain just before the Fete, moles and vehicles in the Playing Field meant the surface was not in quite as good condition as it was before the Fete but should recover quickly. The litter bin was covered during the Fete and was almost empty and there was no litter left in the Playing Field. The Clerk was asked to look into alternative electricity suppliers with a lower standing charge.

5651 – Planning Application: There were no planning applications to consider but the Parish Council had been notified of an application for agricultural excavation at Horsehill Farm: Planning Application 2024/01468/AGE – Excavation of five shallow scrapes to intercept rain water runoff from adjacent land. Scrapes to provide flood alleviation, a watering resource for animals and valuable habitat for wildlife. Horsehill Farm, Horse Hill Lane, Batcombe, Shepton Mallet - Agricultural Notification Excavation.

Planning Application Updates: The application for the loft conversion at Home Farm, Batcombe had been approved as had the application for Listed Building Consent for the repairs to the outbuilding at The Weavers House.

5652 – 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.

5653 – Parish Council Laptop: It had been previously noted that the Parish Council's laptop would need to be replaced in the next financial year as the operating system could not be updated from Windows 10 to Windows 11. The Clerk noted several issues with the laptop which was working slowly, had crashed several times and at one point all Microsoft Office programs had stopped working. A basic laptop sufficient for the needs of the Parish Council would cost around £350 and the Clerk suggested bringing forward the purchase of a new laptop. There was

a discussion around providing Microsoft Office for the new laptop. Bryony Harling declared a personal interest when she became aware that her husband had provided the original laptop for the Parish Council. The Council authorised the Clerk to purchase a new laptop for around £350 and to investigate the best way of providing Microsoft Office for the laptop.

5654 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: The bank reconciliation for the first quarter had been checked by Tom Price and reported to 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 28th August and a projection for the current year based on expenditure to date.

Receipts were projected to be approximately £100 more than the budgeted figure. This was due to the precept being £150 more than the original figure proposed and allotments rent likely to be less than budgeted due to vacancies.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was about £150 less than budgeted, as there was no increase in the grass cutting cost. The cost of the water supply was higher than expected and may indicate a small leak.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was about £50 more than budgeted. While the insurance premium was slightly lower than budgeted, the hire costs of the Old School had increased, the Clerk's expenses were likely to be slightly higher than budgeted and two years' internet protection had been purchased for a slightly lower price each year. The Clerk's salary was likely to increase but no figures had yet been agreed for the current year's salary scales.

The projection for expenditure on Grants was £500 more than budgeted, due to the grant for the church clock. Other expenses including those of the allotments might be around £350 less than budgeted as no charge had yet been made for the refurbishment of the Westcombe notice board.

Overall, there was a projected deficit of £750 compared to a budgeted deficit of £760. As a result, the projected funds at the end of the year were £11,907 – around £1,180 more than expected when the budget was made due to the better position at the start of the year. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure would be earmarked for the allotments.

5655 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payment:

- £180.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in August).
- £127.13 Somerset Association of Local Councils Ltd – Affiliation fee.
- £50.00 Amanda Jayne Cox – Payment to pest controller re wasps in the Playing Field.

The following payments were authorised retrospectively:

- £180.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in July).
- £117.60 Playsafety Ltd – RoSPA inspection of the Playing Field.
- £49.65 water2business – six months water supply to the Playing Field.

5656 – Other Business – matters of information only. The Clerk reported that the Community Engagement Officer from the Somerset Rivers Authority would like to meet sometime in September to talk about historic and recent flooding in the Alham catchment area that had affected the parish. It was noted that there had been flooding at Churchbridge Lodge and there was an issue with water on the Honeycliff bridleway.

The crime report for July showed one crime in Batcombe, the theft of a motor vehicle, while the crime report for August showed no crimes. These compared to seven crimes reported in June.

The Chair reported a resident's concern with parking at Ash Tree Cottages during the Fete. The Chair was coming off the Sustainable Batcombe group and asked if any Councillors were interested in joining the group. Jayne Cox reported a concern about the state of Kale Street.

5657 - Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 2nd October 2024 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

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