

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 2nd October 2024 in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.

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 four members of the public.

5658 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Somerset Councillors Rob Reed and Claire Sully.

5659 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the authorisation of the Clerk's salary as relatives of the Clerk. Peter Glaisher declared an interest in the consideration of a grant for the Church clock as a member of the PCC.

5660 – Public Participation: Camilla Frederick reported that a representative of the Somerset Rivers Authority had come to the Somerset Arts Week exhibition seeking to contact someone regarding flooding on the River Alham in the parish. The Clerk to contact the Somerset Rivers Authority.

Steve Gilbert reported that the Sustainable Batcombe group had been active for eighteen months discussing different areas of environmental concern. The group felt that it had done all it could do and suggested that a new group be set up by the Parish Council to take things forward as they felt that official bodies were more likely to respond to the Parish Council. It was agreed to put this as an item on the next month's Agenda.

5661 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4th September 2024 were agreed as a correct record after the removal of the statement in Minute 5647 that the owner of the Westcombe footpath had been spoken to as this had not happened. The corrected Minutes were signed by the Chair.

5662 – Matters Arising: Action Table – It was agreed that a date should be added to the Action Table. The actions listed on the Action Table from the last meeting were checked and the following points noted:

Mill Cottage – A letter to be written and left at Mill Cottage by the Clerk.

Speeding – The Clerk to investigate the cost of a new speed survey.

Playing Field Plaque – Bryony Harling to put the request for information on the missing plaque on Facebook. Jayne Cox to provide a photograph of the plaque.

Kale Street Parties – The Chair had spoken to the host of the Kale Street street parties and would check their legality before speaking to the host again.

Other items on the Action Table were considered under the relevant Agenda item.

5663 – Tourist Tax: Steve Gilbert and Tim Chater had requested that the Parish Council discuss the introduction of a tourist tax again. They believed that a voluntary tourist tax for those providers of accommodation willing to participate could bring in £5,000 or more and that the village was missing out on this income every day that this had not been actioned.

The Parish Council had considered setting up a Working Party in May 2024. Tom Price had volunteered to be a member of the Working Party and it had been agreed to ask Tim Chater to chair it. There were issues over the collection, distribution and administration of the tax and concern that the Parish Council were being asked to do all the work – noting that Parish Councillors were volunteers with limited time available. More detail was needed of how this would work before the Parish Council could make a decision. The Clerk was asked to check if the Parish Council can hold funds for a tourist levy. (It was suggested that those proposing that the Parish Council should taking on responsibility for this and for environment concerns should attend a LCN meeting to see how little influence the Parish Council has.)

5664 – Somerset Councillors’ Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): A written report from Councillor Claire Sully had been received and distributed to Parish Councillors.

Jayne Cox had attended the latest meeting of the Shepton LCN on September 30th. Jayne reported that highways were the main topic of discussion. It was suggested that highways should be a centrally funded government issue as should rivers and flooding. It was noted that there was no money available from Somerset Council, and volunteers would need to do everything. It was suggested that Parish Councils should be raising their precept to cover the cost of highways maintenance. The Highways Working Group would be meeting soon to discuss further costs for services.

5665 – Footpaths and Highways: Enhanced Highways Maintenance pilot – The EHM would allow parishes to purchase work directly from Somerset Council’s contractors at a cost of £685 a day (for two men with a lorry and small tools). More specialist work would also be available at cost, as well as training for volunteers to work on the highway. Details of the pilot were sent to Parish Councillors at the beginning of September. It was felt that the pricing was not clear and there was a concern that the Parish Council would end up paying for work that was a statutory requirement of the Somerset Council. Jayne Cox stated that she had reported the issues the Parish Council had had with gritting the roads to the LCN. It was hoped that Peter Glaisher would be able to get more information at the Highways Group meeting.

Bryony Harling reported that the works at Wanstrow had been completed and the main road was now open. Peter Glaisher had spoken to the landowners about the wall near the war memorial in Westcombe and they would be getting repairs done to the wall. The provision of grit bins at Westcombe was discussed. Westcombe Footpath – ownership of one half of the footpath had just changed hands. The owner of the other half regularly parked on the footpath and the Clerk was asked to report this to Clare Haskins at the Somerset Council.

Jane Cox reported that the Mendip Byways and Bridleways Association had paid for the void on the Honeycliff bridleway to be filled in with stone. However, it was noted that this would only address the issue until the next heavy storm of rain which would wash out the stone again. The issues with water running down the bridleway had not been resolved as the landowner at the top of the bridleway was unwilling to allow water to collect in a pond on their land.

The Clerk was asked to contact Somerset Highways about the road signs left behind after the closure of Vinings Hill. The Clerk was also to ask about the cost of a speed survey. A resident had suggested writing “SLOW” on the roads but it was felt this would spoil the village. It was suggested that all the B&Bs be written to to ask their visitors to respect the village. It was also suggested that a survey of parishioners feelings should be taken.

5666 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Willow and Wasps – the willow structure had attracted a large number of wasps and hornets into the Playing Field. It was agreed to remove both willow structures from the Playing Field. Ian Sage volunteered to pull out and remove the willow and Tom Price offered to help. It was noted that there may be a need to buy topsoil and

grass seed to level out the sites of the willow structures. The work would need to be done when the ground was dry enough to allow machinery access to the Playing Field without damaging the surface and the Playing Field would need to be closed when this was being done. The Clerk to put an item in the parish magazine informing parishioners that this would be happening and to thank all those who had helped with the maintenance of the willow structures over the years.

It was noted that the Playing Field litter bin was overflowing again. Clare Kingston noted that children were seen climbing on the bus shelter roof again. The Clerk confirmed that there was a note in the Playing Field stating that it was the parents' responsibility to supervise their children while in the Playing Field. Clare Kingston stated that a parent had allegedly been reported to social services for leaving their children unattended in the Playing Field. Clare had reported this to the Chair and the Clerk and Councillors asked for such information to be passed onto them in future.

The Clerk stated that he would place a warning sign on the electricity meter box and noted that the Fete Committee had offered £100 as a contribution towards the cost of the electricity for the Village Fete instead of the £120 requested. Ian Sage had found replacement chains for the toddler swing at a cost of £38 and it was agreed that he should purchase these.

5667 – Planning Application: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Application Updates: Prior Approval was not required for the excavation of five shallow scrapes at Horsehill Farm. Lodge Farm planning application – the details reserved by conditions 11 and 12 (Dairy stair, screen, WC door and floor) had been approved. However, the details reserved by condition 17 (exterior lighting) had been refused.

5668 – Review of the Parish Emergency Plan: The list of volunteers in the Parish Emergency Plan had been updated by the Chair and Bryony Harling two years ago and the Plan was then updated to reflect the replacement of the District and County Councils by the new Somerset Council. No further update to the Plan was felt to be needed at the current time.

5669 – Church Clock: In June the Parish Council had agreed a grant of £500 towards the £16,000 cost of the repair of the church clock in addition to the regular budgeted grants that the Parish Council provides. Peter Glaisher noted that the repair of the clock was underway and asked the Parish Council to consider an additional grant towards the cost. The Council felt that priority had to be given to the potential future cost of undertaking work on the highways in the parish and that the £500 grant was a sufficient amount to be given from the precept for the repair of the clock.

5670 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£180.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in September).

£1,398.71 The Clerk – Salary and expenses for the 2nd Quarter.

The Clerk reported that he had obtained a quote for a new laptop and software from Dell Technologies. This was for an Inspiron 15 laptop with an Intel Core i5 processor and Microsoft Office Home and Business 2024 installed at a cost of £588.07 plus VAT. This was slightly above the £350 authorised for the laptop at previous meeting but the Clerk felt that a higher powered processor was needed and this was the cheapest quote he had found for an equivalent laptop. The Clerk was authorised to purchase the new laptop.

5671 – Other Business – matters of information only. The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had been informed by the organiser of a new music festival at Gilcombe Farm over the second bank holiday in May. This would be an annual event starting in 2026 and the music would be jazz and “jazz inspired electronica”. The Clerk to respond pointing out the importance

of the direction of the stages and the dangerous nature of the A361 for walkers. He would also point out the need for a contact number, the details of hours and the provision of security.

Peter Glaisher was thanked for sorting out the allotments and the hedge. The three vacant allotments were now covered with plastic. It was noted that there could be further vacancies after the allotment rent became due on November 1st. The viability of the allotments would be considered after the rents were paid.

5672 - Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th November 2024 at 7.30pm in the Old School.

Janet Jones

6/11/24