

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 5th February 2025 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 and eleven members of the public.

5721 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: None.

5722 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the authorisation of the reimbursement to Ian of the payment for the new grit bin made on his personal debit card.

5723 – Public Participation: The farmer at Lower Alham Farm stated that he was fed up with cars and vans trying to reach Westcombe via the track that ran past his farm, getting stuck in the ford at Lower Alham and then asking him to pull them out. He wanted to close the track off with a gate below the bungalow at Lower Alham as there was nowhere apart from his farm accessible past this point and he had been targeted by thieves. It was noted that he could not close off the track as it was a public highway and classed as a road. The Clerk was asked to report the issues to Somerset Highways.

A representative of Mendip Developments Ltd, the developer for the Beeches Farm development, noted that Prior Approval had been given for the conversion of seven agricultural buildings to nine residential dwellings at Beeches Farm and that Mendip Developments were considering making an application for a new build on the site which would allow for improved design, more environmentally friendly buildings and greater options for landscaping. He provided a site plan for six single-storey dwellings that would have sedum roofs and garages. The neighbour of the site felt this would be an improvement on the nine converted barns. Conversion was not felt to provide very attractive buildings. The Parish Council could not express an opinion on the proposed new build as it was not on the Agenda, but individual Councillors commented on the plan – and there was a general feeling that the proposed new build would be better than the permitted Class Q conversions. The developer would bring the proposal to the next Parish Council meeting for consideration.

A large tree had fallen on the footpath along the river to Spargrove taking out two footbridges. Jayne Cox stated that the Rights of Way department at Somerset Council would reinstate the footbridges if the landowners cleared the tree. Unfortunately, the tree had fallen where the land of three different properties came together and it was not clear who was responsible for clearing the tree. Two of the landowners were present and disagreed as to whose land the tree had been growing on.

5724 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 8th January 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5725 – Matters Arising: Precept – The precept form with a request for a precept of £11,000 had been sent to the Somerset Council and acknowledged.

Allotments – Tom Price reported that the chest left on the allotments did not belong to the former allotment it had been thought to belong to. The Clerk reported that one of the vacant allotments had been rented which meant that there were now two vacant allotments.

Trees – Bryony Harling reported that there was a tree on Hincombe Hill that was in danger of falling onto the road. Bryony to report the tree to Somerset Highways. It was noted that a resident was concerned about three trees that had been blown down from neighbouring land into her garden during the recent storm. The landowner would be dealing with the trees when he was able to.

5726 – Somerset Councillors’ Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): No reports had been received. The next meeting of the Shepton LCN had been moved from January 27th to March 3rd and notes from the last LCN meeting in September had been distributed to Parish Councillors Peter Glaisher noted that there had been no news about the cancelled Highways Group meeting.

5727 – Tourist Tax and Community Review: Tom Price had put together a slideshow with Tim Chater to present at the Annual Parish Meeting and went through a draft version of the slideshow for the benefit of Councillors. The pub was supportive of a voluntary accommodation levy which could be collected through their room booking system. Other accommodation providers could participate using a QR code. The slideshow noted the current community challenges including the shortage of volunteers to run organisations and the funding challenges for the Somerset Council resulting in a reduction in services. The levy could support a variety of activities in the parish and it was thought to be important to produce a community plan for the parish to see what was wanted. The Parish Council agreed to the presentation being made at the Annual Parish Meeting, although there were still concerns over who would decide how the money raised would be spent and who would produce the community plan. It would need a committee but who would be willing to be on it and to lead it.

5728 – Footpaths and Highways: Ian Sage was thanked for purchasing a new stone grey 450l grit bin and installing it by the war memorial in Westcombe. The grit bin cost £220.74 (which included £36.79 in VAT) from Roadware Ltd.

Concern was noted that the farmer at Lower Alham Farm (present for the Public Participation - see Minute 5723 above) had been placing a gate across the public highway.

The Chair reported receiving an e-mail from a resident concerned about the water running down Back Lane, being joined by water coming off the footpath at the bottom of Back Lane and then flowing down to the drain at the junction with Kale Street. The Chair had advised the resident to report the issue to the Somerset Council on their website.

Concerns had also been raised about the flooding at the bottom of Saite Lane in the recent heavy rains. It was noted that the culvert under the road that took water from the stream running alongside Saite Lane to the river was partially blocked and the Clerk was asked to report this to the Somerset Council.

5729 – Annual Parish Meeting: The Annual Parish Meeting would take place on Wednesday 2nd April. The Clerk had a DVD of the building of the Jubilee Hall and the official opening by Prince Charles produced by Derek Gregory. The Chair volunteered to select highlights from the DVD as the combined video was one hour 45 minutes long. It was agreed to show the video highlights and make the presentation on the accommodation levy and community review (see Minute 5727 above) after the usual business. Bryony Harling volunteered to produce a poster if the appropriate wording was sent to her.

5730 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk had contacted the molecatcher who had asked that the Playing Field being closed while her traps were in the ground to avoid any risk to children. This was agreed provided it was not during half-term week when children would want to use the Playing Field. The molecatcher would charge £45 plus £15 per mole that was caught.

The Clerk reported agreeing to a three-year electricity contract with British Gas for the supply to the Playing Field that would start on 1st February. He noted that prices were changing daily on the “Love Energy Savings” website and that British Gas were offered the lowest standing charge for a three-year deal on the day after the last meeting. The standing charge was 45p/day and the unit price was 25.82 p/kWh. This compared to 28.311p/kWh and a standing charge of 63.1p/day charged by SSE under our old contract.

5731 – Planning Applications: Planning Application Number: 2025/0173/TCA. G1 Birch x 3 – Reduction by 3m. G2 Birch x 2 – Reduction by 2m. Top O’ Hollow, Kale Street, Batcombe. Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area. Notification was received too late for the Agenda but was considered as the Clerk had been delegated authority to respond to tree applications after consulting with Councillors. There were no objections to the proposed tree works, intended to reduce wind sail on these trees.

Planning Application Updates: The tree works at Provis (next to Rockwells House) – the felling of a Larch and the crown lift of a Catalpa – had been approved and the application for a replacement single storey rear extension at Cobblers on Kale Street had also been approved.

5732 – 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. It was noted that references to District and County Councillors in the Standing Orders added “or unitary Councillors”.

5733 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update for Year Ending 31st March 2025: The bank reconciliation for the third quarter had been checked by the Chair and was 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 26th January and a projection for the current year based on expenditure to date.

Receipts were projected to be approximately £150 more than the budgeted figure. This was due to the precept being £150 more than the original figure proposed, plus the unbudgeted income of £100 for the Playing Field wood and gate and less the reduction in the allotments rent due to the vacancies in November.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure was about £40 less than budgeted, as the projected cost of the grass cutting for the year was less than was budgeted while the cost of the water supply was likely to be more than budgeted and two years’ subscriptions to the Somerset Playing Fields Association had been paid this year.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration was about £790 more than budgeted. This was mainly due to the unbudgeted cost of the new laptop and software of £705.68 (although the VAT of £117.61 would be reclaimed). In addition, the Clerk’ salary would be £70 more than budgeted and the hire of the Old School for meetings £50 more than budgeted. The insurance premium was £25 less than budgeted.

