

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 5th June 2024 in the Old School, 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 three members of the public.

5607 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: Rob Reed, newly elected Somerset Councillor for the Mendip South Division, had given his apologies due to a prior engagement.

5608 – Declarations of Interest: Peter Glaisher declared an interest in the provision of grants for the Church clock and churchyard as a member of the Parochial Church Council.

5609 – Public Participation: None.

5610 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1st May 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5611 – Matters Arising: The Clerk reported that the insurance cover was in place and that the precept and VAT claim had both been paid. Allotments – The Clerk noted that the allotment holder who had yet to pay for the two allotments he held had said that he wanted to keep them, but no payment had yet been received. It was agreed to advertise three vacant allotments and suggested that people in Nunney might be interested. Jayne Cox stated that the offer for the gate stood and that two offers had been received on the logs with the highest being £50. It was suggested that the adverts be placed on Facebook.

5612 – Annual Grants from the Parish Council: The Parish Council had budgeted for a grant of £300 to the Village Hall (£150 for its own meetings and £150 for committee meetings of other village organisations); a grant of £300 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard (increased from £200 last year) and £220 for smaller grants to charities (increased from £200 last year). Peter Glaisher asked the Parish Council to consider a grant for the repair of the church clock. (The Parish Council has the power to assist another body in providing a public clock under the Parish Councils Act of 1957.) £16,000 was needed by August for the repair of the clock. The Friends of Batcombe Church were seeking to raise funds for the project. After discussion it was agreed to provide a grant of £500. As this grant was not budgeted a resolution was required – proposed by the Chair, seconded by Tom Price and agreed.

The grant to the Village Hall Trust was deferred until the cost of hiring the rooms could be confirmed. It was agreed to make a grant of £300 to the PCC for the upkeep of the churchyard and two grants of £100 to Mendip Community Transport and Citizens Advice Somerset. The Parish Council had the power to support the Village Hall Trust, to provide a grant for the maintenance of the churchyard and to support Citizens Advice. The grant to Mendip

Community Transport was made by resolution under the section 137 power – proposed by Clare Kingston, seconded by Peter Glaisher and agreed.

5613 – Planning Application: Planning Application 2024/0688/LBC – Demolition of an existing single-storey rear extension and replacement with new single-storey rear extension with alterations to windows and doors. Cobblers Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe – Listed Building Consent. Cobblers Cottage is a Grade II Listed Building in the Conservation Area, previously known as Romsey Cottage and before that as Cobblers. The applicant explained that the proposal was to sort out the kitchen and provide a modern utility room by demolishing the single storey rear extension and replacing this with a new single storey extension. In addition, a simple walkway would be added to the roof of the extension to allow easier access to the terraced garden behind the cottage, which would involve the creation of a doorway at first floor level in the rear elevation and the relocation of an existing first floor rear window. The Parish Council recommended approval as there were no objection to the works which were felt to be an improvement to the cottage, particularly the replacement of the cement-based render on the rear and front elevations with a lime-based render.

Planning Application Updates: The Chair reported on correspondence with the Planning Enforcement Officer regarding Mill Cottage. Although the Enforcement Officer had missed the fact that Mill Cottage was in the Conservation Area, he had stated that his advice was unchanged in that the owners of the cottage should apply for planning permission for the skylight they had installed, but no action would be taken if they did not apply as the skylight was considered to be permitted development.

Notification of a planning application for a loft conversion at Home Farm, Batcombe had been received too late to be included on the Agenda of this meeting. The Clerk reported that an extension to the consultation period had been granted to allow the Council to consider it at its July meeting.

5614 – Footpaths and Highways: Notification had been received that Westcombe Road would be closed at Stoney Stratton from June 17th to June 19th for the OCU Group to install infrastructure on behalf of Gigaclear. It was noted that this might cause issues for the memorial for JJ Edgell on June 18th.

There had been a report of unauthorised camping on the footpath from Pugh’s Bottom Farm to Eastcombe Lane. It was noted that the landowners were aware of this, as they had reported it, and that it was their responsibility to deal with. A man named Julius, who was attending the meeting, stated that he had been clearing the land thinking that it had been abandoned. His colleague had been leaving his car at the Hedgestocks crossroads. Julius asked for contact details for the landowners and the Chair agreed to pass on his details to the landowners which he provided. Although this was a civil and not a criminal matter, the Chair stated she would speak to the PCSO about it.

Concern was raised about a wall in Westcombe close to the War Memorial that was in danger of collapsing. Peter Glaisher volunteered to speak to the landowners of the wall.

5615 – Somerset Councillors’ Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): No report had been received from the Somerset Councillors.

Jayne Cox volunteered to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Shepton LCN on Monday June 10th in the Council Chamber at Shepton Mallet Council Offices. The Clerk suggested deferring the writing of the letter to the Chair of the LCN until after the AGM when a report of the LCN’s work over the last year would be presented and this was agreed.

5616 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Confirmation had been received that the annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June. Jayne Cox had cleaned the basketball stand. There was no sign of any moles. The pub was concerned that people were taking glasses into the Playing Field. It was agreed to place a sign stating no glasses in the Playing Field.

The Cricket Club had asked to use the cricket net for practice and whether they could cut the grass shorter with their own mower and cut off some low branches of the trees by the cricket net. It was noted that the Parish Council had previously agreed that the Cricket Club could use the cricket net for practice. The Parish Council was happy for them to cut the grass shorter but noted that anyone using a lawnmower in the Playing Field needed Public Liability insurance. It was also noted that the Playing Field was in the Conservation Area and so tree works would require permission.

Concerns were raised that children were climbing on the roof of the bus shelter and there was risk that someone could fall and injure themselves.

5617 – Adoption of New Financial Regulations: New model Financial Regulations had been produced for parish councils by the National Association of Local Councils. The Clerk had adapted the model regulations for use by a small parish council (removing regulations regarding online banking, committees, and Welsh Councils and recognising that the Clerk is also the Responsible Financial Officer) and the adapted regulations had been distributed to Parish Councillors with the Agendas. It was agreed to remove the words “other than the Chair” from Regulation 2.6 to allow the Chair to check the quarterly bank reconciliation (to be reviewed when the Chair changes). It was also agreed to set the limits for the authorisation of expenditure under delegated authority at £500 for both the Clerk and the Clerk in consultation with the Chair. With these changes adoption of the new Financial Regulations was proposed by Bryony Harling, seconded by the Chair and agreed.

5618 – Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control, Internal Auditor’s Report and Certificate of Exemption from a Limited Assurance Review: The Clerk reported his belief that the Council’s system of internal control was more than sufficient for a small Parish Council. The details were given in the Financial Regulations and included the budgetary process, the authorisation of all payments by the Council, the signing of cheques at Council meetings by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the internal audit.

Griff Williams was thanked for undertaking the role of Internal Auditor. Copies of the Internal Auditor’s Report had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Internal Auditor had no recommendations to make to the Council.

The Clerk noted that the Parish Council’s gross annual income and expenditure were both under the £25,000 limit which meant that the Parish Council could certify itself as exempt from a limited assurance review by the External Auditor. The Chair and the Clerk then signed the Certificate of Exemption that had to be sent to the External Auditor by the end of the month.

5619 – Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2023/24: Copies of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return - the Annual Governance Statement - had been enclosed with the Agendas. Approval of the Annual Governance Statement was agreed and the Statement was signed by the Chair and the Clerk.

5620 – Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2023/24: Copies of Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return – the Statement of Accounts – had been enclosed with the Agendas, along with a copy of the Financial Statements, considered at the previous meeting, showing how the figures in the Statement of Accounts had been

derived. Approval of the Statement of Accounts was agreed and this was signed by the Chair, having previously been signed by the Clerk as the Responsible Financial Officer. It was noted that there were significant variations (of more than 15%) in boxes 3 and 6 between the figures for last year and those for the previous year. In box 3 this was due to the VAT refund of £1,003 in 2023/24 (with no claim in 2022/23) and the contributions to the Coronation mugs and electricity (with none in 2022/23). In box 6 this was due to the costs in 2022/23 of the cricket mat and nets, new benches, hedge laying and tree works in the Playing Field; and the costs of the parish council election, Jubilee Lane contribution and the strimmer (with no equivalent costs in 2023/24). There was query as to why the value of the Parish Council's assets did not show any depreciation and it was noted that the value of the assets was recorded at purchase value.

5621 – War Memorial Garden: Tom Price stated that something needed to be done with the War Memorial garden as it was a mess. It was felt that the box hedges needed to be removed. Tom stated that the volunteer group was no longer in being and that he could not commit to organising volunteers to take care of the garden. Tom suggested a low maintenance garden with a budget for maintenance possibly employing a contractor twice a year. Tom volunteered to come up with ideas and to talk to a possible contractor in the village. This would need to be considered as part of next year's budget. It was possible that the Horticultural Society might contribute towards the cost.

5622 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments in addition to the grants authorised above (Minute 5612):

£270.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (three cuts in May).

The Clerk reported that the smart meter in the Playing Field was not working with the result that SSE were over estimating the electricity used. The latest electricity bill had underestimated the electricity used leaving the Parish Council £12.92 in credit. The Clerk has regularly provided meter readings but these had not been used in producing the bills.

5623 – Other Business – matters of information only. The Clerk reported that the Parish Council laptop was eight years old, used Windows 10 as its operating system and was not suitable for upgrading to Windows 11. Microsoft was withdrawing support for Windows 10 from October 2025 and so the Parish Council should consider the purchase of a new laptop in its budget for next year.

It was noted that the footpath gate at the bottom of Holly Hill had been sorted. The Clerk had not written to the owners of Mill Cottage regarding the skip left at the top of Mill Lane as their address was not known.

5624 - Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 3rd July 2024 at 8.00pm in the Old School. It was noted that the meeting may be held in the Jubilee Hall if the Old School had already been set up as the Polling Station for the General Election on July 4th.