

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: [clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk](mailto:clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk)

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.**

**Present - Councillors:** John Sommer – Chairman (for the first item only), Mary Comley, Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher, Janet Jones and Ian Sage.

**Also Present:** The Clerk – Rob Sage and six members of the public.

**4710 – Election of Chairman and Chairman’s Acceptance of Office:** Although he had not stood in the recent Parish Council elections, John Sommer remained the Chairman for this item. Ian Sage proposed Mary Comley as Chairman and this was seconded by Jayne Cox. There being no other nominations Mary was duly elected and signed her Acceptance of Office. John Sommer, no longer a member of the Council, joined the public gallery and Mary Comley chaired the remainder of the meeting.

**4711 – Apologies for Absence:** Apologies had been received from Michael Gay, the newly elected District Councillor who was attending an induction evening for new Councillors, and from Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, the County Councillor.

**4712 – Councillors’ Acceptance of Office:** All the elected Councillors signed their Acceptance of Office, witnessed by the Clerk.

**4713 – Filling of Parish Council Vacancies by Co-option and Acceptance of Office:** Five people had expressed an interest in serving on the Council: Justin Witcombe, David Stevens, Dominick Henry, Henrietta Gosling, and Colin Pool. Dominick Henry and Colin Pool had given their apologies. The Chairman invited the three who were present to say a few words about themselves and they did so. The Chairman then asked for nominations and Justin Witcombe was proposed by Ian Sage; David Stevens was proposed by Peter Glaisher; Dominick Henry was proposed by Janet Jones; Henrietta Gosling was proposed by Peter Glaisher and Colin Pool was proposed by Jayne Cox. Standing Orders allowed for a paper ballot and the Council agreed that each of the elected Councillors should place two names on a piece of paper. After the first vote both Justin Witcombe and David Stevens received more than 50% of the votes which is the requirement to be co-opted and the Chairman declared them to be co-opted onto the Council. Justin and David signed their Acceptance of Office, which was witnessed by the Clerk, and took part in the remainder of the meeting.

**4714 – Declarations of Interest:** There were no declarations of interest. The Clerk reminded Councillors that they had 28 days to complete their Register of Interests Declaration Form. He asked that the forms be returned to him by the end of the month so that he could send them onto the District Council’s Monitoring Officer. The Clerk also reminded those Councillors who had stood for election that they had 28 days from the election to return their election expenses form to the District Council, even if they had no expenses to declare.

**4715 – Election of Vice Chairman:** Janet Jones was proposed by David Stevens, seconded by Peter Glaisher and elected as Vice Chairman.

**4716 – Public Participation:** Louise Nicholson stated that she had received a letter regarding wayleaves payments from a firm of chartered surveyors. It was suggested that she contact Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks directly to see if she was due any payment.

Chris Wildridge asked if the Chairman was happy to be addressed by that title and she was. He also asked if any progress had been made on the repair of the sewage system at Ash Tree Cottages and suggested that the Council write to Hastoes asking when the work would be done. The Clerk noted that as a matter of procedure the Council could only make decisions on items on the Agenda and so could not take decisions on items raised by members of the public at the meeting. Justin Witcombe stated that he would contact Hastoes as a resident of Ash Tree Cottages and report back to the Clerk.

Chris Wildridge asked how quickly a member of the public could expect a response after contacting the Council. The Clerk noted that he only worked seven hours a week so an immediate response was not always possible. The length of time to respond would depend on the nature of the request, but he would normally be able to make an initial response within a few days.

**4717 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019.** These were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**4718 – Matters Arising:** None that were not covered under other Agenda items.

**4719 – District and County Councillors' Reports:** None.

**4720 – Allotments:** The Clerk reported that three people from Wanstrow had expressed an interest in the vacant allotments along with one of our existing allotment holders. Two of the vacant allotments had been rented for the remainder of this year for £20 and if the other two were taken up there would only be one vacant allotment. It was agreed to consider the viability of the allotments at the next meeting.

**4721 – Footpaths and Highways:** There was nothing to report. A map giving details of the rights of way in the parish had been distributed to Councillors with the Agenda.

**4722 – Playing Field - Maintenance Report:** The Clerk reported that the annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA would take place in June. It was agreed to leave ordering any more play bark until after the inspection. Dominic Conway had begun cutting the Playing Field grass again and there were still no signs of any moles in the Playing Field. The Councillors and the Clerk who applied the eco-friendly wood preservative to the play equipment in April were thanked. Ian Sage noted that there was rot in the main support of the zip wire as well as in the multi-play equipment and this would need monitoring to ensure the equipment remained safe. The Clerk was asked to arrange a meeting of the Playing Field Working Party to discuss fundraising for the new equipment. There was a discussion of whether to replace only the multi-play or to wait and do all the equipment together. It was noted that it would be cheaper to do everything as the same time.

**4723 – Planning Applications:** Planning Application Number 2019/0858/TCA – Field Maple – pollard back to previous points, approx. 20ft – to allow more light in garden. South View, Kale Street, Batcombe. Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area. There were no objections to the proposed pollarding of the tree and the Council recommended approval of the application.

Planning Application Nos: 2019/0678/FUL & 2019/0679/LBC – Conversion of outbuilding for ancillary use. Church View House, Batcombe – Full Application & Listed Building Consent. It was noted that Church View House was the rear section of Church Farmhouse and the outbuilding was small building located between Church View House and Turret House. The proposal was to convert the building into a studio for homeworking with a shower and storage area in the roof. Concerns were raised about the possible impact on Turret House and on the listed Church Farmhouse. The Council decided to leave the decision to the case officer as it did not feel it had enough information to make decision. The Clerk was asked to add a recommendation that the Conservation Officer looks closely at the proposal.

**Planning Application Updates:** There were no updates to report.

**4724 - Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters:** Staffing Committee – David Stevens, Peter Glaisher and Justin Witcombe volunteered to be the members of the Staffing Committee. Justin Witcombe volunteered to contact Justin Robinson of the Somerset Association of Local Councils to arrange training in the conduct of the Clerk’s annual review.

Additional Hours - the Clerk was reported that he had worked no additional hours in the year 2018/19.

Clerk’s Salary - The National Joint Council for Local Government Services had reached agreement on new pay scales for 2019/20 and the National Association of Local Councils and the Association of Local Council Clerks had jointly recommended these salary scales for all Clerks with a standard contract of employment. Due to the introduction of the National Living Wage a new pay spine has been introduced and the Spinal Column Point 22 which had determined the Clerk’s salary was now SCP 12. Under the new pay scales, the Clerk’s salary would increase from £10.953 an hour to £11.22 from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2019. (The Clerk is paid quarterly in arrears.) This was a 2.43% increase, which the Council agreed to as it was in line with the Clerk’s Contract of Employment.

**4725 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives:** It was agreed that Justin Witcombe should continue as the Village Hall Representative and that the Clerk should continue as the Heritage Room Representative.

**4726 – Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters:** It was agreed that Financial Regulations be reviewed at the June meeting; Standing Orders at the February meeting; and the Risk Management Policy, insurance cover and the Schedule of Assets at the March meeting. Other policies were reviewed in the year before the election and it was agreed to review them again in the year before the next election.

**4727 – Insurance Renewal:** The Council’s insurance was due for renewal on June 1<sup>st</sup>, and our insurance brokers Came & Company had provided three quotes from different insurance companies. The Council decided to go with the cheapest quote from Hiscox, our current insurers, as there was little difference in the cover provided. The Clerk noted that Came & Company were adding an administration charge of £50, whereas previously they had not charged the Parish Council and had relied on commission from the insurance companies. The Council agreed to enter into a three-year agreement which reduced the insurance premium to £337.71. Under the long-term agreement, the insurer agreed not to increase the premium except as a result of increased sums insured, index linked increases in the value of the assets insured, increases in premium tax or a higher rate resulting from claims made against the policy.

**4728 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019:** The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 had been verified by John Sommer before the meeting and was reported to the Council.

A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas and the Chairman read the following notes that had been included with the Agendas.

The VAT Refund was £23 less than budgeted and the allotments rent was £190 less than budgeted because five allotments were vacant at the end of the year. The £1,676 raised for new play equipment had not been budgeted for. As a result, receipts were £1,464 more than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting and trimming included £110 for hedge cutting, and was £20 less than the budgeted figure despite the change of contractor resulting in an increased price per cut – a result of fewer cuts being undertaken. The cost of the electricity supply was £10 more than budgeted as the Southern Electric had doubled the standing charge – this had been reduced by entering into a new electricity contract with Southern Electric. The cost of the water supply was £15 below budget. Maintenance consisted of £160 for the molecatcher, £120 for the removal of the Horse Chestnut tree stump and £75 for cutting back the willow. Overall maintenance was £395 less than budgeted – partly because no play bark was purchased this year. The annual inspection was less than the previous year when we accompanied the inspector on his inspection. Overall Playing Field payments were £2,422 less than budgeted, although this was largely a result of the £2,000 budgeted for repairs to the multi-play equipment not being used as it was decided to replace the equipment.

The Clerk's salary and expenses were slightly less than budgeted. Two years of the Clerk's membership of SLCC was paid for in 2017/18 and only one year in 2018/19. The additional cost for the laptop was to provide secure memory sticks to back up the Parish Council's computer files. No training or publications were purchased in 2018/19, and no audit fees were charged following the end of external auditing. The increase in insurance premium was slightly more than anticipated and an increase in the cost of hiring the Old School and Jubilee Hall for meetings was balanced by a reduction in the grant paid to the Village Hall Trust. Photocopying was less than budgeted. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted and overall administration costs were £157 less than budgeted.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted, other than the reduction in the Village Hall grant. The expenditure on the allotments was £200 for the lease of the field and £50 spent on hedge cutting, which was £50 less than budgeted. The cutting of the grass around the telephone kiosk in Batcombe was included with the cost of the Playing Field grass and only £41 was spent of the Armistice 100 Commemoration. As a result of the above, total payments were £3,104 less than budgeted, although £2,000 was money not spent on the multi-play repairs, which would be put to the purchase of new equipment instead.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and the play equipment were given on the back of the Financial Statement. At the end of the year there was £878 of allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. Other earmarked monies in the Parish Council accounts at the end of the year were the £1,676 raised for new play equipment and the remaining £77 of the grant money for new notice boards.

The net result of the variations against the budget given above is a surplus of £3,564 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £1,004. This was largely a result of the £1,676 raised for new play equipment and the £2,000 not spent on play equipment. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £11,138 in its funds, £5,402 more than anticipated in the budget. In addition to the surplus on 2018/19 the position at the start of the year was £2,000 better than anticipated as a result of £2,000 budgeted for play equipment repairs the previous year and not

spent. Of these funds at the end of the year, £878 is set aside for the allotments, £2,248 for new play equipment and £77 for notice boards. This meant that the Parish Council has funds totalling £7,934 that are not earmarked for specific items, (although it was envisaged that the £4,000 that had been intended for play equipment repairs would go towards the cost of the new play equipment). This would have been a sufficient reserve to cover the possible cost of a contested election in 2019 and/or a by-election during the coming year (which is the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure). SALC recommend that a Parish Council has reserves of between one-third and two-thirds of its precept, which with the current precept means the reserves should be between £3,000 and £6,000.

The Clerk reported that he had been in contact with the internal auditor, Griff Williams, who would be able to complete the audit by the June meeting.

**4729 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020:** An updated projection on this year's budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that this year's precept of £9,750 had been received. The VAT repayment would be slightly less than budgeted and £76.48 for the year up to March 2019 had been claimed. If most of the vacant allotments were taken up the rent this year would be higher than budgeted as there would be two payments on some of the allotments.

With regard to payments, the Clerk's salary would be £10 more than budgeted due to the recommended pay increase. As there was no contested election, the election costs will be considerably lower than budgeted although Mendip would still make a charge for election costs. A figure of £6,248 was included for new play equipment. This is the £2,248 raised for the new equipment plus the £4,000 included in the last two years' budget for repairs to the play equipment. The projection did not include an estimate of additional fundraising or grants that might be obtained and the money might not be spent in the year – but by showing the money as being spent the projection shows what funds the Council will have without the play equipment money.

If the play equipment money was spent there would be a deficit of £4,750 on the year. This would give funds of £6,385 at the end of the year of which £933 would be earmarked for the allotments and £77 for notice boards.

**4730 – Change of Bank Mandate:** The Parish Council should only make payments by cheques (or standing orders) signed by two members of the Council (normally after authorisation at a Council meeting). The Clerk has to be a signatory in order to receive bank statements but should not sign cheques. The other signatories were Mary Comley, John Sommer and Chris Wildridge which meant that only one Councillor was a signatory after the start of this meeting. It was agreed that the Chairman, Vice Chairman and David Stevens should be signatories. The Clerk noted that the change of the mandate was now done electronically and he would forward the mandate by e-mail to the signatories in turn.

**4731 - Authorisation of payment:** Councillors authorised the following payments:

£337.71	Came & Company – Insurance premium.
£107.26	Somerset Association of Local Councils – Affiliation fees.
£220.00	T & E A Hollis – Rent of allotments field.
£240.00	Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in March and April.
£26.93	SSE – Playing Field electricity – to be paid by Direct Debit.

**4732 – Other Business - Matters of Information Only:** Janet Jones reported on a meeting by the company Truespeed the evening before the meeting. Truespeed were offering to bring

high speed broadband to the parish and needed 30 – 40% of people to sign up. Janet was working with Chris Wildridge and James Stubbs to encourage people to sign up. Truespeed's service had reached Downhead and would shortly be coming to Nunney.

Jayne Cox asked why the Upton Noble telephone exchange had been lit up and asked if the Parish Council could do something about speeding in the parish.

The Clerk noted that SSEN would be replaced transformers, lines and electricity poles in the parish during May.

Justin Witcombe noted that the Village Hall Trust were working on the area below the Jubilee Hall. Louise Nicholson asked if something could be done as a memorial to Juliet Davies who had died suddenly given her contributions to the village. Justin reported that the Village Hall Trust had something in mind.

**4733 - Dates of Future Meetings:** The following dates were agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council during the coming year, most being the first Wednesday of the month:

5 <sup>th</sup> June	3 <sup>rd</sup> July	7 <sup>th</sup> August	4 <sup>th</sup> September	2 <sup>nd</sup> October	6 <sup>th</sup> November
4 <sup>th</sup> December	8 <sup>th</sup> January	5 <sup>th</sup> February	4 <sup>th</sup> March	1 <sup>st</sup> April	6 <sup>th</sup> May

The August meeting would only be held if there were planning applications to consider. The meeting in January would be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday to avoid the Christmas holidays and the date in April would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The Council to meet at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year (apart from April).

M Comley  
5/6/19