

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 4th November 2015 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe

Members are reminded that the Council has a general duty to consider the following matters in the exercise of any of its functions: Equal Opportunities (race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and any disability), Crime & Disorder, Health & Safety and Human Rights.

Agenda

1. Apologies and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest and Granting of Dispensations

Councillors' Declaration of Interests forms have been sent to the Monitoring Officer at Mendip District Council. As they have not yet been published on the District Council website all interests should be declared at this meeting.

3. Public Participation – Open village meeting for fifteen minutes for any member of the public to raise any issue relevant to Batcombe Parish

The Chairman can invite members of the public to speak at this or at any other appropriate time.

4. Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 7th October 2015 to be agreed and signed. *Enclosed.*

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Housing Needs Survey – The application form for the Awards for All grant was completed after the last meeting and sent it to Jane Birch at the Community Council for comments and advice.

Internet Provision – The public meeting held by Field Internet attracted considerable attention and support for their plans. There is some concern being expressed about the perceived dangers of low level radio waves from the wireless technology that would be used.

6. District and County Councillors' Reports

An opportunity for the District and County Councillors to report on matters relevant to the parish, either in person or in writing.

7. Allotments

The allotment rents are due on November 1st. So far the rent for three allotments has been paid. There is one vacancy and this has been advertised in the parish magazine. A decision on the allocation of the vacant allotment will be taken at the next Parish Council meeting. The Chairman to report on his informal meeting with allotment holders.

8. Footpaths and Highways

The County Council have informed us that Gunnings Lane in Upton Noble will be closed from 16th November for 7 days (excluding the weekend) to enable sewer connection works to be carried out. Gunnings Lane is the road into Upton Noble from the A359 past the garage. The closure will be the other side of the garage, between it and the school.

No response yet from the County Council regarding the “No HGV” signs. As in previous years Somerset Highways are offering ten 20kg bags of de-icing material. This would need to be collected from the Frome depot at Manor Furlong on Saturday November 21st between 9.00am and 1.00pm.

The Council has received a letter from the owner of Westcombe Cottage in response to the Council’s letter about the overhanging hedge. The owner would have appreciated a discussion with the Council before receiving a letter and noted that the problem was caused by cars parked opposite. The Chairman has since visited the owner and will report back at the meeting.

9. Playing Field - Maintenance Report

Having researched the zip wire, Ian Sage reported that a replacement spring could be obtained at a lower price than quoted by Mainstay Projects and that the replacement could be undertaken by volunteers, saving the quoted labour costs. However, our insurers require that the work is undertaken by someone with the technical accreditation to install, alter and inspect a zip wire and suggest we ask a play equipment company to undertake the work. Ian has also expressed concerns about the nest swing.

10. Planning Applications

Planning Application No: 2015/2516/TCA - Proposed pruning of T1 Maple (twin-stemmed) – remove major (left hand) stem above old wound (decayed), reduce (right hand) stem to appropriate points to balance remainder of tree; T2 Chilean Pine – fell (dead)

The Old Barn, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area..

Planning Application Updates.

The appeal against the refusal of planning permission by South Somerset District Council for the proposed wind turbine at Gilcombe Farm has been ruled invalid by the Planning Inspector. This is a result of the pre-application consultation arrangements not meeting the requirements of the relevant legislation. The Chairman to report on the Appeal Hearing.

Mendip District Council has approved the proposed alterations and extension of the existing utility/cloakroom at Batcombe Lodge. The District Council has not objected to the felling of the Crab Apple tree at 1 Sunnyside or the Purple Leaf Plum and the Goat Willow at Ivy Wall House.

The application for a certificate of lawfulness has been approved for the change of use of agricultural building to a C3 Use 4 bedroomed dwelling with integral carport off an existing hardstanding area and access at Bailey’s Lane. Prior approval for change of use of the agricultural building to a dwelling house (Class 3) was granted in July. This confirms that the plans submitted are permitted development under this approval.

11. Emergency Plan

The Chairman to report back on his meeting with the Village Hall Committee regarding the use of the Old School as an Emergency Control Centre and the purchase of a generator for use in an emergency. The Chairman has also raised with the Village Hall the possibility of obtaining a defibrillator.

12. Social Media Policy

With the increasing use of social media, such as Facebook, it is advisable for the Parish Council to have a Social Media Policy. Enclosed is a model Social Media Policy, adapted for Batcombe Parish Council. The “struck through” items relate mainly to social media pages which the Council does not currently have. The Council has previously appointed the Clerk as the “webmaster” for the Parish Council website.

13. Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update

The bank reconciliation for the second quarter to 30th September to be verified by the Vice Chairman before the meeting and reported to the Council.

An update on the budget as at the end of October for the current year is enclosed. The first column shows the actual accounts for last year. The second column is budget for this year as agreed in January. The third column is the receipts and payments to the end of September and the fourth column a projection of the position at the end of the year. The expected variations against budget are: i) a larger VAT refund (because of the VAT on the new picnic table purchased with the Health and Well-Being grant in the previous year); ii) the cost of the new fencing in the Playing Field (which had been expected to be part of last year's expenditure); iii) the Playing Field maintenance (due to the cost of the playbark and of repairing the zip wire); iv) the uncontested election (which means the estimated cost has been reduced from around £1,000 to perhaps £150); v) photocopying (larger than budgeted because no bill had been received since August last year; and vi) no money to be spent on Coney Wood.

This gives a projected surplus of £120 on the year, despite the increased maintenance costs, which is largely due to the election not being contested. This leaves the Council with projected funds of £5,325 at the end of the year, of which approximately £950 will be earmarked for the allotments.

14. Administration

Computer Grant - As you have to state what laptop you are going to buy when applying for the grant for the Transparency Code compliance, I am waiting for some advice on an appropriate computer before applying.

Microshade – I have obtained a quotation from Microshade for their file hosting service. There would be an initial cost of £100 and then a monthly fee of £31.60 or £39.60 if they hosted the Scribe 2000 accounting package. Given this comes to £379.20 a year or £475.20 with Scribe 2000, this does not appear to be a cost-effective means of ensuring business continuity. Microshade would be happy to attend our meeting to explain their service, providing it was not a waste of their time and ours – so I have deferred inviting them to this meeting. If the Council has its own laptop, then business continuity could be ensured through a regular back up onto a secure hard disk, stored in a separate location to the laptop (such as the fireproof safe in the Heritage Room). A secure, password-protected hard disk with the software to back up the complete contents of a computer including e-mails would cost about £80.

Scribe 2000 Accounting – This is an accounts package produced for Parish Councils that appears to produce many of the reports required by a Parish Council. I have obtained a quote of £145 a year for this package, which is £50 less than the usual price for a small Parish Council. The Chairman is keen to use the package as he believes it would improve the efficiency of the Clerk. Given the limited number of entries in the accounts, the Clerk is less certain that any savings in time would represent value for money. The Council might wish to consider a year's evaluation of the package which the Clerk would be happy to undertake.

15. Budget and Precept 2015/16

Enclosed is a budget for the year ending 31st March 2017. These accounts have two columns allowing the budget for 2016/17 to be compared to the projected figures for this year.

The VAT refund includes the VAT on the fencing materials and on the zip wire repair and so will be similar to this year which included the VAT on the picnic table. I've assumed there will be a Council Tax Support Grant again, but there is no guarantee of this and it may be reduced.

Most items of expenditure have been assumed to be similar to this year with small increases where likely. I've increased yearly sum for equipment maintenance to £500 in light of the increased expenses this year – the actual figure varies from year to year depending on what work needs doing. There may be a small increase in the Clerk's hourly rate. It will not be an election year but we need to have sufficient reserves to cover the cost of a by-election and to build up those reserves for the next election year in 2019.

With no increase in the precept, the budget predicts a surplus of £950. However, this budget makes no allowance for any additional expenditure, other than on Playing Field maintenance. And there are a number of items the Parish Council may wish to budget for:

Computer & Software - *if the grant application is unsuccessful, a laptop computer with the necessary software is likely to cost around £350. If the Council agrees to evaluate the Scribe 2000 accounting package (see item above) the cost would be around £500.*

War Memorial Wall - *the low wall on the road boundaries of the war memorial in Batcombe needs repointing. We do not yet have an estimate of the cost for this job. The Chairman is keen that this job is undertaken and not left for another year.*

Notice Boards - *a new notice board is needed to replace the one of the churchyard wall. This is likely to cost around £750. In addition, the noticeboard in Westcombe needs repairing.*

There might possibly be grants for these items, but if not they would cost around £2,000 in total if all undertaken in one year.

I also enclose a forecast for the years 2015-2019. *Again most of the figures are based on the assumption of a small increase each year. In the forecast I have included the £2,000 of additional expenditure noted above in the budget for next year. This would result in a deficit of £980 next year, but modest increases in the precept would allow for small surpluses in the following years maintaining a reserve sufficient to meet the cost of an election in 2019. The forecast also allows for £500 a year for unexpected/additional expenditure.*

SALC recommend that a parish council's reserves should be between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of its precept, which would currently be between £2,650 and £5,300. As the reserve would need to cover the cost of a contested election and a by-election in the same, I would recommend having a reserve near the upper limit in an election year.

The Council needs to agree a precept in light of its anticipated expenditure, but does not need to make a decision at this meeting - this can be deferred until the December meeting.

16. Authorisation of Payment

- £???.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in October. (Invoice not yet received.)
- £???.00 SSE – Playing Field Electricity. (Amended Invoice not yet received.)
- £151.32 The Parish News – Photocopying (from August 2014)

17. Other Business – matters of information only.

None at present.

18. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 2nd December 2015 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

28th October 2015