

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage Tel: 01749 850934 e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

You are Summoned to the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 1st May 2024 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. Election of Chair & Chair's Acceptance of Office

The current Parish Council Chair chairs this item. After the newly elected Chair has signed their Acceptance of Office, they then chair the rest of the meeting. The Parish Council is unable to do anything else until a Chair is elected.

2. Apologies and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence

This is necessary as any member who is absent for six months, without the Council accepting their reasons for absence, automatically loses their seat on the Council.

3. Declarations of Interest

It is the Councillors' responsibility to declare any interests they may have in any item on the Agenda. If you are uncertain please ask the Clerk before the meeting.

Parish Councillors' Registers of Interests are published on the Somerset Council's website (as well as on the Parish Council website). Councillors have been asked to check that their Register of Interests is correct and up-to-date and to inform the Monitoring Officer at Somerset Council if any changes are required.

4. Election of Vice Chairman

The main role of the Vice Chairman is to chair meetings of the Parish Council when the Chair is absent or has a pecuniary interest in an item. If both Chair and Vice Chairman are absent, Parish Councillors have to elect one of their number to chair the meeting.

5. 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 point in the meeting.

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd April 2024 to be agreed and signed.
Enclosed/attached. If you spot any typos or have any issue with the Minutes it is helpful to inform the Clerk before the meeting so that where necessary an amended version of the Minutes can be signed by the Chair.

7. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Allotments – we currently have one vacant allotment and the allotment holder who has not yet paid has been given a month's notice to pay. The rent for the allotments field of £220 is now due.

8. Somerset Councillor's Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN)

An opportunity for our Somerset Councillor to report on matters relevant to the parish, either in person or in writing. Jayne Cox to report back on the meeting of the Local Community Network on April 29th.

9. Tourist Levy

It was agreed at the last meeting to discuss the setting up a Working Party to consider the how a Tourist Levy might work - and be administered - at this meeting. Any Tourist Levy would need to be voluntary as the Parish Council has no power to impose a Levy and so would involve the active co-operation of those imposing the Levy on their customers. Terms of Reference for the Working Party and its composition would need to be established.

10. Footpaths and Highways

Highways and Traffic LCN Subgroup – Peter Glaisher had e-mailed the notes from the inaugural meeting of the Subgroup to Councillors before the last Parish Council meeting and it was agreed to discuss the items raised at this meeting. Items raised include the Terms of Reference for the Subgroup and the possible employment of a Highway Steward.

11. Playground - Maintenance Report

The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA will take place in June.

12. Planning Application

Planning Application 2024/0590/FUL – Installation of solar arrays

Lower Eastcombe Farm, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe – Full Application.

The application is for seven rows of solar panels with twenty panels in each row to be located in the field to the south west of Lower Eastcombe Farm – on the opposite side of Eastcombe Lane to the allotments field. The consultation deadline is April 30th but the Parish Council has received an extension to consider the application at this meeting.

Planning Application Updates. *The applications to fell a Willow tree at Provis and to fell a Birch tree at Sunnyside have been approved. As have the applications to thin a limb of a Cedar tree at Rockwells House and to pollard a Goat Willow at Netherlea.*

13. Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters

Our Standing Orders require the appointment of a Staffing Committee. This Committee would consider any complaints against or grievances by the Clerk. The Committee should consist of three Councillors so that any appeal could be considered by the remaining Councillors. (As relatives of the Clerk, Ian Sage and Jayne Cox should not be members of this committee.) SALC recommend that the Staff Committee or a representative from it should conduct an annual review with the Clerk. Janet Jones, Peter Glaisher and Bryony Harling were re-elected to the Staffing Committee last year.

The Clerk has been asked to report any additional hours worked in the previous year at the May meeting. In 2024/25 the Clerk worked 14 hours less than he was paid for, although half of these have already been made up by extra hours worked in April.

14. Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives

The Council appoints a representative to the Village Hall Trust Committee. Currently this is Jayne Cox. (Please note that the member appointed as Village Hall representative needs to declare this in Part 2 of the Register of Interests Declaration Form as a category (a) membership.)

The Council has appointed the Clerk as its representative to help run the Heritage Room. This appointment should be confirmed, unless a Councillor wishes to take on this role. There are three Trustees running the Heritage Room and the role involves a commitment to open the Heritage Room on a Saturday morning and assist those inquiring about the history of the parish and its former inhabitants.

15. Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters

Standing Orders require that the Council make arrangements at this meeting for the review of its Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Schedule of Assets, insurance cover, membership of other bodies, complaints procedure, procedures for handling requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, policy for dealing with the press, and social media policy. The Parish Council should also review the Emergency Plan for Batcombe. I suggest the following timetable: Financial Regulations to be reviewed at the June meeting; Social Media Policy and policy for dealing with the press to be reviewed at the July meeting; complaints procedure to be reviewed at the September meeting; Emergency Plan to be reviewed at the October meeting; budget to be considered at the November meeting; membership of other bodies to be reviewed at the December meeting; Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February meeting; and the Schedule of Assets, Risk Management Policy and insurance cover to be reviewed at the March meeting in time for the preparation of the Annual Report and renewal of the insurance.

16. Insurance Renewal

Our insurance is due for renewal on June 1st, and we are two years into a three year long-term agreement with Aviva Insurance organised via our insurance brokers (formerly known as BHIB Ltd, the brokers are now Clear Councils, a trading style of Clear Insurance Management Limited). The insurance premium increased by £40.41 to £627.54 last year but this year has been reduced by £2.60 to £624.94.

17. Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2024

The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31st March needs to be verified by a Councillor before the meeting and reported to the Council.

A copy of the Financial Statements is enclosed. The three columns show the previous year's figures, the budget for last year (which was set in the January of the previous year) and the actual figures for last year.

Receipts were £1,392 more than the budgeted figure because the VAT claim for £1,003 (which included the VAT on the cricket mat and nets, the new benches, the strimmer and the hedge laying) was made in 2023/24 rather than the previous year and because of the unbudgeted contributions to the Coronation mugs and the electricity for the Playing Field. The allotments rent was £115 less than the full £350 due to the vacant allotments and the fact that two allotments had not been paid for by the end of the financial year.

Playing Field expenditure was £991 less than budgeted, as the maintenance budget was largely unspent and the cost of the electricity supply was less than anticipated following a refund from SSE at the start of the year. The grass cutting was £70 less than budgeted, while the water supply was £50 more than budgeted (following a leak) and the annual inspection £42 more than budgeted (due to the purchase of an inspection template).

The expenditure on Administration was £102 more than budgeted, due to a higher than expected increase in the Clerk's salary. Most other items were close to budget, although the increase in the Clerk's salary was balanced by less spent on training and the being no bank custody fee.

The expenditure on Grants was as budgeted. Other expenditure was £189 more than budgeted because of the cost of the Coronation mugs, which was balanced by the fact that nothing had been spent on maintenance of the allotments or the strimmer.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and other items are given on the back of the Financial Statement. Although only £235 of allotments rent was received, the fact that there was no expenditure on maintenance meant that there was a £15 surplus on the allotment funds at the end of the year compared to a £56 deficit the year before. This left £985 of allotments money at the end of the year of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May.

The net result of the variations against the budget outlined above is a surplus of £2,016 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £75. This is largely due to the VAT claim, the underspend on maintenance in the Playing Field and the fact that the cost of the electricity supply for the Playing Field was less than expected. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £12,657 in its funds, £3,276 less than anticipated in the budget. This is a result of spending available funds on the Playing Field in 2022/23 which meant that Parish Council funds at the start of the year were lower than when the budget had been set. £985 is set aside for the allotments and £77 for new notice boards, meaning that the Parish Council has funds totalling £11,595 that are not earmarked for specific items. This means that the Parish Council has sufficient reserves to cover the cost of 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 £3,360 and £6,720.

Our internal auditor, Griff Williams, is able and willing to undertake the audit again this year. This needs to be completed by our June meeting, at which we need to agree the Annual Return.

18. Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2025

Enclosed is an updated projection on this year's budget. The first column shows the actual figures for last year. The second column shows the budget for this year as agreed in January. The third column is the updated projection for this year. We have not yet received notification from the Somerset Council that they have paid our 2024/25 precept of £10,075, which was increased from the budgeted figure as the increased tax base meant that there would be no increase in the Council Tax if the precept was increased by £150. The VAT repayment of £165.84 has been received. The projection for the allotments rent assumes one vacant allotment.

With regard to payments, most items are expected to be as budgeted. The grass cutting is likely to be less than budgeted as there has been no increase in the price per cut. The Westcombe notice board is being refurbished instead of replaced and so the cost is likely to be less than budgeted. Overall the projection is for a deficit of £212 instead of the budgeted deficit of £760 – largely as a result of the increased precept and lower than budgeted cost of the grasscutting. This gives funds of £12,445 at the end of the year of which around £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments.

19. Authorisation of Payments

Clear Insurance Management Ltd - £624.94 – Insurance premium.

T & E A Hollis - £220.00 – Rent of Allotments Field.

Somerset Playing Fields' Association - £15.00 – Subscription.

Kevin Gale - £180.00 – Grass cutting in April.

20. Other Business – matters of information only.

Please note that the Parish Council cannot make decisions on items that do not appear on the Agenda – so matters raised under this item are for information only.

21. Dates of Future Meetings - Next Meeting: Wednesday 5th June 2024 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

Traditionally the Parish Council has met on the first Wednesday of the month. Thus for 2024/2025, the suggested dates, to be confirmed at the meeting, are:

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

Wednesday April 2nd would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The August meeting will only take place if required to consider planning applications. The Council normally meets at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year.

Rob Sage