

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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## You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2024 at 8.00pm 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**

*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.*

**2. 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.*

**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 point in the meeting.*

**4. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 to be agreed and signed.**  
*Enclosed/attached.*

**5. Matters Arising** – information updates only.  
*None at present.*

**6. Somerset Councillors' Reports and the Shepton Local Community Network**

*An opportunity for the Somerset Councillors to report on matters relevant to the parish, either in person or in writing.*

*The Minutes of the latest meeting of the Shepton Local Community Network (LCN) on April 29<sup>th</sup> at Croscombe Village Hall have been circulated to Councillors. Jayne Cox attended the meeting and reported on it at the May Parish Council meeting. The next meeting of the LCN will be the AGM on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June in the Council Chamber at the Mendip Hub.*

*The latest meeting of the Shepton LCN Highways and Traffic Subgroup took place on May 1<sup>st</sup> and Peter Glaisher reported on this meeting at the May Parish Council meeting. Brief notes of the items discussed at the meeting were distributed to Councillors together with list of the highways maintenance schemes to be undertaken in the Shepton LCN region. There is not a date yet for the next meeting of the Subgroup.*

*Notes from the LCN Flood working group have also distributed to Councillors.*

## 7. Footpaths and Highways

*Westcombe Road will be closed at Stoney Stratton from June 17<sup>th</sup> to June 19<sup>th</sup> for the OCU Group to install infrastructure on behalf of Gigaclear. The closure will be 24 hours a day.*

*There has been a report of unauthorised camping on the footpath from Pugh's Bottom Farm to Eastcombe Lane. The landowners are aware of this (they reported it) and it is their responsibility to deal with.*

## 8. Playground - Maintenance Report

*We have received confirmation that the annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA will take place in June.*

## 9. Planning Applications

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 on Kale Street is a Grade II Listed Building in the Conservation Area, previously known as Romsey Cottage and before that as Cobblers. The proposal is to demolish the single storey rear extension (believed to be a 20<sup>th</sup> Century replacement of an original 19<sup>th</sup> Century extension) and replace this with a new single storey extension to form ground floor cloakroom and lobby. In addition a simple walkway will be added to the roof of the extension to allow easier access to the terraced garden behind the cottage. This will involve the creation of a doorway at first floor level in the rear elevation and the relocation on an existing first floor rear window. In addition, the ground floor rear door and window will be replaced and the current cement-based render on the rear and front elevations replaced with a lime-based render. Plans can be downloaded from the planning website: [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 Shepton Mallet Somerset BA4 6AB \(mendip.gov.uk\)](https://www.mendip.gov.uk/planning/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-Shepton-Mallet-Somerset-BA4-6AB).*

**Planning Application Updates.** *An update on Mill Cottage has been distributed by the Chair.*

## 10. Adoption of New Financial Regulations

*The annual review of the Parish Council's Financial Regulations is due at this meeting. The National Association of Local Councils has produced new model Financial Regulations for its member councils. I have adapted the model Regulations to make them suitable for our Parish Council (removing regulations regarding online banking, committees and Welsh councils and recognising that the Clerk is also the Responsible Financial Officer). The adapted Regulations are attached for consideration. As with previous Financial Regulations, the sections in bold type are statutory regulations and cannot be changed. Other regulations can be adapted to fit the needs of the Parish Council where thought appropriate. The Regulations also contain a number of figures that can be set by the Parish Council to suit its circumstances (as different figures will be appropriate depending on the size of the Council).*

*Particular regulations to consider and possibly amend are:*

*1.7 – this sets the level of expenditure that the Clerk can make without authorisation from the Council. The model Regulations give a figure of £5,000 but recognise that the figure will be much lower for a small council. I suggest a figure of £100 which will allow the Clerk to make small purchases such as stamps when needed without authorisation.*

*2.6 – this states that a Councillor other than the Chair should check the bank reconciliation each quarter and should sign the bank statements to show this has been done. We either need to amend this regulation or appoint someone else to verify the bank reconciliations.*

*4.2 – I'm not sure that we need a separate budget for salaries as there is only the Clerk's salary which is basically the number of hours multiplied by the salary recommended by the National Joint*

*Council for Local Government Services and this forms part of the draft budget. We could therefore omit Regulation 4.2.*

*5.6 – sets the figure at which a formal tendering process is required for procurement. The tendering process is outlined in Appendix 1 of the Regulations. The model regulations suggest £60,000 although this would have meant the Parish Council tendering for the new play equipment, so we might want to make it higher.*

*5.8 & 5.9 – set the figures at which fixed price quotes or estimates are required. Above £3,000 for quotes and £500 to £3,000 for estimates. Again these are the figures suggested by the model regulations and the Parish Council can adjust them.*

*5.15 – Sets the limits for authorisation of expenditure under delegated authority at £500 for the Clerk and £2,000 for the Clerk in consultation with the Chair. Again, these are the figures suggested by the model regulations.*

*5.18 – authorises the Clerk to spend up to £2,000 when public safety is an issue – for example in the Playing Field.*

*9.1 – allows the Clerk to purchase stamps etc on his debit card and then claim on expenses.*

## **11. Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control, Internal Auditor's Report and Certificate of Exemption from a Limited Assurance Review**

*Our Financial Regulations (1.5) require a review of the effectiveness of our system of internal control before approving the Annual Governance Statement which forms part of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (see below). I believe our system of internal control to be more than sufficient for a small Parish Council. The details are given in the Financial Regulations. These include the budgetary process, the authorisation of all payments by the Council, the signing of cheques by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the requirement for an internal audit.*

*Our internal audit has been undertaken by Griff Williams, who satisfies the necessary requirements of independence of the Parish Council and competence. A copy of the completed Internal Audit Report is enclosed – page 4 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The Parish Council needs to accept the Internal Audit Report before it can approve the Annual Governance Statement and the Accounting Statements (see next item).*

*Parish Councils, whose income and expenditure are both less than £25,000, do not have to send the Annual Return to the external auditor provided they send a certificate of exemption (copy enclosed) signed at this meeting and publish the Annual Return on their website by July 1<sup>st</sup>.*

## **12. Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2023/24**

*Section 1 of the AGAR is the Annual Governance Statement (page 5 of the enclosed Annual Return). This has to be approved by the Council before the Council approves the Accounting Statements with a separate Minute reference. I believe the Council can agree all eight statements, but the Council can only do this once the Internal Audit Report has been considered.*

*Note: Statement 4 - The Parish Council's accounts have to be available for public inspection for 30 working days that include the first ten working days in July.*

## **13. Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2023/24**

*Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is the Statement of Accounts (page 6 of the enclosed Annual Return) which has to be approved by the Council. The attached Financial Statements for last year show how the figures in the Statement of Accounts have been derived – the circled numbers refer to the boxes in the Statement of Accounts. There are significant variations (more than 15%) in boxes 3 and 6 between the figures for last year and those for the previous year. In box 3 this is due to the VAT refund of £1,003 in 2023/24 (no claim in 2022/23) and the contributions to the Coronation mugs and electricity in 2023/24 (none in 2022/23). In box 6 this is*

*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 trimmer (with no equivalent costs in 2023/24).*

*The Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities requires that signed copies of the Statement of Accounts, the Annual Governance Statement and the Internal Auditor's Report have to be published on the Parish Council website no later than June 30<sup>th</sup>, along with a bank reconciliation and details of all items of expenditure over £100 and any land assets.*

#### **14. War Memorial Garden Fundraising**

*At the last meeting it was agreed to consider fundraising to redo the War Memorial Garden at this meeting.*

#### **15. Annual Grants from the Parish Council**

*The Parish Council has budgeted for a grant of £300 to the Village Hall (£150 for our own meetings and £150 for committee meetings of other village organisations); for 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). For several years the Council has given two grants of £100 to Mendip Community Transport and Mendip Citizens Advice Bureau (now Citizens Advice Somerset). In the past we have supported Victim Support Somerset; Mendip RELATE; the Bruton Carers Group; St Margaret's Somerset Hospice and Somerset Art Works; and we have received a request for a grant from Age UK Somerset.*

*In addition, we have had a request from Peter Glaisher to consider a grant for the repair of the church clock. (As a member of the PCC, Peter will need to declare an interest in this.) The Parish Council does have the power to provide a public clock or to assist another body in providing a public clock under the Parish Councils Act of 1957 (section 2). And an amendment to the 1894 Local Government Act made last year clarifies that there is nothing in the 1894 Act that prevents a parish council from providing funding for places of worship under powers granted by subsequent legislation. The Parish Council could provide a grant for the church clock from the £220 budgeted for smaller grants or it could make an additional unbudgeted grant provided the Parish Council passes a resolution to that effect (new Financial Regulation 5.17).*

*The Council has the power to support the Village Hall Trust [Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19], to help maintain the churchyard [Open Spaces Act 1906, sections 9 & 10], and to support the Citizens Advice Bureau [Local Government Act 1972, section 142], but grants to other charities must be made by a specific resolution under the section 137 power, which allows the Council to spend a limited sum on items in the interest of parishioners which it has no specific power to support [Local Government Act 1972, section 137].*

#### **16. Authorisation of Payment**

*Kevin Gale - £??0.00 – Grass cutting in May. (Invoice not yet received.)*

*Plus any grants approved under item 15 above.*

#### **17. Other Business – matters of information only.**

*The Parish Council laptop is now eight years old. It uses Windows 10 as its operating system and is not suitable for upgrading to Windows 11. Microsoft is withdrawing support for Windows 10 from October 2025. The Parish Council should therefore consider the purchase of a new laptop in its budget for next year.*

#### **18. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2024 at 8.00pm in the Old School.**

*Rob Sage*