

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: robsage@uwclub.net

You are Summoned to the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 13th May 2015 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall, 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 Chairman & Chairman's Acceptance of Office

This item should be chaired by the current Chairman. The current Chairman has indicated that he will leave the room while the election takes place, as he has done in previous years. This means that the meeting will first have to elect a Chairman for this item, as we will have no Vice Chairman once Liz Hollis ceases to be a Councillor on May 11th.

2. Election of Vice Chairman

The newly elected Chairman chairs the rest of the meeting. The main role of the Vice Chairman is to chair meetings of the Parish Council when the Chairman is absent.

3. 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.

4. Councillors' Acceptance of Office

The enclosed Acceptance of Office should be signed and witnessed at the meeting. Any Councillor not signing the Acceptance of Office by the end of this meeting automatically loses their seat on the Council - unless the Council resolves to extend the deadline to the next meeting. Those Councillors who stood for election are reminded that their Return of Election Expenses should be sent to the District Council within 28 days of the election.

5. Filling of the Parish Council Vacancy by Co-option and Acceptance of Office

Following the uncontested election there will be a vacancy on the Parish Council from May 11th. This has been advertised on the website, in the parish magazine and on the notice boards. So far only Diane Roberts has expressed an interest in serving on the Parish Council in writing, - although I understand that one other person has expressed an informal interest to Iona FitzGerald.

The co-option has to be agreed by a vote of the current Council. The correct procedure is for the Chairman to call for nominations and for current Councillors to nominate persons who are willing to be co-opted. (It may be that not all persons expressing an interest are nominated - equally not expressing a written interest does not prevent someone being nominated if they are willing to serve.) If only one person is nominated the Council still has to vote on the co-option. (Should the vacancy not be filled at this meeting there will be another opportunity to fill it by co-option at our June meeting, otherwise we have to revert to the procedure of advertising the opportunity of a by-election before filling the vacancy.)

If there is more than one person nominated, our Standing Orders allow for a paper ballot of Councillors. If more than two people are nominated and no one obtains more than 50% of the votes, the person with the least number of votes is dropped from the list and a new vote is taken. This process is repeated until someone receives more than 50% of the votes. The Chairman then declares them to be co-opted. If the newly co-opted Councillor signs their Declaration of Acceptance of Office they take their place on the Council immediately. If the person co-opted is not present the Council should pass a resolution allowing them to sign their Declaration of Acceptance before the next meeting. (Diane Roberts has given her apologies as she has a work commitment on the evening of the meeting.) If the person co-opted does not sign their Declaration of Acceptance their co-option is invalid.

To avoid embarrassment the Chairman will give any candidates present the option of leaving the room while the vote takes place. It should however be noted that the vote has to take place in public and that the candidates are entitled to be present if they wish.

6. 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. All Councillors, elected or co-opted, have 28 days to complete a new Register of Interests Declaration Form (enclosed). Please return this by the next meeting to the Clerk who is required to keep a copy and who will forward it to the District Council's Monitoring Officer.

***Please note** that the District Council's Monitoring Officer has stated that where a Councillor has a pecuniary interest in an item they cannot take part in any discussion on that item. This includes making a statement on the matter before leaving the room. This is contrary to previous advice from the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) but we have to accept the Monitoring Officer's interpretation. Unfortunately, this means that Iona cannot give additional information about tree works her husband is undertaking.*

7. 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.

8. Minutes of Meetings held on Wednesdays 8th April and 29th April 2015 to be agreed and signed. Enclosed.

9. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Nothing that does not appear on the Agenda below.

10. Footpaths and Highways

Somerset Highways have sent out their Environmental Maintenance Information for 2015. The verges on C and unclassified roads should be cut in either June or July.

The damaged finger post by the Round House has been added to Somerset Highways repair list. According to Charlie Higgins at Somerset Highways, local residents undertaking minor maintenance such as painting the finger posts would be welcomed.

Somerset Highways have inspected the trees opposite Church Farm and agree that some minor pruning is required. The second and fourth trees when coming from the direction of the Church would benefit from some minor crown lifting. These trees should have been licensed to the Parish Council, which would mean that the responsibility for them is the Parish Council's, but it is likely such licensing never happened. Somerset Highways would be happy for the Parish Council to organise the work on the trees, but if that is not possible they are prepared to undertake the work

when they have a contractor in this area. As the trees are in the Conservation Area, an application to the District Council will be required for consent to prune the trees.

11. Allotments

One of the allotment holders has given notice on his allotment. Although there is a six month notice period, he would be happy for someone else to take on the allotment, which has been advertised in the parish magazine and on the website. To date we have received one application from someone in Westcombe interested in taking on the allotment. Allotment rents are due in November so the Council will need to decide whether it wishes to charge for the remaining months of this year.

A meeting with between the allotment holders and the Chairman to discuss any issues arising in the management of the allotments will be arranged for a Saturday in May (date to be confirmed).

12. Emergency Plan

Following the Parish and District Council elections the Emergency Plan needs to be updated. The Community Emergency Management Team in the Plan consists of the Parish Council Chairman, Vice Chairman and Clerk when the Plan was adopted, along with Arish Turle. The membership of this Team needs to be updated. In addition the Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingencies Unit would like the Council to nominate Emergency Community Contacts to be a point of contact between the community and the authorities in an emergency. It was agreed at the last monthly meeting that these contacts should be the members of the Emergency Management Team and this should be confirmed when we know who the Emergency Management Team are.

13. Coney Wood

A copy of the draft lease is attached along with some initial notes on questions to be considered. The Council needs to consider taking legal advice on the lease and also to consider how the Wood would be managed. SALC are willing to offer advice on the latter.

14. Playground - Maintenance Report and Preparation for RoSPA Inspection.

The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA will take place in June. The mole continues to be active. Geoff Sparkes has begun cutting the Playing Field grass again and has provided a copy of his insurance cover.

15. Planning Applications - None at present.

Planning Application Updates. *The appeal against the decision to refuse permission to convert and extend the stables at Crows Hill to a single dwelling has been dismissed, as has an application for an award of costs against Mendip District Council. The planning inspector concluded that the "proposal would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the countryside and by reason principally of its isolated location the scheme would not represent sustainable development".*

The District Council had no objection to the crown reduction of the willow tree at Lower Farm, nor to the felling of the five conifers at Fir Tree Cottage. The tree surgeon has informed us that the willow tree at Lower Farm had to be felled after splits in the trunk were discovered when work on the crown reduction began. The tree officer at Mendip has been informed and is happy with this.

16. Appointment of Staffing Committee

Our Standing Orders require the appointment of a Staffing Committee. This Committee would consider any complaints against or grievances by the Clerk and hopefully would not meet that often. 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 Clerk.

17. Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives

The Council appoints a representative to the Village Hall Trust Committee. Currently this is Justin Witcombe. (Please note that the member appointed as Village Hall representative needs to declare this in section 8(a) of the Parish Councillors' Declaration Form.)

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 (one each from the Village Hall Trust, the PCC and the Parish Council) and the role involves a commitment to open the Heritage Room on a Saturday afternoon and assist those inquiring about the history of the parish and its former inhabitants.

18. 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, and policy for dealing with the press. I suggest the following timetable: Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February meeting (this would be two years since the new Standing Orders were adopted); Financial Regulations to be reviewed at the June 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. The Council's other policies were reviewed last year before the election and, unless there are changes to the models on which they are based, I suggest these do not need to be reviewed until the year before the next Parish Council election in 2019.

19. Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2015

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 December of the previous year) and the actual figures for last year. The precept was £50 less than budgeted as it had been adjusted in the January of the previous year when the level of the Council Tax Support Grant was known. This grant had not been budgeted for as it was not known whether it would be paid at the time of setting the budget. No VAT refund was claimed in 2014-15 as the VAT had been reclaimed part way through the previous year to recover the VAT on the new play equipment and this meant there was not sufficient VAT to claim at the end of the year (for part of a year claims have to be more than £100).

There was no footpaths grant as the footpaths are now being strimmed by our volunteers with a strimmer provided by the County Council. The rent from the allotments was £17.50 less than budgeted as one allotment was vacant for six months. A grant of £525 was received from our County Councillor's Health and Well-being budget for a new picnic table for the Playing Field. The bank interest was almost nothing because of the minimal interest rates.

The cost of the grass cutting in the Playing Field was slightly less than budgeted, as was the cost of the electricity supply. The cost of the water supply was higher than budgeted because three six-monthly payments were made during the year and only one the previous year. The cost of maintenance was lower than budgeted - £95 was paid to the molecatcher and £16.71 on a new padlock for the vehicle gate – as the playbark and the new fence were paid for after the end of the year. £623 was spent on the new picnic table and £86.75 on the new vehicle gate (which had been included in the previous year's budget).

The Clerk's salary increased compared to the previous year as the number of hours worked were raised to seven a week. Changes to the Clerk's tax code meant no PAYE was paid and overall the Clerk's salary was less than budgeted as there was no increase in the salary scales until January. The Clerk's expenses were roughly as budgeted. Most other expenses of administration were largely as budgeted, although there was no expenditure on training or publications (the Clerk's training having been paid for in the previous year). Data protection registration was an additional expense

and photocopying was lower than usual as no bill had been received for the second half of the year. The insurance premium was lower than budgeted as a new three year deal had been entered into.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted and the expenditure on the allotments was £45 on hedge cutting. Details of the earmarked money for the allotments (and the monies raised for the Playing Field improvements) are given on the back of the Financial Statement. At the end of the year there was £933 of allotments money of which £200 would pay for the lease of the field in May.

The net result of the variations against the budget is a surplus of £593 on the year instead of the expected surplus of £200. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £5,207 in its funds, £1,458 more than anticipated in the budget (largely because of a healthier balance at the start of the year). Of this £933 is set aside for the allotments. This means that the Parish Council has funds totalling £4,274 that are not earmarked for the allotments. As the Parish Council election was not contested, this should be a sufficient reserve to cover the possible 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 £2,650 and £5,300. I would recommend that the Parish Council's reserves are nearer the top end of this range and the Chairman would like the Parish Council to increase its reserves.

The Annual Return, which is sent to the External Auditor, does not need to be considered until the next meeting, by which time the internal auditor should have presented his report.

20. Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2016

As reported at the April meeting, this year's precept of £7,948 has been received along with a Council Tax Support Grant of £71.28. A VAT repayment of £264.64 has also been claimed for the twenty months up to March 2015.

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. Receipts are likely to be as budgeted, except that the VAT is higher – largely because of the VAT on the new picnic table which was not in the budget. Most expenditure is also likely to be as budgeted. Exceptions include the cost of the new fencing in the Playing Field (which was in last year's budget) and the Playing Field maintenance, because of the cost of the playpark. However, the main variation on budget is due to the fact that the election has not been contested, which means the cost has been reduced from around £1,000 to perhaps £150 (the last uncontested election four years ago cost £116). There are some uncertain figures. These are the possible costs of repairing the war memorial wall, purchasing or repairing notice boards, and the cost of Coney Wood – in particular whether and how much we pay for legal advice on the lease.

Leaving aside these uncertain items there is a projected surplus of £450 on the year - largely due to the fact that the election was not contested – giving funds of £5,650 at the end of the year. However the surplus could easily be spent on any one of these items.

21. Change of Bank Mandate

The Parish Council should only make payments by cheques signed by two members of the Council (normally after authorisation at a Council meeting, although authorisation can be made retrospectively where payment is required before the next meeting). The Clerk has to be a signatory in order to receive bank statements but should not sign cheques. The other signatories are currently Chris Wildridge, Liz Hollis, Iona FitzGerald and John Sommer. In the past the Chairman, Vice Chairman and two other Councillors have been signatories, which is useful in case two of the signatories are not present at a meeting. It would therefore be helpful to add an additional signatory to the bank mandate. The change of the mandate requires a formal resolution.

22. Authorisation of Payment

Broker Network Ltd - £265.00 – Insurance premium via Came & Co.

Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) - £107.84 – Affiliation fees.

T & E A Hollis - £200.00 – Rent of Allotments Field.

Mr G Sparkes (Gardens of Avalon) - £141.00 – Grass cutting in March and April.

SSE (Electricity Supply for Playing Field) - £??.?? – Amended invoice not yet received.

23. 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.

24. Dates of Future Meetings - Next Meeting: Wednesday 3rd June 2015 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

Traditionally the Parish Council has met on the first Wednesday of the month. Thus for 2015/2016, the suggested dates, to be confirmed at the meeting, are:

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

Wednesday April 6th 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 and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

6th May 2015