

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 3rd June 2015 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

2. Declarations of Interest and Granting of Dispensations

Councillors' Declaration of Interests forms should be returned to the Clerk at or before this meeting so they can be copied and sent to the Monitoring Officer at Mendip District Council. Please complete all sections (with "None" if appropriate – "Not Applicable" will not be accepted by the Monitoring Officer) and don't forget to include your own house under section 5.1 Land. As the Declaration of Interests has not yet been published 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 13th May 2015 to be agreed and signed. Enclosed.

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Insurance – Confirmation has been received that the insurance premium has been paid and the Council is insured for the year from June 1st 2015.

Coney Wood – I have informed Justin Milward of the Woodland Trust of the concerns of the Parish Council with the lease. He would be happy to talk through the lease with the Parish Council and notes that the lease is in a form that has been accepted by Parish Councils and community groups around the country.

6. Footpaths and Highways

A copy of a map of the parish showing the current rights of way is enclosed. The pruning of the trees opposite Church Farm has been put on Somerset Highways' list of works pending. They do not currently have any other works in this area and so it may be some time before the work is undertaken.

7. Allotments

The new allotment holder has signed a tenancy agreement and paid £15 rent for the remainder of this year. The Chairman would like to arrange a meeting of allotment holders.

8. Playing Field - Maintenance Report

The annual safety inspection by RoSPA will take place in June.

9. Planning Applications

None at present.

Planning Application Updates.

The matters reserved by conditions for the Listed Building Consent at 2 Sunnyside and the planning permission for Giles Cottages have been approved.

10. Emergency Plan

The Chairman has distributed by e-mail copies of the plan produced by Robert Jones for the implementation of the Emergency Plan. This implementation plan, which developed out of the suggestion from the Chairman that Robert Jones should do a paper test of the Emergency Plan, needs to be considered carefully by the Parish Council. The Parish Council may wish to ask the Community Emergency Management Team to look at the details of the implementation plan as they will be the ones who have to implement it.

Robert Jones' plan includes the suggestion of setting up of a control room in the Old School for use in emergencies. As reported at the last meeting the Chairman has already had an informal discussion with the Village Hall Chairman over resources for this "control room" and is looking into the possibility of grants towards the cost of this. If the Parish Council feels that this is option to be explored, then the Chairman should be authorised to approach the Village Hall Trust formally, although the Council may wish to wait until the Emergency Management Team reports back.

11. Draft Plan for the next Four Years

The Chairman would like the Parish Council to take a longer term perspective and plan for the next four years of the Council. At the last meeting he suggested a number of items that the Parish Council might tackle over this period: Coney Wood, the Emergency Plan, more affordable housing, and improved broadband. Other items were suggested at the meeting: the repair of the War Memorial wall and the repair and replacement of the parish notice boards.

In determining a "Four Year Plan" the Parish Council should be aware of the limited resources at its disposal and not attempt to undertake too many major initiatives at one time. In particular it should be noted that the Clerk is only paid for seven hours work a week, and much of this time is taken up with the routine business of the Council and new regulations from central government.

The Chairman would also like to prepare a budget for the Council in line with a plan for the next four years. As noted at the last meeting it is recommended that parish councils have a reserve of between one third and two thirds of their precept to meet any unexpected expenditure – the most likely source of which would be a by-election. As the election in May was uncontested, the Parish Council's funds at the end of this year are likely to around two-thirds of the year's precept. However, around £1,000 of this will be earmarked for the allotments (to restore the allotments field at the end of the lease), which means the Council's uncommitted reserve will be about 60% of its precept.

The Council can build up larger reserves provided that they are for a particular purpose. Generally speaking this would be a capital project too large to pay for out of one year's precept. The Council is expected to budget for whatever it proposes to spent money on and set a precept accordingly. Hence the value of a longer term plan. As part of its budgetary process the Council has to agree a three year forecast every year when it sets its precept (see Financial Regulations 3.1-3.4).

12. Staffing Committee

Rather than call a separate meeting of the Staffing Committee, which has to be publicised just like the main Parish Council meeting, it would be sensible to make arrangements for the Clerk's annual review at this meeting. It is recommended by SALC that the review is undertaken by two Councillors. I would suggest a date in the second half of July as the Clerk will be busy with the requirements of the new Transparency Code before that. There are issues regarding the Clerk's available time as noted above.

13. Review of Financial Regulations

Our Financial Regulations were adopted in June 2014 and are based on a model produced by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), with some amendments agreed by the Council where the model was not appropriate for a small Parish Council. Certain figures in the Regulations are set by the Council and should be reviewed annually. These are:

1.14 – ii) The suggested figure in the model was £5,000 (presumably based on a large town council with committees that have delegated powers to spend up to this amount.) The Council agreed £100 to cover items paid for by the Clerk and then reclaimed such as stamps. The same figure is used in Regulation 4.1.

4.5 - £500 is the figure recommended in the model regulations. This would allow for emergency safety work to be carried out in the Playing Field.

4.8 – The recommended figures for reporting variances against budget (£100 or 15% of the budget) seem appropriate.

5.5 c) – The figure of £10,000 allows the Clerk to transfer the precept to the reserve bank account (at the same bank) to earn interest.

6.18 – The limit for transactions on a debit card issued to the Clerk is academic as no such card has been issued.

11.1 – The figure of £60,000 is the EU Procurement threshold.

12.2 – The figure in the model was £250. £25 means that the sale of any moveable property would need to be authorised by the Council.

Regulation 2.2 states that the Parish Council needs to appoint a Councillor other than the Chairman to verify the bank reconciliations and sign the bank statements. Liz Hollis undertook this task last year and it would seem an appropriate task for the Vice Chairman.

All Councillors should have a copy of the Financial Regulations. If any Councillor does not have a copy, please inform the Clerk.

14. Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control

Our new 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 Return to the external auditor 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 at Council meetings by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the internal audit undertaken by Griff Williams, who is both competent and independent of the Council. As noted last year one area in which internal controls could be improved is in the receipt of large sums of cash as happened during the fundraising for the Playing Field. Ideally the cash needs to be counted in the presence of the person presenting the cash to the Clerk and a signed receipt obtained. The internal auditor recommended keeping a register of money received.

15. Annual Return for the Year Ended 31st March 2015

The External Auditor has set the audit date at 15th June 2015, which means the Annual Return needs to be considered at this meeting. The Annual Return consists of four sections. Section 1 is the Statement of Accounts (enclosed) which has to be approved by the Council. The enclosed Financial Statements for last year show how the figures in the Statement of Accounts have been derived – the numbers refer to the boxes in the Statement of Accounts. There is a significant variation in boxes 3 between the figures for last year and those for the previous year. This is because of the fundraising for the new play equipment in the previous year and the VAT recovered on the purchase of that

equipment. The variation in boxes 4 is due to the Clerk's hours being increased from six to seven a week. The significant variation in boxes 6 is due to the money being spent on the new play equipment in the Playing Field in the previous year. The value of fixed assets in box 9 is obtained from the Schedule of Assets.

Section 2 is the Annual Governance Statement. This needs to be approved by the Council. I believe the Council can answer "yes" to all eight questions. (The notice that the Parish Council's accounts will be available for inspection for the required 20 working days from May 13th to June 11th has been displayed on the parish notice boards.) Section 3 (not enclosed) is the External Auditor's Certificate. Section 4 is the Internal Auditor's Report (not enclosed) which should be available in time for the meeting after being completed by Griff Williams.

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 July 1st, along with a bank reconciliation and details of all items of expenditure and land assets.

16. Annual Grants from the Parish Council

The Parish Council has budgeted for a grant of £300 to the Village Hall (£100 for our own meetings, £150 for committee meetings of other village organisations and £50 to help with maintenance costs); for a grant of £200 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard and £200 for smaller grants to charities. Last year the Council gave two grants of £100 to Mendip Community Transport and Mendip Citizens Advice Bureau. In the past we have supported Victim Support Somerset; Mendip RELATE; the Bruton Carers Group; St Margaret's Somerset Hospice and Somerset Art Works. In the past year the Council has received a request for support from Mendip Community Transport.

The Council has the power to support the Village Hall Trust, to help maintain the churchyard, and to support the Citizens Advice Bureau, 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.

17. Authorisation of Payment

£???.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in the Playing Field. (Invoice not yet received.)

£15.00 [REDACTED] – Reimbursement of Allotment Rent.

Plus any grants approved under the previous item.

18. Other Business – matters of information only.

Nothing at present.

19. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 1st July at 8.00pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

27th May 2015