

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 2nd November 2016 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' Register of Interests forms have now been published on the Mendip District Council website. This means that Councillors need only declare interests that have not been disclosed in the Register of Interests. However, it would be good practice to declare any interests.

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 5th October 2016 to be agreed and signed. *Enclosed.*

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Housing Needs Survey – the parish meeting to consider the results of the Housing Needs Survey has been booked for 2.30pm on Saturday 26th November in the Jubilee Hall. Justin Witcombe and Jayne Cox are unlikely to be able to attend the meeting. Arrangements need to be made for the presentation of the hamper at this meeting – or at least an announcement of the winner.

NHS Health Check – the Project Coordinator states that they have a wide range of availability so can probably accommodate a date that would suit us. They are able to come and deliver the health checks provided a minimum of 5 people have booked in/are interested. Do we have a date in mind?

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

In addition to the allotment for which new tenants were agreed at the September meeting, a further three allotments will become vacant on November 1st – two allotments being given up by holders moving from the village and one holder who had two allotments giving one up. Interest has been expressed in one of the allotments from a couple just moved into the village with no garden of their own. The allotments rents are due on November 1st and one has been paid in advance.

8. Footpaths and Highways

We've not yet been informed of the details of the County Council's Winter Maintenance and whether Batcombe remains on the pre-salting network. Hopefully this information will be available by the time of the meeting.

The Chairman attended the Mendip Parish Forum on October 18th at which there was a presentation by Peter Hopley of Somerset County Council on a number of initiatives relating to Rights of Way to mitigate the reduction in resources available. The Chairman's report on the Forum is attached/enclosed.

The Chairman has received a complaint from a resident about the amount of hedge trimmings left on the road to Upton Noble that could cause damage to car tyres.

9. Playground

Maintenance Report – *The mole remains active. The lockable cap over the water tap in the bus shelter was not removed again since being taped up. Ian Sage has now removed the tap.*

Iona FitzGerald reports that Anthony Greenhalgh from Mainstay Projects cannot spare the time to come to a meeting to consider his proposals for repairs to the zip wire and multi-play. He is willing to discuss any concerns with Ian Sage over the phone and to send some men to do the work at the end of November.

10. Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2016/2437/HSE – Demolition of existing garage and retaining wall.

Erection of new utility room and cycle store, rebuilding of retaining wall. Replacement of windows to east and south elevations.

The Cottage, Holly Hill, Batcombe. Householder Application.

The Cottage is a narrow building that runs alongside the road from the Old Post Office to Holly Hill House. At the far end (from the Old Post Office) there is a small garage (room for one car) and a concrete forecourt. A retaining wall holds back the house garden which is considerably higher than the forecourt. The proposal is to replace the garage with a utility room and to rebuild the retaining wall further back from the road to allow three parking spaces in the forecourt.

Planning Application Updates.

The Chairman reports that the application to convert and extend the stable at Crows Hill for use as holiday accommodation was refused permission at a meeting of the Planning Board despite the case officer's recommendation for approval. The Chairman to report on the meeting.

The application for a Lawful Development Certificate for an activity in breach of the planning condition requiring the occupants of Cedar Lodge, Westcombe to be employed in agriculture has been approved - this lifts the agricultural tie on the building. The single storey extension at Honeycliff Cottages has also been approved.

11. 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.

Receipts are projected to be approximately £1,000 more than the budgeted figure because of the donations of £1,081 for the war memorial wall repairs. It is likely that there will be a couple of vacant allotments at the end of the year reducing the rent received.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure is likely to be £1,000 over budget because of the repair to the zip wire (expected to have been paid in the previous year), the costing of the fencing repair, and the additional safety inspection following repairs to the play equipment.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration is £350 under budget. Although an additional £115 was paid to the Clerk (for extra hours) and the Audit fees of £120 were not budgeted (the grants received took receipts over the £10,000 limit at which fees are charged) - the purchase of the Parish Council laptop and software was budgeted for £500 in this year but actually purchased at the end of last year, and it was decided not continue with the accounts software, budgeted at £174.

The projection for the expenditure on Other items is £3,300 over budget because of additional expenditure on the allotments; the cost of the Frome bus pilot; the repair to the War Memorial wall being £1,000 over budget; purchasing two new notice boards instead of repairing the one at Westcombe; and the remaining cost of the Housing Needs Survey (paid for by a grant received last year but not included in this year's budget).

Although the projected deficit is £3,380 compared to a budgeted deficit of £500, the healthier position at the start of the year (as a result of the grants for the Housing Needs Survey, new notice board and laptop) means that the projected funds at the end of the year are around £4,500 – only £280 lower than the expected figure when the budget was made. It should be noted that approximately £1,100 of the figure will be earmarked for the allotments.

12. Budget and Precept 2017/18

Enclosed is a budget for the year ending 31st March 2018. These accounts have two columns allowing the budget for 2017/18 to be compared to the projected figures for this year. Also enclosed is a forecast for the years 2016-2020. The next Parish Council election will take place in 2019/2020 and we need to budget to have sufficient reserves to pay for a contested election as well as any other contingencies such as a by-election. The figure of £1,200 is an estimate based on the fact that the last contested election ten years ago cost £933.

The budget and the forecast are produced on the basis of taking the projected figures for this year (apart from one off expenditures) and adding small increases. These figures are not set in stone, and should be seen as the basis for discussion rather than final figures. It is for the Council to agree them or change them if they feel they are inadequate and additional expenditure needs to be made. In particular the Chairman would like to consider the level of grants given by the Parish Council and we had a request for additional cuts of the Playing Field grass at the last meeting. (However, it should be noted that additional expenditure can only be made by either cutting costs, reducing reserves or increasing the precept.)

Looking at the budget for 2017/18, the VAT refund will be around £250 and includes the VAT on the zip wire repair, new fencing materials and additional safety inspection. There will be no Council Tax Support Grant in 2017/18. The allotment rent may be less than £350 if one or more allotments remain vacant, but this does not affect the budget as this money is earmarked for the allotments.

Most items of expenditure have been assumed to be similar to this year with small increases where likely. Assuming that Mainstay Projects are able to repair the play equipment I've set the figure for equipment maintenance at £500 (it used to be £250 a year but this was felt to be inadequate). If Mainstay are unable to repair all the equipment, the Council needs to consider what it is going to do and how much it is going to spend on the play equipment, but this is better shown as a separate item in the Budget. It should be noted that the Playing Field maintenance is the most difficult item to budget for, as you don't know what something will cost until it breaks. The £500 is therefore a nominal sum to cover minor repairs based on past experience, and anything major either has to be paid for from reserves (which is why we have them) or have to wait until money can be raised. It is for the Council to decide if the £500 is adequate.

There was a request at the last meeting from a member of the public to consider more frequent cuts of the Playing Field grass. The grass is currently cut fortnightly at a cost of £50 a cut. In the past when the contractors lived in the village we have asked for more frequent cuts when the grass is growing rapidly. This would be more difficult with our current contractor who is based in Street and has a set work schedule.

The Chairman would like the Council to review the level of its grants. Currently we give £200 to the PCC to help with the upkeep of the churchyard; £200 to the Village Hall Trust (of which £150 pays for village organisations to use the Old School for committee meetings free of charge); and £100 to two other charities – currently Mendip Community Transport and Mendip Citizens' Advice Bureau.

With no increase in either the grants or the precept, the budget predicts a surplus of £1,000 on the year. Looking at the forecast for the years 2015-2019, I have allowed for increased equipment maintenance of £750 in future years, a £500 allowance for unexpected/additional expenditure and a cost of £1,200 for the election. For the purposes of the forecast I've included a £300 increase in the precept for 2017/18 and £250 increases thereafter. This gives a surplus of £1,320 in 2017/18, £675 in 2018/19 and a deficit of £300 in the election year (assuming a contested election). It should be noted that the deficit is solely because of the election costs and is covered by the surpluses in the preceding years – this allows for a gradual increase in precept rather than a large increase in the election year.

This leaves the Council with reserves of over £6,000 which is near the upper limit recommended by SALC (that a parish council's reserves should be between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of its precept) and should be sufficient to cover the cost of a by-election and other additional expenditure in the same year.

Should the Council decide to increase expenditure, for example on additional grants, the precept would need to be increased by an equivalent amount (possibly phased in over three years) as there is limited scope for cutting costs and I would advise against reducing reserves.

A decision on the level of the precept does not have to be made at this meeting - and can be deferred until the December meeting. Councillors may wish to wait until the tax base for 2017/18 has been determined so that we will know the impact any increase will have on Council Tax.

13. Authorisation of Payment

£???.00 Gardens of Avalon – Grass cutting in October. (*Invoice not yet received.*)

14. Other Business – matters of information only.

Nothing at present.

15. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 7th December at 7.30pm in the Old School Rooms, Batcombe.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

26th October 2016