

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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You are Summoned to a Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held remotely via Zoom on Thursday 9th July 2020 at 7.30pm

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. Meeting Procedure** – Any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting should contact the Clerk on the e-mail address above for details of how to join. *Anyone who has not used Zoom before should attempt to join a few minutes before the meeting as the software will need to download. The Zoom “meeting” will start at 7.10pm, twenty minutes before the actual meeting to allow participants to familiarise themselves with Zoom. Zoom meetings only work if one person speaks at a time. Everyone except the Chairman and Clerk should mute themselves and only unmute when they wish to speak. Members of the public wishing to speak should raise a hand and speak at the invitation of the Chairman. The meeting will be recorded to facilitate the taking of the Minutes – any member of the public not wanting to be recorded should switch off their video. The recording will be deleted once the Minutes have been approved.*
- 2. Apologies and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence**
Justin Witcombe has given his apologies as he is unable to attend the Zoom meeting.
- 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.
- 4. 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. If a large number of members of the public wish to speak, they may be limited to three minutes each.*
- 5. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4th March 2020** to be agreed. *Previously circulated. The Minutes will need to be signed at a later date.*
- 6. Matters Arising** – information updates only.
Insurance Cover - The insurance cover was renewed from June 1st with Came & Co at a premium of £349.22 – an increase of £11.51 on last year.
- 7. Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages**
The work has not yet been undertaken on the sewage treatment plant at Ash Tree Cottages and the coronavirus lockdown may have had an impact on this. Our District Councillor has been in contact with Hastoes who have informed him that their solicitor is dealing with the paperwork that will allow

them to begin work. S & D Services have been instructed to ensure the tank is emptied regularly, and Justin Witcombe informs me that this was done recently for the first time since the lockdown - resulting in a very bad smell.

8. Planning Applications:

Resubmission of Planning Application No: 2020/0260/FUL

Change of use of land and construction of tennis court with associated fencing and landscaping

Rockwells House, Batcombe – Full Application

The original application was withdrawn before it could be considered at the March meeting because of concerns raised over its siting by the owners of neighbouring properties. The tennis court has been moved 10.5m to the east which means that part of the court will be within the curtilage of Rockwells House with the remainder in the field to the south-west of the house. The tennis court will measure 35m by 17.5m surrounded by 2.75m high netting with a hedge and trees planted outside of this. The planning statement is attached and plans can be viewed on the District Council's planning website <https://publicaccess.mendip.gov.uk/online-applications/> Due to the coronavirus restrictions there will not be an opportunity to view paper plans prior to the meeting.

Planning Application No: 2020/1188/VRC

Application to vary condition 2 (drawings) on previously approved 2018/0992/FUL

Lower Eastcombe Farm, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe – Full Application

The application is to vary the drawings for the planning permission granted for the “Proposed conversion and change of use of redundant barn, into a gym, games room and home office, ancillary to dwelling and the erection of a detached garage and greenhouse/potting shed. (amended scheme)”. The amendments are described as follows: “To the lower barn, in order to increase the robustness of the tanking to the rear wall and to create further floor space below the rear patio, we seek to extend out by approximately 2.0m from the rear wall. These proposed changes are all below ground level and will not have a visual effect externally. The proposed windows to the east elevation have also been enlarged and the design of the existing windows & doors to this elevation have been modified.” The plans can be viewed on the District Council's planning website (just enter the application number into the search engine) at <https://publicaccess.mendip.gov.uk/online-applications/>

Planning Application No: 2020/1189/FUL

Proposed tennis court, swimming pool, greenhouse and associated groundworks in position of approved potting shed (application 2018/0992/FUL – not yet implemented)

Lower Eastcombe Farm, Eastcombe Lane, Batcombe – Full Application

The proposed tennis court will be sited to the east of the farmhouse and upper barn using cut and fill to place it on the hillside there. The greenhouse will shield the tennis court from the south and a native hedge will shield it from the footpath through the property. The swimming pool will sit between the greenhouse and the lower barn. The planning statement is attached and plans can be viewed on the District Council's planning website <https://publicaccess.mendip.gov.uk/online-applications/>

Planning Application Updates.

Listed Building Consent has been given for the alterations to the wall between Cherry Tree Cottage and Boords Farm required to undertake the rear extension to Cherry Tree Cottage.

9. Playground.

Maintenance Report: *The molecatcher caught three moles in the Playing Field and there is currently no evidence of active moles, although the dry weather has meant their empty holes have appeared. The Playing Field has been closed throughout the lockdown with no weekly safety inspections are taking place. The Government have permitted the use of outdoor play equipment from July 4th and so it has been agreed to re-open the Playing Field from that date with appropriate warning signs in place regarding the need for social distancing, cleaning and hygiene. Grass cutting*

has been taking place while the Playing Field is closed and Justin Witcombe has treated the picnic bench with wood preserver.

The annual safety inspection by RoSPA took place in June. The report can be downloaded at <http://playbase.rosaplaysafety.co.uk/Inspections/index.php?ID=2783A0E9-A1D5-FC42-8E7B-577570881096> All items were as usual rated low or medium risk, with the exception of the zip wire. This was rated high risk because of rot in the wooden supports and has been immobilised by removing the seat.

New Play Equipment: *The total raised for the new play equipment was £10,632 at the end of our financial year (March 31st). Since then we have just received a few pounds from the Mendip Lottery.*

There are two remaining closing dates for a grant application to Viridor Credits this year – July 31st and October 31st. These are followed by meetings to decide on the grants they will give which are on September 24th and January 7th 2021 respectively. We need to decide whether to get an application in for July 31st or wait until October, which means we won't have a decision until January. The issue with aiming for July 31st is that Viridor recommend getting your application in well before the closing date – because if there are any issues with the application and it is not complete by the closing date it will not be carried forward to the next closing date.

For the grant application we need three comparable quotes. Following a meeting of the working party and a delay caused by the coronavirus restrictions we asked Redlynch Leisure, Sutcliffe Play and Wicksteed to provide revised quotes which have been distributed to Councillors and the working party. Most items on the quotes are similar and we do not need to consider them in detail at this stage. The item that does need discussion is the multi-play equipment. We have asked both Redlynch Leisure and Sutcliffe Play to quote for two different pieces of equipment and so we will need to decide which one from each company we include in the grant application. We have only asked for one option from Wicksteed.

Details of each piece of multi-play equipment can be seen by following the links below:

<https://www.redlynchleisure.co.uk/product/play-centre-m/>

<https://www.redlynchleisure.co.uk/product/iridium/>

<https://www.sutcliffeplay.co.uk/equipment/puzzle-slide/>

<https://www.sutcliffeplay.co.uk/equipment/scramble-and-slide/>

<https://wicksteed.co.uk/products/multiplay/planet-jungle-modular-play-system/mamba/>

Plans and illustrations from the equipment suppliers have been placed on the Parish Council website, but the quotes are confidential. It should be noted that we are not making a final decision at this stage, although the Viridor grant will be based on the lowest quote. However, we do not have to go with that quote if we are willing to fund the difference. I understand that we have some flexibility with changing the design of items after getting the grant, provided we spend all the money on the project within the time given.

10. Broadband Update

A company called Voneus are offering fast wireless broadband in Batcombe and have advertised this in the parish magazine. Janet Jones to update on progress.

11. Allotments

All allotment rents have been paid and the rent for the field paid to the owner. Advice from the National Allotment Society is that allotment holders can continue to work their allotments during the lockdown provided they maintain social distancing and don't share tools. The current lease on the field comes to an end next April so the Parish Council needs to agree to ask the owners for a new lease.

12. Footpaths and Highways

Patching followed by resurfacing has taken place on Saite Lane, Portway Hill, Holly Hill, Crows Hill, Copplesbury Lane and the road towards Bruton – but only as far as the bottom of Snakelake.

Concerns have been raised about visibility as a result of the verges not being cut – especially at the bottom of Vinings Hill – and about blocked gullies leading to flooding off the road. Both issues have been reported to Somerset Highways who responded to say that the verges in our area should be cut in the next two weeks and that Batcombe is due to have its gullies cleared this year, although this has been delayed by the coronavirus.

We have had complaints from one of the landowners of cyclists using the footpath from Spargrove to Mill Farm along the river and some of them becoming abusive when asked not to do so. The County Council Rights of Way Department offered to small no cycling signs at either end of the footpath and at the end of Bailey's Lane.

The same landowner has also reported children swimming in the river along the footpath and asks if the Parish Council would put up warning signs about the dangers of doing this.

13. Website Accessibility Check

A report on the Website Accessibility Check will be distributed when complete – there are a couple of checks still to do. This is the basic website accessibility check allowed when a detailed check would be a disproportionate burden. So far the Parish Council website meets the required accessibility standards except in the following areas: subheadings on the website are not styled as headings; images do not have alternative text; and headings in the pdfs on the website are not styled as such. The first two are relatively simply to correct, but the third will take time given the number of pdf documents on the website. Fortunately, we only have to amend those published after September 2018. We need to publish an Accessibility Statement on the website by September 23rd this year and to have a plan in place to correct the issues revealed in the Accessibility Check.

14. Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2020

Verification of the bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31st March can be left to the internal auditor as it is impractical for a Councillor to do this while we are not meeting.

A copy of the Financial Statements is attached. 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. The allotments rent was £220 more than budgeted because all ten allotments are now rented and the five allotments that were vacant at the end of last year were subsequently rented for part of a year at £20 each. The £8,405 raised for the new play equipment during the year had not been included in the budget. As a result, receipts were £8,620 more than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting and trimming was one cut more than budgeted. The cost of the electricity and water supplies were as budgeted. Maintenance was £565 less than budgeted as no play bark was required and no repairs were needed. It consisted of £110 for hedgecutting and £75 for cutting back the willow. No money was spent on the play equipment apart from £21 in fundraising expenses – this was the TEN for bonfire party. Overall Playing Field payments were £5,032 less than budgeted, largely a result of the money budgeted for new play equipment not being being spent by the end of the year.

The Clerk's salary and expenses were largely as budgeted, but the Clerk's membership of the SLCC increased by £20 as his salary was over £4,000. Training and Publications consisted of £75 in Councillor training and £86.40 for a new Minute binder. No audit fees were charged following the end of external auditing. The insurance premium increased largely as the result of a fee charge by the insurance broker. Election costs were £1,100 less than budgeted as there was no contested election. Photocopying was more than budgeted as this was eighteen months' copying. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted. Overall administration costs were £943 less than budgeted largely because there was no contest election.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted, except that the Community Council for Somerset no longer asked for a subscription. The expenditure on the allotments was £200 for the lease of the field, £70 spent on hedge cutting and £72 on sheeting for the vacant allotments at the start of the year. As a result of the above, total payments were £5,972 less than budgeted, although £4,572 was money not yet spent on the new equipment.

Details of the earmarked monies for the allotments and the play equipment are also attached. At the end of the year there was £1,016 of allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. At the end of the year there was also £10,632 raised for the new play equipment.

The net result of the variations against the budget given above is a surplus of £10,394 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £4,202. This was largely a result of the £8,405 raised for new play equipment and the fact that no money was spent on play equipment during the year. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £21,532 in its funds, £16,790 more than anticipated in the budget. In addition to the surplus on 2019/20 the position at the start of the year was £2,195 better than anticipated when the budget had been set. Of these funds at the end of the year, £1,016 is set aside for the allotments, £10,632 for new play equipment and £77 for notice boards. This means that the Parish Council has funds totalling £9,807 that are not earmarked for specific items, (although it is envisaged that the £4,000 that had been intended for play equipment repairs would go towards the cost of the new play equipment). This is 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 £3,320 and £6,640.

15. 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 at Council meetings 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 was 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 will be distributed later – an uncompleted copy listing the internal control objectives can be found on page 4 of the attached Annual Return. All the internal control objectives were achieved, with the exception of petty cash payments which was “not covered” because the Council does not make any petty cash payments. Our internal auditor has noted that the Financial Statement does not make it clear that £10,632 of the £21,532 held by the Parish Council at the end of the year were restricted for the new play equipment - this is the reason for the attached accounts for the play equipment and allotments. He also advised the keeping of a separate income register for the allotments and the play equipment donations.

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 the external auditor a certificate of exemption (copy enclosed) signed by the Chairman and Clerk and publish the Annual Return on their website by September 1st. Assuming we obtain the grant for the play equipment we will have to send the Annual Return to the external auditor next year and this will cost around £200.

16. Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is the Annual Governance Statement (page 5 of the attached 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.

Note: Statement 4 - The Parish Council's accounts have to be available for public inspection for 30 working days that begin on or before September 1st.

17. Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2019/20

Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is the Statement of Accounts (page 6 of the attached 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, 6 and 9 between the figures for last year and those for the previous year. In box 3 this is due to the money raised for the new play equipment being £8,405 in 2019/20 compared to £1,676 in 2018/19. In box 6 this is due to cost of the grass cutting being £1,280 in 2019/20 compared to £980 in 2018/19. In box 9 this is due to the removal of the multi-play equipment (purchase value £9,450) from the Schedule of Assets when it was removed from the Playing Field.

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 September 1st, along with a bank reconciliation and details of all items of expenditure over £100 and any land assets.

18. Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2021

Attached 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. This year's precept of £9,950 has been received. The VAT repayment was slightly more than budgeted at £86.16 for the year up to March 2020 and has been received. If all the allotments remain occupied the rent will be £350 – less than last year when two payments were received for some of the allotments which had been vacant at the start of the year. There will be a small income during the year for the play equipment from the Mendip Lottery. Interest will be minimal.

With regard to payments, the projection for £14,000 for the new play equipment is a rough estimate – we have £10,632 raised for the equipment plus £4,000 of the Council's own money put aside. This doesn't include any grants that may be received. Maintenance is likely to be lower than usual this year if new equipment is being installed. The Clerk's salary is an estimate as no recommendation for the salary has yet been made. Other administration expenses are likely to be as budgeted. For grants see the item below. The budget included £200 for road salt but the County Council provided this last winter without charge.

If the play equipment money is spent we will have a deficit of £11,880 on the year. This gives funds of £9,653 at the end of the year of which £996 will be earmarked for the allotments and £77 for notice boards.

Financial Impact of Covid-19 – *We are fortunate in having done the fundraising for the play equipment last year and having already received our precept for this year our income will not be effected by the coronavirus restrictions. We are also unlikely to have any significant additional expenditure arising from Covid-19. We also have healthy reserves, which will allow the Council to consider the financial impact on residents when setting the precept for next year.*

19. 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 £200 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard and £200 for smaller grants to charities. For several years the Council has given 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.

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.

20. Authorisation of Payments

- £1,021.02 The Clerk – Salary for 1st Quarter. *See attached paper.*
- £112.66 The Clerk – Expenses for 1st Quarter. *See attached paper.*
- £112.89 Somerset Association of Local Councils – Affiliation fee.
- £90.60 Playsafety Ltd – Annual safety inspection of the Playing Field.
- £320.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in May & June.

Plus any grants approved under item 16. The following payments have been made since the lockdown began and need to be authorised retrospectively:

- £1,021.02 The Clerk – Salary for 4th Quarter.
- £97.79 The Clerk – Expenses for 4th Quarter.
- £75.00 E Clarke – 3 moles caught in the Playing Field.
- £349.22 Came & Company – Insurance Premium.
- £220.00 T & E A Hollis – Rent for Allotments Field.
- £320.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in March & April.

21. Other Business – matters of information only. *The Clerk’s annual appraisal has been postponed for the time being. The Clerk worked no additional hours during 2019/20. Recommendations for the 2020/21 salary rates for the Clerk are unlikely to be made before August.*

22. Dates of Future Meetings

It remains to be seen when the Parish Council will be able to meet in person again. The following dates have been provisionally booked with the Village Hall Trust from September. These are as usual the first Wednesday of the month apart from January. These dates need to be approved by the Parish Council:

<i>2nd September</i>	<i>7th October</i>	<i>4th November</i>	<i>2nd December</i>	<i>13th January</i>
<i>3rd February</i>	<i>3rd March</i>	<i>7th April</i>	<i>5th May</i>	

Wednesday April 7th would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The Council normally meets at 8.00pm in the summer and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year. When meetings do start again they may have to be held in the Jubilee Hall to ensure adequate social distancing.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

1st July 2020