

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held remotely via Zoom at 7.30pm on Wednesday 7th October 2020

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

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 2nd September 2020 to be agreed. *Attached/enclosed. The Minutes will need to be signed later.*

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Future Meetings – In light of the resurgence of the coronavirus and the increased restrictions imposed by the Government, it was decided to follow the recommendations from the National Association of Local Councils and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to meet remotely for the time being.

Bartletts Quarry – The Chairman has offered to attend the next meeting of the Torr/Colemans Liaison Group on behalf of the Parish Council. The meeting will be held on Wednesday 21st October via Google Meet.

6. District and County Councillors' Reports

An opportunity for the District and County Councillors to report to the meeting, either via Zoom or in writing. Our District Councillor would be interested to hear the Parish Council's views on the proposed Greencore Development in Evercreech – 129 houses on the site of the old factory in the centre of Evercreech. Leaflet attached.

7. Sewage Treatment Plant at Ash Tree Cottages

An opportunity for an update on progress on the work to replace the sewage treatment plant at Ash Tree Cottages. The District Councillor reports no progress over the last two months, although the waste removal contractor may have been replaced.

8. Allotments

The allotment rents will be due on November 1st and allotment holders will be sent a reminder shortly with a note to keep their allotment fences tidy. The hedge and overgrown areas in the allotment field will be cut back and tidied up but have not been done yet. Hopefully, the owners of the allotment field will then agree to a new lease. There may be a couple of vacant allotments – but we have people waiting if this is the case.

9. Footpaths and Highways

Another HGV got stuck on the junction at the top of Holly Hill. The driver claimed not to have seen the No HGV signs at the Hedgestocks crossroads and the owner of the cottage on Holly Hill has suggested that larger signs are needed.

The hedges on Mill Lane have been cut back by the owners of the fields on either side and Justin Witcombe suggests that the Parish Council thanks them for having this done. Justin also trimmed the verges down the lane with the help of Tom Price and suggests that the Parish Council sends Tom a letter of thanks.

Complaints have been received about overhanging hedges on Westcombe Hill which are making it difficult for agricultural vehicles to pass. Several branches have been broken off by passing vehicles. The Chairman has been in contact with Somerset Highways and has permission to reproduce their overhanging vegetation diagram in the parish magazine.

A complaint has also been received about dog walkers not keeping their dogs under control when using public footpaths near people's homes.

10. Playground.

Maintenance Report: *The moles are back – with some fresh molehills in the middle of the football pitch. No other issues that I am aware of.*

New Play Equipment: *A donation of £100 for the play equipment has been received from someone grateful for the work done removing the Himalayan Balsam.*

Viridor Credits made a pre-assessment visit in early September. The officer from Viridor Credits was positive about our application – the need for more equipment, the support from the community and the intention to provide for a wide range of children and young people including the disabled. However he also noted that Viridor Credits had much less money to distribute than in the past as less waste was going to landfill. Viridor Credits have decided to consider applications for large grants (which includes ours) separately from the main grants and so a decision on our application will not be made until October 29th. This means we will probably not hear the result until after our November meeting.

11. Planning Applications:

None at present.

Planning Application Updates.

The application for the construction of a tennis court with associated fencing and landscaping at Rockwells House has been withdrawn. The application for the erection of a two-storey and a one-storey extension at 2 Wickham Cottages has been approved and Listed Building Consent has been granted. The District Council had no objection to the felling of three Beech trees at 6 Kale Street; the Oak tree at Batcombe Village Hall; or the three Ash trees at Shortwood Farmhouse.

We were made aware of an application for the Conversion of Buildings and New Workshop and Offices at Alham Farm by the planning agent. As Alham Farm is in Evercreech parish, we were not consulted by the District Council on this application and the consultation period has ended. Evercreech Parish Council recommended approval of the application.

12. Website Accessibility Check

The basic Website Accessibility Check has been completed and an Accessibility Statement has been published on the website by the September 23rd deadline. The Accessibility Statement includes a timetable for correcting the issues revealed in the Accessibility Check. Some of these (such as ensuring that all images on the website have alternative text) should be straightforward. Others (such as ensuring all pdfs published since September 2018 have properly styled headings) will be more time consuming. The Accessibility Statement and a copy of the Accessibility Check can be found on the Parish Council website at <http://www.batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk/website-accessibility-statement/>

13. Clerk's Salary

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services has reached agreement on new pay scales for 2020/21. The National Association of Local Councils and the Association of Local Council Clerks jointly recommend these salary scales for all Clerks with the standard contract of employment. Under the new pay scales, the Clerk's salary will increase from £11.22 an hour to £11.53 to be backdated to April 1st 2020. (The Clerk is paid quarterly in arrears.) This is a 2.76% increase. The Parish Council should formally agree the increase in the Clerk's salary, which is in line with the Clerk's Contract of Employment.

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

We would normally ask a Councillor to check the quarterly bank reconciliation at a meeting. This was deferred from the last meeting as I did not have time to prepare the reconciliation and it isn't practical at a remote meeting. I therefore suggest a Councillor volunteers to do this before the next meeting – when the next quarter's bank reconciliation has been prepared.

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 shows the receipts and payments to 4th September this year and the fourth column is an updated projection for this year.

Receipt of this year's precept and VAT repayment have been noted previously. Allotments rent will be £350 if all the allotments remain occupied. £39.50 has been received from the Mendip Lottery for the play equipment and a donation of £100 was received in September. 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 recommended increase in the Clerk's salary means this will be slightly higher than budgeted. Other administration expenses are likely to be as budgeted. Grants were as budgeted. 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 £12,000 on the year. This gives funds of £9,470 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 affected 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.*

15. Authorisation of Payments

£????.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in September (invoice not yet received).
£1,077.44 The Clerk – Salary for 2nd Quarter. *See enclosed sheet.*
£123.83 The Clerk – Expenses for 2nd Quarter. *See enclosed sheet.*

16. Other Business – matters of information only.

Unitary Council – you will be aware that the County Council have proposed creating a single unitary council for Somerset. Details of their proposal can be found at: <https://onesomerset.org.uk/>

The District Councils have produced a counter proposal based on two unitary councils for Somerset – East and West. Details of their proposal can be found at: <https://www.strongersomerset.co.uk/>

Recycle More – the Recycle More service will be launched in Mendip at the end of October. The service uses a new recycling container – a bright blue bag and each Parish Council is being offered the opportunity to collect one of these bags before the service begins.

Planning System Review – The Government are proposing major changes to the planning system and there are currently two consultations taking place. A briefing paper from Mendip District Council is attached. Planning for the Future is a white paper that will require a new Planning Act and the consultation period lasts until October 29th. The main proposal is the replacement of the current individual planning system with three predetermined zones (growth, renewal and protection) with a presumption in favour of development in the first two zones. The second consultation ends on October 1st is about short term measures to be introduced by December including the widening Permission in Principle and the relaxation of affordable housing requirements.

Remembrance Sunday – Avon & Somerset police have issued advice on Remembrance Sunday noting the responsibilities of the event organisers in the current situation. Traditionally Remembrance Sunday has been a collaborative event involving the Royal British Legion, the Church and the local council. Apparently the Royal British Legion have told Avon & Somerset police that the local Council should be considered the event organiser as it is a civic event. While this may be appropriate in a town situation, we need to be careful that we are not considered the event organiser for Remembrance Sunday with the responsibility to ensure compliance with the coronavirus regulations.

17. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 4th November 2020 at 7.30pm via Zoom.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

30th September 2020