

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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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 4th November 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 Meetings held on Wednesday 7th and Thursday 22nd October 2020 to be agreed. *Attached. The Minutes will need to be signed later.*

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Bartletts Quarry – The Chairman to report back on the meeting of the Torr/Colemans Liaison Group held on Wednesday 21st October via Google Meet. The Chairman has e-mailed the County Council regarding the impact on private water supplies in the parish.

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.

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 Chairman has sent the letter to the Chief Executive of Hastoos, suggested at the October meeting, and has received a response from Stuart Damon, the surveyor dealing with the issue. The letter states that "the adjoining landowner has requested a new easement be put in place, which might I add is completely within his rights. At this stage I am unable to comment on specific details regarding the negotiations currently still ongoing between Hastoe's solicitors and [the landowner]. I can inform you that Hastoe and our solicitors are working tirelessly to get this matter resolved."

8. Tackling Loneliness Digitally

The local branch of the Royal British Legion have been contacted by the Red Cross to inform them of their Tackling Loneliness Digitally programme www.redcross.org.uk/loneliness-resources which provides online resources for those who may be feeling lonely and their Digital Loneliness Classroom which offers participants the chance to learn skills to help those who may be experiencing loneliness. The local RBL has asked if the Parish Council sees a role for itself in joining with the RBL in helping to identify a response to the offer of Red Cross help.

9. Footpaths and Highways

Details of Somerset Highways' pre-salting network for this winter have been published and as in previous years the A359 (Bruton-Frome) and the B3081 (Bruton-Evercreech) roads will be gritted but not the road through Batcombe. The Chairman's article and diagram about overhanging hedges has been published in the parish magazine. The Chairman has received a response from Somerset Highways regarding the No HGV signs.

10. Playground.

Maintenance Report: The electricity cabinet has been broken open and both locks on the cabinet are now broken. We need to find a way of securing the cabinet or replacing it with a stronger one.

New Play Equipment: Viridor Credits will be making a decision on our grant application on October 29th and we should know the result in early November, but possibly not until after this meeting. We should agree a date for a meeting of the Working Party to consider the next steps, which will hopefully be a recommendation accepting one of the quotes. A decision could then be made at our December meeting.

11. Planning Applications:

Planning Application No: 2020/1994/HSE

Extension to existing residential dwelling.

Donegal Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe – Householder Application.

Planning Application No: 2020/1995/LBC

Extension to existing residential dwelling.

Donegal Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe – Listed Building Consent.

It is a resubmission of the previous applications for the extension to Donegal Cottage in order to extend the works commencement period as work has been delayed due to the pandemic. The application can be viewed on the District Council's planning website <https://publicaccess.mendip.gov.uk/online-applications/> Just enter the reference number into the search engine. Due to the coronavirus restrictions there will not be an opportunity to view a paper application prior to the meeting.

Planning Application Updates.

None.

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

We would normally ask a Councillor to check the quarterly bank reconciliation for the second quarter at this meeting. However, this isn't practical at a remote meeting and I therefore suggest a Councillor volunteers to do this before the next meeting when it can be reported. Janet Jones has now checked the bank reconciliation for the first quarter and can confirm this to the Council.

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 7th October this year and the fourth column is an updated projection for this year.

There is very little change from the update provided at last month's meeting – see the Minutes of last month's meeting for details.

As with last month's projection I have assumed that all the money raised for play equipment will be spent this year, i.e. before 31st March 2021. This may not be the case, but the advantage of this assumption is that it removes the play equipment money from the projected funds at the end of the year.

13. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2022

Enclosed is a budget for the year ending 31st March 2022. These accounts have two columns allowing the budget for 2021/22 to be compared to the projected figures for this year. Also enclosed is a forecast for the years 2021-2024. The next Parish Council election will take place in 2023/2024 and so we need to budget to have sufficient reserves to pay for a contested election at that time as well as any other contingencies such as a by-election. The last contested election was thirteen years ago so we it is difficult to estimate the cost but it is likely to be well over £1,000 and a by-election would potentially be double this as the costs would not be shared with a District Council election.

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.

Looking at the budget for 2021/22 the VAT refund will be around £80 as no major works have been undertaken this year. (If the play equipment is purchased this year there would be a very large VAT refund but that would be part of the funding for the play equipment.) The allotment rent will be £350 if all the allotments are rented out.

The cost of the grass cutting is likely to be similar that projected for this year depending on the number of cuts required and any increase in the price per cut. I've set the figure for equipment maintenance at £250 as we no longer have to purchase play bark. The budget doesn't include money or grants raised for the play equipment. If these have not been spent in the previous year, they will be spent on the play equipment and so don't affect the precept unless we decide to make a larger contribution than the £4,000 already put aside.

I've budgeted for a 2% increase in the Clerk's salary. Other expenditure on administration is likely to be similar that projected for this year. The budget is an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants.

The budget has been prepared on the assumption that the play equipment will have been purchased this year. On this basis the budget predicts a surplus of £1,940 if the precept is unchanged at £9,950. This would leave £11,485 in our funds at the end of 2021/22. Given that around £1,000 of this will be earmarked for the allotments, this leaves us with reserves that are above the higher limit suggested by SALC (that a parish council's reserves should be between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of its precept) and should be more than sufficient to cover the cost of a by-election.

It also allows some flexibility to spend more of the Parish Council's own money on the Playing Field if required. We may also face a cash flow problem with the purchase of the new play equipment in that we cannot claim back the VAT until we have purchased the play equipment and the VAT will be an amount close to the level of our reserves.

Looking at the forecast for the years 2020-2024 I have allowed £500 year for unexpected/additional expenditure in 2022/23 and 2023/24. With no increases in the precept in these years, we would still have surpluses sufficient to build up reserves for the next election year.

A decision on the level of the precept does not have to be made at this meeting - and can be deferred until the December or January meetings. We should wait until we hear the result of our grant application and Councillors may wish to wait until the tax base for 2021/22 has been determined in January so that we will know the impact any increase will have on Council Tax.

14. Authorisation of Payments

£????.00 Dominic Conway – Grass cutting in October (*invoice not yet received*).

£78.00 The Parish News – Photocopying for past year.

15. Other Business – matters of information only.

The Frome Rural Beat has a new Beat Manager in PC Toni Lines. She came out to Batcombe to introduce herself to me and was keen for us to pass on any issues in the parish to her. She can be contacted by the 101 telephone number.

16. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 2nd December 2020 at 7.30pm via Zoom.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

28th October 2020