

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 November 2021 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall, Batcombe

*Please note that the Jubilee Hall may be well ventilated and seating will be well spaced.
The wearing of face masks is optional but recommended.*

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 6th October 2021 to be agreed and signed. *Enclosed/attached.*

5. Matters Arising – information updates only. *Nothing that does not appear on the Agenda below.*

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. Discussion of the decision on the Carrot Hill planning application may be had here or under planning.

7. Electoral Arrangements for the new Unitary Council

The last meeting directed that this should be an Agenda item for this meeting. There is no information available yet on the Government's decision on the electoral arrangements for the new unitary authority in Somerset.

8. Allotments

The allotments rent for the coming year was due on November 1st and allotment holders have been reminded. There will probably be two vacant allotments and the start of the year and these have been advertised in the parish magazine. Allotment holders are responsible for the upkeep of the communal areas – but the grass was being cut regularly by Dominic Conway. If the allotment holders are not

able to do this, we may need to pay for it to be cut and possibly raise the allotment rent to cover the cost. The allotment lease has not yet been signed by the field owners. The Parish Council should authorise the cutting of the allotments field hedge.

9. Footpaths and Highways

The recent heavy rain caused a landslip on Hincombe Hill and there is now a steep drop directly from the roadside into the river. Somerset Highways have been informed and have placed bollards on the road edge.

Thanks to Mary Comley for reporting the issue with the “water feature” on Kale Street to Somerset Highways. Charlie Higgins from Somerset Highways has responded to state that a filter drain has been ordered and will be installed.

An issue with the drains at the bottom of Cockpit Lane has been reported – apparently after any heavy rain debris washed down the lane blocks the drains. This has been reported to Somerset Highways who will be inspecting the drains.

The Mendip Byways and Bridleways Association (MBBA) have reported an issue with Fry’s Lane behind Longleat Cottage. The surface of the lane was disturbed when the owners of Longleat Cottage erected a wall and has not been restored. It is now very muddy and a hazard for horseriders using the lane. The MBBA have asked if the Parish Council can assist in getting this work done, which the owners have agreed to do but have not yet done it.

10. Playground – Maintenance Report

The molecatcher laid ten traps in the Playing Field and caught two small moles. She notes that because of the existing runs under the Playing Field other moles are likely to move in as some point in the future. The molecatcher charges £35 to set up and £15 per mole caught.

The quote for the tree work on the trees overhanging the cricket net and the tree in the corner of the Playing Field has increased to £255 + VAT plus an additional £25 for applying for the planning permission as the trees are in the Conservation Area. The original estimate was £225 + VAT.

I hope to have an update on electricity supply contract in time for the meeting.

11. Planning Applications:

None.

Planning Application Updates.

Discussion of the planning application for Carrot Hill Farmhouse if not had under the County and District Councillors’ Reports.

Listed Building Consent has been granted for the internal and external alterations at South View, Kale Street.

12. Bank Reconciliation and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2022

Financial Regulations require that each quarter a bank reconciliation is produced by the Clerk, checked by a member of the Council, and reported to the Council as soon as possible after the end of the quarter.

Financial Regulations also require an update on the budget each quarter. The enclosed/attached sheet with four columns of figures shows the accounts for last year, the budget for this year, receipts and payments to 6th October this year and a projection for this year based on expenditure to date.

Receipts are projected to be approximately £12,500 more than the budgeted figure because of the VAT claimed on the new play equipment which was not included in the budget.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure is roughly £16,000 more than budgeted, due to the money spent on the new play equipment and the cost of the new gate that was not included in the budget. This was mainly the VAT that have been reclaimed. Grass cutting is likely to be less than

budgeted (depending on the number of cuts required later in the year) because of the free cut provided. Maintenance consists of £110 for the hedge trimming and £15 for wood preservative. Overall maintenance is likely to be £225 more than budgeted as it will include the tree works in the Playing Field.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration is likely to be £130 more than the budgeted figure. While the Clerk's expenses and photocopying costs are likely to be less than budgeted, the cost of the Zoom subscription was not budgeted and the insurance premium was larger than budgeted because of the new play equipment being insured. The Clerk's salary increase from April 2021 has not yet been agreed. This is because it is linked to the salaries for Local Government employees – the employers have offered a 1.75% increase but this has been rejected by the unions.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants and Other Items are likely to be as budgeted.

Overall, there is a projected deficit of £2,650 compared to a budgeted surplus of £1,915. This mainly due to the net expenditure on the play equipment after the VAT is reclaimed and the cost of the new gate. However, the projected funds at the end of the year are £16,000 – around £4,500 better than expected when the budget was made. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure will be earmarked for the allotments

13. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2023

Enclosed is a budget for the year ending 31st March 2023. These accounts have two columns allowing the budget for 2022/23 to be compared to the projected figures for this year. Also enclosed is a forecast for the years 2021-2025. I am assuming that the next Parish Council election will be brought forward to 2022 although this has not yet been confirmed. The last contested election was fourteen years ago so it is difficult to estimate the cost but it is likely to be well over £1,000 and we also need to maintain sufficient reserves to fund a by-election would potentially be double this as the costs would not be shared with a Unitary 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 2022/23 the VAT refund should return to its usual figure of £100. The allotment rent will be £350 if all the allotments are rented out.

The cost of the grass cutting is likely to be higher than 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 but there should be any major expenditure as the play equipment is relatively new. I've budgeted £950 for the cricket net refurbishment which is the quote that Ian obtained.

I've budgeted for a 1.75% increase in the Clerk's salary. Other expenditure on administration is likely to be similar that projected for this year, except that there will be no Zoom subscription. The exception being the cost of the election which depends on whether the election is contested or not. If it is uncontested the cost will be a few hundred pounds. If it is contested, it is likely to be well over £1,000. The budget is an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants.

The budget shows a deficit of £700 if the precept is unchanged at £9,925. This would leave £15,300 in our funds at the end of 2022/23 of which around £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments. If the election is uncontested we would have a significant surplus. Our reserves are now higher than recommended but, given the uncertainties of the election next year, this is probably not a bad thing and the Council can reassess its finances next year.

Looking at the forecast for the years 2021-2025 I have allowed £500 year for unexpected/additional expenditure in 2023/24 and 2024/25. With an unchanged precept this provides a surplus of £1,000 a year and increasing reserves which the Council would need to justify.

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 have confirmation of the VAT repayment before agreeing the budget and Councillors may wish to wait until the tax base for 2022/23 has been determined in January so that we will know the impact of the precept on Council Tax.

14. Authorisation of Payments

£160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in Playing Field in October.

£65.00 Mole Catcher – two moles caught in Playing Field.

15. Other Business – matters of information only.

Come and Meet Batcombe – The Village Hall Trust would like the Parish Council to man a table at this function in the Jubilee Hall to inform people about what goes on in Batcombe. The event will take place between 12 noon and 2.00pm on Sunday November 21st.

Christmas Tree Festival – The Parochial Church Council would like the Parish Council to decorate a Christmas Tree for display in the Church or churchyard from Monday 13th December to Wednesday 29th December. The tree will need to be decorated on Saturday December 11th. The PCC will provide the tree which will be either 3ft or 5ft tall. If we wish to participate we need to let Sheena Pool know by November 8th and nominate a tree decorator.

Review of Financial Regulations – The Parish Council’s Financial Regulations were due to be reviewed at our last meeting. NALC have now produced new model financial regulations following the repeal of Section 150(5) of the Local Government Act 1972. I recommend that the Parish Council adopt new financial regulations based on these model regulations at its next meeting.

16. Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 1st December 2021 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

27th October 2021