

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 7th September 2022 at 8.00pm 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

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 Wednesdays 6th July and 3rd August 2022 to be agreed and signed. *Enclosed/attached.*

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Allotments – the allotment that was not being worked has now been rented to a new allotment holder at a reduced price for the remainder of the year. There are a pair of allotment holders working two allotments but have only paid for one of them. And an allotment holder has given up their allotment leaving one allotment that is currently vacant.

Annual Grants – acknowledgement and thanks for the grants have been received from Mendip Citizens Advice, Mendip Community Transport and the Village Hall Trust.

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. A County Council report from Claire Sully is attached.

7. Local Community Networks (LCNs)

Jayne Cox to report on the meeting of the Mendip Rural Parishes Liaison Group on August 11th. The Liaison Group have asked us to complete the attached survey about matters that concern our parish and their priority. The Group will be meeting again on September 8th to consider a map of the proposed LCNs in Somerset, assuming the map has been published by then. I am receiving updates on the LCN pilots in Frome and in East Somerset and from the County Council's Town and Parish Council Working Group. The latter has expressed concerns that there is currently a lack of details about LCNs and how they will be geographically based.

8. Footpaths and Highways

Mendip Area Highways have asked if we can check the contents of the roadside salt bins in our parish and let them have our requirements for salt bin refilling by the end of September. They would like the location of the bin, its reference number (if known) and the level of salt (e.g. ¼ full). Nothing else to report at present.

Fingerposts – I have been in contact with the County Council regarding restoration work on fingerposts. Volunteers are limited to preparation and painting works on fingerposts while any more specialised restoration will need to be undertaken by qualified contractors. Volunteers need to attend a training course provided (and paid for) by the County Council before they can work on the fingerposts. Work undertaken by contractors will need to be managed and paid for by the Parish Council. Unfortunately, the County Council don't know when they will be running another course but will be happy to put us on a waiting list. We need two or three volunteers to take the course as all work on fingerposts needs to be undertaken by pairs of volunteers as a minimum. More information can be found at: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/waste-planning-and-land/somerset-fingerpost-restoration-project/>

9. Playground – Maintenance Report:

Thanks to Ian Sage for replacing the damaged plaque acknowledging the contributors to the new play equipment. The replacement sign cost £35 from Mendip Signs. The inside of the Playing Field hedge needs cutting back. We normally ask Gary Butler to do this.

***Annual Safety Inspection** – The report of the RoSPA safety inspection has previously been distributed to Parish Councillors. As noted at the time, most items are of low/medium risk with the actual risk of items being the same or slightly higher than the innate risk for that type of item.*

The inspector noted rot in the gateposts and in one of the seats, wear in the chains of the toddler swing, protruding growth in the willow structure, a trip hazard in the cricket net and a finger entrapment hazard in the roof of the multiplay. None of these pose a significant risk.

The one item he has given a high risk rating is the cableway. However, he has given this a high risk rating not because he is aware of a defect but because he cannot be certain there isn't a defect without dismantling the cableway. He recommends a dismantling inspection every year to check the cable. The suppliers gave no indication that this was necessary when they installed the cableway and poses a problem as any dismantling inspection would need to be carried out by the installers as it is not a job to be carried out by volunteers without invalidating our insurance.

***Annual Fete** – Following concerns over whether the PCC's insurance would cover the Fete as the PCC were not in charge of the Fete, the Fete Committee obtained their own insurance. The cover for the Fete was limited to an attendance of 250, and there may have been more than attending the Fete. The Playing Field was inspected on the Tuesday after the Fete and was in a good condition with everything cleared away. The Playing Field grass shows signs of wear but should recover if we get some rain. There is some subsidence over one of the mole runs as a result of the dry soil and footfall in the Playing Field.*

10. Planning Applications:

None at present.

Planning Application Updates.

The applications for planning permission and Listed Building Consent for a bungalow at Highfields have been withdrawn. The application to vary the drawings for the staff accommodation at The Three Horseshoes has been approved. The application for a single storey extension at Giles Cottage has been approved. Planning permission and Listed Building Consent has been granted for the alterations to the annex at Kings Hayes.

An application for prior approval to convert an agricultural building on land opposite Higher Greenscombe to a dwelling house has been refused. We considered an application that was approved last year to add cladding and a concrete pad to this building.

The Conservation Officer has recommended refusal of the application for the erection of a dwelling of exceptional quality at Valley View farm because of the impact on St Mary's Church, the other listed buildings in Batcombe and the Conservation Area. The application is still awaiting a decision.

11. Effective Communication

At the July meeting it was agreed to follow up the discussion on effective communication at this meeting.

12. Review of the Parish Council's Complaints Procedure

A copy of the Council's Code of Practice for handling complaints is attached and can be downloaded from the Parish Council website on the Parish Council Documents page. This was adopted on 3rd September 2003, last amended on 6th July 2011, and is based on a model produced by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). This procedure is only for complaints about the actions of the Parish Council as a body. Complaints about the Clerk should be dealt with by the Staffing Committee in accordance with the Clerk's Contract of Employment; and complaints against individual Councillors for breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct should be made to the District Council's Monitoring Officer. We have only had one complaint since the Code of Practice was adopted. I am not aware of any need to amend the current Complaints Procedure.

13. Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update

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 31st August this year and a projection for this year based on expenditure to date.

Receipts are projected to be approximately £400 more than the budgeted figure because of the VAT to be reclaimed on the new gate, cricket net and benches in the Playing Field which was not included in the budget.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure is roughly £1,600 more than budgeted, due to the money spent on the new benches that was not included in the budget, higher than expected maintenance costs because of the tree works required, and higher than expected electricity costs.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration is likely to be £100 less than the budgeted figure. While the Clerk's salary is likely to increase (the employers have offered what is in effect an 8.5% increase in the Clerk's salary from April 2022 and the trade unions are considering this) and increase costs increased significantly, the cost of the Parish Council election was over £500 less than expected.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants and Other Items are likely to be as budgeted. Other expenses including those of the allotments are likely to be around £100 more than expected.

Overall, there is a projected deficit of almost £2,000 compared to a budgeted deficit of £730. As noted above this is due to the expenditure on the new benches, tree works in the Playing Field, higher than expected electricity costs and an expected increase in the Clerk's salary, balanced to an extent by the lower election costs. As a result, the projected funds at the end of the year are £14,350 – around £900 less than expected when the budget was made. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure will be earmarked for the allotments. With the cricket net and new benches, all the money raised for the Playing Field has now been spent, although there is still the £4,000 of the Parish Council's own money that was put aside for the Playing Field.

14. Authorisation of Payments

£160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field in August (2 cuts).

£35.00 Mendip Signs – Replacement sign for Playing Field.

£114.28 Somerset Association of Local Councils – Affiliation fee.

£65.00 Somerset Association of Local Councils – Training for Councillors (3 courses).

Note: this is a replacement cheque for the one signed in July as we have received a £10 discount on one of the courses.

15. Other Business – matters of information only. *External Audit – our external auditors have acknowledged receipt of our annual return but we have not yet received their report. Our external auditors are appointed by SAAA Ltd for a five year period and the next five year period runs from 2022/23 to 2027/28. We have the option of opting out of this central appointment process if we contact SAAA by the end of October, but we would then need to appoint our own external auditors by the end of November 2022. I strongly recommend not opting out.*

16. Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 5th October 2022 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

31st August 2022