

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 2nd November 2022 at 7.30pm 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 5th & 13th October 2022 to be agreed and signed. *Enclosed/attached.*

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Local Community Networks – A response to the LCN consultation has been made on behalf of the Parish Council and we await the result of the consultation to see how Local Community Networks will work in practice.

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.

7. Allotments

Allotment rents are due on November 1st and all allotment holders will have been sent a reminder before then. We will have two vacant allotments from November 1st. One of the allotment holders giving up their allotment has asked that if the allotment remains vacant, they might leave their sprout plants and collect the sprouts during the winter.

8. War Memorial Garden

We have received a quote of £5 a cut from Kevin Gale to cut the grass around the war memorial while he is cutting the Playing Field grass. Tom Price to report back on the progress of the working parties tidying up the war memorial garden ready for Remembrance Sunday.

Tom is proposing that the Parish Council agree a plan for maintenance of the garden moving forward. He feels that there are two options, either: i) trial a volunteer based approach, perhaps on a quarterly basis; or ii) pay a contractor to maintain the garden.

9. Footpaths and Highways

A volunteer has asked if they can help with the painting of the fingerposts and have been added to the list of those attending the County Council Fingerpost Training Course on Thursday November 10th at The Canalside in Bridgwater. As noted in the Minutes of the October 5th meeting three Councillors have volunteered to attend the course.

10. Playground – Maintenance Report: *Jayne Cox has obtained one quote for the laying of the Playing Field hedge and is seeking others.*

The tree surgeon, Jody Osborne, has booked Friday December 2nd to work on the Oak tree in the Playing Field. He suggests waiting until then to do the reduction as the tree should be dormant.

11. Planning Applications:

None at present.

Planning Application Updates.

The application for the extension and alterations at Mill Cottage has been approved after revised plans were submitted.

12. Bank Reconciliation and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2023

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 £425 more than the budgeted figure because of the VAT claimed on items such as the new benches and the strimmer that were not included in the budget.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure is roughly £1,700 more than budgeted, due to the money spent on the new benches, the additional money spent on maintenance due to the tree works and the extra cost of the electricity supply.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration is likely to be £250 more than the budgeted figure. While the final recommendation for the Clerk's salary (when agreed) is likely to be more than budgeted because of the rise in the rate of inflation and the cost of Councillor training and insurance were higher than budgeted, the cost of the contested election was less than expected.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants is likely to be as budgeted. Other expenditure is likely to be £1,200 more than budgeted because of the additional cost of the contribution to the Jubilee Lane project and the purchase of the strimmer and protective equipment.

Overall, there is a projected deficit of £3,425 compared to a budgeted deficit of £730. This is mainly due to the unbudgeted expenditure on the new benches, the contribution to the Jubilee Lane project and the purchase of the strimmer. The projected funds at the end of the year are £12,900 of which approximately £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments. This is a reserve well in excess of the recommended two thirds of the precept – although there is an intention of spending a proportion of this on the laying of the Playing Field hedge.

13. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2024

Enclosed is a budget for the year ending 31st March 2024. These accounts have two columns allowing the budget for 2023/24 to be compared to the projected figures for this year. Also enclosed

is a forecast for the years 2022-2026. The Parish Council needs to maintain sufficient reserves to fund a by-election would potentially be double the cost of a contested normal election 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 increases in line with inflation. 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 2023/24 the VAT refund should return to its usual figure of around £100. The allotment rent will be £350 if all the allotments are rented out. There is a small amount of funds being raised for the play equipment from the Mendip Lottery and bank interest should increase but is not a major source of income.

The cost of the grass cutting may be higher than that projected for this year depending on any increase in the price per cut. I've set the figure for equipment maintenance at £250 but there shouldn't be any major expenditure as the play equipment is still relatively new. I've budgeted £1,400 for the laying of the Playing Field hedge – depending on the quotes obtained by Jayne. The cost of the electricity supply has risen sharply due to increases in the standing charge.

The Clerk's salary is based on the salary scales for local government employees and the rates from April 2022 have not yet been agreed. (The employers have proposed an across the board increase that would equate to an 8% increase in the Clerk's salary but the unions have not yet responded.) Given the current political and economic uncertainties it is difficult to judge what next year's increase might be. Other expenditure on administration is likely to be similar that projected for this year, although there may be some increases in line with inflation – particularly likely for the insurance premium. There shouldn't be an audit fee next year and hopefully no election costs (although we do need to keep a reserve in case we have a by-election to pay for).

The budget is an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants. Allotment expenses should be less than this year as we paid for additional tidying up. There will be additional costs of maintaining the war memorial garden and the strimmer.

The budget shows a deficit of £975 if the precept is unchanged at £9,925. This would leave £11,900 in our funds at the end of 2023/24 of which around £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments. We have now spent all of the money raised for the Playing Field improvements but still have the majority of the £4,000 the Parish Council put aside from its own funds for the Playing Field. Some of this will be spent on the laying of the Playing Field hedge.

As a result, our reserves are now higher than the recommended level (between a third and two-thirds of our precept). The Parish Council will need to consider whether to reduce its precept or maintain the current precept and run a deficit budget until the reserves are within recommended levels.

Looking at the forecast for the years 2022-2026 there are likely to be deficits of around £200 and £600 in the following years if the precept is unchanged and there are no other new items of expenditure. This will still leave reserves higher than our precept, which the Parish 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 normally wait until the tax base for 2023/24 has been determined in January so that we will know the impact of the precept on Council Tax. (If the tax base goes up, the same precept costs each Council Tax payer less – but if the tax base goes down, the same precept costs each Council Tax payer more. In the latter case the Parish Council might want to reduce the precept to ensure that Council Tax bills don't show an increase due to the Parish Council's precept.)

14. Authorisation of Payments

£160.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field in October.
£25.00 SALC – Councillor Training.

15. Other Business – matters of information only.

The District Council have now processed Parish Councillors' Declaration of Interests' forms and these can now be downloaded from on the Mendip District Council website at <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/6834/Batcombe-Parish-Council> The redacted forms will shortly be added to the Parish Council website as well. Councillors may wish to check their forms. Any changes in the declared interests should be notified to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days.

16. Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 7th December 2022 at 7.30pm in the Old School.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

26th October 2022