

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage    Tel: 01749 850934    e-mail: [clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk](mailto:clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk)

## You are Summoned to the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 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. Election of Chair & Chair's Acceptance of Office**

*The current Parish Council Chair chairs this item. After the newly elected Chair has signed their Acceptance of Office, they then chair the rest of the meeting. The Parish Council is unable to do anything else until a Chair is elected.*

**2. Apologies and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence**

*This is necessary as any member who is absent for six months, without the Council accepting their reasons for absence, automatically loses their seat on the Council.*

**3. 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.*

*Parish Councillor's Register of Interests were previously published on the District Council's website (as well as on the Parish Council website). These are in the process of being transferred to the Somerset Council website.*

**4. Election of Vice Chairman**

*The main role of the Vice Chairman is to chair meetings of the Parish Council when the Chair is absent or has a pecuniary interest in an item. If both Chair and Vice Chairman are absent, Parish Councillors have to elect one of their number to chair the meeting.*

**5. 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.*

**6. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023 to be agreed and signed.**

*Enclosed/attached. If you spot any typos or have any issue with the Minutes it is helpful to inform the Clerk before the meeting so that where necessary an amended version of the Minutes can be signed by the Chair.*

**7. Matters Arising – information updates only.**

*Coronation Mugs – we need to discuss the distribution of the mugs to the “senior citizens” of the parish.*

**8. Somerset Councillors' Report**

*An opportunity for our Somerset Councillors to report on matters relevant to the parish, either in person or in writing.*

**9. Allotments**

*We currently have one vacant allotment. The rent for the allotments field of £220 is now due.*

**10. Footpaths and Highways**

*Nothing to report.*

**11. Playground - Maintenance Report**

*The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA will take place in June. For an extra £30 RoSPA are offering a template to help with our weekly inspections. I think this would be worth obtaining.*

*As part of the Big Help Out on the Bank Holiday Monday after the Coronation, volunteers are willing to tackle the willow structure in the Playing Field. We would need a risk assessment and a list of volunteers for our insurance to cover this.*

**12. Planning Applications – None at present.**

**Planning Application Updates.** *The application for minor alterations to Romsey Cottage, including the repair of the boundary wall, has been approved. The application for the erection of an outbuilding at Mill Cottage has been approved. The Chair will update on the application to insert windows in the east elevation of Church Barn after communication with the case officer.*

**13. Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters**

*Our Standing Orders require the appointment of a Staffing Committee. This Committee would consider any complaints against or grievances by the Clerk. The Committee should consist of three Councillors so that any appeal could be considered by the remaining Councillors. (As relatives of the Clerk, Ian Sage and Jayne Cox should not be members of this committee.) SALC recommend that the Staff Committee or a representative from it should conduct an annual review with the Clerk. Janet Jones, Peter Glaisher and Bryony Harling were elected to the Staffing Committee last year.*

*The Clerk has been asked to report any additional hours worked in the previous year at the May meeting. In 2022/23 the Clerk worked 8 additional hours, which have been carried over to the current year.*

**14. Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives**

*The Council appoints a representative to the Village Hall Trust Committee. Currently this is Jayne Cox. (Please note that the member appointed as Village Hall representative needs to declare this in Part 2 of the Register of Interests Declaration Form as a category (a) membership.)*

*The Council has appointed the Clerk as its representative to help run the Heritage Room. This appointment should be confirmed, unless a Councillor wishes to take on this role. There are three Trustees running the Heritage Room and the role involves a commitment to open the Heritage Room on a Saturday afternoon and assist those inquiring about the history of the parish and its former inhabitants.*

**15. Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters**

*Standing Orders require that the Council make arrangements at this meeting for the review of its Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Schedule of Assets, insurance cover, membership of other bodies, complaints procedure, procedures for handling requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, policy for dealing with the press, and social media policy. The Parish Council*

*should also review the Emergency Plan for Batcombe. I suggest the following timetable: Financial Regulations to be reviewed at the June meeting; Social Media Policy and policy for dealing with the press to be reviewed at the July meeting; complaints procedure to be reviewed at the September meeting; Emergency Plan to be reviewed at the October meeting; budget to be considered at the November meeting; membership of other bodies to be reviewed at the December meeting; Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February meeting; and the Schedule of Assets, Risk Management Policy and insurance cover to be reviewed at the March meeting in time for the preparation of the Annual Report and renewal of the insurance.*

## **16. Insurance Renewal**

*Our insurance is due for renewal on June 1<sup>st</sup>, and we are one year into a three year long-term agreement with Aviva Insurance organised via our insurance brokers BHIB Ltd. The insurance premium is £627.54, an increase of £40.41 on last year's premium. The increase is due to increasing costs and the fact that generally in the insurance world the level of premiums has not kept up with the level of claims.*

## **17. Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

*The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31<sup>st</sup> March needs to be verified by a Councillor before the meeting and reported to the Council.*

*A copy of the Financial Statements is enclosed. The three columns show the previous year's figures, the budget for last year (which was set in the January of the previous year) and the actual figures for last year. No VAT Refund was claimed in 2022/23 as an additional claim for refund of the VAT on the new play equipment had been made in the previous year. A claim for just over £1,000 will be made shortly this year. The allotments rent was £21 less than budgeted because several allotments were vacant during the year and some discounted payments were received for allotments rented for part of the year. £52 was raised for maintenance of the new play equipment from the Mendip Lottery Fund. Interest rates showed a small increase from the minimal level of the previous year. As a result of no VAT claim being made, receipts were £114 less than budgeted.*

*The cost of the grass cutting and trimming in the Playing Field was more or less as budgeted. This was an increase on the previous year's figure when no cuts were undertaken while the play equipment was being installed. The cost of the electricity supply was £309 more than budgeted as the Standing Charge increased from £21.35 a quarter to £1.2321 per day (£112.43 a quarter). This is part of an industry wide move to transfer costs from the unit cost to the standing charge, but has a greater impact on our costs as we use very little electricity. The cost of the water supply was slightly less than budgeted and a drop on the previous year when the turf for the new play equipment needed watering. Maintenance consisted of £110 for hedgecutting, £70 for two signs (one a replacement), £44 for a new stopcock and £660 for tree work on the Oak tree. Overall maintenance was £634 more than budgeted – although the level of maintenance needed is always difficult to predict. The annual inspection was £10 more than budgeted due to additional items to inspect.*

*The cost of the new cricket net, mat and stumps was £126 less than budgeted. In addition there were two unbudgeted items using money raised or put aside for the Playing Field. £1,014 was spent on new benches – the GWR bench in memory of Dominic Conway and the bench in the bus shelter – and £1,680 was spent on laying the Playing Field hedge. All these costs include VAT which will be claimed back. Overall Playing Field payments were £3,533 more than budgeted, because of the cost of the hedge laying, new benches and tree work.*

*The Clerk's salary increased more than expected because of an 8% pay rise (negotiated nationally and agreed in line with the Clerk's Contract of Employment). This meant that the Clerk's salary was £297 more than budgeted. The Clerk's expenses were more or less as budgeted. The Zoom subscription was no longer required as in-person meetings had resumed. Training of new Councillors following the election cost £140 - £65 more than budgeted but in previous years the training budget had not been spent. The insurance premium was £117 more than budgeted. (The Parish Council's three year agreement with Hiscox Insurance arranged by Came & Co had come to*

*an end and the new premium quoted was double the previous year's premium. The Parish Council therefore accepted an alternative quote from Aviva arranged by BHIB Insurance Ltd which provided a similar level of cover at a much lower price.) A fee of £240 was charged by the external auditors as the cost of the new play equipment put the Parish Council's expenditure the previous year above the £25,000 limit requiring an intermediate audit. The cost of the contested election was £976 which was £524 less than budgeted. Photocopying was £43 less than budgeted as few paper copies of the Agenda and papers are now being distributed. The cost of the bank custody fee was £7 more than budgeted as payment for part of the current year was included – up to the point when bank custody of the Parish Council deeds ceased. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted. Overall administration costs were £152 more than budgeted.*

*The grants given by the Council were as budgeted. The expenditure on the allotments was £220 for the lease of the field; £90 for cutting the grass in the allotment field and £75 spent on hedge cutting - overall £15 more than budgeted. There were unbudgeted costs of £629 as a contribution to the cost of the Jubilee Lane (access for walkers and horse riders to Wanstrow); £438 on a strimmer and protective equipment to strim the footpaths; and £61 on paint for the telephone kiosk in Westcombe. As a result of all the above, total payments were £4,827 more than budgeted, largely because of the new benches, hedge laying and tree work in the Playing Field and the contribution to the Jubilee Lane project and the strimmer.*

*Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and the play equipment are given on the back of the Financial Statement. At the end of the year there was £970 of allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. All the remaining money raised for the play equipment has now been spent – the accounts show £600 going to the cricket net and the remainder going towards the cost of the new benches.*

*The net result of the variations against the budget outlined above is a deficit of £5,671 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £730. This is due to the spending of the money raised for the new play equipment and the money put aside by the Parish Council for improvements to the Playing Field. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £10,641 in its funds, £4,537 less than anticipated in the budget. This is a result of spending available funds on the Playing Field and elsewhere as noted above. Of the funds at the end of the year, £970 is set aside for the allotments and £77 for new notice boards, meaning that the Parish Council has funds totalling £9,594 that are not earmarked for specific items, (although £2,761 of this total consists of funds that had been intended for the new play equipment). This means that the Parish Council has sufficient reserves to cover the cost of a by-election during the coming year (which is the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure). SALC recommend that a Parish Council has reserves of between one-third and two-thirds of its precept, which with the current precept means the reserves should be between £3,300 and £6,600.*

*Hopefully our internal auditor will be able to complete the audit by our June meeting, at which we need to agree the Annual Return.*

## **18. Update on Budget for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**

*Enclosed 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 is the updated projection for this year. We have received notification from the Somerset Council that they have paid our 2023/24 precept of £9,925. The VAT repayment will be £904 more than budgeted as no claim was made in 2022/23. The claim will be made shortly. I am projecting one vacant allotment at present. £200 has been promised in donations towards the Coronation mugs.*

*With regard to payments, most items are expected to be as budgeted. The cost of the Coronation mugs is an extra expense not included in the budget. The grass cutting increases by £10 a cut as so is likely to be £110 more than budgeted (if the same number of cuts are done). The insurance premium is £28 more than budgeted but there will be no bank custody fee as the bank no longer keep items in safe custody. Overall the projection is for a surplus of £373 instead of the budgeted deficit of £75 –*

*largely as a result of the VAT refund. This gives funds of £11,014 at the end of the year of which around £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments.*

**19. Authorisation of Payments**

BHIB Ltd - £627.54 – Insurance premium.

T & E A Hollis - £220.00 – Rent of Allotments Field.

Kevin Gale - £180.00 – Grass cutting in April.

**20. Other Business** – matters of information only.

*Please note that the Parish Council cannot make decisions on items that do not appear on the Agenda – so matters raised under this item are for information only.*

**21. Dates of Future Meetings** - Next Meeting: Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

*Traditionally the Parish Council has met on the first Wednesday of the month, although we have previously agreed to meet on the second Wednesday in June and July. Thus for 2023/2024, the suggested dates, to be confirmed at the meeting, are:*

<i>14<sup>th</sup> June</i>	<i>12<sup>th</sup> July</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> August</i>	<i>6<sup>th</sup> September</i>	<i>4<sup>th</sup> October</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> November</i>
<i>6<sup>th</sup> December</i>	<i>10<sup>th</sup> January</i>	<i>7<sup>th</sup> February</i>	<i>6<sup>th</sup> March</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> April</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> May</i>

*Wednesday April 3<sup>rd</sup> would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The August meeting will only take place if required to consider planning applications. The Council normally meets at 8.00pm in the summer and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year.*

*Rob Sage*

Rob Sage – Clerk

26<sup>th</sup> April 2023