

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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## You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 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. 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.*

**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 Chair 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 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023** to be agreed and signed.  
*Enclosed/attached.*

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

*LCN – The next meeting of the Shepton Local Community Network will take place on Thursday January 11<sup>th</sup> at Shape Mendip. The organisers inquired about coming to Batcombe in December but reconsidered on hearing that the village is inaccessible in icy weather. Clare Kingston has volunteered to attend the next meeting.*

**6. Allotments**

*Allotment rents were due on November 1<sup>st</sup>. We have received the rents for six of the allotments and one allotment is now vacant. I will chase up the remaining three allotment rents when we get our next bank statement – the previous statement only shows bank transfers to November 3<sup>rd</sup>. It is possible that there may be more vacancies.*

**7. Somerset Councillors' Reports**

*An opportunity for the Somerset Councillors to report in person or in writing.*

**8. Footpaths and Highways**

*Grit and Determination (winter gritting) – it was decided at the last meeting to draw a line under this project due to the issues over insurance.*

*Fingerpost Restoration – it was decided at the last meeting to leave this project to volunteers with no involvement of the Parish Council.*

*No HGV sign at Brickhouse Farm – Wanstrow Parish Council have considered the possibility of erecting No HGV signs at the junction by Brickhouse Farm which is in Wanstrow and are more than happy for this to happen. We just need to make a request from Somerset Highways, although the financial position of the Somerset Council may have an impact on this.*

*Ash Tree Cottages – a Residents Only sign has been erected on the verge outside Ash Tree Cottages. Apparently, it should have been erected inside and will be moved inside the hedge.*

## **9. Playground - Maintenance Report**

*The water supply to the Playing Field has been turned off at the stop taps below the standpipe and beside the bus shelter now that the weather has turned cold. The waterpipes in the bus shelter need to be drained to avoid them bursting.*

*The contract for the supply of electricity to the Playing Field expires on January 31<sup>st</sup> 2024. SSE are offering a new contract with a reduction in the unit price from 43.875 p/kWh to 28.622 p/kWh. Unfortunately, the quarterly charge would increase from £41.99 to £57.58. And given that we use very little electricity this would mean that our overall bill will increase. We could look for alternative quotes but it is worth noting that all energy companies are transferring costs from the unit price to the standing charge.*

## **10. Planning Applications**

Planning Application No: 2023/2186/HSE                      Proposed extension to existing residential property.  
Donegal Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe                      Householder Application

Planning Application No: 2023/2187/LBC                      Proposed extension to existing residential property.  
Donegal Cottage, Kale Street, Batcombe                      Listed Building Consent

*The applications appear to be identical to similar applications for a rear extension to Donegal Cottage that were approved three years ago. Planning permission is only valid for three years if work has not begun and so this would appear to be an application to renew the existing planning application.*

**Planning Application Updates.** *Land at Hincombe Hill – the Enforcement Officer is recommending serving an enforcement notice on those residing on the land requiring them to cease residing on the land; remove their caravan and camper van; remove all structures, chattels and possessions associated with their unauthorised residential use of the land; and return the land to the condition prior to the unauthorised change of use.*

## **11. Review of the Parish Council's Connection with External Bodies**

Council's Membership of the Somerset Association of Local Councils

Clerk's Membership of the Society of Local Council Clerks

*Membership of both of these bodies is very helpful in providing information and advice on matters relating to the work of the Parish Council and would make the Clerk's job more difficult if they were not available. Membership of SALC will cost around £125 in 2024 and paying for the Clerk's membership of the SLCC will cost a similar amount.*

## **12. Employment Matters – the Clerk's Salary**

*The National Joint Council for Local Government Services has finally reached agreement on new pay scales for 2023/24. The agreement consists of a flat rate increase of £1,925 across all pay scales up SCP 43 (pro rata for part time employees). This will mean the Clerk's salary (on SCP 12) increasing from £12.73 an hour to £13.73 an hour (an increase of 7.86%) backdated to April 2023. The National Association of Local Councils recommends that these salary scales are paid to all Clerks*

*with the standard contract of employment. The Parish Council should formally agree the increase in the Clerk's salary, which is in line with the Clerk's Contract of Employment.*

### **13. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025**

*Parish Councillors will have received a copy of a letter from Cllr Bill Revans, the Leader of Somerset Council regarding the dire financial position of the Somerset Council and the possibility of devolving assets and services to town and parish councils in an effort to save money. There are no Somerset Council assets in Batcombe to be devolved and as a small parish council it would be impractical for Batcombe to consider running services. We have already looked at the possibility of providing gritting without seeing a way to do that.*

*Having said that there are a number of services relevant to Batcombe that are on the list that may potentially be devolved. These include the cutting of verges, drain jetting, new road signage, footpath repairs, fly tipping and emptying of litter bins. Although it would not be practical for a small parish council to manage any of these services on its own – I can foresee the possibility of the Somerset Council charging parish councils for services provided to their parish and so we should retain sufficient reserves in case this eventually should happen.*

*The Somerset Association of Local Councils have asked parish councils to let the Somerset Council devolution team know about: any items on the list that our parish would be interested in; or if our council is not interested in anything on the list; or if our council is not interested now, might it be interested in specific assets at a later point.*

*Enclosed is an updated budget for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. As before these accounts have two columns allowing the budget for 2024/25 to be compared to the projected figures for this year. Also enclosed is an updated forecast for the years 2024-2027.*

*The projected figures for this year have been updated to include the proposed increase in the Clerk's salary backdated to April. This reduces the projected surplus from £1,074 to £912, leaving £11,143 in Parish Council funds at the end of this year.*

*The budget has been updated to include the impact of an allotment vacancy, a revised estimate of the electricity costs, the Clerk's increased salary, the proposed increases in the grants, and a guestimate for the cost of refurbishing the Westcombe notice board. This gives a projected deficit next year of £760 instead of the £45 suggested at last month's meeting. The forecast shows deficits of £1,175 and £1,550 in the following two years if there is no change in precept and no additional expenditure, but this still leaves reserves of over £8,000 at the end of 2026/27.*

*One item raised at last month's meeting was the possibility of projects for improving footpaths in the parish, particularly the footpath through Pugh's Bottom and the bridge near Batcombe Vale. A decision on the level of the precept does not have to be made at this meeting - and can be deferred until the January meeting when the tax base for 2024/25 should have been determined so that we will know the impact of any changes in the precept on Council Tax.*

### **14. Authorisation of Payment**

*£??0.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field and War Memorial in November (invoice not yet received).*

### **15. Other Business – matters of information only.**

*SALC have informed us that their Chief Executive Justin Robinson has resigned and will be leaving SALC in January after 10 years with the Association.*

### **16. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday January 10<sup>th</sup> 2024 at 7.30pm in the Old School.**

*Rob Sage*