

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 8th January 2025 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 Chairman can invite members of the public to speak at this or at any other appropriate point in the meeting. Prior Approval has been given for the conversion of seven agricultural buildings to nine residential dwellings at Beeches Farm and a representative of Mendip Developments would like to meet with the Parish Council to discuss options going forward with this site.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4th December 2024 to be agreed and signed.
Enclosed/attached.

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Action Table – A copy of the Action Table from the meeting on December 4th is attached/enclosed. The Parish Council agreed to check progress on the actions listed in the Table under Matters Arising.

Tourist Tax – SALC has stated that the Parish Council can accept, hold and administer gifts of property under Section 139 of the Local Government Act 1972. This can include financial gifts and would provide a means of administering voluntary donations provided through a "tourist tax". It should be noted that such gifts can only be used for the purpose of discharging the Parish Council's functions or for the benefit of the inhabitants of the parish within the limits provided by Section 137 of the Act. The limit on the amount that can be spent under the Section 137 power has been set as £10.81 per local elector for 2024/25. As Batcombe currently has 345 local electors, the total that could be spent under Section 137 is £3,729.

6. Somerset Councillors' Reports and the Shepton Local Community Network

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

7. Allotments

Allotment rents were due on November 1st – and we have received the rent for six allotments. One allotment holder has indicated that they are giving up their allotment and we have not heard from another. This leaves three or possibly four vacant allotments.

8. Footpaths and Highways

Crows Hill will be closed for three days, January 20th to 22nd to enable Bristol Water to “replace service water issue”. The issue appears to be by the farm buildings near the top of the hill.

I have checked the footpath from Bailey’s Lane to Westcombe Street and found no obstructions.

9. Playground - Maintenance Report

The moles in the Playing Field are very active at the moment. We did say we would leave them until the willow had been removed – but in light of the damage they are doing to the Playing Field surface, should we get in the molecatcher now?

Kevin Gale has provided a quote for cutting the grass in the Playing Field and around the War Memorial of £95 a cut. This is an increase of £5 a cut on this year due to increased costs.

The current electricity contract with SSE comes to an end on 31st January. SSE are currently offering prices of 23.938p/kWh and 70p/day standing charge for a one year contract; 24.701p/kWh and 70.98p/day for a two year contract; and 24.995p/kWh and 72.8p/day for three years. The “Love Energy Savings” website offers the current deals with the lowest standing charge: one year – 25.9p/kWh and 37p/day standing charge (Valda Energy); two years – 26.57p/kWh and 42p/day (British Gas); and three years – 25.19p/kWh and 42p/day (Valda Energy).

The Parish Council are waiting to hear if the Fete Committee wants the Parish Council to retain the electricity supply. However it should be noted that if we do not agree a new contract, the out of contract prices from February 1st will be 34p/kWh and £2.05/day standing charge. Our current tariff is 28.311p/kWh and a standing charge of 63.1p/day. It should also be noted that there is a charge of £79 + VAT to disconnect the supply and remove the meter.

10. Planning Applications - None at present.

Planning Application Updates. *Prior Approval has been given for the conversion of seven agricultural buildings to nine residential dwellings at Beeches Farm. The installation of 10 photovoltaic panels to the garage roof at Wisteria Cottage has been approved.*

11. Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting will take place in the Jubilee Hall on Wednesday April 2nd. If we wish to invite a speaker for the meeting we should decide who to invite at this meeting.

12. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2026

A budget for the year ending 31st March 2026 was enclosed with November’s Agenda. See November’s Agenda notes for details of the budget. An updated budget was enclosed with the December Agenda taking into account the fact that the Council would be liable for Employers’ National Insurance contribution on the Clerk’s salary; an expected increase in the SALC affiliation fee; and the decision to increase the precept by 4-5% in anticipation of the need to pay for highway works. This resulted in a budget with a precept of £10,500.

A final decision on the precept was deferred in the hope that the tax base for 2025/26 would be known at this meeting so that the impact of the precept on Council Tax could be taken into account.

Batcombe's tax base for 2025/26 is 216.49 which is slightly higher than the tax base for 2024/25 which is 212.78. A higher tax base means each household pays less Council Tax for the same precept (assuming any discounts have not changed). As a result, increasing the precept by 4.22% to £10,500 means that the Council Tax for a Band D property (with no discounts) resulting from the Parish Council's precept will increase from £47.35 to £48.50 – an increase of £1.15 or 2.43%.

13. Authorisation of Payment

- £1,387.42 The Clerk – Salary for 3rd Quarter. *See enclosed sheet*
(includes backdated pay rise from April 2024).
- £34.00 HM Revenue & Customs – Income Tax on Clerk's Salary. *See enclosed sheet.*
- £88.29 The Clerk – Expenses for 3rd Quarter. *See enclosed sheet.*
- £15.00 Somerset Playing Fields Association – Annual subscription.

14. Other Business – matters of information only.

We have received a letter from a planning consultant at RCA Regeneration Limited who will be conducting a Housing Needs Survey for their clients Long Term Land Ltd. Long Term Land intend to provide affordable housing in Cranmore with its preferred housing association Stonewater and the Housing Needs Survey will cover Cranmore and the neighbouring parishes of Batcombe, Evercreech, Doultling, Stoke St Michael, Downhead and Wanstrow. The purpose of the survey is to understand the local need for affordable housing in relation to a potential rural exception site development. The planning consultant asks if the Parish Council has any comments to make before the survey is undertaken in January.

Dr Bel Deering, the Community Engagement Officer with the Somerset Rivers Authority, would like to arrange a visit to discuss details of recent and historic flooding in the parish with people who have relevant local knowledge. I had previously sent Dr Deering some details of recent and historic flooding in the parish.

Somerset Council is running a consultation on the budget for 2025/26. Anyone wishing to take part can find an online survey at [Budget Consultation 2025/2026 - Somerset Council - Citizen Space](#)

The Government is running a consultation on strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England. More details and an online survey can be found on the gov.uk website at [Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England - GOV.UK](#)

15. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 5th February 2025 at 7.30pm in the Old School.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

31st December 2024