

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 4th September 2024 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

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. There may be a resident wishing to speak about speeding in the village.

4. Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 3rd & 17th July 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 July 3rd is attached/enclosed. The Parish Council agreed to check progress on the actions listed in the Table under Matters Arising.

Annual Grants – We have been thanked by the Friends of Batcombe Church for our £500 to their clock fund. The restoration of the Church Clock should begin in September.

Allotments – A local resident is interested in one of the two allotments held by the allotment holder who has not paid this year.

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. A written report has been received from Cllr Claire Sully and distributed to Parish Councillors.

7. Footpaths and Highways

Verge Cutting – concerns have been raised that some of the verges in the parish have not been cut. This was reported by the Chair in early August (via the "report an overgrown verge" online system <https://service.somerset.gov.uk/report-a-problem-on-the-road/?issue=OVH&serviceCode=HRI>) and the response was that "The problem was not big enough for us to plan work in to fix it at this time."

Grit Bins – We have had a request from Somerset Council to tell them how full our grit bins are.

8. Playground - Maintenance Report

Annual Safety Inspection – The link to the report of the RoSPA safety inspection has previously been distributed to Parish Councillors. The link will expire next month so if you would like to retain a copy, please ensure you have downloaded and saved it. The link is

<https://playbase.rosaplaysafety.co.uk/Inspections/index.php?ID=2783A0E9-A1D5-FC42-8E7B-577570881096>

As in previous years, 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 exceptions are the junior/toddler swing which has wearing of the bushes and of the chains on the toddler swing. The inspector recommends dismantling and inspection of the bushes and replacement if necessary and replacement of the cables on the toddler swing. The inspector also recommends an annual inspection of the cable attachments, which would involve dismantling the cableway. As this would need to be done by the suppliers, the Parish Council agreed last year that no dismantling inspection was needed until the cableway was five years old as it was unlikely to have any significant wear at this stage.

The inspector noted rot in the gateposts. This isn't a safety issue as the gateposts don't support the self-closing gate but they are of historic value as they hold the plaques noting the dedication of the Playing Field as a King George V Playing Field. One of these plaques is now missing. The inspector also noted rot in the seat under the willow arch and strimmer damage to the posts supporting the overhead rings, which could accelerate rot in these posts. He also noted bowing in the picnic table, a trip hazard in the cricket net and recommended planned maintenance programme to control growth in the willow tunnel. None of these issues pose a significant risk, other than protruding growth in the willow tunnel which needs regular checking.

Thanks to Peter Glaisher and Tom Price for cutting back the growth on the inside of the Playing Field hedge. Our insurers were happy for volunteers to do this work, provided a risk assessment was made and protective equipment worn.

***Litter Bin** – The Somerset Council are planning to introduce charges for the emptying of litter and dog waste bins that are not on Council land from April next year. The charges would be around £7.82 + VAT per collection (this is the current collection charge in the former Somerset West and Taunton area). Fortunately, although our litter bin was purchased by the Parish Council and placed by the entrance to our Playing Field, the fact that it was placed on the verge which belongs to the Somerset Council means we will not be charged.*

***Annual Fete** – Thanks to the Chair for undertaking the hand-back of the Playing Field from the Fete Committee on the Bank Holiday Monday. A combination of rain just before the Fete, moles and vehicles in the Playing Field means the surface is not in quite as good condition as it was before the Fete but nothing untoward and it should recover quickly. The litter bin was covered during the Fete and so is almost empty and there was no litter left in the Playing Field.*

9. Planning Applications

There are no planning applications to consider but the Parish Council has been notified of an application for agricultural excavation at Horsehill Farm. This is for notification only.

Planning Application 2024/01468/AGE –

Excavation of five shallow scrapes to intercept rain water runoff from adjacent land. Scrapes will provide flood alleviation, a watering resource for animals and valuable habitat for wildlife.

Horsehill Farm, Horse Hill Lane, Batcombe, Shepton Mallet - Agricultural Notification Excavation.

Planning Application Updates. *The application for the loft conversion at Home Farm, Batcombe has been approved as has the application for Listed Building Consent for the repairs to the outbuilding at The Weavers House.*

10. 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 Somerset 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.

11. Parish Council Laptop

As noted earlier in the year, the Parish Council's laptop will need to be replaced next year as the operating system cannot be updated from Windows 10 to Windows 11. However, the laptop may need replacing this year. It has been operating slowly, has crashed several times while I've been working on it (fortunately no significant work was lost), and recently no Microsoft Office program would work (fortunately I found a way to repair Microsoft Office). The cost of a basic laptop sufficient for the needs of the Parish Council is around £350. The issue is obtaining Microsoft Office. Laptops no longer come with this installed – instead you are encouraged to take out a yearly subscription. Microsoft Business Standard costs £10.30 + VAT a month. Microsoft 365 Personal costs £59.99 a year. Alternatively Microsoft Office Home and Business 2021 is available for £249.99. We have a choice of purchasing a laptop and software directly or going back to the supplier of our current laptop. If we did this Bryony would have a pecuniary interest and need to be not involved in the decision.

12. 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. The Chair may be late to the meeting so another Councillor may like to volunteer.

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 28th August this year and a projection for this year based on expenditure to date.

Receipts are projected to be approximately £100 more than the budgeted figure. This is due to the precept being £150 more than the original figure proposed and allotments rent likely to be less than budgeted due to vacancies.

The projection for the Playing Field expenditure is about £150 less than budgeted, as there was no increase in the grass cutting cost. The cost of the water supply is higher than expected and may indicate a small leak.

The projection for the expenditure on Administration is about £50 more than budgeted. While the insurance premium was slightly lower than budgeted, the hire costs of the Old School have increased, the Clerk's expenses are likely to be slightly higher than budgeted and two years' internet protection have been purchased for a slightly lower price each year. The Clerk's salary is likely to increase but no figures have yet been agreed for this year's salary scales.

The projection for the expenditure on Grants is £500 more than budgeted, due to the grant for the church clock. Other expenses including those of the allotments may be around £350 less than budgeted as no charge has yet been made for the refurbishment of the Westcombe notice board.

Overall, there is a projected deficit of £750 compared to a budgeted deficit of £760. As a result, the projected funds at the end of the year are £11,907 – around £1,180 more than expected when the budget was made due to the better position at the start of the year. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure will be earmarked for the allotments.

13. Authorisation of Payment

Kevin Gale – £180.00 – Grass cutting in August.

The following payments need to be authorised retrospectively as payment was due before the meeting:

Kevin Gale – £180.00 – Grass cutting in July.

Playsafety Ltd – £117.60 – RoSPA inspection of the Playing Field.

water2business – £49.65 – six months water supply to the Playing Field.

14. Other Business – matters of information only.

Floods - The Community Engagement Officer from the Somerset Rivers Authority would like to meet sometime in September to talk about historic and recent flooding in the Alham catchment area that has affected the parish.

Crime – The crime report for July shows one crime in Batcombe, the theft of a motor vehicle. This compares to seven crimes the previous month.

15. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 2nd October 2024 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

28th August 2024