

# 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 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024 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.*

**4. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 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 October 2<sup>nd</sup> is attached/enclosed. The Parish Council agreed to check progress on the actions listed in the Table under Matters Arising.*

**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. The Highways Working Group will have met on Wednesday October 30<sup>th</sup>.*

**7. Parish Council Environmental Working Group**

*As agreed at the last meeting, this is an opportunity to discuss the setting up of a Parish Council Working Group to consider the environmental concerns facing the parish and actions that might be taken. As with previous Working Groups, members do not need to be Parish Councillors but at least one Parish Councillor should be on the Group. The Parish Council will set the terms of reference for the Group, which will not make any decisions itself but will seek information and then bring proposals to the Parish Council for consideration. The Working Party would need to be aware that the Parish Council can only do those things that it has the legal power to do and that, as mentioned at the last meeting, Parish Councillors are all volunteers with limited time available for additional activities.*

## 8. Allotments

All allotment holders will have been sent a reminder that allotment rents are due on November 1<sup>st</sup> – unchanged at £35 per allotment. We anticipate there will be a number of vacant allotments. However, we do have one new allotment holder who lives in Frome and has taken the allotment in the corner furthest from the gate.

## 9. Footpaths and Highways

Hopefully, Peter Glaisher will be able to provide more details regarding the Enhanced Highways Maintenance pilot following the meeting of the LCN Highways Working Group on October 30<sup>th</sup>.

We have received an e-mail from a concerned resident who spoke to contractors undertaking the flushing of gulleys on the Cranmore. The resident pointed out a number of blocked gulleys but was told by the contractors that they could only do the gulleys on their chart. The resident was under the impression that the Parish Council was paying for the gully flushing and felt that therefore we should have more input into which gulleys were being flushed.

## 10. Playground - Maintenance Report

The Village Fete Committee have paid £120 as a contribution to the cost of providing the electricity for the Village Fete.

## 11. Planning Applications

**Planning Application 2024/1952/HSE – Install 10 photovoltaic panels to garage roof.**

**Wisteria Cottage, Westcombe – Householder Application.**

The proposal is to install 10 black photovoltaic panels to the south-facing slope of the garage roof at Wisteria Cottage. The garage is to the north of the cottage with access from Westcombe Stables Lane. Plans can be viewed on the planning website - [2024/1952/HSE | Install 10 photovoltaic panels to garage roof. | Wisteria Cottage Holly Hill To Westcombe Road Westcombe Shepton Mallet Somerset BA4 6ER](#)

Planning Application 2024/1868/TCA – Larch – Fell. Catalpa – Crown lift to approx. 18ft.

Provis, Batcombe – Works/Felling Trees in a CA.

The two trees are on land opposite Provis, next to Rockwells House. The Larch is considered a poor specimen and the owner is concerned over its proximity to the neighbouring property. The crown lift for the Catalpa will give clearance over the road and “allow light into window of house”. [2024/1868/TCA | Larch - Fell. Catalpa - Crown lift to approx 18ft. | Provis House Frys Lane To Mill Lane Batcombe Shepton Mallet Somerset BA4 6HD](#)

Planning Application 2024/1765/PAA – Change of use of 7 agricultural buildings to 9 residential dwelling houses and associated building operations.

Beeches Farm, Wanstrow – Prior Approval Agricultural to Residential. (Notification only)

The application is for prior approval for the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential use, which the Parish Council is notified of but not consulted. The agricultural buildings that it is proposed to convert are on land opposite Batcombe Lodge. [2024/1765/PAA | Change of use of 7 agricultural buildings to 9 residential dwelling houses and associated building operations. | Beeches Farm Batcombe Shepton Mallet Somerset BA4 6BZ](#)

**Planning Application Updates.** No updates to report.

## 12. Clerk’s Salary for 2024/25

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services has finally reached agreement on new pay scales for 2024/25. The agreement consists of a flat rate increase of £1,290 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 £13.73 an hour to £14.36 an hour (an increase of 4.59%) backdated to April 2024. 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. Bank Reconciliation and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2025**

*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 30<sup>th</sup> October this year and a projection for this year based on expenditure to date.*

*Receipts are projected to be approximately £185 more than the budgeted figure. This is due to the precept being £150 more than the original figure proposed, plus the unbudgeted income of £100 for the Playing Field wood and gate and less the reduction in the allotments rent due to the likely vacancies in November.*

*The projection for the Playing Field expenditure is about £140 less than budgeted, as the projected cost of the grass cutting for the year is less than was budgeted.*

*The projection for the expenditure on Administration is about £830 more than as budgeted. This is largely due to the unbudgeted cost of the new laptop and software of £705.68 (although the VAT of £117.61 can be reclaimed). In addition, the Clerk's salary will be £70 more than budgeted and the hire of the Old School for meetings £50 more than budgeted.*

*The expenditure on Grants is £530 more than budgeted. This is due to the unbudgeted grant of £500 for the Church clock and the increase in the grant to the Village Hall Trust from £150 to £200 (Other grants were £20 less than budgeted). Other expenses including those of the allotments are likely to be around £450 less than budgeted. This is due to the fact that no money was spent on either the refurbishment of the Westcombe notice board or the maintenance of the strimmer.*

*Overall, there is a projected deficit of £1,340 compared to a budgeted deficit of £760, largely due to the unbudgeted cost of the new laptop and software. As a result, the projected funds at the end of the year are £11,318 – around £590 more than expected when the budget was made due to the surplus on last year's accounts. It should be noted that approximately £1,000 of this figure will be earmarked for the allotments.*

### **14. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026**

*Enclosed is a budget for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026. These accounts have two columns allowing the budget for 2025/26 to be compared to the projected figures for this year. Also enclosed is a forecast for the years 2025-2028.*

*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. The budget and forecast have only included existing items of expenditure and have not included additional items of expenditure. They have been produced to allow the Council to see the impact of additional expenditure which would need to be added to the budget and forecast.*

*Looking at the budget for 2025/26 the VAT refund will be around £120 more than this year because of the VAT on the new laptop and software. The allotment rent will be £280 if there are two vacant allotments. The money being raised from the Mendip Lottery is tailing off and there is a small amount of bank interest. We can also ask the Fete Committee for a contribution towards the cost of the electricity supply to the Playing Field again.*

*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 £750 as suggested last year, but there shouldn't be any major expenditure as the play equipment is still relatively new. The electricity and water supplies should be around the same level as this year.*

*I have assumed an increase in the Clerk's salary that is slightly less than this year's as inflation is reducing. Other expenditure on administration is likely to be similar that projected for this year, apart from the expenditure on the laptop and software.*

*The budget is an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants. Allotment expenses and the costs of maintaining the war memorial garden and the strimmer should be similar to those projected for this year. Without any additional payments the budget shows a deficit of £675 if the precept reverts to £9,925 (needed if the tax base is reduced to keep the component of Council tax resulting from the precept at the same level). This would leave £10,643 in our funds at the end of 2025/26 of which around £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments.*

*Looking at the forecast for the years 2026/28 with the precept at around £10,000 each year and no additional expenditure there would probably be deficits of around £1,330 in 2026/27 and £2,600 in 2027/28 when there will be another Parish Council election. This would leave reserves of £6,713 at the end of 2027/28, which would be in line with our reserves policy.*

*This is the time for the Parish Council to consider any additional items of expenditure to be included in the budget.*

*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 2025/26 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.)*

**15. Authorisation of Payment**

£270.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in October (*Three cuts*).

£705.68 The Clerk – New laptop and software (£588.07 + VAT).

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

*The Somerset Parishes Conference will take place on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November, 9.30am to 4.00pm at the Canalside Conference Centre in Bridgwater. There will be workshops on how Somerset Council can work more closely with parish councils and a celebration of success stories from Somerset's Local Community Networks. Guests include the Chief Executives of Somerset and of NALC and a number of other Somerset Officers. The final session of the afternoon will be SALC's AGM from 3.00pm. Each parish council is restricted to two representatives due to the limited capacity of the conference centre.*

*The Somerset Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan. As a first stage it is consulting on a Settlement Assessment Overview (i.e what facilities each settlement has and what facilities are considered important) and an Open Spaces, Built Sports and Playing Pitch Overview. Attached for Councillors is a copy of the questions being asked in the survey. Once response per settlement is requested ideally from the Clerk, but input from Councillors to the questions is welcomed. It should be noted that some questions are only seem relevant to larger settlements.*

*The Local Government Boundary Commission for England are conducting a review of division boundaries in Somerset. They are minded to reduce the number of Somerset Councillors by 14 to 96 and are consulting on the pattern of divisions to accommodate this number of Councillors. More information on the consultation can be found on the LGBCE website:*

[www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset](http://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset)

**17. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 at 7.30pm in the Old School.**

*Rob Sage*