

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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## **Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2025 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.**

**Present - Councillors:** Janet Jones – Chair, Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher, Bryony Harling, Clare Kingston, Tom Price and Ian Sage.

**Also Present:** The Clerk and three members of the public.

**5706 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence:** None.

**5707 – Declarations of Interest:** Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the authorisation of the Clerk's salary as relatives of the Clerk. Tom Price declared an interest in the application for tree works at Batcombe House as the applicant. The Chair declared an interest in the authorisation of the payment to the Parish News as its editor.

**5708 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024** were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**5709 – Public Participation:** A representative of Mendip Developments Ltd, the developer for the Beeches Farm development, noted that Prior Approval had been given for the conversion of seven agricultural buildings to nine residential dwellings at Beeches Farm. Given the approval already obtained, Mendip Developments were considering making an application for a new build on the site which would allow for improved design, more environmentally friendly buildings and greater options for landscaping and wanted to know if the Parish Council would object to such an application. The neighbour of the site was concerned about a possible increase in the curtilage area and height of the buildings. The developer stated that there would be no increase in the area of the site and that a new build would allow a reduction in height as the buildings could be sat into the landscape. They would also have sedum grass roofs which would make them less visible.

The Parish Council had no great objection to a new build application in principle but much would depend on the plans for the new buildings. The developer stated that plans would cost a lot of money to produce so he was in two minds whether just to build what already had approval or produce plans for a new build. A new build would delay the project because of the time needed to draw up plans and get them approved. It was noted that a new main would need to go in to provide water for the development, whichever route the developer took.

**5710 – Matters Arising:** Action Table – The actions listed on the Action Table from the last meeting were checked and the following points noted:

Facebook – Items about the Beeches Development and speeding in the village had been posted on Facebook.

Allotments – Tom Price volunteered to speak to the former allotment holder about removing the metal chest from his former allotments. Peter Glaisher noted that polytunnels and sheds had been blown away in the recent storms. Peter to talk to the allotment holder with three allotments before the future of the allotments was discussed in April. Rent had been received for six allotments. The Clerk to chase up the two allotment holders that had not paid.

Grit Bins – Ian Sage stated that he had refilled the grit bin at Hincombe Hill after the grit had been used during recent icy weather and had placed the rest of the grit in its bag at Westcombe. Details of a grit bin for Westcombe discussed under the Footpaths and Highways item (*Minute 5713 below*).

Willow Structure – it had been too wet to remove the willow structure from the Playing Field without damaging the surface.

Tourist Tax – the Chair and Tom Price had met with Tim Chater the previous evening. The proposal for a Tourist Tax had now morphed into one for community action. People wanted it to happen but no one wanted to organise it. There were ideas for collecting money, such as using QR codes, but the question of who would administer it remained. It was agreed to ask Tim Chater to speak about the proposal at the Annual Parish Meeting, provided the Parish Council approved the script for what he would say. The Chair and Tom Price to have another meeting with Tim Chater and Steve Gilbert.

**5711 – Somerset Councillors’ Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN):** No reports had been received.

**5712 – Allotments:** Discussed under Matters Arising above.

**5713 – Footpaths and Highways:** The Parish Council had been notified that Crows Hill would be closed for three days from January 20<sup>th</sup> to enable Bristol Water to “replace service water issue”. The issue was believed to be a redundant supply to the farm buildings at the top of the hill.

The Clerk had checked the footpath from Bailey’s Lane to Westcombe Street and found no obstructions. There was a serious issue with the footpaths at the bottom of Bailey’s Lane where a fallen tree had taken out two footbridges. The Clerk to report the issue to Clare Haskins at Rights of Way with details of the three landowners whose land the affected footpath crossed.

The damaged road sign at the A359 to be repaired. Clare Kingston reported glass in the road by Chapel Row. Ian Sage provided prices for different sized grit bins. It was agreed to buy a 450l stone-grey grit bin to be placed by the war memorial in Westcombe.

**5714 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report:** The Clerk reported that the moles in the Playing Field were very active and it was agreed to use a molecatcher. Kevin Gale had provided a quote for cutting the grass in the Playing Field and around the War Memorial of £95 a cut, which was an increase of £5 a cut due to increased costs. It was agreed to accept the quote.

The current electricity contract with SSE would come to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> January and SSE were offering new contracts with a standing charge of 70p/day or higher. The “Love Energy Savings” website was offering contracts when the Agenda notes were written of between 37p/day for one year and 42p/day for three years, although prices were increasing every day. The standing charge if out of contract was £2.05/day. Peter Glaisher had spoken to a member of the Fete Committee who had decided that they needed an electricity supply in the Playing Field. As a result, it was agreed to enter into a new three-year contract at the lowest price on offer.

**5715 – Planning Applications:** Planning Application Number: 2025/0001/TCA. T1 Copper Beech - Crown lift to 12ft from ground level. T2 Ash – Fell. Tree has Ash dieback and is unsafe. Batcombe House, Gold Hill, Batcombe. Works/Felling trees in a Conservation Area. Notification was received too late for the Agenda but was considered as the Clerk had been delegated authority to respond to tree applications after consulting with Councillors. There were no objections to the proposed tree works.

**Planning Application Updates:** As noted previously, Prior Approval had 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 had also been approved.

**5716 – Annual Parish Meeting:** The Annual Parish Meeting would take place on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April. In addition to Tim Chater speaking about the proposal for additional funding for the parish, it was felt that something was needed to bring people into the meeting. Bruno Cristofoli was thought not to want to do another film, but the Clerk stated that he may have a film of the building of the Jubilee Hall. Jayne Cox also offered to see if she could find a speaker to talk about highways and rights of way.

**5717 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026:** A final decision on the precept had been deferred until the tax base for 2025/26 was known so that the impact of the precept on Council Tax could be taken into account. Batcombe’s tax base for 2025/26 was 216.49 which was slightly higher than the tax base for 2024/25 and a higher tax base meant each household would pay less Council Tax for the same precept.

It was agreed to increase the precept by £925 to £11,000 to provide additional funds for potential costs of works on the highways that the Parish Council would need to fund as a result of the financial difficulties of the Somerset Council. While this would be an increase of 9.18% in the precept, the higher tax base would mean a 7.31% in the Council Tax resulting from the precept. For a Band D property (with no discounts) this would be an increase of £3.46 in Council Tax. The Clerk to explain the increase in the parish magazine.

**5718 - Authorisation of Payments:** Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £1,387.42 The Clerk – Salary for 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter (including backdated pay rise from April).
- £34.00 HM Revenue & Customs – Income Tax on Clerk’s Salary.
- £88.29 The Clerk – Expenses for 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter.
- £15.00 Somerset Playing Fields Association – Annual subscription.

**5719 – Other Business** – matters of information only. A letter had been received from RCA Regeneration Limited who would be conducting a Housing Needs Survey for their clients Long Term Land Ltd, who intended to provide affordable housing in Cranmore with its preferred housing association Stonewater. The Housing Needs Survey would cover Cranmore and the neighbouring parishes of Batcombe, Evercreech, Doultong, Stoke St Michael, Downhead and Wanstrow to determine the local need for affordable housing. The Parish Council had been asked for comments and noted the need for a Section 106 agreement to ensure that the housing was restricted for local people.

Dr Bel Deering, the Community Engagement Officer with the Somerset Rivers Authority, wished to arrange a visit to discuss details of recent and historic flooding in the parish with people who had relevant local knowledge. The Clerk to arrange.

It was noted that the Somerset Council was running a consultation on its budget for 2025/26 and that the Government was running a consultation on strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England.

**5720 - Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025 at 7.30pm in the Old School.

*Janet Jones*  
*5/2/25*