

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage Tel: 01749 850934 e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

You are Summoned to the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 8th May 2019 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. Election of Chairman & Chairman's Acceptance of Office

John Sommer remains the Parish Council Chairman until a new Chairman is elected and should chair this item. Justin Witcombe also remains the Vice Chairman until the new Chairman is elected and if John is unable to attend the meeting, should chair this item. The newly elected Chairman then chairs the rest of the meeting. The Parish Council cannot do anything else until a Chairman is elected.

2. 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.

3. Councillors' Acceptance of Office

The enclosed Acceptance of Office should be signed and witnessed by the Clerk either before the start of the meeting or at this point. Any Councillor not signing the Acceptance of Office by the end of this meeting automatically loses their seat on the Council - unless the Council resolves to extend the deadline to the next meeting. Those Councillors who stood for election are reminded that their Return of Election Expenses should be sent to the District Council within 28 days of the election.

4. Filling of the Parish Council Vacancies by Co-option and Acceptance of Office

Following the uncontested election there will be two vacancies on the Parish Council from May 7th. This has been advertised on the website, in the parish magazine and on the notice boards. So far I have received five expressions of interest from Justin Witcombe, Pippa Taylor, David Stevens, Dominick Henry and Henrietta Gosling and I have heard that there may be others interested.

The co-options have to be agreed by a majority vote of the Councillors who stood for election. The correct procedure is for the Chairman to call for nominations and for Councillors to nominate persons who are willing to be co-opted. (It may be that not all persons expressing an interest are nominated - equally not expressing a written interest does not prevent someone being nominated if they are willing to serve.) If only one or two people are nominated the Council still has to vote on the co-options. (In the unlikely event that one or both the vacancies are not be filled at this meeting there will be another opportunity to fill it by co-option at our June meeting, otherwise we have to revert to the procedure of advertising the opportunity of a by-election before filling the vacancy.)

If three or more people are nominated, our Standing Orders state there should be a paper ballot of Councillors. Each Councillor will be asked to write up to two names on a piece of paper (they can

vote for one or even for none if they wish) and the Clerk as Proper Officer will count the votes. To be co-opted, a nominated person has to receive more than 50% of the votes (with five Councillors voting that means three votes). If no one obtains more than 50% of the votes in the first ballot, the person with the least number of votes is dropped from the list and a new vote is taken. If only one person receives more than 50% of the votes, the Chairman declares them to be co-opted and they take part in the next vote after signing their Declaration of Acceptance of Office. (It is theoretically possible for three people to receive more than 50% of the votes and for the 2nd and 3rd person to have an equal number of votes – in this case the Chairman would use his/her casting vote to decide who is elected. The Chairman can opt to draw straws if he/she cannot decide between the nominees.)

Provided they sign their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, those co-opted take their place on the Council immediately. If the person co-opted is not present, the Council should pass a resolution allowing them to sign their Declaration of Acceptance before the next meeting. If the person co-opted does not sign their Declaration of Acceptance their co-option is invalid.

It should be noted that the vote for co-option has to take place in public and that the candidates are entitled to be present.

5. 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. All Councillors, elected or co-opted, have 28 days to complete a new Register of Interests Declaration Form (enclosed). Please return this by the end of May to the Clerk who is required to keep a copy and who will forward it to the District Council's Monitoring Officer.

Please note that the District Council's Monitoring Officer has stated that where a Councillor has a pecuniary (i.e. financial) interest in an item they cannot take part in any discussion on that item. This includes making a statement on the matter before leaving the room.

6. Election of Vice Chairman

The main role of the Vice Chairman is to chair meetings of the Parish Council when the Chairman is absent or has a pecuniary interest in an item.

7. 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.

8. Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd April 2019 to be agreed and signed. Enclosed.

9. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Nothing that does not appear on the Agenda below.

10. District and County Councillors' Reports

An opportunity for the District and County Councillors to report on matters relevant to the parish, either in person or in writing. The election for our District Councillor will take place on May 2nd. The two candidates are Michael Gay (Green Party) and Linda Norris (The Conservative Party Candidate).

11. Allotments

We have had three people from Wanstrow expressing an interest in the vacant allotments along with one of our existing allotment holders. Two allotments have been rented for the remainder of this year for £20 and if the other two are taken up we will only have one vacant allotment. If this is the case the allotments will again be viable.

12. Footpaths and Highways

Nothing to report. A map giving details of the rights of way in the parish is enclosed.

13. Playground - Maintenance Report and Preparation for the annual RoSPA inspection.

The annual inspection of the Playing Field by RoSPA will take place in June. Still no sign of any moles. Many thanks to the Councillors who applied the eco-friendly wood preservative to the play equipment in April. We need to consider ordering more play bark for the multi-play equipment. Dominic Conway has begun cutting the Playing Field grass again.

14. Planning Applications – Planning Application Number 2019/0858/TCA – Field Maple – pollard back to previous points, approx. 20ft – to allow more light in garden.

South View, Kale Street, Batcombe. Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area

Planning Application Nos: 2019/0678/FUL & 2019/0679/LBC –

Conversion of outbuilding for ancillary use.

Church View House, Batcombe – Full Application & Listed Building Consent

Church View House is the rear section of Church Farmhouse. The outbuilding is small building that is located between Church View House and Turret House (on the former Church Farm site). The proposal is to convert the building into a studio for homeworking with a shower and storage area in the roof.

Planning Application Updates. *No updates to report.*

15. Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters

Our Standing Orders require the appointment of a Staffing Committee. This Committee would consider any complaints against or grievances by the Clerk. The Committee should consist of three Councillors so that any appeal could be considered by the remaining Councillors. (As relatives of the Clerk, Ian Sage and Jayne Cox should not be members of this committee.) SALC recommend that the Staff Committee or a representative from it should conduct an annual review with Clerk.

The Clerk has been asked to report any additional hours worked in the previous year at the May meeting. In 2018/19 the Clerk worked no additional hours.

Clerk's Salary - The National Joint Council for Local Government Services has reached agreement on new pay scales for 2019/20. The National Association of Local Councils and the Association of Local Council Clerks jointly recommend these salary scales for all Clerks with the standard contract of employment. Due to the introduction of the National Living Wage a new pay spine has been introduced and the Spinal Column Point 22 which determined the Clerk's salary is now SCP 12. Under the new pay scales, the Clerk's salary will increase from £10.953 an hour to £11.22 from April 1st 2019. (The Clerk is paid quarterly in arrears.) This is a 2.43% increase, more or less in line with inflation. The Parish Council should formally agree the increase in the Clerk's salary which is in line with the Clerk's Contract of Employment.

16. Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives

The Council appoints a representative to the Village Hall Trust Committee. Currently this is Justin Witcombe. (Please note that the member appointed as Village Hall representative needs to declare this in Part 2 of the Register of Interests Declaration Form as a category (a) membership.)

The Council has appointed the Clerk as its representative to help run the Heritage Room. This appointment should be confirmed, unless a Councillor wishes to take on this role. There are three Trustees running the Heritage Room (one each from the Village Hall Trust, the PCC and the Parish Council) and the role involves a commitment to open the Heritage Room on a Saturday afternoon and assist those inquiring about the history of the parish and its former inhabitants.

17. Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters

Standing Orders require that the Council make arrangements at this meeting for the review of its Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Schedule of Assets, insurance cover, membership of other bodies, complaints procedure, procedures for handling requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, and policy for dealing with the press. I suggest the following timetable: Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February meeting; Financial Regulations to be reviewed at the June meeting; and the Schedule of Assets, Risk Management Policy and insurance cover to be reviewed at the March meeting in time for the preparation of the Annual Report and renewal of the insurance. The Council's other policies were reviewed last year before the election and, unless there are changes to the models on which they are based, I suggest these do not need to be reviewed until the year before the next Parish Council election in 2023.

18. Insurance Renewal

Our insurance is due for renewal on June 1st, and our insurance brokers Came & Company have provided us with three quotes from the following insurance companies: Inspire (using AXA as their insurance provider) £530.52; Hiscox (our current insurers) £302.85; and Ecclesiastical (better known as church insurers) £907.77. Enclosed is a comparison of the cover provided by all three companies. In addition the brokers are adding an administration charge of £50 – previously they have not charge the Parish Council and relied on commission from the insurance companies, but say they have to add the charge because of increased costs.

Came & Company recommend the quote from Hiscox and on the basis of the information they supply I would support this recommendation – it is the cheapest quotes with the same level of cover. With the administration fee the cost of insurance is £352.85. However if we enter into a three year contract the premium is reduced to £337.71. Under the long term agreement the insurer agree not to increase the premium except as a result of increased sums insured, index linked increases in the value of the assets insured, increases in premium tax a higher rate resulting from claims made against the policy.

The Council needs to decide whether to take out the long term agreement or just insure for one year and seek alternative quotes next year. The actual insurance premium, without the £50 administration charge, is actually £3.50 cheaper than this year's insurance. It is worth noting that in the past Came & Company's insurance has been significantly cheaper than that offered by other insurance companies.

19. Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2019

The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31st March needs to be verified by a Councillor before the meeting and reported to the Council.

A copy of the Financial Statements is enclosed. The three columns show the previous year's figures, the budget for last year (which was set in the January of the previous year) and the actual figures for last year. The VAT Refund was £23 less than budgeted and the allotments rent was £190 less than budgeted because five allotments were vacant at the end of the year. The £1,676 raised for new play equipment had not been budgeted for. As a result, receipts were £1,464 more than budgeted.

The cost of the grass cutting and trimming included £110 for hedge cutting, and was £20 less than the budgeted figure despite the change of contractor resulting in an increased price per cut – a result of fewer cuts being undertaken. The cost of the electricity supply was £10 more than budgeted as the Southern Electric doubled the standing charge – this has been reduced by entering into a new electricity contract with Southern Electric. The cost of the water supply was £15 below budget. Maintenance consisted of £160 for the molecatcher, £120 for the removal of the Horse Chestnut tree stump and £75 for cutting back the willow. Overall maintenance was £395 less than budgeted – partly because no play bark was purchased this year. The annual inspection was less than the previous year when we accompanied the inspector on his inspection. Overall Playing Field

payments were £2,422 less than budgeted, although this was largely a result of the £2,000 budgeted for repairs to the multi-play equipment not being used as it was decided to replace the equipment.

The Clerk's salary and expenses were slightly less than budgeted. Two years of the Clerk's membership of SLCC was paid for in 2017/18 and only one year in 2018/19. The additional cost for the laptop was to provide secure memory sticks to back up the Parish Council's computer files. No training or publications were purchased in 2018/19, and no audit fees were charged following the end of external auditing. The increase in insurance premium was slightly more than anticipated and an increase in the cost of hiring the Old School and Jubilee Hall for meetings was balanced by a reduction in the grant paid to the Village Hall Trust. Photocopying was less than budgeted. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted and overall administration costs were £157 less than budgeted.

The grants given by the Council were as budgeted, other than the reduction in the Village Hall grant. The expenditure on the allotments was £200 for the lease of the field and £50 spent on hedge cutting, which was £50 less than budgeted. The cutting of the grass around the telephone kiosk in Batcombe was included with the cost of the Playing Field grass and only £41 was spent of the Armistice 100 Commemoration. As a result of the above, total payments were £3,104 less than budgeted, although £2,000 was money not spent on the multi-play repairs, which would be put to the purchase of new equipment instead.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and the play equipment are given on the back of the Financial Statement. At the end of the year there was £878 of allotments money of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May. Other earmarked monies in the Parish Council accounts at the end of the year were the £1,676 raised for new play equipment and the remaining £77 of the grant money for new notice boards.

The net result of the variations against the budget given above is a surplus of £3,564 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £1,004. This was largely a result of the £1,676 raised for new play equipment and the £2,000 not spent on play equipment. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £11,138 in its funds, £5,402 more than anticipated in the budget. In addition to the surplus on 2018/19 the position at the start of the year was £2,000 better than anticipated as a result of £2,000 budgeted for play equipment repairs the previous years and not spent. Of these funds at the end of the year, £878 is set aside for the allotments, £2,248 for new play equipment and £77 for notice boards. This means that the Parish Council has funds totalling £7,934 that are not earmarked for specific items, (although it is envisaged that the £4,000 that had been intended for play equipment repairs would go towards the cost of the new play equipment). This would have been a sufficient reserve to cover the possible cost of a contested election in 2019 and/or a by-election during the coming year (which is the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure). SALC recommend that a Parish Council has reserves of between one-third and two-thirds of its precept, which with the current precept means the reserves should be between £3,000 and £6,000.

I have been unable to contact our internal auditor to confirm whether he will be able to complete the audit by our June meeting. If not we may need to bring the July meeting forward a week to June 26th to meet the deadline of having approved the audit report by the end of June.

20. Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2020

Enclosed is an updated projection on this year's budget. The first column shows the actual figures for last year. The second column shows the budget for this year as agreed in January. The third column is the updated projection for this year. This year's precept of £9,750 has been received. The VAT repayment will be very slightly less than budgeted and £76.48 for the year up to March 2019 will be claimed shortly. If most of the vacant allotments are taken up the rent this year will be higher than budgeted as they will be two payments on some of the allotments.

With regard to payments, the Clerk's salary will be £10 more than budgeted if the Parish Council approves the recommended salary. As there wasn't a contested election, the election costs will be considerably lower than budgeted although Mendip will still make a charge for election costs. I've included a figure of £6,248 for new play equipment. This is the £2,248 raised for the new equipment plus the £4,000 included in the last two years' budget for repairs to the play equipment. I've not included an estimate of additional fundraising or grants that might be obtained and the money might not be spent this year – but by showing this money as being spent the projection shows what funds the Council will have without the play equipment money.

If the play equipment money is spent we will have a deficit of £4,750 on the year. This gives funds of £6,385 at the end of the year of which £933 will be earmarked for the allotments and £77 for notice boards.

21. Change of Bank Mandate

The Parish Council should only make payments by cheques (or standing orders) signed by two members of the Council (normally after authorisation at a Council meeting, although authorisation can be made retrospectively where payment is required before the next meeting). The Clerk has to be a signatory in order to receive bank statements but should not sign cheques. The other signatories are currently Mary Comley, John Sommer and Chris Wildridge – which means only one Councillor will be a signatory after the start of this meeting. In the past the Chairman, Vice Chairman and two other Councillors have been signatories, which is useful in case two of the signatories are not present at a meeting – so we need two or three additional signatories. Unfortunately, as relatives of the Clerk, Ian Sage and Jayne Cox should not be signatories. The change of the mandate requires a formal resolution.

22. Authorisation of Payment

Broker Network Ltd - £???.00 – Insurance premium via Came & Co. *(Invoice not yet received)*

Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) - £107.26 – Affiliation fees.

T & E A Hollis - £220.00 – Rent of Allotments Field.

Dominic Conway - £240.00 – Grass cutting in March and April. *(Invoice not yet received)*

SSE (Electricity Supply for Playing Field) - £???.?? – Amended invoice not yet received.

23. Other Business – matters of information only.

Please note that the Parish Council cannot make decisions on items that do not appear on the Agenda – so matters raised under this item are for information only.

24. Dates of Future Meetings - Next Meeting: Wednesday 5th June 2019 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

Traditionally the Parish Council has met on the first Wednesday of the month. Thus for 2019/2020, the suggested dates, to be confirmed at the meeting, are:

<i>5th June</i>	<i>3rd July</i>	<i>7th August</i>	<i>4th September</i>	<i>2nd October</i>	<i>6th November</i>
<i>4th December</i>	<i>8th January</i>	<i>5th February</i>	<i>4th March</i>	<i>1st April</i>	<i>6th May</i>

Wednesday April 1st would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The July meeting may need to be brought forward to Wednesday June 26th. The August meeting will only take place if required to consider planning applications. The January meeting takes place on the second Wednesday because January 1st is a bank holiday. The Council normally meets at 8.00pm in the summer and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year.

Rob Sage