BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 4th November 2026 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

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

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage; Rob Reed – Somerset Councillor; and nine members of the public.

6050 – Apologies for Absence: Jayne Cox.

6051 – Declarations of Interest: Tom Price declared an interest in the request for funding for the Eastcombe footpath diversion as an employee of the applicants and in the item on the Community Support Fund as a member of the steering group.

6052 – Public Participation: None.

6053 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7th October 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6054 – Noise and Parking Complaints in Westcombe: Before the last meeting the Parish Council had been copied into a complaint from a Westcombe resident about noise and parking from events at the taproom at Westcombe Dairy and agreed to consider the concerns raised at this meeting. The resident had then made a request for assistance from the Parish Council, which included discussing the concerns and raising them with Westcombe Dairy and with Woodshedding Brewery who ran the taproom.

The planning permission restricted opening hours from 12 noon to 10.00pm each day and the case officer's report had assumed that there would be no issue with parking, which would be in the yard at Westcombe Dairy. The Parish Council had no details of the licence conditions, but it was clear that when the planning application was made in 2023 it was not expected that there would be large scale events with live music on a regular basis at the site.

Three residents of Westcombe and representatives of Westcombe Dairy and Woodshedding were present at the meeting and the Chair began by noting that the Parish Council had no powers to act apart from reporting concerns to the relevant authorities. The Westcombe residents stated that there had been no problems with the taproom when it first started operating, but over the summer the noise had become too loud with loudspeakers in the Westcombe Dairy carpark and parking around Westcombe had become an issue and would have prevented any emergency vehicles from getting through. There was also an issue with the children of those attending the taproom running riot in the village and entering unsafe areas of the Westcombe Dairy site.

The representatives of Westcombe Dairy acknowledged that there had been some occasions that had been a challenge, particularly one local resident's birthday party. They would not allow outside speakers again and would try to reduce the amount of off-site parking by asking their tenants to park at the back of the site, freeing more space in the Westcombe Dairy yard. They also felt that it was the parents' responsibility to take charge of their children. They stated that on days when there were lots of cars they had people directing parking, but this was disputed by the local residents.

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The representative of Woodshedding stated that he had not received any feedback on events at the taproom but one of the local residents stated that she had complained numerous times with no improvement in the issues with noise and parking. Cllr Rob Reed recommended complaining to the licensing authority every time there was an issue with noise or parking, so that they were aware of the issues. A resident of Batcombe suggested putting up with the noise because of the benefits the taproom brought to the community.

The representatives of Westcombe Dairy noted that the premises licence allowed up to 500 people at events and the consumption of alcohol to 11.30pm – although the taproom closed at 9.00pm in the summer and 8.00pm in the winter.

At the suggestion of the Chair, the representatives of Westcombe Dairy and Woodshedding agreed to put in writing what they would do to control the issues of noise and parking, although they felt there was nothing they could do about children running free. This list would be presented to the Parish Council for consideration at the next meeting.

6055 – War Memorial Garden Proposal from the Horticultural Society: Following a successful year of fundraising the Horticultural Society put forward a proposal to spend a proportion of those funds restoring and replanting the War Memorial Garden. Full details were distributed with the Agendas. The proposal included installing a metal bench behind the war memorial to give people somewhere to sit and the Horticultural Society taking on the routine maintenance of the garden.

Tom Price had seen the proposal and raised a number of queries with the Horticultural Society that had been answered. The Horticultural Society would fund and provide hard standing for the bench and were happy for the bench to become an asset of the Parish Council and to maintain the bench as long as they had funds to cover this. The Horticultural Society would also dispose of any plants removed from the garden. It was noted that, apart from the addition of the bench, the proposal was very similar to the longstanding arrangement that the Parish Council had had with the Royal British Legion, whose members maintained the garden for many years.

Representatives of the Horticultural Society stated that they would not be taking on responsibility for the maintenance of the war memorial or the wall around the garden which would remain with the Parish Council. Peter Glaisher reported that the dead tree in the garden had been removed after the application to do so had gone through quickly. The Chair noted that the Horticultural Society would need to give notice of when it was no longer able to fund the maintenance of the garden. The Horticultural Society would also need to check with the Parish Council over what was being planted in the garden and Tom Price volunteered to act as a contact for this. The proposal from the Horticultural Society was then gratefully accepted by the Parish Council.

6056 – Matters Arising from the Minutes: Action Table – Peter Glaisher had spoken to the owners of Kings Hayes about the parking of those working on the house but without any success. It was noted that one of the vans had been parked on the junction of Vinings Hill and Gold Hill obstructing the visibility of vehicles pulling out from Vinings Hill. The Clerk to write to the owners of Kings Hayes asking them to address the issue of parking resulting from work on their house.

It was agreed that the deadlines on the Action Table should be dates rather than the next meeting. Tom Price offered to organise volunteers to tidy up the War Memorial Garden before Remembrance Sunday. The Clerk noted that the cabins at Churchbridge Lodge appeared to be inside the curtilage of the dwelling and so did not require planning permission.

6057 – Somerset Councillor's Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): A report from Somerset Councillor Claire Sully had been distributed to Parish Councillors before

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the meeting. Somerset Cllr Rob Reed stated that he had been unsuccessful in getting an increase in the gritting route to include Batcombe and was thanked for his efforts by the Chair. Alexia Tibbs asked why the school bus route was not gritted.

6058 – Highways and Rights of Way: The Somerset Council Bridge Officer had inspected Bridge #4093 (the vehicle bridge on the footpath at Mill Farm) on 1st October and considered that replacement with a timber kit bridge was a feasible solution. He was preparing the specification for the works, which would be issued to contractors for quotation, but before the replacement can proceed, he was seeking advice regarding the erosion of the northern riverbank adjacent to the existing abutments to determine whether any associated bank protection measures may be required as part of the works.

The Officer had also undertaken a site visit to Bridge #4089 (the bridge taken out by the fallen tree further down the footpath) on 27th October to assess its condition and establish what remedial works may be necessary. Given the inability of the landowners to reach agreement over who was responsible for the fallen tree, he would need to seek further advice with Somerset Council on how to proceed.

s.130(6) Representation regarding Obstruction of Spargrove Footpath. s.130(6) of the Highways Act 1980 had been brought to the attention of the Parish Council as a means to expedite some action regarding the fallen tree and damaged bridges on the Spargrove footpath. The s130(6) procedure requires the Highway Authority to act where a right of way has been "unlawfully stopped up or obstructed" when a representation is made by a parish council. The nature of the obstruction and the intention to make a representation has to be placed on the Parish Council Agenda. The Parish Council must then authorise the Clerk or the Chair to make representations on its behalf. The representations need to be made in writing and sent by post to the Chief Executive of the Highway Authority making it clear that they are being made under s.130(6) and the writer is authorised to act on behalf of the Parish Council. It was agreed to proceed with a s.130(6) representation.

Eastcombe Footpath Diversion. Tom Price outlined the route of the diversion away from Pugh's Bottom farmyard and noted that all the landowners had agreed to the route before leaving the room while funding of the application for the diversion was considered.

Alexander and Libby Russell, two of the landowners, were proposing to make the application to divert the footpath and asked the Parish Council to support the initiative by funding the application, which would cost between £1,500 and £2,000. They felt the diversion would be of benefit to the community as it would render the path usable again after many years. They also noted that if permission was granted, the Somerset Council and the Ramblers Association had undertaken to fund and carry out the work involved.

Two Batcombe residents present expressed concerns about the diversion. While recognising the need to divert the footpath away from the farmyard, they did not want the walk along the river to be lost and felt the diversion could follow the existing permissive path around the farmyard. Ian Sage noted that the permissive path was unsafe, difficult to climb and included a narrow track that was regularly used by cattle with nowhere to get away from them. Peter Glaisher had attempted to walk the footpath from the Eastcombe end and noted the amount of rubbish strewn along the path alongside the river.

The Parish Council decided that as a matter of principle it would not fund the cost of applications to divert rights of way as generally these were undertaken for the benefit of the applicants. The Parish Council was therefore unable to fund the application to divert the Eastcombe footpath. The Clerk was instructed to write to Alexander and Libby Russell informing them that the Parish Council would not fund the application, noting the residents concerns about the diversion and asking them to clear the rubbish from the existing footpath.

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A schedule of Rights of Way Improvements in Batcombe had been distributed with the Agendas and on his return Tom Price stated that this would be passed to the Rights of Way Officer for action.

Cable laying for Wessex Internet. U G Cabling Services had notified the Parish Council that they would be laying cables for Wessex Internet in the New Year from January 18th to March 1st. Cables would be laid in a total of 12 roads, although only one road would be closed at a time. Details of the road closures had been shared with Parish Councillors. Resident and emergency access would be maintained and a letter drop would inform residents of what was happening a minimum of two weeks before the works began. Details of the road closures to be put as a separate item in the January parish magazine.

Ian Sage left the meeting at this point.

It was noted that a lorry had recently had problems on Back Lane, but should not have been there. Somerset Highways East had arranged for an inspection of the barrier on Hincombe Hill and the Area Superintendent would arrange for any necessary remedial works to be carried out in accordance with the Highway Safety Inspection Manual.

6059 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Tom Price volunteered to cut the top of the Playing Field hedge as Ian Sage was unable to do this job.

6060 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Updates: A tree application had been received since the last meeting to reduce Hornbeams at Rockwells House. Parish Councillors were consulted on the application and, as no comments were received, the Clerk recommended approval of the application under his delegated authority to respond to tree applications.

The application to crown thin a Lebanese Cedar at Batcombe House had been approved.

6061 – Community Support Fund: Grant Application and Guidance: A Working Group of the Chair, Tom Price and Bryony Harling had produced a draft policy and application form for community groups to apply for the funding produced by the voluntary accommodation levy, which were distributed with the Agenda. Bryony had also created an online web form on "Tally" for completing the application digitally.

It was agreed to set up a "Community Support Fund" page on the Parish Council website to house the application form, guidance and Tally weblink and to advertise the fund and the fact that application submissions were open via an article in the December parish magazine and via parish community social media. Applications would be invited twice a year with deadlines of January 20th and June 20th so that applications could be considered at the following Parish Council meeting.

It was hoped to expand the voluntary accommodation levy beyond the pub by setting up a QR code with a link to the Parish Council's bank account. Tom Price to send the Clerk a link of how this could be done.

Cllr Rob Reed and Clare Kingston left the meeting at this point.

6062 – Bank Reconciliation and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2027: The bank reconciliation for the first half of the year had been checked by the Chair. The bank reconciliation showed that the cheque for £150 sent to The Three Horseshoes as the Parish Council's contribution to the prize for completing the Community Survey had never been banked and was now out of date. The Parish Council should therefore pay The Three Horseshoes the £150 by bank transfer.

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An update on the budget for the current year had been distributed with the Agenda. This showed the budget for the full year in the first column. Then a comparison between the budget for period August to September and actual payments and receipts and a calculation of the variance between them in the second, third and fourth columns. Finally, there was a second comparison between the budget and the actual figures for the year to date in the fifth, sixth and seventh columns. The period being reported was two months because the period for the last budget report was four months rather than a quarter - as there was no budget report in August.

As noted previously, for the budget comparison the software requires entering which month or months the budgeted figures will be paid/received, which means some variances are just because amounts were paid/received in a different month than expected.

The precept was paid in two parts with the second half being received in September. The variance of £500 on the precept was due to the decision to increase the precept by that amount after the budget had been proposed. The only other receipts during the period were a small amount of interest on the money in the reserve bank account. Bank interest was greater than budgeted as some of the precept had been transferred to the reserve account. The variation against budget under Miscellaneous Receipts is due to the fact that the electricity contribution due from the Fete Committee had not yet been received.

The Playing Field grass cutting was £190 under budget for the period as less cuts were needed over the summer. Playing Field maintenance budget was £375 below budget for the year to date as no money on maintenance had been spent to September 30th. The cost of the electricity supply was less than budgeted to date as was the cost of the water supply.

The only payment towards the Clerk's salary in the period August to September was a small amount of income tax. For the year to the end of September the Clerk's salary was roughly as budgeted but there was a back dated salary increase in October, which means the salary would be over budget at the end of the year. The only other administration payment in the period August to September was the Employer's National Insurance contribution of £14.79.

The only other payment in the period August to September was for the grass cutting of the War Memorial garden. For the period as a whole payments were £351 under budget, largely due to the reduction in grass cutting and the fact no money was spent on Playing Field maintenance. For the year to date, payments were £238 under budget, largely for the same reasons.

Looking forward to the end of the year there would be a deficit as a result of the remaining Community Review grant received the previous year being spent.

6063 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2028: A budget for the year ending 31st March 2028 had been distributed with the Agendas, along with a forecast for the years 2027-2030. The first column of figures gave the budget for the year with subsequent columns giving the budget for each month.

As in previous years, the budget was produced on the basis of taking budgeted figures for the current year (apart from one-off expenditures) and adding increases in line with inflation.

The VAT refund would be around £300 less than the current year as there had been no major items of expenditure. There would no longer be any allotments. There would be a small amount of bank interest and there should be a contribution towards the cost of the electricity supply to the Playing Field from the Fete Committee.

The cost of the grass cutting was likely to be higher than that projected for the current year, assuming an increase in the price per cut. The figure for equipment maintenance was set at £750 as in previous years. A portion of this might be needed to be spent on a dismantling inspection of the cableway. The electricity and water supplies should be around the same level as the current year.

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An increase in the Clerk's salary similar to that in the current year was assumed as inflation did not appear to be reducing. The training budget was likely to be higher than usual if there were new Councillors after the election willing to attend training sessions. The Council also needed to budget for a contested election, although this would only be the case if more than seven people stand as Councillors. Other expenditure on administration was likely to be similar to that projected for the current year.

The budget was an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants. Whether there would be any allotment expenses would depend on whether the allotments field had been restored to its original condition by the end of the previous financial year. The costs of maintaining the war memorial garden and the strimmer should be similar to those projected for the current year. The cost of a new grit bin each year was included under Miscellaneous Payments.

If the precept was increased to £12,000 the budget showed total receipts of £12,600 and total payments of £13,740 – a deficit of £1,140. This assumed a contested election next May. If the election was not contested the deficit would be significantly less.

Also attached was a forecast for the years 2028/30. This was in the same format as previous years as Easy PC Accounts don't produce a forecast. The forecast had been produced on the basis that the Parish Council funded the footpath diversion application at Eastcombe and there was a contested election. As the Council had decided not to fund the footpath diversion the forecast would need to be recalculated and the precept would not need to increase to the levels suggested to maintain the recommended level of reserves.

A decision on the level of the precept was deferred to the January meeting, when the tax base for 2027/28 would be known.

6064 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

Kevin Gale - £200.00 – Grass cutting in October. (Two cuts.)

The Three Horseshoes – £150.00 – Parish Council contribution to Community Survey prize (cheque not banked).

The payments to be made online.

Financial Regulations required payments made online to be reported to the Parish Council at the next meeting. The online payments following the October meeting were:

Kevin Gale - £300.00 – Grass cutting in September. (Three cuts.)

BrueCREW - £808.46 – 4 river testing kits (from the Community Review grant).

HMRC – £6.99 – Employer's NIC less Income Tax credits for 2nd Quarter.

H J Sage & Son - £29.99 – Cricket stumps purchased by Ian Sage.

The payment to H J Sage & Son was still to be paid at the date of the meeting.

6065 – Other Business – matters of information only. Allotments – The allotments tenancies had come to an end on October 31st and the Clerk reported that one of the tenants had asked to be allowed to remove her shed the following week. Peter Glaisher reported that was a lot of rubbish on the allotment field to deal. To go on the Agenda for next month and Peter Glaisher would talk to Ian Sage about ideas for restoring the field to its original state.

The Chair reported that the Staffing Committee had met and reviewed its terms of reference – to be considered at the next meeting. The Chair had also met with the Clerk to perform his annual appraisal.

6066 - Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 2nd December at 7.30pm in the Old School.

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