

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 6th May 2026 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 – Rob Sage.

5957 – Election of Chair and Chair's Acceptance of Office: Janet Jones was proposed by Peter Glaisher and seconded by Clare Kingston. There being no other nominations, Janet was duly elected as Chair. The Chair signed her Acceptance of Office.

5958 – Apologies for Absence: None.

5959 – Declarations of Interest: None. Peter Glaisher noted that the result of his application for a Lawful Development Certificate would be mentioned under Planning Application Updates.

5960 – Election of Vice Chairman: Peter Glaisher was proposed by Janet Jones, seconded by Bryony Harling and elected as Vice Chairman.

5961 – Public Participation: None.

5962 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1st April 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5963 – Matters Arising: Action Table – A copy of the Action Table from the meeting on April 1st had been distributed with the Agenda.

Allotments – Peter Glaisher reported that he had inspected the allotments and the grass was growing. It was noted that only three of the ten allotments were being cultivated and it was unlikely that the allotment holders would manage to maintain the communal areas. It was decided that it would be better to remove any rubbish from the vacant allotments as soon as possible before they became overgrown. Peter Glaisher and Ian Sage to fix a date to do this.

Hincombe Hill – Markings on the road indicated that the barrier would be repaired. To keep an eye on to ensure this happened.

Litter Bin – Bryony Harling reported that this was now being emptied weekly.

Swings – Bryony Harling and Peter Glaisher volunteered to paint and grease the swings in the Playing Field. Access to the electricity supply would allow an electric sander to be used.

Emergency Plan – to be updated in time for the next review.

5964 – Somerset Councillor's Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): A report from Somerset Councillor Claire Sully had been distributed to Parish Councillors before the meeting. The report noted Pilton Parish Council's concerns about the Government's consultation on planning committees proposing tighter controls on which planning applications would be considered by elected members. Jane Cox supported the concerns that Pilton were raising and it was agreed that the Clerk should write to our MP and copy in Claire Sully.

Peter Glaisher reported on the latest meeting of the LCN Highways and Traffic subgroup. A lot of what was discussed was not relevant to Batcombe but some things were. Much of the meeting had been taken up with discussing the Beacon Hill roundabout and the Frome bypass, but it was also noted that Somerset Highways were trying to streamline the reporting process for potholes. Peter would distributed the Minutes of the meeting when these were available.

The LCN AGM would be taking place on Monday 6th July, 7-9.00pm in the Council Chamber at Shepton Mallet. The LCN newsletter had been distributed to Parish Councillors.

5965 – Community Review: Tom Price reported on the meeting on April 24th to consider the way forward following the Community Review. The Review had identified five main areas of concern: Rights of Way; Conditions of the Highways; Environmental/Water Quality issues; IT/Broadband; and Community Support and at the meeting people had signed up to WhatsApp groups to engage further with these issues. An article about the response to the Community Review would be written for the parish magazine and Thrive (the Community Council for Somerset) had provided a list of grant providers in the areas each group were focussed on.

It was suggested that the groups be invited to come to the Parish Council to see what was already being done in these areas and the Chair agreed to invite one group to the Parish Council each month.

5966 – The Three Horseshoes – Asset of Community Value: The Clerk reported that in July 2021 the Batcombe and Westcombe Pub Supporters had successfully applied to Mendip District Council for the Three Horseshoes to be deemed an Asset of Community Value and entered on the register of community assets. For a pub this meant that planning permission would be required for change of use or demolition, but did not prevent the pub from being sold to someone else who will carry on running it as a pub.

Any building on the register is automatically removed after five years and for the Three Horseshoes this would happen on 23rd July 2026. A local resident had asked that the Parish Council reapply for the listing of the Three Horseshoes as an Asset of Community Value and felt this should be done before the pub was removed from the register. However, the information on the Somerset Council website indicated that a new application could only be made after the asset had been removed from the register.

The Parish Council agreed to make an application for the Three Horseshoes to be considered an Asset of Community Value after July this year.

5967 – Highways and Rights of Way: Footpaths – Tom Price reported that the bridge warden at the Somerset Council had returned to work and promised to deal with the bridge issues on the Spargrove footpath. However, it was noted that there were 77 bridges issues to be dealt with in his area. The landowner at Mill Farm was pushing for the issues to be resolved and representatives of Bruton Town Council and Evercreech Parish Council had complained about the closure of the footpath – and received the same response.

Kale Street Parking – A resident of Kale Street had suggested putting double yellow lines on the short stretch of road between Columbine Cottage and June Cottage which acts as a pinch point – anyone parking at this point prevents tractors, recycling collection and emergency vehicles from getting through. The Parish Council noted that this had been considered before and the yellow lines cannot be enforced. Other issues with parking were noted in Westcombe and at the Round House and the Clerk was asked to put a notice in the parish magazine about considerate parking. The Chair volunteered to speak to the resident at the Round House regarding their parking.

It was noted that the farmer at Lower Alham Farm was blocked the lane down to the farm which was a public highway. The Batcombe sign on the A359 junction was loose and the Clerk was asked to report this to Somerset Highways.

5968 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Cricket Club had had a good response to the practice sessions using the cricket net in the Playing Field and requested permission to continue using it though the summer. This was agreed on condition that the warning notice about the practice sessions was taken down when the practice was not taking place.

Bryony Harling requested that the water fountain in the shelter be turned on now the weather was warmer and Ian Sage volunteered to do this.

5969 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Updates: Since the last meeting notification had been received of applications to fell two Himalayan Birch stems at Boxbush (to allow a larger stem to flourish) and to fell a Leylandii at 1 Wickham Cottages. After consulting Councillors, the Clerk had responded to both applications under his delegated authority indicating that there were no objections to the proposed tree works.

The application to fell an Apple tree and a Crab Apple tree at Ivy Wall House had been approved. And the application for a Lawful Development Certificate for the blocking up of two window openings and creation of one new window opening at Home Farm, Westcombe had been successful.

The Clerk reported receiving a report from the Enforcement Officer that the concerns about the extension at Churchbridge Lodge had been investigated and it had been determined that while the extension had not been built in accordance with the approved plans, it had been built more than ten years ago and was now lawful due to the passage of time. Councillors noted that the concerns were not with the original extension but with the further development more recently that did not have planning permission. The Clerk to inform the Enforcement Officer of this.

5970 - Appointment of Staffing Committee and Employment Matters: Staffing Committee – Janet Jones, Peter Glaisher and Bryony Harling volunteered to continue as members of the Staffing Committee.

Clerk's Hours - the Clerk reported that he had worked 7 hours less than he was paid for in the year 2025/26, in addition to the 12½ hours less than he was paid for the previous year. It was agreed to carry forward the shortfall in hours to the current year.

5971 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives: It was agreed that Jayne Cox should continue as the Village Hall Representative and that the Clerk should continue as the Heritage Room Representative.

5972 – Arrangements for Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Other Matters: It was agreed that Financial Regulations be reviewed at the June meeting; Social Media Policy and policy for dealing with the press at the July meeting; complaints procedure at the September meeting; Emergency Plan at the October meeting; budget to be considered at the November meeting; membership of other bodies to be reviewed at the December meeting; Health and Safety Policy at the January meeting; Standing Orders to be reviewed at the February 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.

5973 – Insurance Renewal: The Parish Council's insurance was due for renewal on June 1st. The Council was one year into a three year long-term agreement with Ecclesiastical organised

via our insurance brokers Clear Councils, a trading style of Clear Insurance Management Limited. The premium for 2026/27 was £713.25, a £6 increase on the current year's insurance premium.

5974 – Information Technology (IT) Policy: The Clerk noted that the Annual Governance Statement, which needed to approve at the next meeting, contained an additional assertion, which stated that the Parish Council had put into place arrangements for effective IT and data management in accordance with proper practices. In order to comply with this requirement the Parish Council needed to have in place an IT Policy. A draft IT policy for a smaller authority, provided by the Society of Local Council Clerks, had been distributed with the Agendas and the Parish Council agreed to adopt it.

Section 8 of the IT Policy stated that the Council would endeavour to provide Councillors with an official e-mail account for organisation related communication only, which was one of the proper practices for effective IT and data management. Councillors agreed to use official e-mail accounts which the Clerk would provide. Official e-mails were already in place for the Clerk, the Chair and Footpaths.

5975 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2026: The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31st March 2026 was verified by the Chair and reported to the Council.

A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas. Receipts were £5,037 more than the budgeted figure. This is primarily due to the £4,650 grant for the Community Review that was not included in the Budget. In addition the precept was £500 more than the original figure proposed and there was £142.50 in the Voluntary Accommodation Levy from the Three Horseshoes. Set against this the VAT Refund, Allotments Rent, Electricity Contribution and Bank Interest were all less than budgeted. The money for the play equipment from the Mendip Lottery also came to an end during the year.

Playing Field expenditure was £512 less than budgeted, as a significant proportion of the maintenance budget was unspent. The cost of the grass cutting was £90 more than budgeted. The cost of the electricity supply was £94 less than budgeted following the change of supplier while the cost of the water supply was £10 more than budgeted. It has been agreed that the unspent maintenance budget of £512.88 will be put aside towards the cost of replacing the play equipment in the future.

Expenditure on Administration was £57 less than budgeted. The insurance premium was £68 more than budgeted following the end of the most recent long term agreement; the SALC affiliation fees increased by £55; and the cost of the Data Protection Registration increased by £12. Set against this the Clerk's salary, expenses and NI contribution were all slightly less than budgeted; as was the Clerk's membership of the SLCC, the website hosting fee and the photocopying. In addition there was no expenditure on the laptop or on training.

The expenditure on Grants was £20 more than budgeted due to the increase in the level of the other grants. Other expenses including those of the allotments were £3,936 more than budgeted. This was due to the cost of the Community Review which was covered by the grant mentioned above. While no money had been spent on the maintenance of the allotments, the £237 spent on a new grit bin had not been budgeted.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and other items were provided on the back of the Financial Statement. Only £105 of allotments rent was received, meaning that there was a £115 deficit on the allotment funds at the end of the year compared to a £55 surplus the year before. This left £925 of allotments money at the end of the year of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May.

Of the £4,650 grant for the Community Review, £3,835 was spent on expenses of the survey and meetings connected with the survey – leaving £815 of the grant. There would be some expenses from the survey meeting held in April this year and the remaining grant could be put towards projects arising from the Review. In addition there was £142.50 from the Voluntary Accommodation Levy giving a total £957.50 earmarked for Community Review funds.

In December 2025, the Parish Council agreed to set aside £500 a year for replacing play equipment in the Playing Field in the future to avoid having to do major fundraising. In addition any money left in the Playing Field maintenance budget would be added to this. There was £513 unspent maintenance budget in 2025/26 meaning that £1,013 was earmarked for new play equipment.

The net result of the variations against the budget outlined above was a surplus of £1,480 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £170. This was partly due to the unspent portion of the grant for the Community Review which will be used to help meet the costs of initiatives arising from the Review. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £13,457 in its funds, £2,309 more than anticipated in the budget, which was partly the result of a better than expected position at the start of the year. With £925 set aside for the allotments, £957.50 earmarked for the Community Review, and £1,013 earmarked for play equipment, the Parish Council had funds totalling £10,562 that were not earmarked for specific items. This meant that the Parish Council had sufficient reserves to cover the cost of a by-election during the coming year (which is the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure).

The Parish Council's new internal auditor, Simon Pritchard, had undertaken the audit on the first weekend in May and his report would be considered at the Parish Council's June meeting, when the Council needed to agree the Annual Return.

5976 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2027: An updated projection on this year's budget had been enclosed with the Agendas. The Clerk reported that he had received notification from the Somerset Council that they had paid the first half of the 2026/27 precept of £11,500, which was increased from the budgeted figure. The VAT repayment of £493.92 had been claimed but not yet received. This was larger than budgeted because the Community Council for Somerset was now VAT registered and so the payment for the second half of the costs of the Community Review had had VAT added. There would be no more allotments rent and the electricity contribution was likely to be less as the cost of the electricity had come down.

With regard to payments, there were no known variations from the budget at this time. Allotments money was likely to be spent on maintenance and putting the allotments field back to its original state but it was not clear how much of the cost would be incurred in the current year and how much in the following year.

Overall the projection was for a surplus of £94 instead of the budgeted deficit of £860 – a result of the increased precept and VAT refund and the Voluntary Accommodation Levy. This gives funds of £13,550 at the end of the year. Around £700 of this will be allotments money some of which may have been spent during the year.

5977 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£34.70	News from the Parishes – Printing for the Community Review.
£99.49	Tom Price – Refreshments for the Community Review.
£227.40	Simon Pritchard – Internal Auditor's fee and expenses.
£84.00	MiJan Limited – Easy PC Accounts subscription for 2026/27.
£200.00	Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in April (2 cuts).
£713.25	Clear Insurance Management Ltd – Insurance Premium.
£220.00	T & EA Hollis – Lease of allotments field.

The payments to be made online.

5978 – Other Business – matters of information only. War Memorial Garden – It was reported that the Horticultural Society were willing to assist with the upkeep of the garden, possibly through a financial contribution. Jayne Cox felt the conifers in garden needed removing. Tom Price noted that the garden needed weeding and volunteered to organise this.

Peter Glaisher reported that he had been given some broken bits of finger post.

5979 - Dates of Future Meetings: The next meeting would be at 8.00pm on Wednesday 3rd June in the Old School. The following dates were agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council during the coming year, on the first Wednesday of each month:

3 rd June	1 st July	5 th August	2 nd September	7 th October	4 th November
2 nd December	6 th January	3 rd February	3 rd March	7 th April	12 th May

The date in April would also be the date of the Annual Parish Meeting. The August meeting would only be held if there were planning applications to consider. The Council to meet at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year. The May 2027 meeting would be a week later than usual because of the Parish Council elections.

DRAFT