

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

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

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th January 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 and Rob Reed – Somerset Councillor.

5899 – Apologies for Absence: None.

5900 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the authorisation of the payment of the Clerk's salary and expenses as relatives of the Clerk. Peter Glaisher declared an interest in the application for works to the tree in the Glebe field as a member of the Parochial Church Council who rent the field.

5901 – Public Participation: None.

5902 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd December 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5903 – Matters Arising: Action Table – A copy of the Action Table from the meeting on December 3rd had been distributed with the Agenda. There was nothing to report that did not appear later on the Agenda.

5904 – Somerset Councillor's Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): A report had been received from Somerset Councillor Claire Sully and distributed to Parish Councillors. Cllr Rob Reed informed the Council that Somerset Council had grant funding available for the installation of electric vehicle charging points and the Somerset Council should be informed of any suitable sites. He also noted that the Scrutiny Board was looking at the performance of the Rights of Way team. The Chair noted the issues with the Bridges team at Somerset Council that was holding up the repairs to the Spargrove footpath.

The next LCN meeting would be held on 26th January 2026 and there was no one available to attend from the Parish Council.

5905 – Highways and Rights of Way: Tom Price reported that the landowner at Mill Farm had offered to undertake remedial repairs to the bridge the footpath crossed to Mill Farm, but this had been declined by Somerset Council. Tom had been informed that someone from the Bridges team would be inspecting the bridge in the first week of January. Rob Reed offered to chase up the Rights of Way Officer and noted that a complaint had been received at Evercreech Parish Council about the closed footpath. Jayne Cox noted that there were also issues with the bridleway at Honeycliff.

Clare Kingston reported that a large amount of rubbish had been left on the road from Westcombe to Stoney Stratton and had been removed by Somerset Council, and apparently enforcement officers would be visiting several addresses found amongst the rubbish. Jayne Cox reported wheelie bins left at the gravel pit at Hedgestocks and Clare Kingston expressed concerns about the parking at the Round House, making it difficult for emergency vehicles to pass. Jayne Cox thanked a resident who had cleared branches on Fry's Lane and Clare Kingston

expressed concerns about drones flying at night in Westcombe. Jayne Cox noted that a lot of litter had been left on the roads over Christmas and Bryony Harling reported a problem with litter from an Air BnB at Chapel Row.

The Clerk reported that the Ramblers Association had requested feedback from the Parish Council on potential footpaths to be added to the definitive map – to be considered at the next meeting.

5906 – Allotments: Peter Glaisher noted that two of the allotment holders had not yet paid for their allotment, although the allotment holder who had not previously responded to requests about whether she intended to keep her allotment had paid. The vacant allotments were felt to be too large an area to cover with black plastic and so Peter volunteered to trim them off every month. It was felt unlikely that the remaining allotment holders would keep up with cutting the grass in the communal areas. The rubbish on the allotments would be removed in the Autumn with a trailer.

5907 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: It was noted that the bin outside the Playing Field was overflowing despite being reported several times and people were leaving dog poo bags beside it. It was also noted that the warning sign on the electric meter cabinet had been removed. Concern was expressed about abuse of the litter bin with domestic waste and dog poo bags being placed in it and consideration was given to removing the bin. It was decided to give three months warning with a note in the magazine that if the abuse of the bin continued it would be removed. Bryony Harling volunteered to replace the sign on the bin with a sticker that said no dog poo bags to be placed in the bin.

The moles were still very active in the Playing Field and Clerk stated that now the school holidays were over he had contacted the molecatcher.

Kevin Gale had increased his quote for cutting the grass in the Playing Field and at the War Memorial to £100 a cut, a £5 increase. The Parish Council agreed to the increase as his work in cutting the grass was appreciated.

5908 – Planning Applications: Planning Application No: 2025/2287/TCA Medlar - Fell. Strawberry Cottage, Batcombe. Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area. The Medlar was a 9ft tree in the front garden of Strawberry Cottage and the fruit from the tree has been poisoning the home owner's dog so he wished to remove and replace it. The Parish Council recommended approval.

Planning Application No: 2025/2295/TCA Lime – Reduce by approx. 3m. Land at 369093 139052 Chapel Row Gold Hill, Batcombe. Works/Felling Trees in a CA. This was the storm-damaged tree in the glebe field next to the Parsonage. The application stated that the applicant was the Parish Council, but was actually Batcombe PCC who rent the glebe field. The Clerk had informed the tree surgeon and Somerset Council that the Parish Council had no responsibility for this tree and had not requested any work on it. The Parish Council had no objections to the work on the damaged tree.

A further application for tree works had been received after the Agendas had been distributed and could be considered under the Clerk's delegated authority to respond, after consultation with Parish Councillors, to such applications. Planning Application No: 2026/0017/TCA T1-2 – Box stems – Fell. T3 – Beech – reduction x 3m all over. T4 – Norway Maple – Reduction by 1.5m all over. T5 - Cherry – Reduction by 1.5m all over. The removal of the Box stems would improve visibility at the entrance to Boxbush Farm and the reduction of the other trees would increase light in the garden. There were no objections to any of the tree works listed.

Planning Updates: Approval had been given for the pruning of the Apple tree and the Acer at Pastoral; and for the felling of a Leylandii and the reduction of a Maple at Netherlea. Planning permission and Listed Building Consent had been given for the works at King's Hayes, despite the Parish Council recommending refusal.

5909 – Annual Parish Meeting: The Annual Parish Meeting would take place in the Jubilee Hall on Wednesday April 1st. After discussion of various options for speakers, the Clerk was instructed to ask the MP if she would take part in a Question Time with the Somerset Councillors. A second option would be to ask Bel Deering from the Somerset Rivers Authority.

5910 – Appointment of Internal Auditor: The Clerk had contacted Simon Pritchard, who was an internal auditor based in Shaftesbury. Simon didn't usually take on additional work, but he already did Evercreech and was impressed with the quality of the information on the Parish Council website, so is willing to take the Parish Council on. His minimum fee would be £195 plus travel expenses and he would take away all the relevant paperwork and return it a few days later. The fee was comparable to what Wanstrow Parish Council budgeted for their internal audit by a firm of accountants in Wells.

The Clerk was confident that Simon had relevant knowledge of the public sector and was both independent and competent and the Parish Council agreed to appoint him their Internal Auditor. On appointment, the Internal Auditor should provide a letter of engagement which would normally include: roles and responsibilities; audit planning and timing of visits; reporting requirements; rights of access to information, members and officers; period of engagement; remuneration; and any other matters required for the management of the engagement by the Parish Council.

5911 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2027: An updated budget had been distributed with the Agendas. As there was now no allotment rent due in 2026/27, the Total Receipts had been reduced by £280 to £11,292. Payments showed an increase in the cost of the Playing Field grass cutting from £1,800 to £1,900 in line with the new quote from Kevin Gale. There was also an additional £200 for the Internal Auditor. This had increased Total Payments by £300 to £12,152. The reduced receipts and increased payments mean the projected deficit had increased to £860. The Parish Council had agreed to put aside £500 each year towards the eventual cost of new play equipment which didn't appear in the budget as it was a transfer between reserves rather than a payment. There would also be the receipts from the voluntary accommodation levy, although these were not included as the amounts were not known.

The tax base for Batcombe for 2026/27 was 216.78 which was a 0.29% increase on the 2025/26 tax base. This meant that if the precept was unchanged at £11,000 the Council tax contributions towards the precept would decrease by 0.14%. For a Band D property with no discounts this would be a saving of 7p and they would be asked to pay £50.74 towards the precept in 2026/27. The deadline for setting the precept was January 30th and for precepts over £10,000 these would now be paid in two instalments in April and September. (Somerset Council had also provided a note of the number of dwellings in the parish in each band. Batcombe had 9 in Band A; 12 in Band B; 29 in Band C; 26 in Band D; 38 in Band E; 37 in Band F; 38 in Band G; and 2 in Band H. A total of 191 dwellings.)

5912 – Amendment of the Parish Council's Financial Regulations to allow Online Banking: The Parish Council's application for online banking with NatWest's Bankline for Communities had been successful and after some initial issues the Clerk and Chair were logged into the system. As noted at the last meeting, in order to use online banking, the Parish Council's Financial Regulations which currently require payments by cheque, Standing Order or Direct Debit needed to be amended. In Regulation 6.5 "All payments shall be made by cheque ..." should be replaced by "All payments shall be made by online banking or cheque ...". And

Regulation 7 - Electronic Payments should be replaced by an amended Regulation 7 that had been distributed with the Agendas. The Parish Council agreed to amend their Financial Regulations as indicated.

All payments would need to be authorised at a Parish Council meeting as under the previous Financial Regulations, but instead of signing cheques prepared by the Clerk at the meeting and initially cheque stubs and invoices, the Clerk as System Administrator sets up the online payments and sends copies of the invoices to two signatories who check these before approving the online payment. Details of the payments made are then reported to the Council at the next meeting and a record kept of who approved each payment. The Clerk can act as a signatory, except that he cannot approve a payment to himself, and if the Clerk is absent for a prolonged period another signatory can act as the System administrator. Currently only the Clerk and the Chair were online but, once we are familiar with the system, the other signatories can be added.

5913 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£1,337.42 The Clerk – Salary for 3rd Quarter.

£89.49 The Clerk – Expenses for 3rd Quarter.

£40.84 HMRC – Income tax (£19.80) and Employer's NIC (£21.07) for 2nd Quarter.

£45.90 News from the Parishes – Photocopying in 2025 (1,030 black copies; 47 colour).

The Clerk's salary and expenses were paid by cheque as the Clerk could not approve a payment to himself. The remaining payments to be made online.

59147 – Other Business – matters of information only. The Clerk reported that he had submitted the Re-Declaration of Compliance to the Pensions Regulator. This states that the Parish Council have no one in a pension scheme, which was only compulsory if an employee is earning over £10,000. The Re-Declaration has to be submitted every three years to fulfil the Council's legal duties under the 2008 Pensions Act. The Clerk is also required to write a letter to himself asking if he wishes to request that the Parish Council to set up a pension scheme, which he does not.

The Clerk noted that the Minute binder was getting very full and that the binders that had been used for many years were no longer being produced. A similar binder produced by a specialist company would cost £89. It was suggested that the Minutes are kept in a standard lever arch file and then bound at a later date.

5915 - Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th February 2026 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.