

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 7th May 2025 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 Chair & Chair's Acceptance of Office

The current Parish Council Chair chairs this item. After the newly elected Chair has signed their Acceptance of Office, they then chair the rest of the meeting. The Parish Council is unable to do anything else until a Chair 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. 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.

Parish Councillors' Registers of Interests are published on the Somerset Council's website (as well as on the Parish Council website). Councillors should check that their Register of Interests is correct and up-to-date and to inform the Monitoring Officer at Somerset Council if any changes are required.

4. Election of Vice Chairman

The main role of the Vice Chairman is to chair meetings of the Parish Council when the Chair is absent or has a pecuniary interest in an item. If both Chair and Vice Chairman are absent, the Parish Councillors present have to elect one of their number to chair the meeting.

5. 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.

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 2nd April 2025 to be agreed and signed.

Enclosed/attached. If you spot any typos or have any issue with the Minutes it is helpful to inform the Clerk before the meeting so that where necessary an amended version of the Minutes can be signed by the Chair.

7. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Action Table – A copy of the Action Table from the meeting on April 2nd is attached/enclosed. Tom Price has suggested implementing actions with deadlines, or perhaps progress milestones, to keep actions achievable and prevent them carrying over repeatedly.

8. Somerset Councillor's Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN)

An opportunity for our Somerset Councillor to report on matters relevant to the parish, either in person or in writing. The most recent LCN meeting was on Monday 3rd March and the next meeting will be on Tuesday 13th May at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber at Shepton Mallet. This will be a hybrid meeting and there will be an update on working groups as well as a Service Manager from Adult Social Care who will talk about their work.

9. Community Review

The application for a grant to pay for the Community Council for Somerset undertaking a Community Review for Batcombe was successful. There will be a launch event for the Community Review on Saturday June 7th. See the Parish News for more details.

10. Allotments

The current lease of the allotments field comes to an end on April 30th this year. The Parish Council needs to decide whether to renew the lease for a further four years. The Parish Council decided earlier in the year to review the future of the allotments before renewing the lease. As can be seen from the accounts enclosed with this Agenda, the allotments account has made a small surplus over the last two years despite the vacant allotments. This is due to there being no maintenance costs for the last two years and means the allotment funds currently stand at £1,040. We currently have two vacant allotments but only five allotment holders as one has three allotments and another two.

The rent for the allotments field is due on May 1st and for the last four years has been £220. If the Parish Council decides to stop providing allotments we still need to give the current allotment holders 12 months' notice from November this year. Thus we will need to lease the field for at least a further two years to give the notice period and then restore the field to its original condition. I have been in touch with the landowners who are happy to continue the lease at the same price of £220 a year and are flexible about the length of lease the Parish Council requires. They would just like to be kept informed of the Parish Council's decision about the future of the allotments.

11. Footpaths and Highways

Spargrove Footpath – the Rights of Way Officer has temporarily closed the footpath and cordoned off the fallen tree and damaged bridges. Tom Price was hoping to arrange a meeting between the Rights of Way Officer and the landowners to see if a way forward could be found but the Rights of Way Officer has asked for this to be postponed until his manager decides what Rights of Way are able to do to resolve the situation.

Eastcombe Footpath – at the last meeting it was agreed to look into the possibility of a new permissive way that would avoid the Pugh's Bottom farmyard. This can be deferred to a later meeting.

*Strimmer – it was agreed at the last meeting to consider the cost of the training to use the strimmer at this meeting. The cost of training two volunteers to use the strimmer is £540 + VAT. Tom Price notes that the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) state that employers must **'Ensure all persons who use work equipment have adequate training for the purposes of health and safety, including in the methods which may be adopted when using work equipment, and risks which such use may entail and the precautions to be taken'**. It does not state what constitutes 'adequate training' but that the training standard should be adequate in ensuring the health and safety of workers and any people who may be affected by the work, so far as reasonably practicable. Furthermore it also states that **'as long as training is provided competently and to the standard necessary to ensure health and safety, there is no bar to training being given by competent in-house staff'**. Tom suggests that as he has used such equipment professionally for over 20 years, his experience complies with the above statement and would negate the need for external training. I suggest that after the change of insurers on June 1st (see below) we contact our new insurers to check that they are happy with this arrangement.*

12. Playground - Maintenance Report

Thanks to Ian Sage for removing the willow structures in the Playing Field and to Clare Kingston for painting the frames on the old swings. Ian has also replaced the worn chains on the toddler swing.

We have received a request from the Fete Committee to hold the Village Fete on Sunday August 24th. Are the Parish Council willing to agree to this with the usual conditions including a contribution towards the cost of the electricity? As can be seen from the enclosed Financial Statement, the cost of the electricity over the last year came to £230. However, we switched supplier at the end of January and the standing charge was reduced to 45p a day. This gives an estimated cost of around £175 a year. This indicates that the cost of the electricity for the year to August will be around £200, so a 50% contribution would be £100 (instead of the £120 last year).

13. Planning Applications

None at present.

Planning Application Updates. *Nothing to report.*

14. 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 the Clerk. Janet Jones, Peter Glaisher and Bryony Harling were re-elected to the Staffing Committee last year.

The Clerk has been asked to report any additional hours worked in the previous year at the May meeting. In 2024/25 the Clerk worked 5½ hours less than he was paid for, although he had also worked 14 less than he was paid for the year before. Due to a couple of errors in preparing cheques the Clerk was underpaid by £66 in 2024/25. This equivalent to 4½ hours work, so I suggest this time is taken off the amount the Clerk needs to make up this year.

15. Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives and Future of the Old School

The Council appoints a representative to the Village Hall Trust Committee. Currently this is Jayne Cox. (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 and the role involves a commitment to open the Heritage Room on a Saturday morning and assist those inquiring about the history of the parish and its former inhabitants.

The Village Hall Trust held a public meeting on April 10th to consider the future of the Old School. The Trust views the Old School as a loss making building (due to very high electricity bills and a lack of bookings) while the Jubilee Hall is making money but requires significant sums spent on its maintenance. The Trust Treasurer suggested finding an alternative use for the Old School, such as a holiday let or B&B to stem the losses, but the meeting did not want to lose the use of the Old School for the community and felt that the reason for the high electricity bills should be investigated; the acoustic issues in the main room of the Old School should be addressed to encourage bookings; and fundraising be undertaken to pay for the major repair/maintenance bills. The loss of the Old School would be an issue for the Parish Council as the Jubilee Hall is not ideal for small meetings and there would be no alternative venue when another event such as the Somerset Arts Week was taking place. There would also be the loss to the community if there was no place for the Heritage Room or the Hub. The Parish Council may wish to consider encouraging the Village Hall Trust to keep the Old School open for the benefit of the community, possibly with an increased grant to support the retention of the Old School.

16. 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, policy for dealing with the press, and social media policy. The Parish Council should also review the Emergency Plan for Batcombe. I suggest the following timetable: Financial Regulations to be reviewed at the June meeting; Social Media Policy and policy for dealing with the press to be reviewed at the July meeting; complaints procedure to be reviewed at the September meeting; Emergency Plan to be reviewed 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 (see below) 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.

17. Insurance Renewal and Health and Safety Policy

Our insurance is due for renewal on June 1st, and we have come to an end of a three year long-term agreement with Aviva Insurance organised via our insurance brokers Clear Councils, a trading style of Clear Insurance Management Limited. At the March meeting it was agreed to go with the quote arranged by our insurance brokers rather than seeking alternative quotes ourselves. Clear Councils are now using Ecclesiastical as their preferred insurance partner and we have received a quote for next year's insurance of £725.35. This is a £100 increase on last year's insurance premium of £624.94. However, Ecclesiastical are also offering a reduced premium of £707.25 for entering into a three-year fixed term agreement. It should be noted that insurance costs have increased and being in a long term agreement will have kept those increases down for the last couple of years.

Can Councillors check the attached Statement of Fact and let me know if you have any unspent convictions or pending prosecutions (other than motoring offences); have been declared bankrupt or have been subject to prosecution or notice of prosecution by any regulatory body? Our insurers now require the Parish Council to have a Health and Safety policy, which is one policy we do not have (it is not a requirement under Health and Safety legislation as we only have one employee). Attached is a simple Health and Safety Policy for a small council (borrowed from Colaton Raleigh Parish Council). If the Parish Council adopts this policy we will satisfy the requirements of the insurers and we can review the policy later in the year to ensure it meets our needs.

18. Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2025

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.

Receipts were £177 more than the budgeted figure. This is due to the precept being £150 more than the original figure proposed, plus the unbudgeted income of £100 for the Playing Field wood and gate and less the reduction in the allotments rent due to vacancies. The money for the play equipment from the Mendip Lottery also came to an end during the year.

Playing Field expenditure was £674 less than budgeted, as the maintenance budget was largely unspent and the cost of the grass cutting was £100 less than budgeted. The cost of the electricity supply was £30 less than budgeted while the cost of the water supply was £44 more than budgeted. Two years' subscriptions to the Somerset Playing Fields Association were paid this year as the previous year's subscription was paid after the end of the financial year.

Expenditure on Administration was £609 more than budgeted. This was largely due to the unbudgeted £706 cost of the new laptop and software. The Clerk's salary was £30 less than budgeted, although was a result of the Clerk being underpaid by £66 due to an accounting error.

The hire of the Old School for meetings was £50 more than budgeted due to an increase in the amount paid and the insurance premium was £25 less than budgeted. The cost of the website hosting fee was £27 less than budgeted as the increase in the fees was not as great as expected.

The expenditure on Grants was £530 more than budgeted. This was due to the unbudgeted grant of £500 for the Church clock and the increase in the grant to the Village Hall Trust from £150 to £200 (Other grants were £20 less than budgeted). Other expenses including those of the allotments were £367 less than budgeted. This was a result of no money being spent on the maintenance of the allotments, the maintenance of the strimmer or the refurbishment of the Westcombe notice board. However, £221 was spent on a new grit bin and £12 on cable ties.

Details of the earmarked money for the allotments and other items are given on the back of the Financial Statement. Although only £275 of allotments rent was received, the fact that there was no expenditure on maintenance meant that there was a £55 surplus on the allotment funds at the end of the year compared to a £15 surplus the year before. This left £1,040 of allotments money at the end of the year of which £220 would pay for the lease of the field in May.

The net result of the variations against the budget outlined above is a deficit of £681 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £760. This is due to the additional precept and the underspend on the Playing Field maintenance balancing the unbudgeted cost of the new laptop and savings on the allotments and strimmer maintenance and the notice board refurbishment balancing the cost of the new grit bin and the additional grants. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £11,977 in its funds, £1,184 more than anticipated in the budget. This is a result of a better than expected position at the start of the year. With £1,040 set aside for the allotments, the Parish Council has funds totalling £10,937 that are not earmarked for specific items. This means that the Parish Council has sufficient reserves to cover the cost of a by-election during the coming year (which is the most likely source of major unbudgeted expenditure). It also means that the Parish Council has reserves to meet unexpected costs that may be passed down from the Somerset Council or to meet other unexpected needs for funds.

Our internal auditor, Griff Williams, is able and willing to undertake the audit again this year. This needs to be completed by our June meeting, at which we need to agree the Annual Return. It should be noted that Griff has stated that this will be the last year in which he will act as our Internal Auditor, so we will need to find a new Internal Auditor for next year.

19. Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2026

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. We have received notification from the Somerset Council that they have paid our 2025/26 precept of £11,000, which was increased from the budgeted figure. The VAT repayment of £232.60 has been claimed but not yet received. The projection for the allotments rent assumes two vacant allotments.

With regard to payments, most items are expected to be as budgeted. The grass cutting will be higher than budgeted due to the increase in the price per cut. We have made a commitment to buy a new grit bin each year which was not included in the budget. Overall the projection is for a surplus of £23 instead of the budgeted deficit of £170 – as a result of the increased precept balanced by the increased cost of the grasscutting and the unbudgeted grit bin. This gives funds of £11,999 at the end of the year of which around £1,000 will be earmarked for the allotments.

20. Authorisation of Payments

Clear Insurance Management Ltd - £707.55 – Insurance premium.

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

Kevin Gale - £190.00 – Grass cutting in April.

21. 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.

22. Dates of Future Meetings - Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th June 2025 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

Traditionally the Parish Council has met on the first Wednesday of the month. Thus for 2025/2026, the suggested dates, to be confirmed at the meeting, are:

<i>5th June</i>	<i>2nd July</i>	<i>6th August</i>	<i>3rd September</i>	<i>1st October</i>	<i>5th November</i>
<i>3rd December</i>	<i>7th January</i>	<i>4th 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 August meeting will only take place if required to consider planning applications. The Council normally meets at 8.00pm in the summer (June to October) and at 7.30pm for the rest of the year.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

30th April 2025