

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 7th May 2025 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.

5765 – Election of Chair and Chair's Acceptance of Office: Janet Jones was proposed by Jayne Cox and seconded by Peter Glaisher. There being no other nominations, Janet was duly elected as Chair. The Chair signed her Acceptance of Office.

5766 – Apologies for Absence and Acceptance of Reasons for Absence: None.

5767 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5768 – Election of Vice Chairman: Peter Glaisher was proposed by Janet Jones, seconded by Clare Kingston and elected as Vice Chairman.

5769 – Public Participation: None.

5770 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 2nd April 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5771 – Matters Arising: Action Table – Tom Price proposed that deadlines should be added to the Action Table and this was agreed. The Action Table from the last meeting was reviewed. The George V plaque to be taken off the Action Table. Clare Kingston would paint the top of the swings but needed someone to hold the ladder.

5772 – Somerset Councillor's Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): No report had been received from our Somerset Councillors.

The next LCN meeting would be on Tuesday 13th May at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber at Shepton Mallet, when there would be an update on working groups and a Service Manager from Adult Social Care talking about their work. Anyone able to attend was asked to inform the other Councillors that they would be going to the meeting.

5773 – Community Review: The application for a grant to pay for the Community Council of Somerset to undertake a Community Review for Batcombe had been successful and there would be a launch event for the Community Review on Saturday June 7th at 6.00pm. Tom Price was authorised to sign the Community Review Agreement with the Community Council on behalf of the Parish Council. Tom reported that the Review Steering Group consisted of Tom Price, Tim Chater, Dan Dovar, Ali James and Melissa Corthorne and would be meeting for the first time the following evening.

5774 – Allotments: The current lease of the allotments field came to an end on April 30th. The allotments account had made a small surplus over the last two years despite the vacant allotments, due to no maintenance costs for the last two years and this meant the allotment funds

stood at £1,040. There were currently two vacant allotments and, although there was interest in taking on an allotment from someone from Lamyatt, the allotment holder who had three allotments had indicated that he would be giving up his allotments at the end of the year.

If the Parish Council decided to stop providing allotments, it would need to give the current allotment holders 12 months' notice from November this year and then return the allotments field to its original condition. The Clerk reported that the landowners were happy to continue leasing the field at the same price of £220 a year and were flexible about the length of lease the Parish Council required. The Parish Council decided to lease the field for two years and make a decision in October about whether to give the remaining allotment holders 12 months' notice. Peter Glaisher to contact the person interested in an allotment and explain the position to them.

5775 – Footpaths and Highways: Spargrove Footpath – the Rights of Way Officer had temporarily closed the footpath and cordoned off the fallen tree and damaged bridges. Tom Price reported that the Rights of Way department at Somerset Council was considering whether they could remove the tree from the footpath or could arrange a work around with the landowners. Tom was asked to press the Rights of Way department for a decision.

Eastcombe Footpath – there was a need to consult with the landowners about a new permissive route that would avoid Pugh's Bottom farmyard. There was a need for four kissing gates on the new route and it was suggested that the two landowners, the Parish Council and the Rights of Way department could each pay for one of these. Tom Price to contact the two landowners and Rights of Way to arrange a meeting in October.

Strimmer Training – It was agreed to defer this to the July meeting.

5776 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Ian Sage and Tom Price were thanked for removing the willow structures in the Playing Field and Clare Kingston was thanked for painting the frames on the old swings. Ian was also thanked for replacing the worn chains on the toddler swing.

A request had been received from the Fete Committee to hold the Village Fete on Sunday August 24th. This was agreed subject to the Fete Committee providing a £100 contribution to the cost of providing electricity for the Fete and the usual conditions: the Fete Committee to provide their own litter bins and cover the Parish Council bin; the Fete Committee to provide proof of their public liability insurance and to return the Playing Field to the same condition as before the Fete. The Chair would undertake the inspection on the Bank Holiday Monday so that the Playing Field can be opened for use that day. The Clerk to respond to the Fete Committee.

There was a discussion of whether to move the picnic bench to the space where the willow structure had been but it was agreed that the current position was the best place for the picnic table as it gave parents a central position to supervise their children. The bench that had been under the other willow structure was rotting and Ian Sage volunteered to remove it. He also volunteered to treat the other benches with wood preservative. There was evidence of moles in the Playing Field and it was agreed that the Clerk should get the molecatcher back. Jayne Cox reported finding glass in the Playing Field.

5777 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Concerns were raised about building work at Churchbridge Lodge that did not have planning permission. The Clerk to report this to Planning Enforcement to see if this was permitted development or not.

Planning Application Updates: There were no updates to report.

5778 - 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.

Additional Hours - the Clerk reported that he had worked 5½ hours less than he was paid for in the year 2024/25, in addition to the 14 hours less than he was paid for the previous year. The Clerk was underpaid by £100 in 2024/25 due to an arithmetical error. This was equivalent to 7 hours work so it was agreed to take this off the hours the Clerk needed to make up in the current year.

5779 – Appointment of Village Hall and Heritage Room Representatives and Future of the Old School: It was agreed that Jayne Cox should continue as the Village Hall Representative and that the Clerk should continue as the Heritage Room Representative.

Future of the Old School – It was noted that the Village Hall Trust held a public meeting in April to consider the future of the Old School. The Trust viewed the Old School as a loss making building (due to very high electricity bills and a lack of bookings) while the Jubilee Hall was making money but requires significant sums spent on its maintenance. The Trust Treasurer had 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 a significant issue for the Parish Council as the Jubilee Hall was 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.

5780 – 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.

5781 – Insurance Renewal and Health and Safety Policy: The Parish Council's insurance was due for renewal on June 1st, and the Council had 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 had been agreed to go with the quote arranged by our insurance brokers rather than seeking alternative quotes ourselves. Clear Councils were now using Ecclesiastical as their preferred insurance partner and had provided a quote for the next year's insurance of £725.35. This was a £100 increase on the previous year's insurance premium of £624.94. However, Ecclesiastical were also offering a reduced premium of £707.25 for entering into a three-year fixed term agreement. The Parish Council agreed to enter into a new three-year agreement for the reduced premium.

The new insurers required the Parish Council to have a Health and Safety policy (although this was not a requirement under Health and Safety legislation as the Council only had one employee). A simple Health and Safety Policy for a small council (borrowed from another

parish council) had been distributed with the Agendas and was adopted by the Parish Council. The policy would be reviewed later in the year to ensure it met the Council's needs.

5782 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2025: The bank reconciliation for the fourth quarter to 31st March 2025 was verified by the Chair and reported to the Council.

A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas. Receipts were £177 more than the budgeted figure, 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 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 this was a result of the Clerk being underpaid by £100 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 were provided 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 was a deficit of £681 on the year instead of the budgeted deficit of £760. This was 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 was 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 had funds totalling £10,937 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). It also meant that the Parish Council had the reserves to meet any unexpected costs that may be passed down from the Somerset Council or to meet any other unexpected needs for funds.

The Clerk noted that the Council's internal auditor, Griff Williams, was willing and able to undertake the audit again this year. This needed to be completed by the June meeting, at which the Annual Return needed to be agreed. However, the Clerk added that Griff had stated that this

would be the last year in which he would act as Internal Auditor, so the Parish Council will need to find a new Internal Auditor for the next year.

5783 – Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2026: 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 2025/26 precept of £11,000, which was increased from the budgeted figure. The VAT repayment of £232.60 had been claimed but not yet received. The projection for the allotments rent assumed two vacant allotments.

With regard to payments, most items were expected to be as budgeted. The grass cutting would be higher than budgeted due to the increase in the price per cut. The Parish Council had made a commitment to buy a new grit bin each year which was not included in the budget. Overall the projection was 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 grass cutting and the unbudgeted grit bin. This gave funds of £11,999 at the end of the year of which around £1,000 would be earmarked for the allotments.

5784 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£285.00	Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (three cuts in April).
£220.00	T & EA Hollis – Annual rent of the allotments field.
£707.55	Clear Insurance Management Ltd – Insurance Premium.
£6.12	Read Agriservices Ltd – Chain for toddler swing. The Clerk to query this invoice as it seemed too low.

5785 – Other Business – matters of information only. The crime report for April included one crime in Batcombe recorded as harassment. It was agreed to consider online banking for the Parish Council at the next meeting. Bryony Harling to get a “No Dog Poo” sign for the litter bin by the Playing Field entrance.

5786 - Dates of Future Meetings: The following dates were agreed for the monthly meetings of the Parish Council during the coming year, on the first Wednesday of each month:

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

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

Janet Jones
4/6/25