

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage Tel: 01749 850934 e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 7th January 2026 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. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd December 2025 to be agreed and signed.
Enclosed/attached.

5. Matters Arising – information updates only.

Action Table – A copy of the Action Table from the meeting on December 3rd is attached/enclosed.

6. Somerset Councillors' Reports and the Shepton Local Community Network

An opportunity for the Somerset Councillors to report on matters relevant to the parish, either in person or in writing. The next LCN meeting will be held on 26th January 2026.

7. Highways and Rights of Way

Nothing to report at present.

8. Allotments

The Chair and Peter Glaisher to report on their inspection of the allotments and to consider proposals for keeping the vacant allotments tidy for the rest of the year.

9. Playground - Maintenance Report

The litter bin outside the Playing Field was overflowing again and I have reported it to the Somerset Council. Anyone can report a litter bin that needs emptying on the Somerset Council website at [Report or request a Dog or Litter Bin - Somerset Council](#)

I have turned off the water in the Playing Field as we are due for some cold weather. The pipes in the bus shelter need draining.

British Gas have replaced the smart meter in the Playing Field as no signal could be received from the previous smart meter.

Kevin Gale has provided a quote for cutting the grass this year of £100 a cut. This is a 5.26% increase on the £95 a cut he charged in 2025. The Parish Council to accept the quote or seek additional quotes.

10. Planning Applications

Planning Application No: 2025/2287/TCA Medlar - Fell.

Strawberry Cottage, Batcombe. Works/Felling Trees in a Conservation Area.

The Medlar is a 9ft tree in the front garden of Strawberry Cottage. The fruit from the tree has been poisoning the home owner's dog and so he wishes to remove and replace it.

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 is the storm-damaged tree in the glebe field next to the Parsonage. The application states that the applicant is Batcombe Parish Council! I assume the applicant is Batcombe PCC who rent the glebe field and that the tree surgeon making the application has confused the PCC with the Parish Council. I have informed the tree surgeon that the Parish Council has no responsibility for this tree and has not requested any work on it.

Planning Application Updates. *Approval has 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 has been given for the works at King's Hayes, despite the Parish Council recommending refusal. The case officer's report giving the reasons for approval can be found at [2025_1015_LBC-PVWRCM - OFFICER REPORT-1468820.pdf](#)*

11. Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting will take place in the Jubilee Hall on Wednesday April 1st. If we wish to invite a speaker for the meeting we should start thinking about it at this meeting.

12. Appointment of Internal Auditor

I have been in contact with Simon Pritchard, who is an internal auditor based in Shaftesbury (and who I am pretty sure is the same Simon Pritchard who does the training for SALC). He doesn't usually take on additional work, but he already does Evercreech and was impressed with the quality of the information on our website and so is willing to take us on. His minimum fee would be £195 plus travel expenses. He would take away all the relevant paperwork and return it a few days later (which is essentially what our previous internal auditors did) so travel expenses would be a couple of trips from Shaftesbury.

As a comparison, I've checked what Wanstrow do. They use a firm of accountants in Wells – and budget £200 a year, although it has cost them more than this when the internal auditor found a few issues that needed addressing. (Bruton budget £1,600 and Nunney £450 but these are larger councils.)

In appointing an Internal Auditor, the Parish Council needs to be confident that the Internal Auditor has relevant knowledge of the public sector and is both independent and competent. I think we can be confident that Simon fulfils all these criteria. My understanding is that on appointment the Internal Auditor will provide a letter of engagement which will 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.

13. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2027

Attached is an updated budget for 2026/27. There is now no allotment rent due in 2026/27 so the Total Receipts have been reduced by £280 to £11,292. Payments show 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 is also an additional £200 for the internal auditor. This has increased total payments by £300 to £12,152. The reduced receipts and increased payments mean the projected deficit has increased to £860. The Parish Council has agreed to put aside £500 each year towards the eventual cost of new play equipment which doesn't appear in the budget as it is a transfer between reserves rather than a payment. There will also be the receipts from the voluntary accommodation levy, although I have not included these as I don't know what they will be.

The tax base for Batcombe for 2026/27 is 216.78 which is a 0.29 increase on the 2025/26 tax base. This means that if the precept is unchanged at 11,000 the Council tax contributions towards the precept will 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 is January 30th and for precepts over £10,000 these will now be paid in two instalments in April and September. (The Somerset Council have also provided a note of the number of dwellings in the parish in each band. We have 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.)

The question for the Parish Council is whether you wish to increase the precept to maintain reserves at their current level. Under normal conditions, the Parish Council's reserves are higher than recommended (between a third and two thirds of the precept). However, conditions are not normal with the potential for additional expenditure from the Somerset Council and/or the Community Review.

As a guide, increasing the precept by £500, would result in a 4.41% increase in the Council Tax resulting from the precept with a Band D property paying an extra £2.24 or £53.05 in total. Increasing the precept by £1,000 would result in an 8.95% increase in the Council Tax resulting from the precept with a Band D property paying an extra £4.55 or £55.36 in total. (A Band H property pays twice as much as a Band D property and a Band A property two thirds of a Band D property.)

14. Amendment of the Parish Council's Financial Regulations to allow Online Banking

The application for online banking with NatWest's Bankline for Communities has been successful and after some initial issues the Clerk and Chair are logged into the system. As noted at the last meeting in order to use online banking we need to amend the Parish Council's Financial Regulations which currently require payments by cheque, Standing Order or Direct Debit. 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 the attached Regulation 7.

All payments will need to be authorised at a Parish Council meeting as currently (unless payment is required before the next meeting). 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 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 are online but, once we are familiar with the system, we can add the other signatories.

15. Authorisation of Payment

£1,337.42 The Clerk – Salary for 3rd Quarter. *See enclosed sheet*

£89.49 The Clerk – Expenses for 3rd Quarter. *See enclosed sheet.*

£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 will need to be paid by cheque as the Clerk cannot approve a payment to himself, but we can test the online system in paying the bill from HMRC.

The latest bill from British Gas for the electricity supply to the Playing Field for the period from November 29th to December 18th is £9.45 and will be paid by Direct Debit. The bill is usually around £15 a month – but the billing period is only 20 days this month.

16. Other Business – matters of information only.

I have submitted the Re-Declaration of Compliance to the Pensions Regulator. This states that we have no one in a pension scheme, which is only compulsory if we have an employee earning over £10,000. The Re-Declaration has to be submitted every three years to fulfil our legal duties under the 2008 Pensions Act. I am also required to write a letter to myself asking if I wish to request that the Parish Council to set up a pension scheme. Fortunately, I did not request a pension scheme be set up.

17. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 4th February 2026 at 7.30pm in the Old School.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk

31st December 2025