

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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## You are Summoned to the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council to be held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026 at 8.00pm 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. Our internal auditor is of the opinion that where interests are declared the person declaring the interest should leave the room for that item (see attached Internal Auditor's Report) whether or not the interest is pecuniary or not.*

**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 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026** 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 May 6<sup>th</sup> is attached/enclosed.*

*Insurance – we have received confirmation of the renewal of our insurance from June 1<sup>st</sup>.*

**6. 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 LCN AGM will take place on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July, 7-9.00pm in the Council Chamber at Shepton Mallet.*

**7. Allotments**

*The rent for the lease of the allotments field has been paid for the final year to April 2027. The field owners have stated that they are happy with the entrance to the field that the Parish Council installed when taking on the field – so there is no need to restore the entrance to its original condition.*

## 8. Community Review

*Discussion with one of the groups set up following the Community Review.*

## 9. Highways and Rights of Ways

*Road Closure at Wanstrow – The A359 will be closed at Wanstrow for three days from June 15<sup>th</sup> to June 17<sup>th</sup> to allow Bristol Water to connect a new supply.*

## 10. Playing Field - Maintenance Report

*The Cricket Club would like to cut back some overhanging branches that interfere with their practice. They are offering to do this themselves as they have some qualified landscapers in the club. I have informed them that the Playing Field is in the Conservation Area and asked them to let us know what they propose doing.*

*Thanks to Ian Sage for greasing the swings in the Playing Field and turning the water in the shelter on. He has also removed one of the cricket stumps that was broken.*

*The annual inspection of the equipment in the Playing Field by RoSPA will take place in June. Each year the inspector states that we should undertake a dismantling inspection of the cableway to examine the hidden sections of the cable. Our new internal auditor also has a cableway in his parish and told me his Parish Council budget £500 a year for the inspection of their cableway - £200 for a dismantling inspection and the rest to replace any worn parts (as this usually requires a further dismantling). Although not part of his internal auditor's report, he does recommend that a dismantling inspection is undertaken each year to ensure we are covered by our insurance should an accident happen on the cableway. I have checked with our insurers and they say we should follow the recommendations of the RoSPA inspector. I tried contacting the installers of the cableway last year without any response but will follow this up.*

## 11. Planning Applications

Planning Application No: 2026/0934/TCA

T1(A) – Cherry – Removal of bough at point of trunk that extends approx. 3m outwards, due to potential for failure.

Netherlea, Back Lane, Batcombe  
Works/Felling Trees in a CA.

*The reason for removing the bough is clear from the photo. Tree applications are notification only, but we are continuing to comment on the applications.*



**Planning Application Updates.** *The application for various tree works at Pastoral has been approved. As has the application to fell two stems of a Himalayan Birch at Boxbush and the application to fell a Leylandii at 1 Wickham Cottages.*

*I have received a further response from the enforcement officer regarding the extension at Churchbridge Lodge. He has shared a photo of the extension as seen from within the property taken in 2015 which shows the extension the same as it is today. He states that whatever work was undertaken on the roadside wall would not be expedient to take action on. Regarding any cabins in the woodland, he states that if we submit a report of a suspected breach of planning online, along with evidence, then it can be investigated when an officer is available. He notes that currently there is a shortage of staff and a large backlog of cases waiting to be allocated, although the staffing issue may be being addressed.*

## 12. Review of Financial Regulations

*The Parish Council's Financial Regulations need to be reviewed annually. However, the Parish Council adopted new Financial Regulations in June 2024 based on model Financial Regulations*

*produced by the National Association of Local Councils and then updated these in January 2026 to allow online banking. A copy of the Financial Regulations can be downloaded from the Parish Council Documents on the Parish Council website [Batcombe Parish Council Somerset - Parish Council Documents](#) if Councillors wish to examine them.*

*There is a small inconsistency in the regulations for electronic payments (section 7). Regulation 7.1 states that the Clerk may be an authorised signatory, while regulation 7.6 states that “Two Councillors who are authorised signatories shall check the payment details against the invoices before approving each payment using the online banking system.” Checking the model regulations from NALC the words “Councillors who are” were in square brackets which means they can be omitted, so regulation 7.6 reads “Two authorised signatories ...”.*

*We should therefore amend regulation 7.6 to allow the Clerk to authorise payments. The alternative would be for one or both of the other bank signatories to be authorised to approve online payments. See below for discussion of the implications for our internal controls.*

### **13. Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control, Internal Auditor’s Report and Certificate of Exemption from a Limited Assurance Review**

*Our Financial Regulations (1.5) require a review of the effectiveness of our system of internal control before approving the Annual Governance Statement which forms part of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (see below). I believe our system of internal control to be more than sufficient for a small Parish Council. The details are given in the Financial Regulations. These include the budgetary process, the authorisation of all payments by the Council, the signing of cheques by two Councillors, who have to initial the cheque stubs and invoices, the quarterly bank reconciliations and the requirement for an internal audit. The internal controls for payments by online banking should be reviewed. The fact that the Clerk is currently an authorised signatory for the approval of online payments means that there only one person (the Chair) checking payments the Clerk has raised online before they are authorised, whereas with cheque payments is has always been two Councillors who check the invoices and sign the cheques. While our Financial Regulations allow this (if amended as noted above), the question is whether the Council feels this an adequate control or should we move to having two Councillors approve online payments as with cheques. As noted above, this would mean one or both our other bank signatories been authorised to approve online payments.*

*Our internal audit has been undertaken by Simon Pritchard of Moderamen Auditing, who satisfies the necessary requirements of independence of the Parish Council and competence. A copy of his Internal Audit Report as well as the completed Internal Audit form that is page 4 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) are attached/enclosed. The Parish Council needs to accept the Internal Audit Report before it can approve the Annual Governance Statement and the Accounting Statements (see next two items).*

*The internal auditor noted that many elements of the Parish Council’s governance, paperwork and policies were above the average standard of councils of a similar size. He did note two issues with the setting of the precept – one being that delegation of the setting of the precept to the Clerk (in case the Council cannot meet in January) is unlawful and the other is that the Minutes of the meeting in January don’t actually record the final decision to set the precept.*

*The internal auditor also noted that Councillors should leave the room when declaring an interest; that Minutes should be adopted at the August meeting (if held); that the Clerk is only claiming 40p a mile for travel when the national rate is 45p (since increased to 55p); and the Staffing Committee needs terms of reference. Potential terms of reference are attached but probably need to be modified for a smaller council.*

*Parish Councils, whose income and expenditure are both less than £25,000, do not have to send the Annual Return to the external auditor provided they send a certificate of exemption (copy enclosed) signed at this meeting and publish the Annual Return on their website by July 1<sup>st</sup>. The internal auditor notes that the decision to exempt should be made by the Council and recorded in the Minutes.*

#### **14. Annual Return Section 1 – Approval of Annual Governance Statement 2025/26**

*Section 1 of the AGAR is the Annual Governance Statement (page 5 of the enclosed Annual Return). This has to be approved by the Council before the Council approves the Accounting Statements with a separate Minute reference. I believe the Council can agree the first eight statements, but the Council can only do this once the Internal Audit Report has been considered. The ninth statement is not applicable as the Parish Council is not the trustee of any Trust funds. The tenth statement is a new one this year and I believe that having approved its Information Technology Policy last month the Parish Council state that it has in place arrangements for the effective IT and data management.*

*Note: Statement 4 - The Parish Council's accounts have to be available for public inspection for 30 working days that include the first ten working days in July.*

#### **15. Annual Return Section 2 – Approval of Accounting Statements 2025/26**

*Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is the Statement of Accounts (page 6 of the enclosed Annual Return) which has to be approved by the Council. The attached Financial Statements for last year show how the figures in the Statement of Accounts have been derived – the circled numbers refer to the boxes in the Statement of Accounts. There are significant variations (more than 15%) in boxes 3 and 6 between the figures for last year and those for the previous year. In box 3 this is due to the Community Review grant of £4,650 in 2025/26. In box 6 this is due to the £3,835 costs of the Community Review in 2025/26 less the £767 cost of the new laptop and software in 2024/25.*

*The Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities requires that signed copies of the Statement of Accounts, the Annual Governance Statement and the Internal Auditor's Report have to be published on the Parish Council website no later than June 30th, along with a bank reconciliation and details of all items of expenditure over £100 and any land assets.*

#### **16. Annual Grants from the Parish Council**

*The Parish Council has budgeted for a grant of £400 to the Village Hall (£200 for our own meetings and £200 for committee meetings of other village organisations); for a grant of £300 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard and £220 for smaller grants to charities. Last year the Parish Council gave grants of £110 to Citizens Advice Somerset and Upton Noble School (for the refurbishment of the school library). In the past we have also supported Mendip Community Transport; Victim Support Somerset; Mendip RELATE; the Bruton Carers Group; St Margaret's Somerset Hospice and Somerset Art Works; and we have received requests from Age UK Somerset.*

*The Council has the power to support the Village Hall Trust [Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19], to help maintain the churchyard [Open Spaces Act 1906, sections 9 & 10], and to support the Citizens Advice Bureau [Local Government Act 1972, section 142], but grants to other charities must be made by a specific resolution under the section 137 power, which allows the Council to spend a limited sum on items in the interest of parishioners which it has no specific power to support [Local Government Act 1972, section 137].*

#### **17. Authorisation of Payments**

*Kevin Gale - £?00.00 – Grass cutting in May. (Invoice not yet received.)*

*The Parish Council has a reserve bank account with NatWest that earns a small amount of interest. The account has been effectively dormant for many years because of the difficulty of transferring money between the current and reserve accounts (which required two signatories on a form to be taken to a bank branch); and the very low interest when rates were low. Now we have online banking it will be relatively easy to transfer funds between the two accounts, so I would like the Council to authorise transfers between the two accounts as and when the Clerk, as Responsible Financial Officer, feels it appropriate.*

**18. Other Business** – matters of information only.

*Wessex Internet – In April 2024, Wessex Internet was awarded a five-year contract under the UK Government's Project Gigabit programme to bring gigabit-capable broadband to hard-to-reach rural communities. As part of this programme, a number of properties within the parish will be eligible to receive gigabit-capable full-fibre broadband directly to their home or business premises, including free installation funded through Project Gigabit. In addition, Wessex Internet have commercial plans to extend their full-fibre network to further properties in the area that fall outside the scope of the government contract.*

*Wessex Internet would have liked to give a brief 5–10 minute introduction to their work in the area at a Parish Council meeting – but unfortunately their Engagement Manager is unable to attend either the June or July meetings and is on holiday in August. Instead they would like to meet with me and then find a suitable date for a wider engagement later in the year.*

*Show of Hands Music Festival – The Show of Hands festival which was due to take place at Gilcombe Farm on the second May bank holiday has been postponed and will now take place on 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 2027.*

**19. Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026 at 8.00pm in the Old School.

*Rob Sage*

Rob Sage – Clerk

27<sup>th</sup> May 2026