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 4th November 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 Chair 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 7th October 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 October 7th 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.

7. **Noise and Parking Complaints in Westcombe**
   Before the last meeting the Parish Council was copied into a complaint from a Westcombe resident about noise and parking from events at the taproom at Westcombe Dairy. The Parish Council agreed to consider the concerns raised at this meeting. Since the last meeting the resident has made a request for assistance from the Parish Council. The resident would like the Parish Council to:
   1) Formally record these concerns and raise them with Woodshedding/Westcombe Dairy.
   2) Establish exactly what planning permission was granted for the taproom and what conditions apply to its use.
   3) Establish what premises licence is currently in force and what it permits in relation to live music, DJs, amplified music, recorded music, external speakers, vinyl sessions and events.
   4) Ask Somerset Council Planning and Licensing to investigate whether the current operation is compliant with the relevant permissions and licences.

5) Ask Somerset Council Environmental Health to consider the ongoing noise concerns and the impact of amplified music on neighbouring residential properties.
6) Ask Somerset Council Highways to consider the ongoing parking of Woodshedding customers on Baileys Lane and the surrounding narrow lanes.
7) Establish whether the parking arrangements currently being used by Woodshedding are sufficient and appropriate for the number of customers attending.
8) Establish whether the occasional use of the farmer's field for Woodshedding customer parking is appropriately authorised.
9) Consider the implications of customer parking for emergency access through Baileys Lane and the surrounding lanes.
10) Establish whether the scale and frequency of the current events and entertainment are consistent with the original planning application and approved use of the premises.
11) Place this matter on the agenda for the next Parish Council meeting, so that it can be properly discussed and formally recorded.
12) Advise me which further authority I should now be contacting regarding the noise, parking, planning and licensing concerns.

The planning permission restricts opening hours to from 12 noon to 10.00pm each day. The case officer's report assumed that there would be no issue with parking, which would be in the yard at Westcombe Dairy. There was a condition restricting outdoor seating in this area until a "Tables and Chairs Plan/Operation Statement" had been submitted and approved by the Local Planning Authority. There is no indication on the planning website as to whether or not this has happened. The Parish Council was not consulted on the premises licence application so we have no details of the licence conditions. It is clear that when the planning application was made in 2023 it was not expected that there would be large scale events with live music on a regular basis at the site.

8. Footpaths and Highways

The Somerset Council Bridge Officer inspected Bridge #4093 (the vehicle bridge on the footpath at Mill Farm) on 1st October and considers that replacement with a timber kit bridge is a feasible solution. He is preparing the specification for the works, which will be issued to contractors for quotation, but before the replacement can proceed, he is seeking advice regarding the erosion of the northern riverbank adjacent to the existing abutments to determine whether any associated bank protection measures may be required as part of the works.

He also undertook a site visit to Bridge #4089 (the bridge taken out by the fallen tree further down the footpath) on 27th October to assess its condition and establish what remedial works may be necessary. Given the inability of the landowners to reach agreement over who is responsible for the fallen tree, he will need to seek further advice with Somerset Council on how to proceed.

s.130(6) Representation regarding Obstruction of Spargrove footpath. *s.130(6) of the Highways Act 1980 has been brought to our attention as a means to expedite some action regarding the fallen tree and damaged bridges on the Spargrove footpath (presumably the downstream bridges referred to above). The s130(6) procedure requires the Highway Authority to act where a right of way has been "unlawfully stopped up or obstructed" when a representation is made by a parish council. The nature of the obstruction - in this case the fallen tree that has blocked the footpath and damaged the two footbridges on footpath SM 2/14 near the junction with footpath SM 2/13 - and the intention to make a representation has to be placed on the Parish Council Agenda. The Parish Council must then authorise the Clerk or the Chair to make representations on its behalf. The representations need to be made in writing and sent by post to the Chief Executive of the Highway Authority making it clear that they are being made under s.130(6) and the writer is authorised to act on behalf of the Parish Council.*

Eastcombe Footpath Diversion. *Alexander and Libby Russell are proposing to make an application to divert the Eastcombe footpath away from the Pugh's Bottom farmyard. They would like the Parish Council to support the initiative by funding the application, which will cost between £1,500 and £2,000. Alexander and Libby have stated:* "We think that the way we would like this application to re-route the RoW to be seen is as a community benefit because it will render the path usable once again after many years. It is for this reason that we are trusting that the PC will be able to support the initiative by funding the cost of the application that we understand may be in the region of £1500-£2000. What further underlines the community benefit aspect of the project is that if permission is granted, we understand that Somerset Council and the Ramblers Association have undertaken to fund and carry out the work involved." *Attached is a map showing the proposed diversion.*

Also attached is a Schedule of Rights of Way Improvements in Batcombe. Tom Price states that this meeting is the last opportunity to add to the schedule before he submits it to the Rights of Way Officer.

Cable laying for Wessex Internet. *U G Cabling Services have notified us that they will be laying cables for Wessex Internet in the New Year from January 18th to March 1st. Cables will be laid in a total of 12 roads, although only one road will be closed at a time. Details of the road closures have been shared with Parish Councillors. Resident and emergency access will be maintained and a letter drop will inform residents of what is happening a minimum of two weeks before the works begin. U G Cabling Services have asked if the Parish Council have any concerns.*

Somerset Highways East have arranged for an inspection of the barrier on Hincombe Hill and the Area Superintendent will arrange for any necessary remedial works to be carried out in accordance with the Highway Safety Inspection Manual.

9. War Memorial Garden Proposal from the Horticultural Society

After a successful year of fundraising the Horticultural Society has put forward a proposal to spend a proportion of those funds restoring and replanting the War Memorial Garden. Full details of the proposal can be found on the attached/enclosed paper. The proposal includes installing a metal bench behind the war memorial to give people somewhere to sit. The Horticultural Society would also be willing to take on the routine maintenance of the garden.

Tom Price has seen the proposal and raised a number of queries with the Horticultural Society that have been answered. The Horticultural Society are happy to fund and provide hard standing for the bench. They are also happy for the bench to become an asset of the Parish Council (assuming the Parish Council wants it) and to maintain the bench as long as they have funds to cover this. The Horticultural Society would also dispose of plants removed from the garden.

It is worth noting that, apart from the addition of the bench, the proposal is very similar to the longstanding arrangement that the Parish Council had with the Royal British Legion, whose members maintained the garden for many years.

10. Playground - Maintenance Report

Nothing to report.

11. Planning Applications

None at present.

Planning Application Updates. *Another tree application was received since the last meeting – to reduce Hornbeams at Rockwells House. Parish Councillors were consulted on both applications and as no comments were received the Clerk recommended approval of both applications under his delegated authority to respond to tree applications. The application to crown thin a Lebanese Cedar at Batcombe House has been approved.*

12. Community Support Fund: Grant Application and Guidance

The last meeting agreed that a Working Group of the Chair, Tom Price and Bryony Harling would produce a draft policy and application form for community groups to apply for the funding produced by the voluntary accommodation levy. The draft policy and application form are attached/enclosed. Bryony has also created an online web form on "Tally" for completing the application digitally. To view the form, follow the link: https://tally.so/r/o9b0XV Bryony has set this up so that each Parish Councillor will receive an email when an online application is submitted, if this is agreed.

The Working Group proposes that a "Community Support Fund" page is set up on the Parish Council website to house the application form, guidance and Tally weblink. If all is agreed at the meeting, advertising the fund and the fact that application submissions are open will be communicated via an article in the December Parish News and via parish community socials.

13. Bank Reconciliation and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31st March 2027

Financial Regulations require that each quarter a bank reconciliation is produced by the Clerk, checked by a member of the Council, and reported to the Council as soon as possible after the end of the quarter. The bank reconciliation shows that the cheque for £150 sent to The Three Horseshoes as the Parish Council's contribution to the prize for completing the Community Survey was never banked and is now out of date. We should therefore pay The Three Horseshoes the £150 by bank transfer.

Financial Regulations also require an update on the budget each quarter. The attached/enclosed budget report shows the budget for the full year in the first column. Then a comparison between the budget for period being considered and actual payments and receipts and a calculation of the variance between them in the second, third and fourth columns. Finally, there is a second comparison between the budget and the actual figures for the year to date in the fifth, sixth and seventh columns. The period being reported is actually two months (August and September) because the period for the last budget report was four months rather than a quarter - as we don't have a budget report in August.

As noted previously, for the budget comparison the software requires entering which month or months the budgeted figures will be paid/received. This means some variances are just because amounts were paid/received in a different month than expected.

This year the precept was paid in two parts with the second half being received in September. The variance of £500 on the precept is due to the decision to increase the precept by that amount after the budget had been proposed. The only other receipts during the period were a small amount of interest on the money in the reserve bank account. Bank interest was greater than budgeted as some of the precept had been transferred to the reserve account. The variation against budget under Miscellaneous Receipts is due to the fact that we have not yet received the electricity contribution due from the Fete Committee.

The Playing Field grass cutting is £190 under budget for the period as less cuts were needed over the summer. Playing Field maintenance budget is £375 below budget for the year to date as no money on maintenance had been spent to September 30th. The cost of the electricity supply is less than budgeted to date as is the cost of the water supply.

The only payment towards the Clerk's salary in the period August to September was a small amount of income tax. For the year to the end of September the Clerk's salary was roughly as budgeted but there was a back dated salary increase in October, which means the salary will be over budget at the end of the year. The only other administration payment in the period August to September was the Employer's National Insurance contribution of £14.79.

The only other payments in the period August to September was for the grass cutting of the War Memorial garden. For the period as a whole payments were £351 under budget, largely due to the reduction in grass cutting and the fact no money was spent on Playing Field maintenance. For the year to date, payments were £238 under budget, largely for the same reasons.

Looking forward to the end of the year there will be a deficit as a result of the remaining Community Review grant received the previous year being spent. The level of the deficit will depend on whether the Parish Council decides to fund the application for the footpath diversion at Eastcombe.

14. Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2028

Enclosed is a budget for the year ending 31st March 2028. The first column of figures gives the budget for the year with subsequent columns giving the budget for each month.

As in previous years, the budget is produced on the basis of taking the projected figures for this year (apart from one-off expenditures) and adding increases in line with inflation.

Looking at the budget for 2027/28 the VAT refund will be around £300 less than this year as there have been no major items of expenditure. There will no longer be any allotments. There will be a small amount of bank interest and there should be a contribution towards the cost of the electricity supply to the Playing Field from the Fete Committee.

The cost of the grass cutting is likely to be higher than that projected for this year, assuming an increase in the price per cut. I've set the figure for equipment maintenance at £750 as in previous years. A portion of this may need to be spent on a dismantling inspection of the cableway. The electricity and water supplies should be around the same level as this year.

I have assumed an increase in the Clerk's salary similar to this year's as inflation doesn't appear to be reducing. Other expenditure on administration is likely to be similar to that projected for this year.

The training budget is likely to be higher than usual if there are new Councillors after the election willing to attend training sessions. We need to budget for a contested election, although this will only be the case if more than seven people stand as Councillors.

The budget is an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants. Whether there will be any allotment expenses will depend on whether the allotments field has been restored to its original condition by the end of this financial year. The costs of maintaining the war memorial garden and the strimmer should be similar to those projected for this year. I have included the cost of a new grit bin each year under Miscellaneous Payments.

If the precept is increased to £12,000 the budget shows total receipts of £12,600 and total payments of £13,740 – a deficit of £1,140. This assumes a contested election next May. If the election is not contested the deficit would be significantly less.

Also attached is a forecast for the years 2028/30. This is in the same format as previous years as Easy PC Accounts don't produce a forecast. On the basis that the Parish Council funds the footpath diversion application at Eastcombe and there is a contested election, the precept would need to be increased to £12,500 in 2028/29 to maintain reserves of around £8,000, which are within the recommended level of reserves.

A decision on the level of the precept does not have to be made at this meeting - and can be deferred until the December or January meetings. We normally wait until the tax base for 2027/28 has been determined in January so that we will know the impact of the precept on Council Tax. (If the tax base goes up, the same precept costs each Council Tax payer less – but if the tax base goes down, the same precept costs each Council Tax payer more.)

15. Authorisation of Payment

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

The Three Horseshoes – £150.00 – Parish Council contribution to Community Survey prize.

Financial Regulations require payments made online to be reported to the Parish Council at the next meeting. The online payments following the October meeting were:

Kevin Gale – £300.00 – Grass cutting in September. (Three cuts.)
BrueCREW – £808.46 – 4 river testing kits (from the Community Review grant).
HMRC – £6.99 – Employer's NIC (£14.79) less Credits (£7.80) for 2nd Quarter.
H J Sage & Son – £29.99 – Cricket stumps purchased by Ian Sage.

16. **Other Business** – matters of information only.
Nothing at present.

17. **Date of Next Meeting –** Wednesday 2nd December 2026 at 7.30pm in the Old School.

Rob Sage

Rob Sage – Clerk 28th October 2026