

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

Tel: 01749 850934

e-mail: clerk@batcombe-parish-council-somerset.org.uk

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 5th November 2025 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 7.30pm.

Present - Councillors: Janet Jones – Chair, Jayne Cox, Peter Glaisher, Bryony Harling, Tom Price and Ian Sage.

Also Present: The Clerk – Rob Sage.

5866 – Apologies for Absence: Clare Kingston. The reason for Clare's absence was formally accepted.

5867 – Declarations of Interest: Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the authorisation of the payments to H J Sage & Son.

5868 – Public Participation: None.

5869 – Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 1st & 15th October 2025 were agreed as a correct record. To be signed later.

5870 – Matters Arising: Action Table – A copy of the Action Table from the meeting on October 5th had been distributed with the Agenda. There was nothing to report that did not appear later on the Agenda.

5871 – Somerset Councillor's Report and Shepton Local Community Network (LCN): A report had been received from Somerset Councillor Claire Sully and distributed to Parish Councillors. The Clerk to thank Claire for the report on highway repairs undertaken in the parish. The next LCN meeting would be held on 26th January 2026.

5872 – Footpaths and Highways: Tom Price had spoken to the Rights of Way Officer at Somerset Council, Daniel Gordon, as the Spargrove footpath was now officially closed because of two issues – the fallen tree that had taken out two footbridges and the bridge near Mill Farm that was unsafe. Anyone using the footpath did so at their own risk. Works to restore the footbridges and to repair the bridge at Mill Farm were awaiting approval from the Bridges and Structures team at Somerset Council. The Clerk was asked to write to the Somerset Councillors for help in getting the approval needed.

Some footpath waymarkers had appeared on footpaths in the parish, including one to the footpath to Eastcombe that was not passable. The Rights of Way Officer had some funding for the repair of styles and anyone knowing of styles that needed repair should inform Tom Price.

Ian Sage was thanked for placing the new larger grit bin on Hincombe Hill. It was agreed that the old grit bin should go at the top of Crows Hill in the old quarry as there was nowhere suitable to place a bin near the Round House.

Jayne Cox reported that a resident had been cutting the grass at the Hedgestocks crossroads and asked if the Parish Council could take this on as she was moving. The Parish Council was unable to take this on as it involved working by the highway.

The Clerk was asked to check if the road from Westcombe to Lower Alham through the ford was still closed.

5873 – Community Review: Tom Price reported that a draft report on the Community Review had been received by the Steering Group. This was being edited and pictures were being added and a final report would be received from Thrive at the end of the year. An open meeting would be organised by the Steering Group to share results in the New Year. A copy of the findings from the Young Persons survey had been distributed to Parish Councillors.

5874 – Allotments: The Clerk reported that the allotment holder with three allotments was giving these up and the allotment holder with two allotments was giving one of these up. There was a potential new allotment holder from Frome willing to take on two allotments and another allotment holder from Frome, who had one allotment, was interested in taking on two more but was not willing to pay a deposit on all three allotments. There was also one allotment holder who had not responded to requests for information about her intentions and one who was willing to rent an allotment to keep them going but would not work it this year.

Given the low take up on the allotments, the Parish Council decided to end the provision of allotments in the parish. The existing allotment holders had already been given a year's notice in order to change the allotment holders agreement and it was decided to allow any new allotment holder who wanted an allotment to have it for a year with no deposit required. All allotment holders would need to quit their allotments by October 31st 2026 and the field would be returned to the owner by May 2027. The Clerk to inform all interested parties of the decision.

It was noted that the condition of the allotments field was greatly improved thanks to Ian Sage's work there.

5875 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: The Clerk reported that one of the seats on the picnic table had become detached as the wood had rotted around the screws attaching it to the table. Ian Sage volunteered to remove the picnic table and see if it could be repaired.

The Clerk also reported that moles were active in the Playing Field again and it was agreed to wait a month before doing anything about them.

5876 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider.

Planning Updates: The application for the felling of a Palm tree and the coppicing of a Hazel at Millbrook on Chapel Row had been approved. Prior Approval had been given for the change of use of the Dutch barn on Cockpit Lane to a dwelling house. Prior Approval was not required for the moving of a barn from the site on the new dwellings at Beeches Farm to a location by the farmhouse.

5877 – Licence Application – Gilcombe Farm Festival in May: The Clerk had made a representation to the Licensing Authority, the Somerset Council, asking for the adoption of a rigorous Noise Management Plan, a hotline for local residents, and a reduction in the hours from 3.00am. As a result a hearing to consider the application and representations received was held on Wednesday November 5th. As no Councillor was available, the Clerk represented the Parish Council at the hearing and at an informal meeting with the applicant on October 30th, where it was discovered that Bruton Town Council and two local residents had also made representations.

The Licensing Authority granted a permanent licence for the festival with conditions that a Noise Management Plan be agreed with monitoring of noise levels and a hotline for local residents to be available and manned. There was no reduction in the hours that music could be played which the applicant had argued was vital to the viability of the festival.

5878 – Bank Reconciliation and Budget Update: The bank reconciliation for the first half of the year had been checked by the Chair prior to the meeting.

A budget update had been distributed with the Agendas. As noted in the September meeting, this had been produced by the new accounting software, Easy PC Accounts, and so was different to previous years' budget updates. Instead of a projection for the year ahead there was a comparison between the budget for the period being considered and the actual payments and receipts with a calculation of the variance between them. There was also a second comparison between the budget and the actual figures for the year to date. For the budget comparison the software required entering which month or months the budgeted figures would be paid or received. This meant that some variances were just because amounts were paid or received in a different month to that expected.

The only receipts during the period was a small amount of interest. The variation against budget under Miscellaneous Receipts was due to the fact that the electricity contribution due from the Fete Committee had not yet been received.

The Playing Field grass cutting was £20 under budget for the period but £30 over budget for the year to date. This was largely due to not being able to predict which months will have three cuts. Playing Field maintenance budget was £369 below budget for the year to date as only £6 had been spent to September 30th – but the cost of the roller will come off this budget. The cost of the electricity supply was less than budgeted to date but the cost of the water supply was more than budgeted.

The Clerk's salary was less than budgeted but there was a back dated payment in October. The Clerk's expenses were less than budgeted. The insurance premium was higher than budgeted as there was a significant increase at the end of the three-year agreement. The Affiliation Fees to SALC and NALC were £55 more than budgeted. This was due to the extra work that SALC is undertaking with the devolution of roles and assets from the Somerset Council to Parish Councils. The website fee was as budgeted over the year to date – there was no payment in this period as the fees were paid quarterly.

The Grants should have been budgeted at £720 which was the amount donated. Other expenses so far were as budgeted, apart from the payment for 50% of the cost of the Community Review which wasn't included in the budget. It was noted that it was likely that there would be around £1,000 of the grant for the Community Review left at the end of the year, which could be put towards the cost of actions arising from the Review.

5679 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2027: A budget for the year ending 31st March 2027 had been distributed with the Agendas, along with a forecast for the years 2026-2029. Again, because the Council was using Easy PC Accounts, the budget looked a little different from previous years – the first column of figures giving 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 budgeted figures for the current year (apart from one-off expenditures) and adding increases in line with inflation. The budget only included existing items of expenditure and not any additional items of expenditure the Council may decide to add to the budget.

The VAT refund would be around £100 less than the current year as there had been no major items of expenditure. The budget included an allotment rent of £280 which would now be significantly lower. The money being raised from the Mendip Lottery had finished and there was a small amount of bank interest. There should also be a contribution towards the cost of the electricity supply to the Playing Field from the Fete Committee.

The cost of the grass cutting may be higher than that budgeted for the current year depending on any increase in the price per cut. The figure for equipment maintenance was kept at £750 as suggested in previous years, but there shouldn't be any major expenditure as the play equipment

was still relatively new. The electricity and water supplies should be around the same level as the current year.

The budget assumed the increase in the Clerk's salary will be slightly less than the current year's as inflation was reducing. Other expenditure on administration was likely to be similar to that projected for this year, although the budget for the Clerk's expenses had been reduced as these came in under budget in previous years.

The Parish Council decided not to increase its training budget for the coming year but to include addition funding for training in the year after a new Council was elected.

The budget was an opportunity for the Council to review the level of its grants. Allotment expenses and the costs of maintaining the war memorial garden and the trimmer should be similar to those budgeted for the current year. The cost of a new grit bin each year was included under Miscellaneous Payments.

If the precept is unchanged at £11,000 the budget showed total receipts of £11,572 and total payments of £11,852 – a deficit of £280. Obviously any additional payments would increase the deficit.

The forecast for the years 2027 to 2029 was in the same format as previous years as Easy PC Accounts did not produce a forecast. With the precept unchanged at £11,000 each year and no additional expenditure there would probably be deficits of around £1,795 in 2027/28 (assuming a contested Parish Council election) and £825 in 2027/28. This would leave reserves of £11,350 at the end of 2028/29, which would still be above the recommended level of reserves.

It was suggested that the cost of an Internal Auditor be included in the budget along with the cost of the accounts package (£80 a year). The budget and forecast to be updated for the next meeting. Tom Price suggested that money should be put aside each year and earmarked to pay for new play equipment when needed to avoid having to raise funds again. To be considered at the next meeting.

A decision on the level of the precept was deferred until the tax base for 2026/27 had been determined so that the impact of the precept on Council Tax would be known. (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.)

Tom Price stated that the voluntary accommodation levy at the Three Horseshoes had so far raised £142.80. The Clerk reported that the bank mandate had been amended to reduce the number of signatories to four, which meant that an application for internet banking could now be made.

5880 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £95.00 Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (one cut in October).
- £156.00 Oakley Machinery Ltd – Hire of roller (£130 + VAT).
- £215.94 H J Sage & Son – Grit bin purchased by Ian Sage (£179.95 + VAT).
- £14.36 H J Sage & Son – Sealant for roundabout gap (£11.97 + VAT).

5881 – Other Business – matters of information only. The monthly crime report stated that there was one crime in Batcombe in October. It was noted that a van parked in the lay-by by Ash Tree Cottages has been left there by someone doing up their house who had nowhere to park it while work was ongoing. The Clerk reported receiving a letter from the MP Anna Sabine with details of a survey about female safety in rural areas.

5882 - Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 3rd December 2025 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Janet Jones
3/12/25