

BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 3rd December 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 – Rob Sage.

5883 – Apologies for Absence: None.

5884 – Declarations of Interest: None.

5885 – Public Participation: None.

5886 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 5th November 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed. The Minutes of the October meetings agreed at the last meeting were also signed.

5887 – Matters Arising: Action Table – A copy of the Action Table from the meeting on November 5th had been distributed with the Agenda. There was nothing to report that did not appear later on the Agenda.

5888 – 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 next LCN meeting would be held on 26th January 2026 and a representative from the Parish Council would be agreed at the January Parish Council meeting.

It was noted that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England had reopened its consultation on the proposed new division boundaries for Somerset, due to their misunderstanding the Somerset Council’s preference for single member divisions as a formal request. The reopened consultation would run from November 25th to January 14th and allow anyone wishing to support multi-member divisions to have their views heard.

5889 – Footpaths and Highways: The Clerk reported that the road from Westcombe to Lower Alham which passes through the ford at Lower Alham was officially closed until January 1st 2027 “to limit inappropriate use of the ford”.

Tom Price reported that the Spargrove footpath was now officially closed until 29th October 2027 because of the issues with the fallen tree that had taken out two footbridges and the bridge near Mill Farm that was unsafe. The landowner had put up a sign warning people of the hazard with the bridge near Mill Farm and had reinstated stock proof fencing on the unofficial diversion people were taking around the fallen tree. Tom volunteered to write an item for the parish magazine reminding residents that the footpath was closed and anyone using the footpath did so at their own risk.

Tom Price reported that the Rights of Way Officer at the Somerset Council would be repairing a number of styles on footpaths in the parish. It was agreed to rename this item Rights of Way and Highways as there was one bridleway in the parish.

The Chair reported receiving an e-mail from the Mendip Bridleways and Byways Association urging parish councils to contact local landowners who had not cut back hedges resulting in narrowing rights of way. The Clerk to write to the landowner of the hedges on the Honeycliff bridleway. Concerns were also raised about the lane through the ford to Lower Alham and Coney Wood.

A resident had reported the blocked drain at the bottom of Fry's Lane to the Somerset Council due to concerns about ice forming on the road at the junction with Fry's Lane in freezing weather and this had been dealt with by Somerset Highways. It was noted that water was running across the road on Hincombe Hill from the Valley View Farm track during heavy rain. It was noted that the landowners had spoken to their tenants regarding this issue.

5890 – Community Review: A report on the Community Review survey had been received from Thrive and shared with Parish Councillors by Tom Price. This consisted of an executive summary and a detailed listing of the responses to each question in the survey. It was agreed to publish the reports on the Parish Council website. An open meeting would be organised by the Steering Group to share results in the New Year. And Thrive were putting together an Action Plan and Funding Plan to address the issues raised in the report.

5891 – Allotments: Following the Parish Council's decision to stop providing allotments, giving current allotment holders 12 months' notice and inviting any new allotment holders to take on an allotment for one year only with no deposit: two Batcombe allotment holders were giving up one allotment and sharing their remaining allotment for a year; an allotment holder from Frome was taking on an additional allotment for a year; and another Frome person was taking on an allotment for a year. An allotment holder who had three allotments had given them up as had a local allotment holder with one allotment. There was also one allotment holder who had not responded to e-mails about their intentions. This meant that there would be either four or five allotments taken for the next year until October 31st.

It was noted that it would be difficult to grass over the vacant allotments while some were still being cultivated and it was decided just to top off the vacant allotments during this year. The Chair and Peter Glaisher would inspect the allotments after Christmas to see what needed doing to keep them tidy. Peter Glaisher would speak to the allotment holder who had not responded to e-mails. The e-mail addresses of the remaining allotment holders would be shared so they could work together to maintain the allotments field.

5892 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report: Ian Sage was thanked for repairing the picnic table. He noted that the wood around the screws had rotted. He had replaced the screws with bolts but felt that the table would not last much longer.

The moles were very active in the Playing Field and the Clerk was instructed to obtain the services of the molecatcher.

5893 – Planning Applications: There were no planning applications to consider. Two applications for tree works had been received. At Pastoral on Kale Street (Linch Lane): T1 - Apple tree - prune to tidy, remove crossing and dead branches, 10% thin; T2 - Acer tree - prune to tidy 0.5-1m. And at Netherlea (Back Lane): T1 - Leylandii – fell; T2 - Maple - reduce by 3m. Both applications were responded to by the Clerk under delegated authority after consultation with Parish Councillors. There were no objections to any of the tree works listed.

Planning Updates: Approval had been given for the felling of the Cypress and the reduction of the Cryptomeria at Truncheon House.

5894 - Review of the Parish Council's Connection with External Bodies: specifically, the Council's membership of the Somerset Association of Local Councils and the Clerk's membership of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

Membership of both of these bodies was very helpful in providing information and advice on matters relating to the work of the Parish Council and would make the Clerk's job more difficult if they were not available. Membership of SALC cost £204.70 in 2025 and had increased significantly as demand for SALC's advice increased as parish and town councils took on more responsibilities from the Somerset Council. The Clerk's membership of the SLCC cost £110 in 2025 and was likely to be a similar amount in 2026. Councillors agreed to fund the continued membership of the two bodies.

5895 – Budget and Precept for Year Ending 31st March 2027: Tom Price had proposed that the Parish Council set aside money each year as earmarked funds for the purchase of new play equipment when the current equipment needed replacing so that the Parish Council would not have to raise funds again. After discussion it was agreed to set aside £500 each year plus any unspent money in the £750 Playing Field maintenance budget.

Given the lack of response to the request for a volunteer internal auditor, the Clerk had obtained a list of local companies/people providing this service and contacted one to obtain an indication of the cost of the internal audit next year. It was also suggested that the Clerk contact Wanstrow Parish Council to see what they were doing for an internal auditor.

These costs would need to be added into the budget provided at the November meeting before making a decision on the precept. As the tax base would be available in mid-December, a decision was deferred until the January meeting. In the unlikely event that the Parish Council was unable to meet in January, authority was delegated to the Clerk to make a decision on the precept after consultation with Parish Councillors should the Council be unable to meet.

Online banking – an application had been made for online banking with NatWest with the Chair and the Clerk as “Account Leaders”. It was noted that the Parish Council would need to agree revised Financial Regulations in order to operate online banking. The model Financial Regulations for online banking produced by NALC require the Clerk to administer the online banking and allow him to be a signatory (unlike the regulation for cheque payments). What was not allowed under the regulations was for anyone to be part of the process of making online payments to themselves – which meant the Council may need to continue paying the Clerk's salary and expenses by cheque.

5896 - Authorisation of Payments: Councillors authorised the following payments:

£190.00	Kevin Gale – Grass cutting in the Playing Field (two cuts in November).
£150.00	The Three Horseshoes – Contribution to prize for Community Review.
£15.00	Somerset Playing Fields Association – Membership.

5897 – Other Business – matters of information only. There was no other business to report.

5898 - Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 7th January 2026 at 7.30pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

Janet Jones
7/1/26