

Hoo St Werburgh Parish Council
Budget report 2021/22

The Finance, Audit and General Purposes Committee met on Monday 30th November 2020 to discuss the 2021/2022 budget and report. The attached draft budget was agreed to put to full council for members consideration and approval.

The draft budget recommends a 2021/2022 Precept of £95945, an increase of 3.5%.

It was agreed that an amount would be brought forward from reserves in order to balance the budget and the precept increase would be capped at 3.5%.

When considering the draft budget, the following matters were considered:

1. Recreation Grounds

The allocation inserted for recreation ground has been reduced to £5000 as some of the previously planning work has been covered, and the tree maintenance is now under a separate allocation.

This is to cover the following:

- **Repairs to play area as necessary.**

The Parish Council needs to make provision for the repair of the play area as it cannot rely on having Section 106 money to cover this, also vandalism is not covered under our insurance Policy.

- **Repairs to footpaths and benches.**

The Parish Council needs to make provision for the replacement/repair of benches and footpaths should this be necessary within the financial year.

A footpath in Pottery Road Recreation Ground has already been identified as needing some remedial work and this has been undertaken by the Chairman and Warden, however at some point in the future it may be necessary to have a contractor in to undertake repairs, and therefore the allocation in the budget should be sufficient to cover this.

2. Maintenance of Parish Council and trees and recreation grounds

This is likely to be the biggest cost to the Parish Council in the next financial year.

As agreed at a recent meeting, Norse has been commissioned to inspect the Recreation Ground and draw up Management Plans for our recreation grounds.

We are still awaiting the final reports – this was delayed due to Covid.

To date we have received an estimate for the maintenance of the trees at Kingshill Recreation Ground over a five-year period, this indicates that in year one the maintenance needed will cost in the region of £1500, reducing to £350 in year five.

It is anticipated that this cost will be similar for each recreation ground and therefore for the maintenance of the trees alone requires an allocation of approximately £5000 – this can be financed by increasing the precept or from the PC reserves.

At present for budget purposes I have brought forward an allocation from our reserves, this can be changed.

The Parish Council needs to consider the maintenance of its trees and land as the insurance cover dictates that we must have evidence that maintenance is carried out on a regular basis should a claim arise against us, therefore the Parish Council has a legal obligation to have this work undertaken.

3. Neighbourhood Plan

Members considered whether to insert an allocation to assist with the Neighbourhood Plan, and also considered the following suggestion from Cllr Pearce.

My budget idea/suggestion/allocation is for the Neighbourhood Plan/Local Plan which in my view is the most important emerging thing just around the corner. The Local Plan will decide the future of Hoo and Chattenden for the next 20 years.

It would be something along the lines of £2 per dwelling (4,500 approx.) - an allocation of £9,000 let us say. This will be used to support the neighbourhood plan as well as any activities relating to the Local Plan which we decide to do - it is there if we need it.

Regardless of being pro or anti the Local Plan (or representing pro or anti local residents), it's safe to say that the more we put in the more we get out, especially in terms of the Neighbourhood Plan. Because of the scale of change and proposals for Hoo I don't feel that standard grants which we may or may not obtain cuts it, the Parish should invest some of our own money as well so it's there if needed.

It was agreed that the precept should not be increased to finance the NHP as grants were available to assist with the finance of this.

Should the NHP Group require financial assistance at some point in the future, they could request support from the Parish Council, and this could be considered from the Parish Councils reserves.

4. Allotments

The allocation for allotment expenditure has been decreased to £1000 as the standpipe work has been completed.

5. Youth provision

The Youth Provision allocation has been maintained at £2000.

6. Burial-ground

An allocation of £5000 has been included for the Burial Ground expenditure, based on Cllr Rees notes below and the need to keep the area well maintained. There may also be S106 funding available for the fencing.

The Burial Ground:-

- 1. Grass Cutting*
- 2. Hedge Maintenance – I have prepared a 40-year cycle of minimal maintenance which will ensure a strong hedge.*
- 3. School Gardening Project. This did not proceed in 2020 because of the pandemic. A water supply is an issue though particularly with the heat waves. I did obtain quotes last year and if the Parish Council is happy to do so then please include this in the budget. £1234.15*
- 4. Gates have been budgeted in the past but if a transfer to the Church is not imminent then I am inclined to leave gates until the hedge grows otherwise, they could be stolen.*

7. Van renewal fund

I have inserted an allocation of £500 to start the new van replacement fund, it was agreed that this may need to be increased in future years.

8. Grant and donations

The Grants and Donations allocation has been increased to £2200. The £200 increase is included to finance the cost of a hamper to donate to the Care Home on an annual basis.

9. Village planting

An allocation of £1000 has been included in the budget for Village Centre Planting as discussed at a previous meeting.

It was agreed that this item should be discussed in detail at a future Environmental Meeting to establish how this could be undertaken in partnership with Medway Norse who are responsible for the maintenance of the Village Centre.

10. Newsletter

An allocation of £600 has been included for the provision of a newsletter.

11. War Memorial Maintenance.

An allocation of £2500 had been included for the maintenance and cleaning of the War Memorial and the Church. Clock. The Parish Council is responsible for both.

It was noted that there is a War Memorial Trust and grants can also be obtained through this at warmemorials.org.

12. Other matters for discussion/consideration:

The following suggestion from Cllr Williams was considered. It was agreed that an allocation of £12000 would be included for the provision of a part time assistant to the Parish Warden. Working 15 hours a week alongside the Warden, to assist with the increased duties in and around the Parish.

The allocation of £12000 would cover the annual salary and the purchase of additional equipment.

Should we now be planning for additional staffing to assist the Warden. This is because of the following.

We now have the maintenance and continuing development of the New Burial ground as our responsibility for at least three years, maybe longer. At the moment, this is being maintained at a minimum standard by a contractor and by the Warden working overtime. If we are to continue to manage this area and improve it, we need to allocate additional resources.

There are an increasing number of jobs occurring where it is impossible for the Warden to tackle without assistance. At this time, we are dependent upon the good offices of Chairman John assisting him.

There are increasing numbers of new residents arriving to occupy the new developments, this will invariably increase the use of open spaces and recreation grounds, which will generate the need for increased maintenance.

Also, at this time we have no cover for the Wardens holiday's, which can leave gaps in work being covered.

I would suggest that we give consideration to making provision in the budget to the employment of a part-time assistant warden for 15 hours per week. Actual hours to be discussed. Rate of pay to be slightly lower than the existing rate for the Warden, plus we will need to make an initial allowance of £1,600 for equipment.