

THE CHARLTONS PARISH COUNCIL

NOTES ON PRECEPT 2023/2024

1. **Employment Costs**

Pay scales are based on the local government pay scales negotiated by the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services. In accordance with minute ref 22/83.d, I have based the Clerk's salary on £17.58 x 26 (hours month) = £5,485 p.a.

2. **Clerk's Expenses**

The mileage rate has been budgeted at **45p per mile** in line with SLCC and NALC Car Allowance for Local Council Clerks. In line with common practice, the Clerk will continue to receive £10 monthly Work from Home Allowance.

3. **Other Parochial Activities**

Speed Mitigation – Lytes Cary. Following the successful application for a Small Highway Improvement Scheme and purchase of a Speed Indicator Device with Solar Panel etc., the Speed Mitigation Reserve balance stands at £3,838.10, which has been earmarked for the speed mitigation scheme in Lytes Cary.

Speed Indicator Device. There is £555 due back in VAT from the purchase of the SIDs, which I will add to a reserve for future maintenance.

Additional Grass Cutting/Hedge Maintenance. I have carried forward £970 for any additional grass cutting of the verges and hedge maintenance, if required.

Village Gateways Broadway reserve currently stands at £870, therefore, I have included £330 to bring the reserve total to £1,200 to cover the anticipated costs.

The signage/defibrillator reserve currently stands at £530 for the purchase of replacement batteries/pads and any repairs to or additional signage as requested. I have included £470 to bring the total reserve up to £1,000.

Village Car Park. I have left the reserve at £2,000 for the urgent drainage work/repairs to the village car park as CIL can be used to pay the additional cost.

Dog Waste/Grit Bins. £350 is still held in reserve for the purchase of an additional dog bin at West Charlton. The reserve currently stands at £430, so I have included £70 to bring the total to £500.

Mill Pond Dredging. I have included £300 for dredging the Mill Pond as work was carried out in November 2020 and the bi-annual dredging is now due if required yet? Reserve currently stands at £730, which will bring the total to £1,000.

Christmas Trees. I have included £200 towards the Charlton Adam/Mackrell Christmas Trees reserve, which stands at £743 with payment of £156 due to be paid, bringing the total reserve to £587.

Parish Council Website (and PC Laptop). Currently stands at £515, having just purchased the PC laptop for £649, as agreed in the precept for 2022/23. I have included £150 to cover the hosting and domain renewals for the PC website.

The War Memorial/Fingerpost Reserve Fund. Following the refurbishment works by Forsey and Son the reserve total stands at £1,640 with £220 due back in VAT. I have included £140 to bring the reserve up to £2,000.

Flood Mitigation Reserve Fund. £2,000 from the reserve was transferred into the General Reserve as agreed in October 2022. I have left the reserve at £3,150 until costs are known, or a scheme is implemented through development.

Training. I have included £300 for clerk/councillor training.

Rights of Way (RoW). I have included £100 for the RoW Reserve, bringing the total to £600, for any materials required to repair footpaths/footbridges and gates.

Charltons Village News (CVN). The annual contribution towards the PC's insert in the CVN is currently £300. I can look into the possibility of a standard article providing the current list of councillors and their contact information, together with any roles, a list of meeting dates scheduled (with a disclaimer re any rescheduling) and information directing people to the website, whilst advising that we will still post a copy of the minutes on each notice board for those with no online capability.

Parish Online and CPRE. I have not included £100 for Parish Online in the budget for FY 23/24 as there has been no interest in continuing with this facility. I have also not included the donation of £120 to CPRE as, under present circumstances, this may not be value for money.

3. Welham Field Maintenance

There is considerable work required on this Parish asset. As responsible landlords, the PC should budget for such work as the asset which it holds on behalf of the residents is being devalued by lack of maintenance, most of which is the responsibility of the tenant but work such as replacing the damaged gate are considered the landlord's responsibility.

Therefore, I have included £500 to replace the gate posts and gate and, as recently discussed, I have also included £2,000 for Land Agent fees and legal advice.

5. Memorial Playing Field Maintenance

The PC reimburses The Charltons Memorial Community Trust for playing field maintenance expenditure in accordance with the criteria set out in the original arrangements by SSDC. Expenditure is reimbursed upon receipt of all invoices relating to grass and hedge cutting within the confines of the playing field. No other costs will be accepted. By the end of November each year, the Trust's treasurer would need provide me with the anticipated expenditure for the following FY so that I can include this figure in the precept. The grant would only be paid upon receipt of all invoices.

The estimated cost for FY 23/24 is £2,435. As previously discussed, there is a greater demand on the PC to repair and maintain its own assets, having delayed such expense due to the substantial level of grant awarded towards Project Charltons (£10,000). In order to achieve the anticipated costs, I have incorporated the Charltons Play Day grant of £250, which was not requested in this FY and included £2,185 in the precept.

Due to financial constraints the level of grant can be reduced to a set level in FY 24/25 and the Trust advised in advance so that they can budget accordingly.

5. Grants and Charitable Donations

The Charltons Memorial Community Trust (CMCT) - Following the recent request for a grant of £1,000 towards its improvements program, for approval, I can confirm that the PC currently holds £1,300 in the CMCT grant reserve, which can be paid in FY 23/34 and this does not need to be included in the precept.

The Charltons Youth Club – maintained at £1,500, to be reviewed in Jan 2024.

Section 137 Grants - I have maintained the section 137 grants at £250 (expenditure which the PC believes is in the interests of, and will bring direct benefit to, their area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants).

Somerton Town Library - £200 towards the running of the Somerton Town Library.

Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal/Wreath - £55 to cover wreath and donation.

The Reading Room routine maintenance grant - increased by £50 to £300 to cover the cost of hosting the defibrillator and Christmas lights.

6. Precept and General Reserve (GR)

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners Guide (JPAG) (March 2020 edition) advises: "The generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a Smaller Authority's GR is that this should be maintained at between three (3) and twelve (12) months Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE)."

"The smaller the authority, the closer the figure should be to 12 months NRE."

The estimated GR at 31/03/23 is £5,000 which is above the minimum recommended GR i.e., c.£3,530 (3 months NRE). I recommend that the PC continues to build this up until it reaches a more acceptable level of GR.

In order for the PC to maintain its assets and to provide a more acceptable level of GR at 9 months NRE, the PC would need to increase its precept by £7,000 (41%) from £17,000 to £24,000 for FY 23/24. This would equate to an increase of approx. £14.31 per household per annum, the equivalent of 35% for a Band D property.

There are hopefully ample provisions in the 2023/24 budget (including a £1,500 contingency and more acceptable level of GR).

Due to the uncertainty of what the future may hold under the new Somerset Unitary Authority and the formation of Local Community Networks, Parish and Town Councils should budget accordingly to maintain an adequate level of service expected by their parishioners and aim to be proactive rather than reactive; this can only happen with a healthy level of reserves. It is also becoming more and more obvious that any grants or funding to local level will be reduced or withdrawn.

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Becky Carter
Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

11th January 2023