

MINUTES of the Finance Committee meeting held by Zoom on Tuesday 19 January 2021 at 7pm.

PRESENT: Cllrs Citarella, (Chair), Moore, O'Keefe (Finance Committee) and Clerk S Jones.

Cllrs Turner, Atty, Roughneen and Casey also attended.

1. APOLOGIES: Cllr Baker
2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
Cllr Casey declared an interest in all items regarding Newburgh Fair as she is Chair of the Newburgh Fair Committee.
3. SPENDING PLANS 2020/21 AND BUDGET 2021/22
Discussions centred on the appendices attached to the Agenda, which were examined and understood.

Forecast Year End Expenditure and Income 2020/21

It was noted that a large underspend in running costs is predicted for the end of the current financial year compared to the budget, mainly due to less money being spent on village environment issues and Bluebell wood and field during the year than originally planned. Less expenditure has been incurred as Parish Councillors, volunteers and contractors have been unable to carry out certain tasks due to the pandemic and various resulting lockdowns. In addition, the Parish Council was successful in gaining a grant from the West Lancashire Borough Council Capital Scheme towards the costs of Bluebell wood and field and also received a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) grant, which was unexpected. The Clerk confirmed that the Concurrent Grant from West Lancashire Borough Council is fully spent for the financial year.

Forecast Year End Reserves 2020/21

Overall, reserves are expected to be increased by the forecast underspend. The breakdown of the resulting reserves will be amended, although the Twinning, External Audit, IT, Elections and CPRE (contribution towards a demographer regarding the West Lancashire Borough Council Local Plan) reserves will remain unchanged. The Footpath Delegation Scheme reserve has reduced due to work carried out on various footpaths during the year to £895. Any additional monies from the forecast underspend could be added to the general reserve, Village Maintenance reserve or Bluebell Wood reserve, depending on the decision taken at the January Parish Council meeting.

Budget 2021/22

- a) Although there are some unknowns this year, many budgets are proposed to stay the same. Some budgets recommended to increase include the clerk's salary following the pay award given in 2020, although the increase is partly offset by a reduction in clerks expenses. Some budgets are proposed to decrease for the new financial year including village maintenance and insurance following lower costs during 2020.
- b) With regards to income, the Concurrent Grant budget from West Lancashire Borough Council has stayed the same. It is also not known at this stage whether Lancashire County Council will offer a grant this year for the monitoring of village footpaths (£500 was offered this year).
- c) Items of capital expenditure were discussed by Councillors and focussed on two main areas:

- costs relating to the Bluebell Wood and adjoining field

A draft budget was circulated showing the latest position regarding income and expenditure for Bluebell wood and field. The proposed precept budget and ringfenced reserve added to the outstanding grant available from the West Lancashire Borough Council Capital Scheme should be sufficient for the forecast expenditure during the next 12 months.

- Additional star for the Christmas tree on the green

It has been suggested that a star could be purchased for the top of the Christmas tree during the new financial year, following the purchase of additional lights for the Christmas tree during 2020. Depending on the size and design of the star, the cost could start from

£100 nett of VAT. Councillors discussed the issue and felt this cost could be affordable depending on the level of expenditure in other areas of the budget.

- d) Councillors will consider whether to apply for a grant from the West Lancashire Borough Council Capital Scheme at the January Parish Council meeting. However, consideration would have to be given as to whether any other large projects could be undertaken by the Parish Council while still overseeing the Bluebell wood and field project.

Although the Parish Council will use reserves when required, it is important that all the reserves are not used up in case an unforeseen emergency may arise, for which we would not get grant funding. The level of current reserves should be sufficient when considering expenditure known to the Parish Council at this stage.

Given the large underspend forecast for this financial year and the success in obtaining grants from the West Lancashire Borough Council Capital Scheme and Community Infrastructure Levy, the Councillors expressed the view that the precept budget should be set at such a level as to result in no increase for the residents for 2021/22. If this is the chosen option, the Precept budget for 2021/22 will be £16,560.

4. LEVEL OF PRECEPT 2021/22

Precept history was presented and considered at the meeting.

The Council is asked to consider the option proposed by the Finance Committee which would result in a Precept budget of £16,560 being set for 2021/22. This would result in no increase for the residents for the Parish Council part of the Council Tax bill.