

Stony Stratford Town Council Precept Letter

Setting the precept is probably the most important decision that a town or parish council can take. Although the actual amount paid by each household is small compared to the Council Tax paid to Milton Keynes Council or the charge paid to the Police and Crime Commissioner, any increase – especially when seen as a percentage – needs to be justified to residents. This letter sets out the thinking behind the decision by Stony Stratford Town Council to increase its precept by just under 5% for the year 2020/2021.

The total income of the Town Council for the forthcoming year as set out in its budget is as follows:

Precept	£223,374
LCTS Grant	£8,222
Bank Interest Received	£50
Dividend Received	£2
Floral Features	£385
Landscaping Grant	£53,616
Farmers Market Income	£1,250
Allotment Rents - Wolverton Rd	£3,000
Allotment Rents - London Rd	£700
Allotment Rents - Boundary Cre	£900
Sponsorship - Stony in Bloom	£1,700
Big Lunch Income	£500
Apple Day Income	£300
5-7 Church St Income	£3,000
Total Income	£296,998

During the year, the Council funds a wide range of activities. These can be broadly described under the headings below:

Office Costs (Photocopier, Telephones, Internet etc.)	£6,905
Insurance	£950
Room Hire	£250
Audits	£1,120
Training	£1,500
Other Council costs (Conferences, publicity etc)	£2,831
Newsletter (Town Crier)	£7,300
Toilets (Silver Street)	£18,000
Dog and Litter bins	£6,300
Landscape Maintenance	£54,900
Highways initiatives (Foamstream & Joint MKC Project)	£10,412
Floral Features (partnership project with Stony in Bloom)	£8,430
Litter Picking	£1,600
Farmers Market	£300
Crafting for Change (Craft activity sessions)	£1,700
5-7 Church Street	£39,000
5-7 Church Street improvements	£10,212

Senior and Junior Youth Clubs (run at York House Centre)	£11,200
Community Events (Apple Day, Big Lunch. free to attend)	£3,000
Allotments (including Allotment maintenance)	£2,700
Capital Borrowing - BC Allotments maintenance	£2,708
Play Sessions for young people (free to attend)	£6,427
Grants to community organisations	£7,100
Annual Community Award	£100
Civic Budget (donation to Royal British Legion for poppy wreath)	£30
Staff Costs (Salaries, PAYE, Travel)	£99,432
Elected Members Allowances	£5,841
Total	£310,248

The budget for the Council was agreed at the full meeting held on January 21, the papers for which can be found at:

www.stonystratford.gov.uk/upload/managerFile/Full%20Council/21stJanuary2020FullCouncilMeetingPaperspart2.pdf

The increase in the precept for 2020/2021 is explained by the need to cover the cost of the project to improve 5-7 Church Street, which is owned by the Council. This building, which houses both the Town Council offices and the library service provided by Milton Keynes Council, is now over 40 years old and in need of improvement to make it both more environmentally friendly and accessible to people with disabilities. Any improvement is also intended to make the building more available to the general public for events and activities.

The Council has consulted widely with the community about improvements to the building. In December, it was granted planning permission to improve the interior of the building through the construction of a new foyer and the removal of the central staircase to create a more open space on both floors. In addition, the Town Council has been working with a local not for profit organisation, Wolverton Community Energy, to install Solar Photo-voltaic panels on the roof of the building which will reduce electricity bills and reduce the carbon footprint of the building.

The Council has set a total budget for the work and will go out to tender shortly to assess whether the work can be achieved within the budget allocated. In the meantime, to ensure that the project is managed properly, the Council has agreed to extend the hours of work of the Clerk and to fund the first phase of development from its reserves. In the coming year, the cost of staffing and the first phase will amount to £24,709, of which £13,250 will be covered from the reserves.

Since its creation in June 2001, the Council has awarded more than £180,000 in grants to local organisations to fund activities within the town. This reflects the importance of these groups within our community. In 2019/20, the Council made grants to Fullers Slade Residents Association, the Riverside Parks Group, the Lantern Festival, StonyLive!, and Stony Stratford Arts for All among others. These groups and the work they do to enhance the town are an important element of the quality of life for all who live and work in the town.

This quality is also supported by the Council in its funding for two annual events: the Big Lunch in June and Apple Day in October. I am very grateful to all the volunteers who have helped the Council over the years to make these a success and to the members of the Projects Committee for their efforts to oversee these events. It was a great pity that Apple Day had to be cancelled this year, once again, due to the weather but I have no doubt that it will be reinstated in 2020.

Town and parish councils are the first tier of local government. Stony Stratford Town Council covers the town of Stony and the estates of Fullers Slade and Galley Hill. It is important to us that we represent and support all the residents of the parish. Our bi-monthly full council meetings are held in public and take place at the Rowans Centre, the Galley Hill Meeting Place and at the Parish Hall in Church Street.

We could not succeed without the commitment of our four part-time employees: Lynne Compton (Town Clerk), Karen Hiser (Properties and Contracts Officer), Melanie Hyde (Information Officer) and Alan Box (caretaker). I am grateful to them for their efforts to support us in our activities and for providing professional support and advice. I am also grateful to my fellow councillors for their work on behalf of the council and their constituents.

Town Councillors are elected for a four-year term with the next elections taking place in May 2020. If you are interested in becoming a councillor, please do not hesitate to talk to our Clerk or to myself about what the role involves. It is essential that the Council reflects all the views of residents within the town and responds to the different needs within the community. A diverse set of councillors from within the parish helps to ensure that.

Best wishes

Robert Gifford
Chair