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# Precept Letter 2023/24

Dear Resident

Probably the most important decision that a Town Council must do during the year, and the one that affects the most people, is to set its budget and precept for the coming year. The numbers that the Town Council have to consider are on a much smaller scale than those that Milton Keynes City Council or The Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner has to deal with but, as a Town Council we consider it vitally important that you, the residents of Stony Stratford, Galley Hill and Fullers Slade hear about your Town Council’s budgetary decisions and the precept level.

No council likes to put up the precept, but it was felt this was not the appropriate time to cut services. For 2023/24 the precept will need to increase, in line with the council’s budget, and our thinking behind this was influenced by a number of factors:-

* Inflation: Like every household and business in the country, the council has suffered the effects of inflation. The last reported figures at the time councillors looked at setting the year’s budget, showed inflation running at 10.5 %
* In the previous three years we had two modest increases in the precept and one year (2021/22) in which the precept didn’t increase at all. However, although your council are very keen to deliver services as efficiently as possible, we were in a position where a lower increase in the precept would have meant implementing significant cuts to services that we are committed to providing to residents.
* Salary Costs: as a council we pay salaries in line with the nationally agreed pay levels, however at the time of setting the budget the increase in these numbers was not known, and so we have had to use our judgement to provide a best guess of our likely salary costs for the year ahead.
* Landscape contract: In a similar situation to the salary costs, the council did not have a complete picture as to the likely expenditure on the landscape contract. This runs to the same timetable as MKCC’s contract which will be changing on the 1st September. The Town Clerk will need to undertake a lengthy procurement process to obtain best value for the new contract.
* Continuing to support local groups through grants, council staff time and resources.
* Additional Activities: we have continued to increase the amount of activities the council support, such as Citizens Advice outreach, exercise classes at the Rowans centre and the library, arranging play sessions for children during the school holidays. There are also other new activities such as the S.106 Arts Project, managing the expenditure of the Cost-of-Living and Footfall Boost grants (from MKCC), producing a Business Plan and new youth provision on Fullers Slade (which involves applying for a large lottery grant)
* Furthering the Neighbourhood Plan Initiatives Action Plan

In light of these and other factors, we decided to increase the precept from £232,058 to £255,264 (an increase of £23,206), with the council’s tax base (the number of homes the precept applies to) being slightly larger for the year, this will mean an increase of **£7.64** **per year** on a Band D (the average) property, a rise of 8.4%. This takes the precept on a Band D property to £98.53 per year, equivalent to £1.90 per week: a very small proportion of a household’s Council Tax bill.

We know that any increase in costs of this nature will be very difficult for many, struggling with the cost of living but, we have tried to keep the increase to a minimum by:-

* Trying to keep a lid on our own expenses by careful negotiations of contracts to make sure that we deliver value for money
* Further cuts in discretionary items such as support for floral features and the newsletter.
* Use of earmarked reserves where possible.

The figures for our forecast income and expenditure are as follows:-

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| Table 1 – Income |
| Nominal Code | **Item** | **Amount** |
| 1000 | Precept | £255,264.00 |
| 1005 | LCTS Grant | £7,069.00 |
| 1010 | Bank Interest Received | £800.00 |
| 1025 | Landscaping Grant | £63,485.00 |
| 1040 | Farmers Market Income | £1,275.00 |
| 1045 | Allotment Rents - Wolverton Rd | £3,152.00 |
| 1046 | Allotment Rents - London Rd | £700.00 |
| 1047 | Allotment Rents - Boundary Cre | £946.00 |
| 1060 | Sponsorship - Stony in Bloom | £1,500.00 |
| 1067 | Apple Day Income | £250.00 |
| 1080 | 5-7 Church St Income | £9,500.00 |
|  | **Total Income** | **£343,941.00** |

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| Table 2 - Expenditure |
| Nominal Code | **Item** | **Amount** |
| 4000 | Salaries | £99,101.00 |
| 4001 | Employers NI etc | £27,000.00 |
| 4002 | PAYE Admin | £487.00 |
| 4005 | Officer Travel and Subsistence | £346.00 |
| 4006 | Human Resources | £645.00 |
| 4015 | Copy Licence | £357.00 |
| 4020 | Telephone and Broadband | £1,375.00 |
| 4025 | Room Hire | £170.00 |
| 4030 | Insurance | £864.00 |
| 4035 | Domain Licence | £285.00 |
| 4040 | Internal audit | £310.00 |
| 4041 | External Audit | £805.00 |
| 4045 | Training | £5,000.00 |
| 4046 | Conferences - Council Run | £108.00 |
| 4047 | Conferences - External | £1,000.00 |
| 4055 | Office Equipment | £1,500.00 |
| 4065 | Finance Software | £284.00 |
| 4067 | Computer software & licenses | £2,293.00 |
| 4070 | Stationery & Postage | £204.00 |
| 4100 | Memberships | £1,765.00 |
| 4150 | Newsletter/Publishing | £5,452.00 |
| 4152 | Website | £300.00 |
| 4160 | Elected Members Allowances | £5,003.00 |
| 4170 | Civic Budget | £32.00 |
| 4200 | Toilets Maintenance | £18,532.00 |
| 4250 | Dog bins | £7,024.00 |
| 4251 | Litter Bins | £810.00 |
| 4253 | Landscape Contract | £66,876.00 |
| 4255 | Litter Picking | £1,765.00 |
| 4260 | Farmers Market | £500.00 |
| 4267 | Citizens Advice Outreach | £4,725.00 |
| 4300 | Annual Community Award | £115.00 |
| 4350 | 5-7 Church St | £35,000.00 |
| 4352 | Capital Borrow PWLB 5-7 ChSt | £8,922.00 |
| 4400 | Youth Activities | £12,000.00 |
| 4406 | Big Lunch | £1,700.00 |
| 4415 | Floral Features | £7,421.00 |
| 4419 | Apple Day | £1,500.00 |
| 4420 | Allotments - Wolverton Rd | £1,561.00 |
| 4422 | Allotments - Boundary Crescent | £1,248.00 |
| 4425 | Capital Borrowing - BC Allots | £2,708.00 |
| 4428 | Play Sessions | £7,000.00 |
| 4450 | Grants | £5,100.00 |
| 4460 | Civic Initiatives | £5,000.00 |
| 4462 | Exercise Classes | £4,500.00 |
|  | **Total expenditure** | **£348,693.00** |
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|  | **Total Budget Income** | **£343,941.00** |
|  | **Expenditure** | **£348,693.00** |
|  | **Net Income over Expenditure (from use of reserves to maintain a balanced budget)** | **-£4,752.00** |

The budget for the year and the level of precept were set at a Special Meeting of the Full Council on 24th January, the minutes of the meeting can be found [here](https://www.stonystratford.gov.uk/town-council-meetings/meetings-20222023).

An important part of the council’s financial activities is providing grants to local organisations to support their activities in the community. During the last year we have provided grants to

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| **Organisation** | **Amount** |
| Galley Hill Residents Assoc. Grant Easter 22/23 | £250.00 |
| Grant Riverside Fair in 110622 | £480.00 |
| Jubilee Party grant Rainbows | £70.43 |
| Grant Galley Hill 50th Celebration | £800.00 |
| Grant Folk on the Green 0622 | £365.00 |
| Jubilee Grant - the Limes | £147.89 |
| Jubilee Grant Ryelands | £150.00 |
| Jubilee Grant Egmont Ave | £150.00 |
| Stonylive! First Aid 0622 | £369.00 |
| Grant Lantern Project | £250.00 |
| Grant for new Orchard Mortimer Pk | £667.69 |
| Grant Funded Gym places - MK Springers \*£1,000 of which from MK Cost of Living EMR | £1,440.00 |
| Grant Residents’ activities YMCA | £1,000.00 |
| Grant children’s Xmas Galley Hill Residents Assoc. | £279.60 |
| Grant for floor Stony Stratford Town Football Club | £860.00 |
| Grant Xmas day party for Seniors | £700.00 |
| **Total grants awarded** | **£7,979.61** |

We would like to encourage as many community activities as possible throughout the Town Council area and would encourage organisations and community groups to apply for grants if they felt this would help them. The criteria and grant application form can be found [here](https://www.stonystratford.gov.uk/about-us/grants).

My fellow councillors have been working very hard during, what has proved, a difficult year and I would like to thank them for the service to the community. Also, the council’s hard-working staff: Lynne Compton (Town Clerk), Amanda Jones (Deputy Town Clerk), Melanie Hyde (Information Officer) and Alan Box (Caretaker) have proved again that they can rise to the task of keeping the Town Council’s activities running smoothly in challenging times. I’m pleased to say that in December, Shelagh Muir joined the council staff as Council Support Officer, bringing the council staff back up to full complement.

During the coming year the Council will continue to work to enhance the town, directly by own activities, supporting local groups and lobbying and acting as a mouthpiece for all aspects of Stony Stratford, Galley Hill and Fullers Slade. If you have any questions about the work of the council, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at roy.adams@stonystratford.gov.uk

Roy Adams, Deputy Chair

Stony Stratford Town Council