

Precept Letter 2024-25

Dear Resident,

Probably the most important decision that a Town Council must make 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 must consider are on a much smaller scale than those that Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) or The Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner must 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.

Setting the budget is always a difficult decision as we try to juggle priorities and try to keep costs down, whilst still providing the services that residents want and expect. This year proved especially challenging, having tried over the last few years to have as small an impact on people's finances as possible by having a series of below inflation increases in the precept. For the 2024-25 precept, we have produced a responsible and forward-thinking budget plan, including an increase to the precept of £14.50 per household, per annum (£1.21 per household per month). This measured decision prioritises vital investments in key areas such as assets, cost-of-living help (through grants from MKCC) and initiatives to help boost footfall on your High Street, landscaping, and staff resources. The budget aims to ensure both the immediate security of our assets and the long-term sustainability of our services. These are outlined in more detail below: -

- Essential security repairs to the Boundary Crescent Allotment fencing and gates. Ensuring the safety and protection of our Allotments is paramount and these critical repairs will safeguard them for future generations.
- Essential replacement of dog bins
- The necessity to set aside funds each year to save for a new lift in the library and ensure we have sufficient funding to pay for improvements and any other major repairs. The improvements and repairs will help safeguard the community's major asset for future generations.
- Launching a comprehensive viability study to explore Community ownership/leasing or similar of a building to help local start-up retail businesses (different to the offer already available) have a presence on Stony Stratford High Street. This proactive research will shed light on the viability of the options available and potential future models for a community owned retail space on Stony Stratford High Street. This would help to stem the trend of bigger retail chains taking the lion's share of retail space and making most High Streets look alike, whilst, at the same time, encouraging small businesses that might otherwise be unable to have a presence to set up in Stony.
- Rising operational costs: We have been very successful this year in gaining grants of over £11,000 from MKCC for the Winter Plan (coffee mornings etc.), over £20,000 from MKCC last year for Footfall Boost plus Cost-of-Living initiatives and £5,000 for match-funding a piece of accessible play equipment. These new initiatives and activities require adequately resourcing with staff. In addition, like many organisations, we are facing increasing costs for essential services such as heating, lighting, and landscape maintenance. The additional funds from the precept will help us mitigate these pressures and maintain the high quality of our services.

The precept increase reflects a balanced approach to addressing these crucial needs while minimising the impact on residents. We understand that any rise in costs requires careful consideration and we have explored all alternative avenues before arriving at this decision.

We appreciate 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.
- Use of earmarked reserves where possible.
- Obtaining grants

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

Precept	£295,964	Allotment Rents - Boundary Cre	£1,003
		Newsletter Sales	£500
LCTS Grant	£7,069	Sponsorship - Stony in Bloom	£1,500
Bank Interest Received	£3,000	Big Lunch Income	£0
Landscaping Grant	£71,637	Apple Day Income	£263
Farmers Market Income	£1,300	5-7 Church St Income	£14,000
Allotment Rents - Wolverton Rd	£3,341	Total Income	£104,313
Allotment Rents - London Rd	£700		
		Income plus precept	£400,277
Salaries	£104,055.00	Landscape Contract	£69,000
Employers NI etc	£27,000.00	Litter Picking	£1,853.00
PAYE Admin	£511.00	Farmers Market	£800.00
Officer Travel and Subsistence	£363.00	Exercise Classes	£4,725.00
Human Resources	£677.00	Citizens Advice contract	£4,961.00
Copy Licence	£375.00	Annual Community Award	£125.00
Telephones and Broadband	£1,436.00	5-7 Church St	£43,750.00
Room Hire	£179.00	5-7 Church Street Improvements	£25,000.00
Insurance	£907.00	Capital Borrow PWLB	£8,922.00
Domain Licence	£100.00	Youth Activities	£12,000.00
Internal audit	£350.00	Big Lunch	£3,000.00
External Audit	£845.00	Floral Features	£8,500.00
Training	£5,250.00	Apple Day	£2,500.00
Conferences - Council Run	£113.00	Allotments - Wolverton Rd	£1,639.00
Conferences - External	£1,200.00	Allotments - Boundary Crescent	£13,310.00
Office Equipment	£1,575.00	Capital Borrowing - BC Allots	£2,708.00
Finance Software	£1,428.00	Play Sessions	£7,000.00
Computer software & licenses	£2,408.00	Grants	£7,000.00
Stationery & Postage	£214.00	Civic Initiatives	£11,000.00
Memberships	£1,853.00	Total expenditure	£420,695.00
Newsletter/Publishing	£5,725.00		
Website	£300.00		
Elected Members Allowances	£6,482.00		
Civic Budget	£40.00		
Toilets Maintenance	£18,532.00		
Dog bins	£10,000.00		
Litter Bins	£984.00		

The budget for the year and the level of precept were set at the Full Council on 16th January, the minutes of the meeting can be found here: - [01.24 Minutes Full Council Jan Draft.docx](#)

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 provided over £10,000 of grants as detailed below: -

Fullers Slade Residents Assoc	50th Celebrations	£1,000
Galley Hill Residents Assoc.	Easter and Christmas community events	£1,090
Greek Orthodox Community of Milton Keynes	White board portable stand for community talks	£500
MK Christmas Day Party for the Elderly	Contribution to MK Christmas Day party	£800
Stony Stratford Swifts and Martins Group	Provision and installation of nesting boxes	£500
Stonylive!	First aid provision	£474

Platinum Jubilee	Street Party Grants from an MKCC grant	£335
Fitness festival	towards festival costs	£272
Drama Llamas	community plays	£500
MK Lions	Annual Remembrance Service costs e.g. band & PA	£350
Christmas Lights at Stony Stratford	two sets of fabricated steps for safety	£180.00
Folk on the Green: Heritage film	contribution to production of a Heritage film	£1,000
Stony Stratford Croquet Club	new Roof	£750
Lantern Project 2023	contribution towards costs	£400
London Road Allotment Association	Purchase of two lockable noticeboards (Allotments EMR)	£759
Keeping Kids Off The Streets	boxing equipment (MKCC Cost of Living grant)	£1,870
	Total	£10,780

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 on our new website at:

<https://www.stonystratford.gov.uk/your-council/grants/>

My fellow councillors have been working very hard during, what has proved, a difficult year. This has included a great deal of work on initiatives to boost the town centre, and on flood protection, whilst at the same time coping with the wholesale replacement of the website, recruitment challenges, rising costs and additional activities. 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 June 2023, Fran Shackelford 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 our 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 or are thinking about becoming a councillor, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at roy.adams@stonystratford.gov.uk

Roy Adams, Chair
Stony Stratford Town Council