

Finance, Policy and Resource Committee

Well what a year! I would like to start out by thanking the committee for the lively debates and healthy discussions which has helped to drive us forward. Finance is always challenging as there is a need to effect a balance on tightropes as small as a piece of cotton thread.

So to the nitty gritty as they say. The focus over the last 12 months has been on investment and ensuring that every penny of the precept has been used to good effect. To this end, it has heartened me to see that the change of accounts to the specialist firm has continued to reap rewards. I estimated the gain to be around circa £300 and I pleased to say that the gains are over £600. I know in the scheme of things this is not a lot. But every little counts... (Where have I heard that before....) Every little bit helps...

Let's turn to the bad news first.... As you will have noticed the precept has increased again this year by £2 (per Band D household). That's less than a single cup of coffee (from anyone of the well-known coffee shops) per year per household. It's not a lot really, especially when you consider what we are trying to do. The money that you spend on Parish precept goes directly into the Parish for the benefit of the Parish of Wythall. And I do mean that.

Now let's turn to the good news... the budget is working, we have increased the precept as explained above to align with increases in costs, however we have managed to cut the deficit (the amount we draw from the general reserves) we are getting there! The aim is to make the precept pay for the costs of running the Parish. Wages, electricity and believe it or not..... mowing does not come cheap!!! So what is the point, of the Parish council, if we do not add some extra benefit the community?

So, what have we done?

I am pleased to say that the lighting on Tile House Lane is going to get an uplift this coming year as we have placed the order for two (much needed) new lighting columns between Whitlocks End station and the houses at Majors Green. This has been something that has desperately needed doing for some time and it has been the constraints of the budget that have tied our hands. I for one do not want to see the budget preventing us for completing projects like this in the future.

Part of what has made everything possible this year is the income stream from the cemetery. This is an asset that I think we as a council and a community can be proud of for so many different reasons. As a resident of Wythall I have family (and sadly friends) residing at the cemetery. It is a peaceful, calm place to visit loved ones, which shows the heart of the community. I believe that, and I could be wrong, that we are one of the only Parish Councils to have such a facility. This means that any revenue it makes goes back into the community. The cemetery has surpassed expectations again this year. This is particularly important as if the cemetery was not there we, as a council, would have to find a further £24,000 – £30,000, the only way we could find this is through increasing the precept. This would mean an increase of circa £8 – £10 per band D household (to give some perspective).

With this in mind, we have been reviewing the reserves policy and are looking at alternatives to the current policy. This looking positive and could see a substantial amount of money released and made available to spend. To this end we will look at moving this into earmarked reserves to spend on projects to benefit the residents of Wythall (such as lighting). I would be interested in hearing from the public and Councillors alike to see where this money should be spent.

We have also looking at alternative income streams and how best to make the money we have work for us. To this end we have taken some expert financial advice and have some options available for the future. So watch this space. Incidentally, the move to the deposit fund in the previous financial year has reaped real rewards. We have historically been achieving circa £50 a year interest previously, the move last year saw this increase to circa £125. I am pleased to see this has increased this year to circa £550. I know in the scheme of things this is small, but goes to show the lengths the council are going to make every penny count.

I think it worthy to mention at this point the worthy local community projects and services that have been supported by the Parish Council. These include, but are not limited to;

- Wythall Park, which is a valuable asset to the community, and without the support of benefactors like the parish would cease to be.
- Woodrush Community centre, which provides a safe place for our local youngsters to go.
- The Tennis Club, which is reaching out to the local community and schools to promote health, fitness and community spirit.
- Village hall, which provides a low cost venue to support local groups and community out-reaches.

There is so much more we can do for the community with the support of the Parish Council and the members of the Parish. Let's keep the momentum going.

Cllr Darren Bibbings

Chairman