

Hughenden Parish Council Precept for 2016/17

Each year Hughenden Parish Council (HPC) has to set a precept to cover its operating costs in providing services for the local community. This precept is paid by Wycombe District Council and included in your Council Tax. For the current year, 2015/16, it averaged £41 per household with variations dependant on your home's tax band. Up until now the services that HPC have been responsible for include playgrounds, allotments, open spaces, bus shelters, dog bins, the Garden of Rest (cemetery) and benches. For 2016/17 things are about to change.

Bucks County Council (BCC) whose expenditure is capped by the Government has been forced to reallocate its resources to cover the extra required to maintain some of its social services such as child welfare to an acceptable standard. This has meant cuts in other areas which are not protected by law and the devolvement of some services to parish councils. In particular the devolvement of roadside maintenance including grass cutting in 30mph areas, hedges, rights of way clearance, clearing the edges of pavements, weed killing and the maintenance of street furniture. To cover the cost of this BCC will be giving £11,200 to HPC. However this is in no way enough to cover the cost of providing the service level expected by the community, so HPC is budgeting an additional £15,000. Even this may not be enough so HPC will be looking to residents to help by the cutting grass in front of their houses, keeping hedges trimmed, preventing graffiti and picking up litter.

The provision of 6 playgrounds, 8 allotments sites and a cemetery are other key areas of HPC responsibility. The playgrounds which are used by about 1/3 of the families *in the Parish provide up to 5 play experiences namely swing, rocker, rotor, agility and slide. The cost of the equipment and the maintenance of it to meet health and safety standards is considerable and we are now coming to the point where equipment needs to be replaced. An additional budget of £10,000 has been allocated. Allotments bring in a small income but that in no way covers the cost of maintenance of the sites and this year additional money will have to be spent on tree surgery to ensure the safety of our allotment holders. The parish wide survey undertaken in 2014 has given the focus for HPC expenditure.

The Garden of Rest in Four Ashes Road is to be run on a self-funding basis. In other words the income from burials and memorials is usually enough to cover the cost of maintenance. However, more significant maintenance will be required to the building and fencing and there will come a time within the next 15 years when the site will be full and we will need to open up and landscape a second area before this happens. In order to ensure that we have enough money to maintain the Garden of Rest in the future an increase of around £2,000 per year has been budgeted which will be ring-fenced for future investment. In total the above increases will amount to an extra £6 on your council tax bill for 2016/17 bringing it to an average of £51 per household. For context, this is still below last year's national average of £55.

The Budget has not only been about increases. There have been a number of cut backs and caps including the administration costs being reduced by £4,000, it is anticipated that there will be improvements in efficiency brought about by the introduction of a new accounting system. The existing accounting system is cash book based where invoices only enter the system when they are paid, we will be moving to a traditional accruals accounting system.

HPC will continue to fund grants and donations to local community activities at last year's level. Whilst the allocation has been filled for the current year it does not mean we cannot be approached for funding during 2016.

10 or so years ago the Government was considering that Parish Councils would not have a role to play. Now it seems as localisation is implemented and county councils are realising that services can be passed to Parish Councils that provide a more focussed attention to local requirements, the role of a parish council is becoming more significant.

HPC will be doing its utmost to ensure that the level of service provided to the local community is the best it can be within the budget available during these times of austerity. If you would like to be a part of the process we would just like to remind you that there are still 4 councillor positions available in Hughenden Valley and Widmer End wards which can be filled by local residents.

*Based on responses from 2014 Parish survey of residents.