

Finance Report by the Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Introduction

Services to the Community:

Costessey TC provides many local services and owns around 90 acres of open spaces including woodlands, playing fields and parks with play equipment. We provide grit bins, litter bins, dog bins and benches and maintain bus shelters. We are the local Burial Authority and maintain the cemetery in Longwater Lane and the closed churchyard at St Edmund's. We own, maintain and hire out rooms at Breckland Hall, the Owen Barnes Room, the Costessey Centre and West Costessey Hall, so residents now enjoy modern facilities throughout Costessey. We provide substantially more public services and facilities than many surrounding parishes and have nine members of staff, some part-time. Our 16 councillors are unpaid volunteers and do not receive allowances.

Council Income to Pay for Services & Facilities:

However, our income is limited and mainly comes from hall & pitch hire, and burial fees. We have reduced the amount we keep of the Parochial Charity's allotment rents in return for help in administering their allotments from 33% to 25%. In general community halls do not cover their costs and our halls are no exception. The shortfall between our income and expenditure is made up by the Precept, the amount collected through Council Tax. This is divided by the tax base (not the number of properties) and is often averaged out and quoted at Band D as a benchmark.

End of year 2016-17

Overall Summary:

The Council has remained in budget during the year to the tune of about £87,600. The accountant finalised the accounts for the end of year closedown on 2 May. Any unspent funds are transferred into our Earmarked Reserves for long-term projects as per our 4-year plan. The accounts will be audited by our internally appointed auditors and subsequently by Mazars, the externally appointed auditors.

Land acquisition and leasing:

We have acquired various parcels of land from South Norfolk Council including land adjacent to the cemetery for the proposed extension, Husenbeth and Breydon Drive play areas, plus woodland at the Roundwell junction and three roundabouts on Longdell Hills.

Four Year Plan:

We have succeeded in completing several projects listed in the plan including installing HDMI screens in several halls, replacing hall chairs, replacing damaged nest swings, replacing old grounds machinery, and upgrading IT systems.

Unfortunately, we have still not quite finished the snagging at West Costessey Hall, so half the retention is still to pay. The final costs have not yet been calculated. We have upgraded some of the play equipment at Breckland Park but plan to phase in more new equipment as funds allow. About £10,000 of CIL monies have been earmarked to be spent on play equipment.

Staff:

Unfortunately due to me breaking my ankle last summer, my Deputy had to step into cover much of my work at short notice. This meant that other staff members had to work extra hours to cover the workload and I am extremely grateful that they were willing to do this. We have a good team in both the office and our grounds, and my thanks go to all our staff for their hard work and dedication. Our Meeter / Greeter at West Costessey Hall decided to move on so our workforce has reduced to nine. Council's business increases year on year, so all our staff are extremely busy in dealing with the work created by hiring out rooms and pitches, co-ordinating burial arrangements and keeping abreast of the finances and maintaining our grounds. Our hall hires and burial fees this last year continued to come in ahead of our budget and we will have to judge if more office hours are required in future. Obviously, staff costs can form a considerable part of the budget.

Budget Requirements for 2017- 18

Every Autumn the Council looks at its previous year's income & expenditure, the expected year-end totals and future commitments, and sets the following year's budget. The Council is required to budget realistically and would be criticised by the auditors if it did not do so.

Currently central government provides a Precept Support Grant, following the slashing of the tax base five years ago year – a knock-on effect of changing the Council Tax Benefit payments system. The grant is reduced year on year and is likely to be withdrawn altogether in future. This year the Precept Support Grant has been reduced from £37,618 to £20,214. The Town Council has had to budget to balance its books without this grant. Additionally, external costs have risen – eg dog bin emptying is going to be charged by South Norfolk Council at the full cost for ALL our bins leading to a 301% increase in dog bin emptying costs alone.

Central Government is devolving more functions to Councils, and County & District Councils in their turn are also trying to pass services and assets to local councils, who are expected to take on responsibility for providing more services and facilities without being given any extra funds. Costessey Town Council took over providing a youth service in the shape of the Cossey Posse and the QUBE when Norfolk County Council pulled the service several years ago following central government cuts. Although this is a revenue cut for those authorities if the Town Council takes them on, the same costs inevitably show up as a much larger percentage increase for the Town Council as our overall budget is much less.

Every year Council sets its priorities and reviews its 4 year plan, so it can budget accordingly. The Council sets money aside into ear-marked reserves to cover major capital projects in addition to its general reserve. My able Deputy, Nigel Bailey, seeks external funding for projects wherever he can, so that facilities are improved without costs over-burdening our local community.

This financial year we hope to continue preparatory work on the extension to the cemetery in Longwater Lane for natural burials, continue the refurbishment of the younger children's play area in Breckland Park, replace decrepit notice boards, upgrade the website again, continue with the Greenhills Woods project, and work towards the Local Council Award Quality Gold accreditation.

The Council budgets realistically and hopes to be able to invest sensibly to maximise interest and increase income, though interest rates are still pitifully low. Revenue costs have been cut in this year's budget for Breckland Hall, West Costessey Hall and open spaces in general. However, given the potential cost increases Council voted to raise its share of Council Tax slightly by just 2 pence per week – or 1%.

As the Council continues to take on more premises, projects and tasks to provide better facilities for its growing population, the Council will need more staff and equipment to look after the extra grounds, play areas and halls. Costessey Town Council will budget for these and unforeseen eventualities and will keep any future increases in Band D rate to a minimum.

A detailed summary of our budget can be found on our website. Paper copies are available on request and we are happy to explain the detail.


Hilary Elias, Town Clerk

Did you know your Council Tax Band is set using your homes' assumed value from 1991?

The Town Council's 1% increase to £111.51 per annum assumes two adults live in a Band D property paying the full charge.

Higher and lower bands pay different rates with South Norfolk Council administering discounts, exemptions and benefits.

Costessey Town Council, Norfolk County Council, South Norfolk Council and Norfolk Constabulary combined charges make up the full Council Tax charge.



COUNCIL TAX BANDS (1991 PROPERTY VALUE)	
BAND A	UNDER £40K
BAND B	£40K - £52K
BAND C	£52K - £68K
BAND D	£68K - £88K
BAND E	£88K - £120K
BAND F	£120K - £160K
BAND G	£160K - £320K
BAND H	OVER £320K