

Crewkerne Town Council

NEWSLETTER

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Town Hall, Market Square, Crewkerne, Somerset TA18 7LN

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Town Council sets the Budget and Precept for 2021/22

This is the time of year when the Town Council must set its budget for the forthcoming financial year and with that, of course, comes the setting of the precept that the residents of Crewkerne will pay as a part of their overall Council tax bill. This year has been particularly challenging in trying to meet all of the budgetary needs of the Town Council, whilst working hard to minimise the impact on the overall precept. That juggling act is now complete and the Council has set the budget for 2021/22 at £440,037. This represents a 4.5% increase in comparison with last year's value.

In order to understand what this means per household, the overall precept must be divided by the Tax Base, which is the equivalent number of Band D properties in the parish of Crewkerne. Each year, the Tax Base is calculated by the District Council and presented to all town and parish councils. For Crewkerne this year, there has been a 1.1% reduction in the Tax Base. As a result, the 4.5% increase in the precept actually equates to a 5.6% increase in the Band D charge. It must be emphasised that this percentage increase actually equates to an increase of only £9.52 per annum per Band D household.

WHY HAS THE TOWN COUNCIL RAISED THE PRECEPT?

There are two key drivers which have required the Council to increase the planned overall expenditure this year. These are:



Falkland Square Public Toilets

The Falkland Square public toilets are a very well-used facility by both residents and visitors to Crewkerne but are now in a very poor state of repair. The Town Council receives constant complaints about the poor state of the toilets and so a major refurbishment is planned, which will provide the town centre with modern, hygienic public toilet facilities.

In order to minimise the impact on the budget, the Town Council has applied for grant funding support and has now received a grant funding commitment from the District Council's Market Towns Investment Group. Nevertheless, the high refurbishment costs inevitably mean a significant "hit" on this year's budget.



George Reynolds Centre

With the sad demise of the charitable company Crewkerne Sports and Youth Activities Ltd (CSYAL) during the year due to financial difficulties, and the subsequent closure of the GRC for public use, it was necessary for the Town Council to step in and manage the building directly. It quickly became evident that there were a number of significant issues with the state of repair of the building that needed to be addressed before the building could be reopened to the public.

Looking forward, the budget takes account not only of the need to complete the ongoing maintenance work, but also to enhance the appearance of the building, to make it a much more inviting venue to visit, and to invest in putting in place all that is necessary to efficiently manage this important community facility.



Use of Henhayes Car Park for Covid Vaccinations

Most residents will have noticed that the Henhayes car park has been prioritised to support the ongoing covid vaccination programme taking place at the Henhayes Centre. Realistically, this intensive programme of vaccinations is likely to continue for several more months and the Town Council is committed to giving its full support to this vital task. So the Council would like to apologise for any disruption caused by the lack of availability of the Henhayes car park, but is sure that residents will understand that this is a necessary sacrifice as part of supporting the covid vaccination programme.



FARMERS MARKET OUTSIDE THE TOWN HALL

In December, the Farmer's Market, usually held at Henhayes, had to relocate at short notice, due to the role out of covid vaccinations. The area in front of the Town Hall was used, along with a car park belonging to Stokes Partners Solicitors.

It was so successful, that the Town Council were asked if they would allow the Farmer's Market to use the area in front of the Town Hall for January. Of course, the answer was yes. Despite having to work around the Christmas tree, the market enjoyed another successful day.

PROPOSED ORCHARD AT BARN STREET RECREATION GROUND



Last year, the Council put forward a proposal to establish an orchard within the Barn Street recreation ground. Comments were invited from residents and the Council received considerable feedback. The message we received was that residents were very much split in their opinions: some strongly in favour of an orchard, others strongly opposed. With this in mind, the Council put forward a proposal for a smaller scale project, with a maximum of 30 trees planted, to ensure that the essence of the land as a recreation ground was not compromised. The Council consulted a former SSDC horticultural expert, who recommended that the best way to visualise the impact of planting 30 trees would be to "plant" 30 stakes in the ground in the proposed location of the trees. When this is carried out, the Council will invite residents to visit the recreation ground so that they can better gauge the impact of planting 30 trees and the Council would then welcome further feedback, as part of the ongoing process of consultation.

The Council recognises that, with the current covid restrictions in place, now is certainly not the time to be asking residents to leave their homes and gather in the Barn Street recreation ground to look at some stakes. So this next phase of the consultation process is currently paused until covid restrictions are suitably lifted.

DOG FOULING



Many of you will have noticed that the issue of dog fouling in the town has become worse over the last few months as dog owners are not picking up after their pets. This is antisocial, illegal, and an issue of public safety, especially for children. The Town Council will begin a campaign of education, beginning with posters around the town, to once again remind dog owners to be considerate, and to pick up after their dog and to dispose of poo bags in a dog or litter bin.



Meeting your Councillors

Covid restrictions have meant that all Council meetings are currently being held remotely on zoom. The Council recognises that this does pose a problem for those who lack internet facilities. But on the plus side, the Council has received very positive feedback about its broadcasting of Council meetings on YouTube.

With covid restrictions likely to be ongoing for many months to come, the Council is looking at other opportunities for electors to engage with their Councillors. Two such opportunities are Councillor Surgeries and the Annual Meeting of Electors.

COUNCILLOR SURGERIES

Councillor Surgeries represent an opportunity for residents to meet one or two of their Councillors face-to-face, in a confidential setting. Usually held in one of the Town Hall meeting rooms, the Council is proposing to re-start the surgeries soon using zoom, using the “waiting room” facility within zoom to manage participation and ensure confidentiality.



ANNUAL MEETING OF ELECTORS

The Annual Meeting of Electors is traditionally held in April in the Victoria Hall. Unlike the formal meetings of the Town Council, the Annual Meeting of Electors is a more informal gathering, where local community groups receive their grant awards and use the opportunity to say a little about the work that they have doing through the year.

It is also an opportunity for electors to quiz Town Councillors on any matters that concern them. Because of covid restrictions, the Council consider it most unlikely that it will be possible to hold the Annual Meeting of Electors in the Victoria Hall in April. It is therefore planned to postpone this meeting until September. In the event that use of the Victoria Hall is still not feasible by then, the Council will look to hold the event online using Zoom.

Please let us know what you think of these plans.



Speed Indicator Device (SID)

Crewkerne Town Council would like to welcome SID to the town. SID is our new speed indicator device, equipped with a smiley face or an angry face, depending on the speed that you are travelling.

Following numerous complaints regarding the speed of traffic through the town, the Town Council have purchased SID to deter speeding drivers. It will be set up in various locations throughout the town, but obviously concentrating on known speeding “hotspots”.

Town Council Christmas Tree Becomes a Nesting Site

Residents may be wondering why the Town Council has not taken down the large Christmas tree in front of the Town Hall. The answer is that we now have a pair of birds nesting in it! So please bear with us, until the birds have flown the nest.

Town Council Develops New Website

The Town Council has contracted a website development company to develop a new website, which will supersede the existing Town Council and Local Information Centre websites. Instead, there will be a single integrated website for the town which will feature a bespoke logo, a modern and user-friendly design and lots of new features that will promote Crewkerne as a great place to live, work and visit.

The Council are keen to build in strong links to local businesses, if you are interested linking in with our new website, please contact either Cllr. Jenna Roberts or Cllr. Rob Cottle (their contact details are on the back page of this newsletter).

Community Grant Awards for 2021/22

As part of setting the overall budget and precept for the forthcoming financial year, the Council has agreed the budget allowance for local community grant awards. For 2021/22, the grant awards budget has been set at £13,000. Within this budget, the following grant awards have been agreed for community groups:

ORGANISATION/COMMUNITY GROUP	GRANT AWARDED
Citizens Advice South Somerset	£2,000
Crewkerne & District Museum & Heritage Centre	£1,000
Crewkerne Cricket Club	£500
Crewkerne in Bloom	£1,000
Crewkerne Men's Shed	£1,000
Crewkerne Tea Dance Group	£100
Henhayes Community Centre	£2,000
Radio Ninesprings	£100
Severalls War Memorial Gardening Group	£200
The Speedwell	£1,000
TOTAL	£8,900

This means that a total of £8,900 has been awarded to date to local community groups, leaving the Council a margin within its £13,000 budget to consider other grant applications that may be received through the year.



TOWN COUNCIL REMAINS OPEN FOR BUSINESS DESPITE COVID RESTRICTIONS

Due to ongoing covid restrictions, the Town Council office and the Local Information Centre remain closed to the public, as do the George Reynolds Centre and Victoria Hall. Nevertheless, the Council office staff are working from home, with systems in place to re-route calls to the office to a member of staff and to respond to voicemails, and of course the Council emails are still working normally. The Town Council grounds maintenance staff are continuing to keep up their excellent work in maintaining the Council's amenities areas around the town.

If you have any comments or concerns about issues which affect Crewkerne, please contact:
Crewkerne Town Council, Town Hall, Market Square, Crewkerne, Somerset TA18 7LN
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TWO VACANCIES		