

## Parish Council – Council Tax

The decision to set the 2021/22 precept was not taken lightly by the Full Council and the budget for next year was agreed unanimously in January. Public finances are not an exact science, and the Parish Council is unable to predict any additional number of Council Tax payers by the time the Budget has to be set and notified to Uttlesford District Council.

The Covid Pandemic has had its effects on budget forecasting owing to some unforeseen loss in income and the uncertainty of continuing to receive grant money. As the year progressed it became clear that something needed to be done to help those more severely affected by the Covid crisis, especially in terms of mental health.

The Parish Council has a policy to set the annual Precept as close to 2% as possible but, if that policy was strictly adhered to, and we had gone ahead with our additional spending plans, then we would have faced a deficit in excess of £71,000, a situation which would be unacceptable.

In addition to this, and as a result of a legal dispute a number of years ago which delayed the completion of the new Library, the Parish Council borrowed £200,000 from the Foresthall Park Community S106 fund to make settlement. Last year the Full Council made the commitment to repay this money at a rate of £25,000 pa. Last year we had a surplus which covered that amount, but this year we do not have that same luxury, so this had to be added to the Precept.

Apart from annual adjustments and regulatory expenditure, amounting to £18,840, the Full Council agreed to add the following to the Precept:

£15,000 as a start-up fund to gain Grant match-funding for recreational equipment for older children and young adults, as we recognise the increase in Mental health issues within this sector of our community.

£2,500 for the election for a contested vacancy on the Parish Council. This is to repay £5,000 set aside for elections in 2024 over two years.

£20,000 for essential repairs to buildings at Crafton Green as we develop a “Community Hub” concept to reach out and support those in need, especially as parts of Stansted Mountfitchet have the highest degree of deprivation in Uttlesford.

£5,000 for Christmas lights to support businesses in the Lower Street commercial centre where Covid has had a particularly drastic effect on business. It is hoped that working together we can revive the “Buzz” of this important season for trade and to lift the general morale of the community.

Stansted Mountfitchet is the third largest community in Uttlesford yet considered to be a centre for more than just its own community. The support in funding the new Library is a good indication of this, yet our Council Tax is still less than, or on a par with, much smaller Parishes.

Historically, our precept has been kept on the low side for the size of our community and the services provided, evidenced through comparison with other settlements such as Dunmow, Thaxted and Newport. We are now on a par with them. The Parish Council’s tax increase, at £19.49 per year or 37p per week, enables us to maintain, and indeed improve, the services we provide for the benefit of all.

The full budget document can be viewed on our website at [www.stansted.net](http://www.stansted.net), About Us, Finance section.