

ST STEPHEN PARISH COUNCIL

In the District of St.Albans, County of Hertfordshire



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT THE PARISH CENTRE, STATION ROAD BRICKET WOOD, ST ALBANS, HERTS ON 23 JANUARY 2014 AT 7.30 pm

Present: Oonah Jones (Chairman), Mick Freeman (Vice Chairman)
Jadwiga Baillie, John Bell, Wendy Berriman, David Brannen,
Karen Hurford, Dorothy Kerry, Nicholas Tyndale and Eileen Whittaker

In attendance: Three Members of public, District Councillor David Yates and
District/County Councillor Aislinn Lee.

Officers in attendance: Mrs J Pienaar (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were accepted from Cllrs Getley and Pryce.

2. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2013

RESOLVED: *Proposed: Cllr Bell* *Seconded: Cllr Hurford* **Motion Carried**
That the minutes be approved as a true record.
Votes in favour: 9 *Votes against: 1* *Abstentions: 0*

A Member asked why the Member had voted against and this was briefly explained. The Clerk was asked to read out her response.

4. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were none.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were none.

6. TO CONSIDER THE 2014/15 PRECEPT

The Clerk presented the precept review document and explained that each budget heading had been analysed, comparing current spend against current budget and current spend against the prior year. The draft 2014/15 budget took into account projected expenditure and other known factors. The Clerk expressed concern as the Council had drawn £12k from its Earmarked Reserves last year to bolster the Precept and pointed out that this practice would be unsustainable. Although £101k remained in the Earmarked Reserves as at the end of November, that amount was steadily reducing as projects were completed. The Council would be ill-advised to reduce its General Reserves any lower than the minimum requirement. Presently the Council was reliant on excess income at the year end to provide funding for future projects and improvements. As the budget was further squeezed, reliance on the Council's income streams would be even greater. The District Council had recently confirmed the parish share of the government grant and this had improved the estimated precept figures.

The Clerk proceeded to answer the query regarding the advertising costs and budget, explaining that the current budget took into account the additional one-off cost of the activities leaflet which was currently being put together. The Council regularly advertised in each of the Residents' Association magazines, as a way of both supporting the Associations and promoting the Centres, and had recently started to advertise online instead of through the Yellow Pages. A member suggested that the advertising in the local magazines should be reviewed and more focused.

The Clerk explained that the future budget for the mobile phones took into account the renewal of the agreement later during the new financial year and the need to ensure the phones were fit for purpose.

A member argued that the Council had no control over increasing costs and would be failing as a business if it did not reflect on that. As a responsible Council he proposed a reasonable increase of 2.5% to keep abreast with inflation which would increase the precept per household by three pence per week. He reminded Members that there was a chance that in 2015/16 the precept would be capped at 2%.

The Clerk clarified that an increase of 2.5% would result in a shortfall of £2172 to be drawn from Reserves.

The Chairman said that, in her opinion, the precept should be kept as low as possible but not 0%. However, a good PR case had been put forward for 0%.

PROPOSED: *Proposed: Cllr Baillie Seconded: Cllr Berriman*
That the precept be increased by 0%.

COUNTER- *Proposed: Cllr Bell Seconded: Cllr Freeman **Motion unsuccessful***
PROPOSED: That the precept be increased by 2.5%.
Votes in favour: 2 Votes against: 8 Abstentions: 0

RESOLVED: *Proposed: Cllr Baillie Seconded: Cllr Berriman **Motion Carried***
That the precept be increased by 0%.
Votes in favour: 8 Votes against: 2 Abstentions: 0

The Chairman thanked the Clerk and Members for their effort and time and declared the meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

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Note: These minutes are to be considered as 'draft' until the Council has resolved to approve them.