

First, a quick recap. The precept paid to Churchill and Blakedown Parish Council from the overall payments to the District Council is to fund the annual running costs of the villages. In 2023, the amount we received for the year was just over £34,000. A little more than half of that goes on the costs of cutting the grass, emptying the litter bins, powering the street lighting, and maintaining the village 'furniture' – the bus shelters, benches, planters, lampposts, two defibrillators, and the VAS signs. Most of the rest meets administrative and governance costs – salary, employment, and office administration costs for the Clerk who as well as looking after the finance and accounts and running the meetings, is also the main point of contact for residents, for external organisations and for contractors carrying out work for the Parish Council.

The accounts for this year (2023/24) won't be finalised until April 2024 at the earliest, with the external audit being completed later in the year, but projections are that we shall come in just within budget at the end of March, 24. However, we already know that costs for 2024/25 will need to be adjusted for inflation (we've budgeted 5%), increases in employment costs (+35% mainly made up of additional employers costs) and to allow for a reduced subsidy from the District Council for the litter bins. In all, based on this year's spending and known additional costs we shall need an **additional £14,000** to keep things going in 2024/25. Spreading the cost over all the 800 or so dwellings in the villages equates to an average of less than **35p more per week per household , or an average of £1.78 for each of the 10 Council Tax instalments paid over the year.**

The Parish Council is required to hold financial reserves. Currently standing at around £22,000, these are funds which have gradually been built over the years and which can be used for special projects for the benefit of the villages. We also have other income – Worcestershire County Council fund the costs of our Lengthsman and occasionally we have grants from our County and District Councillors for special events (e.g. the Coronation) or special equipment (VAS signs, village gateways etc.). The Instavolt EV chargers in the Village Car Park will bring us at least £3,000 per year in rent until 2042 – funding the short and long-term maintenance of the Car Park, so that the precept can be used for other running costs. The finances of the Signal Box (whose reconstruction costs were met by grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Norman Dawson Trust) are dealt with through the C&B Villages Trust and make no use of precept funding.

To reiterate, the precept funding is used for the day to day running of the village services and it is important that the amount collected covers the annual cost. I hope you find this information helpful, but if you have any queries, my email address is suef@churchillandblakedown-pc.gov.uk , or you can contact Louise at clerk@churchillandblakedown-pc.gov.uk. And of course, you are very welcome to come along to the Parish Council monthly meeting (2nd Tuesday each month except August – details on the website) or to the Annual Parish Meeting, which this year will be held at the Sports Pavilion on 28th May 2024 at 7pm.

Sue Fowler

Chair, Churchill & Blakedown Parish Council 2023/4