

Minutes of the Parish Council Precept meeting held on Wednesday 18 January 2017 in the Sherwood Room of Newstead Centre starting at 7.30pm.

1. **Councillors present:** Cllrs Mrs P Young (Chairman), Mr C Bicknell, Mr P Burnham, Mr R Butler, Miss H Scott and Ms J Smith.
2. **Apologies for absence:** Apologies received from Cllr Mrs D Adams. Also, Cllr B Andrews, Cllr C Powell and County Cllr C Barnfather, who were all attending the same planning meeting at Gedling Borough Council.
3. **Declarations of interest:**
No interests were declared
4. **To Review Cemetery Charges for 2016/17**
Details of the revised charges from Clarke’s Cemetery & Churchyard Services applicable from the 1 January 2017 had been circulated with the agenda, where it was noted that the various grave digging fees charged by Anthony Clarke had been increased generally by a flat rate of £20, with the only exception being the interment of ashes, where the cost had increased by £10.

The proposed cemetery charges by the Council for 2017/18 were then discussed. The Clerk advised that it would be better not to increase the rates charged for non residents as these were already quite expensive compared to the rates paid by local residents (understandably so, as this would be only charge towards future upkeep of the cemetery) and they provided an important contribution towards the upkeep of the burial ground in any one year. In questioning how Newstead’s fees compared to charges made by other cemeteries, the Clerk confirmed that Newstead remained fairly competitive as a number of local authorities had increased charges substantially to make up for the loss of local government funding. It was agreed to restrict any increase in the fees charged to residents to the corresponding increase in charges made by Anthony Clarke, with no increase in the fees charged to non residents.

The new cemetery charges for 2017/18 were therefore agreed as follows:

	<u>Resident</u>	<u>Non-Resident</u>
Purchase of a Deed of Right of Burial	£220	£670
Grave preparation fee for 6ft grave	£285	£745
Grave preparation fee for 8ft grave (for 2)	£305	£770
Re-open grave	£265	£535
Purchase of a Deed of Right of Burial in the cremations section	£170	£495
Burial of a casket in the cremations or burial sections	£150	£330
Erection of a headstone in the burial section	£100	£250
Additional inscription	£Nil	£Nil
Memorial on a cremation plot which must be no more than 2ft in height	£90	£240

Cllrs agreed that the new charges would be applicable from the start of the new financial year i.e. 1st April 2017.

5. **To Set the Precept for 2017/2018**

A report by the Responsible Financial Officer on the Council's accounts had been attached with the agenda and is now shown as an appendix to these minutes. This demonstrated the effect on the budget as a result of 0%, 2% and 4% increase in the precept.

The Chairman thanked the Clerk for the comprehensive report in respect of the Council's finances which she assumed all the Councillors had read prior to the meeting.

The Clerk began by stating that during 2016/17, the Council had undertaken a lot of expenditure which would not be repeated in the current year such as replacement of the cemetery wall, contribution towards the MUGA lights, and costs associated with preparing the new location for the Christmas tree. She also noted reserves held by the Council were forecast to remain at £45k. Personally, she did not envisage any significant expenditure for the Parish Council which could not be absorbed by utilising the existing reserves. She also advised that last year whilst Newstead Parish Council did not increase the precept, her own council tax had increased by £50 per annum following increases in the precept charged by the Police and Gedling Borough Council, with further increases likely this coming year. She felt the accounts presented spoke for themselves and that she personally advocated no increase in the precept.

Cllr Bicknell felt there was no point in raising the precept on a 'what if' basis. Cllr Smith asked whether the figures proposed in respect of the Clerk's wages included the increase in the pension contributions as discussed at the last council meeting. The Clerk advised that for the purpose of the budget, the figures assumed that the Clerk would remain a member of the Local Government Pension during 2017/2018. She then explained that if the contribution rates and deficit payments required by Notts County Council were correct, she had calculated that by 2019/2020, a sum equal to almost one third of her salary would need to be put into this scheme to cover the deficit identified in the fund as a result of the latest valuation. At present she had written to Notts. County Council querying whether the figures advised were in fact correct before any further decisions were made.

Cllr Scott commented that within the budget proposed for 2017/18, she had noted there appeared to be sufficient contingencies in the budget, particularly under 'Cemeteries and Parish Maintenance' and 'Capital Expenditure', to allow for additional expenditure and as a result she did not feel an increase in the precept was justified.

No further recommendations were made in respect the proposed budget headings, which were then agreed as stated in the report from the Responsible Financial Officer.

Cllr Bicknell therefore proposed a nil % increase in the precept, seconded by Cllr Young and this was agreed by all councillors resulting in a total precept requirement of **£14,762**.

Form C was then signed by the Chairman and Cllrs Burnham and Butler.

6. Items that the Chairman considers urgent.

Cllr Bicknell confirmed that the lower half of the school speed limit sign was now not functioning at all. Cllrs then discussed a number of 'grot' spots in the village, which were affected by litter including a number of bottles discarded on the jitty from Web Street to the Youth Centre building, Vicarage Corner and behind the

bus stop on Hucknall Road opposite Musters Road. The need to hold a litter pick was discussed, and it was agreed that the school children and youth club should be asked to join any litter pick organised as part of 'British Spring Clean' week.

The Clerk had also advised that following a risk assessment of all graves which had failed the topple test, she had now written to the plot holders concerned. Cllr Smith and Young agreed to deliver letters personally to all affected plot holders still living in the village or within the Newstead Abbey ward.

7. Closure and Date of next meeting

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday 1st February commencing at 7.30pm.

As there was no further business the meeting finished at 8.05pm.

Report for the Precept Meeting

This report has been written by the Responsible Financial Officer of the Council to assist in setting the precept for 2017/2018 and should be read in conjunction with the document headed Receipts and Payment Estimate 2017/18.

This document outlines what has been spent over the current financial year, from 1st April 2016 to the end of December 2016, and also shows the expenditure over the same period in the previous year (left hand side columns on this sheet).

The third column shows the actual income and expenditure incurred by the Council for the whole of 2015/2016, whilst Column 4 shows the budget for 2016/2017, set in January 2016.

Also shown (third column from the right) is a forecast of expenditure for the remainder of this year and includes goods and services already purchased by the Council for which it has yet to pay e.g. Christmas tree redecoration plus other regular expenses such as the Clerks wages, room hire, and Chairman's Allowance.

The final columns demonstrates the effect on the budget set for 2017/2018 based on a **0%**, **2%** and **4%** increase in the precept.

Income / Receipts

The **precept** for 2016/2017 was agreed at **£14,724** (no increase from the previous year) on a tax base of **358.86**, which means that at present the cost of Newstead Parish Council to a Band D household is currently **£41.03** per annum. Households in Tax Band C or less would pay less than this figure, whilst properties in the higher tax bands will pay considerably more.

The tax base for the parish for 2017/18 has been set at **359.78**. If no increase is sought in the amounts paid by individual households i.e. that they continue to pay **£41.03** (a nil % increase in the precept) then slightly more income will be collected overall due to the increase in the tax base i.e. to **£14,762**. Also shown in the final two right hand columns of the **Receipts and Payments Estimate** is the income which would be received as a result of a 2% and 4% increase in the precept.

Council Tax Support, which last year was set at **£3,326**, is a grant is paid to the Parish Council to offset changes to the tax base, which as a result of the Local Government Finance Act had fallen significantly from **409.89** in 2012/2013, to **342** in 2013/2014, although this has now increased to **359.78**. In December 2015, the Parish Council were advised by Gedling Borough Council that less assistance will be provided in future by the Government to offset the effects of the changes to the tax base and it is proposed by Gedling Borough Council to reduce the financial assistance for Newstead during 2017/18, to **£2,740**. The Parish Council has also been advised, that the Borough Council is anticipating further significant cuts to its funding from central government over the next few years with council tax support due to be phased out completely by 2020.

The increase in the precept last year was set at nil %, with any additional expenditure for the year to come from the reserves. The present forecast for 2016/2017, is that by the end of the year, the expenditure of the Council will exceed the income received by approximately **£13k**. This as a result

of expenditure on the cemetery wall; MUGA lights, providing a new location for the Christmas tree and also additional grounds maintenance undertaken, such as strimming the area around the MUGA, the brambles on Station Road, watering hanging baskets and planters, etc. This figure also includes **£1,100** contribution towards work to be undertaken on the former Coal Stocking Yards/Freckland Wood/Linby Trail.

In terms of income received from **cemeteries and other areas**, it is very difficult to assess the amount of income the Council is likely to receive from this source. The income received so far this year has been well below that received in previous years. The amount shown in the estimate for 2017/2018 is based on the average income received over the last three years, but as demonstrated is extremely difficult to predict with any degree of accuracy.

The Council will also need to agree revised cemetery fees as part of the precept meeting under Agenda item 4 and the revised charges for grave digging for 2017, are attached with the agenda.

Other income usually includes grants received by the Council. There are no outstanding grant claims at present, although a pledge has been made by Debbie Widdowson, Newstead Locality Co-ordinator to contribute the sum of £250 towards the drainage scheme on the skate park (we have yet to receive a bill for this work). Although, it is likely that some grant claims may be submitted during 2017/18, additional income received under this heading is generally cost neutral to the council, where any income received is usually matched by a corresponding increase in expenditure. Accordingly, I have included the only known provision under this heading for 2017/2018.

Bank interest is as shown and assumes that interest rates will remain abysmally low.

Expenditure/ Payments

In respect of **salaries** this heading includes wages paid to the Clerk and also includes pension contributions in respect of the Clerk paid by the Council to the Notts. County Council as part of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). For 2017/18, I have assumed for the purpose of this report there will be 2% increase in wage costs, where the Council has agreed to review the Clerks wage annually, usually in July. No allowance has been made to include costs for overtime as a result of dealing with new burials as this cost is never easy to determine. In 2016/2017, pension contributions in respect of the Clerk cost the Council a further 14.7% of the base salary paid to the Clerk and a further payment of £250 had to be made to the Local Government Pension Scheme, over and above the usual contributions, to meet the pension deficit identified during the valuation of the LPGA fund undertaken in 2013. In December 2016, the Parish Council was advised that the contributions paid by Newstead Parish Council as an employer will have to increase from the present level of 14.7% to 17.7% of the Clerk's salary, applicable from the 1st April 2017. In addition further payments will have to be made to cover the deficit identified in the 2016 valuation and for 2017/2018 this will be £385, for 2018/19 £394 and by 2019/20 will have to increase to £404 per annum.

At the last meeting of the Council, it was agreed to include the full cost of the pension provision for 2017/2018 for the purpose of setting the precept, but as discussed, the Clerk is to look at alternative pension provision outside of this scheme, where she is of the opinion this is becoming unaffordable. Further advice will follow on this aspect.

Expenses – This covers the allowance previously agreed for the Chair of the Council, any travel or subsistence costs for Councillors and other expenses assumed by Councillors in the course of their duty. During the current year it was agreed to increase the amount paid to the Chairman **£15** per month. For the purposes of these figures, I have assumed that the amount paid to the Chairman in 2017/18 will remain the same as this year. Expenses also cover a number of items such as postage, ink cartridges and other sundry items, which are bought by the Clerk as and when needed and are reimbursed to her as expenses. A sum of **£8** a month is also paid towards broadband costs and use of the Clerks home as an office. It is also assumed for the purpose of the budget that the same arrangements for the Christmas buffet will apply this year.

Stationery and office equipment is self explanatory. Again there is very little in terms of office equipment required but a provision has been included towards the cost of a new photocopier. The photocopier has become less reliable during the current year and the amount included under this heading will allow for replacement of this item should it fail. **NB** Due to the cost of a new printer/photocopier and with the existing being over three years old, it is unlikely to be worth repairing in the event of a breakdown.

Cemeteries and Parish Maintenance – Again it is not easy to predict with any certainty the amounts likely to be paid out under this heading. Cllrs will be aware that a three year grounds maintenance contract was agreed with Anthony Clarke in April 2015. The cost of this contract is **£3,920** per annum, where prices are fixed for the duration of the contract and this is the final year of the contract.

Also under this heading comes repairs undertaken to parish council property such as seats, notice boards, and the MUGA, either as a result of wear and tear or sadly due to vandalism and also includes other ad hoc expenses relating to the parish such as removal of fly tipping, the provision of grit and grit bins and other sundries such as paint and weedkiller used by the lengthsman. In respect of restocking of the grit bins, the Parish Council will be responsible for six grit bins instead of four at present, so I have included a provision of at least **£200** to cover this aspect of expenditure.

Other costs under this heading also include the provision of a Christmas tree (**£400**), and installation, decoration and disposal of the same (**£350**). Cllrs will also need to bear in mind there will be additional costs in respect of Newstead Meadow, which will require annual strimming and removal of the haylage. The same also applies in respect of the Old Cemetery and the budget assumes costs of **£1,250** towards maintenance of both these areas of land. Other items for consideration include strimming of the brambles on Station Road (**£250**) and also for cutting the grass around the MUGA which is land owned by the Newstead Centre but available for public use (**£350**). Also, included is a further sum of **£250** towards plants for the planters but no provision has been made for watering the same.

Burial fees are also included under this heading, but these costs are always covered by the fees charged by the Council and the budget assumes costs of around **£1k**. The figure also includes a contingency of approx **£500**, where we do not know what other costs are likely to transpire under this heading in respect of a number of graves which have failed topple testing and which will require to be made safe. It is also likely that some pruning will be required of the trees in both cemeteries. With nearly **£8.5k** of known expenditure under this heading, I have included an additional amount of **£2.5k** to cover any unexpected contingencies in terms of expenditure on maintenance in the parish.

The is fairly generous to allow for upkeep of additional areas in the parish not included as part of the regular maintenance contract and can be used to compensate for any shortfall in the service provided by the Borough Council as a result of cost cutting.

Audit/Insurance and Subscriptions – Again these are based on the amounts paid out during current year in respect of insurance and charges for both the internal and external audit. It is assumed that costs will rise slightly this year.

Room Hire – The figure proposed for 2017/18 takes into consideration the present cost of hiring the Newstead Centre and assumes that one additional meeting is likely to be held by the Council over and above the regular council meetings held.

VAT payments – Any VAT payments will always be cost neutral to the Council. The Council is able to reclaim VAT on room hire costs and on other goods and services it buys which are subject to VAT. During the current year the amount of VAT, the Council will be able to claim back is higher than usual where this includes VAT paid on work undertaken on the cemetery wall. As at the end of December 2016, there is at presently some £3,221 of VAT to be reclaimed back from HRMC at the end of the current financial year, with further VAT payments expected to made between January and the end of March 2017.

Section 137/Donations – These are usually grants paid to other bodies that approach the Parish Council for funding. This amount has been pegged for a number of years but has not been always been spent. For the purpose of this budget I have assumed that the amount under this heading will decrease.

Other Expenses – This heading includes items of ad hoc expenditure primary membership of N.A.L.C, copies of local council review, bank charges, etc.

Capital Expenditure – Expenditure under this heading for this year includes the sum of **£5k**, where I believe it is prudent to start building up a provision to cover the cost of replacing the remainder of the original cemetery wall surrounding the Old Cemetery. In addition, the Council may wish to look towards providing a sum towards upgrading the Youth Centre building and the funding allocated under this heading will allow this. Also no provision has been made in respect of land at Vicarage Corner where the scheme proposed may need to be kick started by an element of matched funding from the Council. There may also be other projects that the Council wish to begin next year including enhancement of the area around the skate park.

Summary

Last year the Council opted not to increase the precept but to use the reserves to meet any unexpected contingencies, which were also boosted by funds held for the MUGA lights. Part of those reserves has now been spent on the various projects undertaken by the Council during 2016/17.

At the end of this financial year, the reserves of the Council are expected to reduce to **£45k**, whereby **£40k** of this was previously earmarked towards the extension of the new cemetery, although at the present rate of burials, this will not be required for a number of years.

Even with the increased expenditure over 2016/17, the Parish Council still has substantial reserves, which it could use to fund any other capital projects that may be proposed over the next financial year. There remain a number of significant challenges over the next year both in terms of the Newstead Centre and the Newstead and Annesley Country Park. Also, within the next few years, the Council will need to undertake the replacement of the remaining two sides of the original boundary wall at the Old Cemetery (but not the stone wall adjacent to Hucknall Road).

As the Responsible Financial Officer for the Council, my own advice is that the Council agree an increase in the precept of between **0** to **2%**, with other capital projects/ expenditure over and above that already mentioned in this report to be funded from existing reserves.

Overall, I am pleased to report that the financial position of the Council remains healthy.

In terms of future projects that the Council wishes to undertake, these will form part of the discussions at the precept meeting. However I hope the attached report will provide an overview of the finances of the Council and provide a basis for further discussions.

Signed

Mrs J Johnson
Responsible Financial Officer for the Council

NEWSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL - RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ESTIMATE 2017/18									
Actual		Year to 31st March							
Apr-15 to Dec-15	Apr-16 to Dec-16	Actual	Budget	Forecast	Estimate 2017/8				
		2015/16	2016/17	2016/17	0%	2%	4%		
RECEIPTS									
14,652	14,724	14,652	14,724	14,724	14,762	15,057	15,352		
3,886	3,326	3,886	3,326	3,326	2,740	2,740	2,740		
	3,500	2,105	-	3,750	-	-	-		
3,720	720	4,635	5,675	1,500	4,964	4,964	4,964		
265	1,997	265	200	1,997	3,541	3,541	3,541		
1,505	-	3,163	300	-	250	250	250		
	18	22		24	20	20	20		
24,028	24,285	28,728	24,225	25,321	26,277	26,572	26,868		
PAYMENTS									
3,558	3,939	4,864	5,089	5,396	5,818	5,818	5,818		
53	28	53	50	28	50	50	50		
752	617	988	850	850	850	850	850		
194	-	194	250	125	250	250	250		
6,631	13,408	7,823	9,000	16,100	11,000	11,000	11,000		
966	997	1,154	1,100	1,200	1,100	1,100	1,100		
352	300	390	502	450	502	502	502		
	3,221	-	200	3,541	200	200	200		
622	314	722	1,225	600	1,000	1,000	1,000		
17	533	1,031	300	600	600	600	600		
10,507	8,677	10,507	5,000	9,327	5,000	5,000	5,000		
23,652	32,034	27,726	23,566	38,217	26,370	26,370	26,370		
376 -	7,749	1,002	659 -	12,896 -	93	202	497		
RESERVES									
57,443	58,445	57,443	58,445	58,445	45,549	45,549	45,549		
376 -	7,749	1,002	659 -	12,896 -	93	202	497		
59,216	50,696	58,445	59,104	45,549	45,456	45,751	46,046		