

# Church Stretton Town Council



## BUDGET FORWARD LOOK FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2021/22

Mission Statement:

***“Church Stretton Town Council seeks to provide excellent services at best value***

- ***to meet the needs and improve the well-being of all the residents of the town***
- ***to conserve and enhance the amenity and environment of the town in respect of its buildings and landscape***
- ***to ensure a sustainable and vibrant community for the continuing benefit of residents, visitors and businesses.”***

### Local Council Tax

As for everyone else, 2020/21 has been a most challenging year for the Town Council, which has been dominated by the pandemic lock-downs. They have impacted on the financial circumstances of many constituents and, for this reason, Councillors agreed, at their meeting, on January 19<sup>th</sup> 2021, not to request any increase in the Local Council Tax Precept. This means that the Band D Council Tax in 2021/22 remains at £187.70, the same as last year. As a result, this will raise £404,969, which, with slightly fewer tax-payers, will raise £3,233 less than last year. Further information on the Council budget for 2021/22 is available as a printed leaflet from the Town Council office or via the website [www.churchstretton-tc.gov.uk](http://www.churchstretton-tc.gov.uk)

At their meeting on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2021, Councillors also agreed to freeze costs and charges for services for a further six months. The pandemic has given rise to extra costs for the Council. It has lost income owing to the fact that its facilities have had to be closed for much of the last year. By the same token, however, the lock-downs have also delayed significant elements of the maintenance programme, most notably essential repairs at the Silvester Horne Institute and adjacent Cottage. The Council is also grateful to have received Covi-19 recovery grants, totalling £19,000.

The Council has been without a permanent Town Clerk since October 2019, because of delays in finalising the formalities to allow our present Town Clerk to retire permanently on ill-health grounds. The recruitment of his successor is now under way. The Council's Internal and External Auditors have identified the need to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of Council's financial and accountability systems with Councillors exercising more comprehensive oversight. The Council has committed to meeting all of these requirements. The Council's Finance Officer has reorganised the Council's accounts so as to give Councillors a better understanding of the Council's financial dealings with reserves identified for specific projects. The valuation of the Council's assets will also be updated.

A recent Health & Safety Review of the Council's facilities has identified that significant investment will be required to make the required improvements. Following specialist consultancy advice, the Council is re-ordering its arrangements with the three Charities for which it is responsible. This requires some financial adjustments in the short term for future long term benefit. Councillors have also recognised that there are shortcomings in the Council's overall governance arrangements and work has been set in train to bequeath a stronger governance regime to the new Council being elected on May 6<sup>th</sup>. This work has been complicated by the fact that, for the first time ever, all of the Council's meetings in the last year have had to be conducted remotely.

### The Pandemic

During the first lock-down, from March 2020, the Council played a co-ordinating role, bringing together remotely representatives of the Medical Practice, Police, Shropshire Council and volunteer community agencies such as Mayfair, Good Neighbours, St. Laurence Food Bank, the Rotary Club and the Masonic Lodges, with links to essential shops. This enabled professional and voluntary help to be co-ordinated and voluntary and statutory funding to be channelled appropriately. The community has shown a remarkable resilience through this last year, residents and traders, young and old supporting each other. However, the community will be dealing with the after-effects for many years to come.

The immediate impact, after the first lock-down, was a surge in visitors from across the country, Carding Mill Valley being one of the national beauty spots proving most popular. The Council liaised closely with the National Trust, the Police and Shropshire Council in seeking to minimise the threat of cross-infection to this community, part-funding a local shuttle service to an overflow car park. Most residents abided by the government restrictions, keeping infection rates low. but, sadly, the pandemic still resulted in a small number of deaths.

On the positive side, the lock-downs brought many first-time visitors to the town and many confirmed, in a survey, that they will return. After the enforced closure of most of our independent shops, the return of visitors will be vital for the economic recovery of the town. To aid that process, the Council has supported the creation of a new visitor promoting body, the Visit Church Stretton Community Interest Company, made up of local traders and accommodation providers, to develop the website [www.churchstretton.co.uk](http://www.churchstretton.co.uk) with added social media outreach to potential visitors from farther afield.

## **Planning**

In its submissions to Shropshire Council's consultations on the Local Development Plan up to 2038, the Council has sought to strengthen the planning protection of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. With strong resident support, the Council was able to secure the withdrawal of a 70-house proposed development on the Snatchfields site. The Council conducted a Housing Needs Survey which identified the need for more affordable housing, especially for key workers in the care sector. The Council will strive to meet this need through small rural exception sites.

## **Sandford Avenue Recreation Ground**

The Council is committed to upgrading this facility and has conducted a well-supported on-line survey to canvas community opinion to inform a re-development plan. The Council was also pleased to support a community initiative to bring in a skatepark. A previous youth survey identified the need for youth outreach work, but this had to be deferred owing to the pandemic.

## **Town Council Responsibilities**

### ***Planning:***

The Council is a statutory consultee on all planning matters in the parish and makes representations on individual planning applications and changes in planning policy to Shropshire Council and at the national level.

### ***Community Led Plan:***

In 2019, the Council recruited community volunteers to write a new Community Led Plan for the Strettons. This gives to members of the community the opportunity to influence the development of the town into the medium term future. The Steering Group is currently factoring into its Plan the implications for the town of the pandemic, updating information on its website [www.strettonscpl.org.uk](http://www.strettonscpl.org.uk)

### ***Outdoor Amenity Areas:***

The Council owns and maintains Rectory Wood & Field; Russells Meadow, Coppice Leasowes Local Nature Reserve; the Railway Plot, A49 plot, Hazler Road triangle and the War Memorial Mound.

### ***Cemeteries:***

The Council owns and is responsible for maintaining the Cunnery Road and Greenhills Cemeteries.

### ***Allotments:***

The Council provides land for allotments (next to the Greenhill cemetery). There are currently over 60 plots occupied, with a waiting list.

**Properties:**

The Council owns 60 High Street, which houses the Council Office. It also owns the Lutwyche Road Car Park and toilets, Easthope Road toilets and Russell's Meadow Community Sports Pavilion.

**Market:**

The traditional Thursday Charter market has continued to run throughout the pandemic lockdowns but it has been much reduced in size, being confined only to stall-holders providing essential food supplies, to allow for the requisite social distancing.

**Street Lighting and Furniture:**

The Council provides most of the street lighting in the town (except for the main through routes). It is embarking on a long term programme of replacing ageing concrete lamp-posts with aluminium columns, fitted with more efficient LED lighting, to further reduce energy costs and carbon emissions, in addition to the part-night-lighting, agreed some years ago.

The Council also provides benches (mostly through donations as memorial benches) and also maintains other items of street furniture. Using a small Covid-19 Recovery Grant from Shropshire Council, the Council has purchased picnic benches for Rectory Field and the Recreation Ground for the benefit of both residents and visitors. The same grant is being used to refresh the finger signposts around the town.

**Planters:**

The Council provides summer and winter planters for the Town and is grateful to businesses, organisations and individuals, who contribute towards the cost of maintaining a high standard.

**Charities:**

The Town Council is Corporate Trustee to three charities which it runs for community benefit:

*Sandford Avenue Recreation Ground:* This is the Town's main park, which includes tennis courts, bowling green, croquet lawns, BMX track, crazy golf etc.

*Brooksbury Recreation Ground: (Richard Robinson playing field)* forming part of the main playing fields in the heart of the town, used for sports, general recreation, adventure playground and community events.

*Silvester Horne Institute and Cottage:* One of the main community halls in the town, normally used by a variety of clubs and activity groups, but it has been closed for much of the last year, owing to the pandemic. The cottage is rented out and helps to offset the running costs of the SHI, as do usually a programme of musical events, but, not this last year, so a £10,000 Covid-19 Local Restrictions Support Grant was much appreciated.

**Representing Church Stretton's Views:**

Representatives from the Town Council are appointed to a wide range of local bodies.

The Town Council also responds to numerous consultation papers from public agencies.

**Making your views known:**

The Town Council welcomes your views on all the services we provide.

You can do this by contacting your local Councillors, writing to the Town Clerk or calling in to the Office. We host a free to use direct line to Shropshire Council Customer Services Centre and free access to their range of on-line services.

You can also speak on any Agenda item in the 15 minutes set aside at each Council meeting.

Council meetings and Committee meetings are held in the Silvester Horne Institute. – all are open to the public.

Anyone experiencing difficulties with the access to the Council Chamber, please let the Town Clerk know so that alternative arrangements for the meeting can be organised.

**Notices** of meetings and other matters are displayed in the Council Office window, Silvester Horne Institute, Library and Website.