



# ALVECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL MEDIA STATEMENT

January 2021

## ALVECHURCH PARISH PRECEPT

For many years Alvechurch Parish Council's finances have been based on low increases in precept (Council Tax) and a minimum level of reserves, in tune with the wishes of the local community. Value for taxpayers money has always been the key.

Recently our income levels have dropped due to Covid yet parishioners' expectations still have to be met. Having playing fields, community buildings and a Neighbourhood Plan all mean extra work and financial commitments for the Council. This has meant more money being drawn from Council reserves, not a sustainable situation financially.

The Council recognised and started to address these issues in 2019/20 with a moderate precept increase of 9%. However in setting the precept for 2020/21 we have had to react to emergency tree and drainage work on our playing fields and issues with footway lighting for which the Parish Council is responsible, while our income derived from hiring out our pitches and community centres like Hopwood has fallen steeply due to the Covid pandemic. Councillors have compared the current situation to a "perfect storm" and have decided that it is too risky to drain the Council's reserves any further. Unfortunately a significant increase in the precept is the only practical solution.

The Parish Council fully understands how difficult an increase may be for many families, and Councillors have therefore carried out an across-the-board financial review to reduce expenditure to a minimum and identify savings wherever possible. Recruitment proposals have been deferred and the future of the Parish Office is under review.

A 2021/22 budget of £189,299 has now been approved, a lower figure than the current year's budget. This 2021/22 budget maintains key services, allows some replenishment of reserves and, crucially, paves the way for work to replace footway lighting around the Parish. The latter work is long overdue but a wholesale replacement of older unsafe lights will likely mean £100,000+ expenditure over a number of years. To achieve these ends, and maintain Council finances on a sustainable path, means that a precept increase of 36.5% has been approved by Councillors.

Parishioners may look to compare this rise, and expenditure generally in Alvechurch, with neighbouring Parishes like Barnt Green and Wythall. Great care is needed doing this as other Parishes do not manage the number of playing fields that we have here in Alvechurch.

Whilst the Council's precept increase is likely to be reported in terms of a 'percentage' increase, the actual monetary rise over 12 months for a Band D property ie £55.64 (2020/21) to £76.00 (2021/22) = £20.36/12 months or £1.69/month. Some people could relate this to the price of two pints of milk or a newspaper, but a more relevant comparison might be made with Worcestershire County Council which is proposing a £33 Band D increase on its part of the Council Tax. The County is also seeking to use the increase to replenish some of its own reserves, depleted by the demands of Covid.

In summary, Alvechurch Councillors have scrutinised Council costs and benefits robustly, they have looked hard at the risks of depleting reserves further and the need to reflect the expectations of a growing community. Councillors see the need for a 'step change' in the way the Council operates and is funded. Elected members and officers will continue to ensure that all residents benefit from Parish Council services and that value for money remains the top priority.

ENDS –

Further information from.....

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