

## Extra Ordinary Meeting Girton Parish Council Wednesday 17 January 7pm Reflections from the Chair of Finance and Resource Management

Welcome to this extra ordinary meeting of Girton Parish Council in which we will agree the precept for 2024-2025. There has been a great deal of input from the separate committee and consultation with residents. For this, I am very grateful. This is the third time I have been involved in setting the precept and I can honestly say that as a council we have a very clear picture of where we are with our finances and what we can achieve in the lifetime of this council. The Precept request (January) and AGAR (June) are the two most important financial decisions of Council by Councillors.

Before we begin, I would like to reiterate what I have said in many meetings, monthly reports and summarise the discussions this council has had since last year, particularly for councillors who are involved in voting on this for the first time.

1. As Council, GPC is much better informed of its finances and has on a regular basis communicated to its residents what these are and noted the challenges relating to historic problems before this council was elected in May 2022. We hope that there will be no more surprises unearthed that cause us to look backwards rather than forwards.
2. All the committees have looked at their individual budgets and signed these off. Last night (16 January) there was a Finance and Resource Management Workshop which looked over these figures and where councillors were unclear about the figures, questions were raised and answered.
3. The precept is now ready to be signed off. As not everyone was able to make it to the workshop last night and some who were there are not able to attend this evening, I would like to summarise comments made for reflection in today's meeting.
4. The Chair of GPC, Councillor Carney, believes this to be a well-costed budget and hence it is possible and reasonable to make a significant increase. This is for those of us in this meeting to agree or disagree.
5. In 2023 - 2024, with a value of £74.51 Girton had the lowest precept per band D household of the comparable parishes in South Cambs. Of all the 99 South Cambs parishes, Girton was 66<sup>th</sup> highest in terms of precept per household, where there is a mean value of £103.43.
6. National government data on deprivation shows that Girton ward is the 32,314<sup>th</sup> least deprived area (out of 32,844) in England with an average income rank of 32,352<sup>nd</sup> (where higher rank = lower income) - See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-019> and <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/deprivation/map/>. Whilst many of the areas in England do not have a parish-level layer of government (and hence no parish precept), the mean parish precept in 2023-2024 was £79.35. So, despite being one of the most affluent and well-resourced parts of England, residents have been paying a below-average parish precept. Obviously, some residents are better off than others, but that is equally the case in all other parts of the country.
7. Looking at historic yearly interest rates from 2018 - 2019 for the precept per household for band D to see where an inflation-only increase put us in 2024-2025, it shows that the precept has lagged behind inflation, making it a tax cut in real terms up to now.
8. As a Council we are required or empowered to spend money on certain things:

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allotments, burial grounds, bus shelters, community facilities such as public open space, recreational grounds and community centres, maintain footpaths and bridleways, comment on planning applications and provide street lighting. This is not an exhaustive list. What a council has depends on the money available.

9. We are required to protect our assets. Anything that we spend money on belongs to the village. We need to make sure these assets are kept in good repair, that their value does not depreciate and that we are up to date with legal requirements, particularly health and safety.
10. The facilities we have should be open to all and as a council we should make sure that all members of the community are treated fairly when it comes to providing amenities. At times this may seem that some groups have to wait longer than others and may wait for a while as to avoid wasting money. These are 'our' facilities and just because one group uses them more than others they are not 'theirs'. There should be no exclusivity but if this is the case then the appropriate rate should be paid to use them so that Girton's precept spent on providing these facilities can be recouped to allow other projects to go ahead.
11. The figure agreed tonight will be that of a band D property. This year we have been given a lower number of households to calculate the precept. This is per household and not per person. A reason for this is that not every household pays the precept and there may have been fewer houses built than expected or people in those houses are exempt, for example the lower paid and students. To keep the figures simple, if we were to be asking a band D house to be paying £100 a year to Girton Parish Council, which we are not, this would amount to 28 pence per day.
12. So, the precept is the amount of money we need to operate for the next financial year and to provide services. The income we expect to receive has, for now, been estimated given previous usage and a 5% increase. The actual charges for our users have yet to be fixed and will be looked at in more detail during the next month so that clubs and societies have an idea of their expenses. What we do know is that what we are charging our Sports and Recreational ground users is well below what is being paid by others in the country and to maintain or improve the facilities that have at present, there will need to be an increase. As a Council, we are going to look at how much we are subsidising all the different sports groups and how much this subsidy benefits the village. We are also looking at other initiatives, like the café, which may bring in additional revenue in future years so allowing us to keep any further increases to a minimum.

Many councils fix their precept in private, only bringing it to a public meeting for the final vote. We have had discussions in public and allowed residents to have a say. We have reached out to everyone in the community and listened to their concerns.