

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Ilton Parish Council held in Merryfield Hall on
Tuesday 10th January 2023 at 6.30 p.m.**

2023/1 Attendance and Apologies

Present: Cllrs Simpson, Sherwood, Mackenzie Green, Gordon, Matravers, Ripley and Pike.
District Cllr Cavill, County Cllr Roundell Green and Mrs Larsson (Clerk)

Apologies: Cllr Burt and County Cllr Dance

In attendance: 7 members of the public.

2023/2 Declaration of Interest – there were no declarations of interest.

2023/3 Parish Council Vacancy

There is currently one vacancy on the parish council. An application was received by Mr Kelaart, which was circulated to all councillors in advance of the meeting. Mr Kelaart expressed interest in interest in working on the village facilities and amenities project the council are looking to develop. Councillors voted unanimously in favour of Mr Kelaart being co-opted to the council.

Mr Kelaart duly signed the declaration of acceptance of office and was invited to join the meeting.

2023/4 Visitors and Public Voice

A resident advised they have reported the worn white lines at the give way entry point to the main village, as well as a pot hole in the same area. It was noted that these have been reported by the parish council previously, but Highways advised they were not a priority and would be attended to in due course. County Cllr Roundell Green requested they be copied to any communications with Highways regarding pot holes so she can support wherever possible as it's a widespread problem, made more challenging with recent weather conditions.

Queries were raised by residents prior to the meeting in respect of a broken barrier at the play park and missing gate latch at the Willow Road entrance to the recreation field. Cllrs McKenzie Green and Gordon are aware of these and will be addressing as appropriate.

An update was requested from District Cllr Cavill in relation to a planning application for 15 houses adjoining St Peters Close. He advised he would look into the status and provide an update, but suspected it was being held up as part of the phosphate mitigation issues.

2023/5 Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council meeting held on 8/11/2022

Minutes were approved unanimously by councillors.

2023/6 County Councillor Report

County Cllr Roundell Greene advised there will be an upcoming press release with regards to a consultation on the new Somerset Council budget. Proposal has been put forward for 18 LCN's, which she and County Cllr Dance feels is too many – they have parishes in 3 separate LCN areas in the proposals. Each LCN will have a representative from each parish council, along with fire, police and health services. Planning will not be included at LCN at this stage.

A bus fare initiative has recently been launched. All journeys will be charged at £2.00 for a single fare.

2023/7 Planning Applications – None.

2023/8 Accounts and Financial Information

Financial Report & Payments for Authorisation

The financial report for December was circulated to all councillors.

Payments for Authorisation

The schedule of payments was approved by councillors. A list of payments is annexed at the end of the minutes.

Petty Cash Policy – Deferred to February.

2023/9 2023/24 Precept Setting

A proposal, which included an estimated 5 year plan was circulated to all councillors by the Clerk. This proposal was based on the previously agreed budget for 2023/24 and the current financial position of the council. Cllr Simpson made a statement in relation to the proposal, which can be found annexed at the end of these minutes.

After discussion, Cllr Simpson proposed to set the precept at £26,000 for 2023/24. Cllr Gordon seconded the proposal and all councillors voted in favour.

2023/10 Young Person of the Month – No nominations received.

2023/11 Storage of Memorial Cross

Cllr Sherwood advised the cross is safely stored in the church and that there may be an architect fee to pay in relation to the permanent siting of the cross. The next PCC meeting is in March; further update should be available after that.

2023/12 MUGA Hire and Checks

The current charge of £5.00 per hour for hiring the MUGA has not been reviewed since it was opened and it is evident that costs for maintaining and running the area are increasing. Councillors agreed that an increase in the hire fee was needed, and unanimously agreed to increase this to £10.00 per hour from 31st January. Existing short-term bookings will be honored at the rate when booked.

It was identified that regular checks of the MUGA were needed to ensure it is clean and safe for users. Cllr Kelaart volunteered to take this responsibility. The Clerk will provide a simple checklist for use each week.

ACTION – The Clerk to produce checklist / Cllr Kelaart carry out weekly checks.

2023/13 Recreation Field Drainage

There is an ongoing issue with drainage on the recreation field. The parish council believe there may be a drainage ditch and pond on adjoining land, which if cleared, would alleviate some of the issues, however, this view is not supported by the landowners. Further works may be required to the recreation field in addition to clearing and adjoining to improve the field drainage. After discussion, it was proposed by Cllr Simpson that the Environment Agency are contacted for advice and guidance on what action can be taken. Councillors voted in majority in favour of the proposal. Cllr Simpson will update at the next meeting.

ACTION – Cllr Simpson to contact EA.

2023/14 Volunteer Thank You

Cllr Gordon will be arranging catering for the event. Councillors agreed to a cost of up to £10.00 per head. Final numbers still to be confirmed, but a maximum of 30 attendees are expected.

2023/15 Green Flag Award

Cllr Ripley reported that the deadline for applications for the award is February, which is not achievable. She did not see it as a priority for this year, but the award is annual so can be applied for at a later date. Councillors agreed not to pursue the application at this stage.

2023/16 Councillor Updates

a) Community Engagement – Cllr Simpson reported that Facebook continues to be primary means of communication, with 280 regular followers. The noticeboard and website have been updated with recent information.

There is a mobile library which visits Ilton, stopping at Merryfield Lane.

ACTION - Cllr Kelaart to contact to see if additional stops would be possible.

- b) PCSO / Neighbourhood Watch Cllr Pike has been in contact with the PCSO, John Martin, who plans to attend the February meeting. She is also looking at re-starting the neighbourhood watch scheme and will update on this at a later date.
- c) Skate Park Update –Cllr Gordon proposed holding a dedicated extraordinary meeting to review funding and discuss the skatepark project. Cllr Mackenzie Green seconded the proposal, and all councillors were in agreement. Date to be confirmed.
- d) Recreation Field – Cllr Mackenzie Green reported the field has been too wet to cut. Strimming will be carried out once the weather improves and is dry.
In relation to the Field Working Group (FWG) Cllr Ripley hopes to have cost relating to wildflower sowing soon. She commented that the previously agreed FWG terms of reference require reviewing, noting that these had not been shared with the group. This will be added to the February agenda for review.
- e) Childrens Play Park - Installation of the additional gate has been completed. Contractor to be contacted ref. wheelbarrow and final tidying of site. The ground by the gate is very muddy; Costs for grass matting to be investigated. **ACTION – Cllr Gordon**
- f) Brook Green - SCC Highways/Right of Way may have responsibility for the bridges, being on footpaths. Site visit awaited. Update on 4x4 prevention to be given in February.
- g) Footpaths – No updates or progress on outstanding items. Updates to be given in February, including reports from footpath walking group.
- h) Village Maintenance, including Ranger Scheme
 - a. Ranger – New ranger has attended for half a day before Christmas and attended the play park and Brook Green.
 - b. General Maintenance – The recreation field car park has some potholes develop where the stones have moved. Cllr McKenzie Green will re-distribute the stone to level it.
- i) Highways – In addition to items reported in public voice; Pavement buckling previously reported at Cottage Corner has been addressed.
- j) A358 Upgrade – Submission of the Development Consent Order was delayed to allow a review into appropriateness of the environmental mitigations proposed for the project. Submission is now anticipated during 2023.

2023/17 Outstanding Actions not covered in agenda items:

- a. Recreation field access restriction – Cllr Gordon to obtain quotes for drop down bollards for Willow Road entrance to field.

2023/18 Matters for Report

- a. Christmas tree will be collected for recycling on 14th/15th January.
- b. Harlequin Carnival Club will liaise with IPC regarding the Santa visits for 2023.
- c. Fly tipping – The Parish Council would like to express their thanks to Magpie Mole Treasures, who cleared some items that had been fly-tipped in the village.

2023/19 Items for the next meeting

- a. Petty Cash Policy
- b. Merryfield Messenger update
- c. Field Working Group Terms of Reference

Date of next ordinary meeting: Tuesday 14th February 2023, at 6.30pm at Merryfield Hall.

The Chairman closed the meeting.

Elaine Simpson, Chairman

Annex 1. Payments Authorised

Jan-23				
PAYMENTS AUTHORISED				
	INVOICE DATE	AMOUNT	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION
	09/01/2023	£ 469.22	CREWKERNE HORTICULTURAL	GRASS CUTTING EQUIPMENT SERVICING
	22/12/2022	£ 124.80	YARCOMBE WOODLAND	CHRISTMAS TREE
	11/01/2023	£ 775.00	CANNON FENCING & LANDSCAPES	PLAY PARK GATE INSTALLATION
	13/01/2023		K LARSSON	MONTHLY SALARY
	09/01/2023		K LARSSON	ADMIN EXPENSES
	19/12/2022	£ 90.00	ELITE PLAYGROUND INSPECTIONS	MONTHLY INSPECTIONS
PAYMENTS MADE SINCE THE LAST MEETING				
	31/12/2022	£ 10.00	CASH	YOUNG PERSON OF THE MONTH AWARD

Annex 2. Chairman Statement re Budgets & Precept – 10th January 2023

Budgets:

Last month the PC reviewed our budget and agreed estimated expenditure for the coming tax year. It is important that good financial planning takes place, not only to cover our costs, but also to consider future expenditure and plan accordingly.

Various options were put forward last month to include such planning, and the potential precept increases ranged from just under 12% to as high as almost 69%. Our discussions at the time were in general agreement that given the current financial climate and our cash reserves, we would need to make a sensible decision regarding the precept increase and that decision will be made tonight.

There were a couple of slight changes agreed to the budget last month (including using reserve funds for some expenditure and some future proofing) – the result of those calculations has been distributed to councillors with a summary before them at this meeting.

Precept:

Kim, as our 'Responsible Financial Officer' has done a huge amount of work, not only on budgets, but also in reviewing our accounts for the past 5 years. With the upmost respect to previous councillors and the clerk, although the budgeting process was undertaken in the past, there is little evidence of detailed planning for the future.

The rate of inflation, as an average over the past 5 years, was 3.6% It went up to over 11% last year and currently sits at 9.6% with experts predicting further rises again – difficult times are ahead for everyone. Conversely, over the same period, our precept has only increased by an average of 1.1% per year, which means that we have been behind for a number of years in terms of income versus expenditure.

So why do we have such a healthy balance? I did not want Kim to spend any more time than she already had looking over historical records, so we can only assume that for some years previously the income exceeded the expenditure and the balance increased – savings so to speak. We cannot do anything to change the past, but what we can do, and what is incumbent upon us, is to start to put things right now and look towards the future.

We could hike the precept up by a very large percentage this year to put right the under payments from previous years, but (in my opinion, and I am only one voice) that seems morally wrong and inappropriate given the reserves we have built up over years gone by, and the current financial crisis, which is affecting everyone. However, the fact does remain that we saw a huge increase in our costs last year and we have a financial obligation to cover them.

It is Kim's job to do all the financial calculations and present to us her recommendation. To soften the blow of a massive increase this year, Kim has produced a 5 year plan to get our precept back on track, whilst using reserves for projects and also being mindful that once the Unitary Authority (UA) comes into effect, we may see our costs rise further. We will of course need to do a similar exercise for next year, and calculate in the new UA information, but now all the hard work is done, so it should be much easier.

So, taking everything into consideration I would like to propose that we accept Kim's findings and use the agreed budget from last month to increase the precept by 11.79% for the coming financial year – this keeps us roughly in line with inflation. This percentage equates to £7.96pa (15.3p per week) equivalent Band D property charge.

After some discussion the proposal was of an increase of 11.79% was restated, seconded and carried unanimously by all Parish Councillors.