

## The rise in the precept

With regret, the parish council has had to increase its precept (our share of council tax) substantially for the coming financial year. This is not a decision we have taken lightly. For the last few years we have tried very hard to contain our budgets to avoid a sharp rise in the precept. But like many other parishes in recent times we are now facing the point where this is no longer possible. Our costs have been rising, our income, other than from the precept, has been falling, our reserves are getting down to a critical level. On top of this Ashford have estimated that our "tax base" – that is the number of people who pay council tax – will fall by around 6% in the coming financial year since more people will qualify for council tax relief as a result of the pandemic.

So we were faced with a bleak choice. Do we cut services – stop cutting the grass (or reduce the frequency), close the toilets, maybe even close a playground – or do we put up the precept by an amount which will enable us to carry on providing these services? We believe that a majority would wish us to carry on providing the services we do. If you think this is wrong, please tell us and tell us which services you think should be cut.

At this point we want to confirm once again that we will be bringing CCTV to Charing. That was a pledge we made following clear public demand that this be done. Sadly, it has taken longer to bring about due to the complexities of linking into the 24 hour monitoring service at Ashford combined with the impact of the pandemic but progress is being made and it will happen.

Nevertheless, it is important that we give you all some more information about the need to raise the precept by so much. We do not yet know whether it will be possible to hold a parish meeting this year but we will in due course put budget details for 2021/22, along with the normal financial details for 2020/2021, on the website. Our annual accounts will be available for anyone to examine on request as always. Meanwhile here is a summary of the issues.

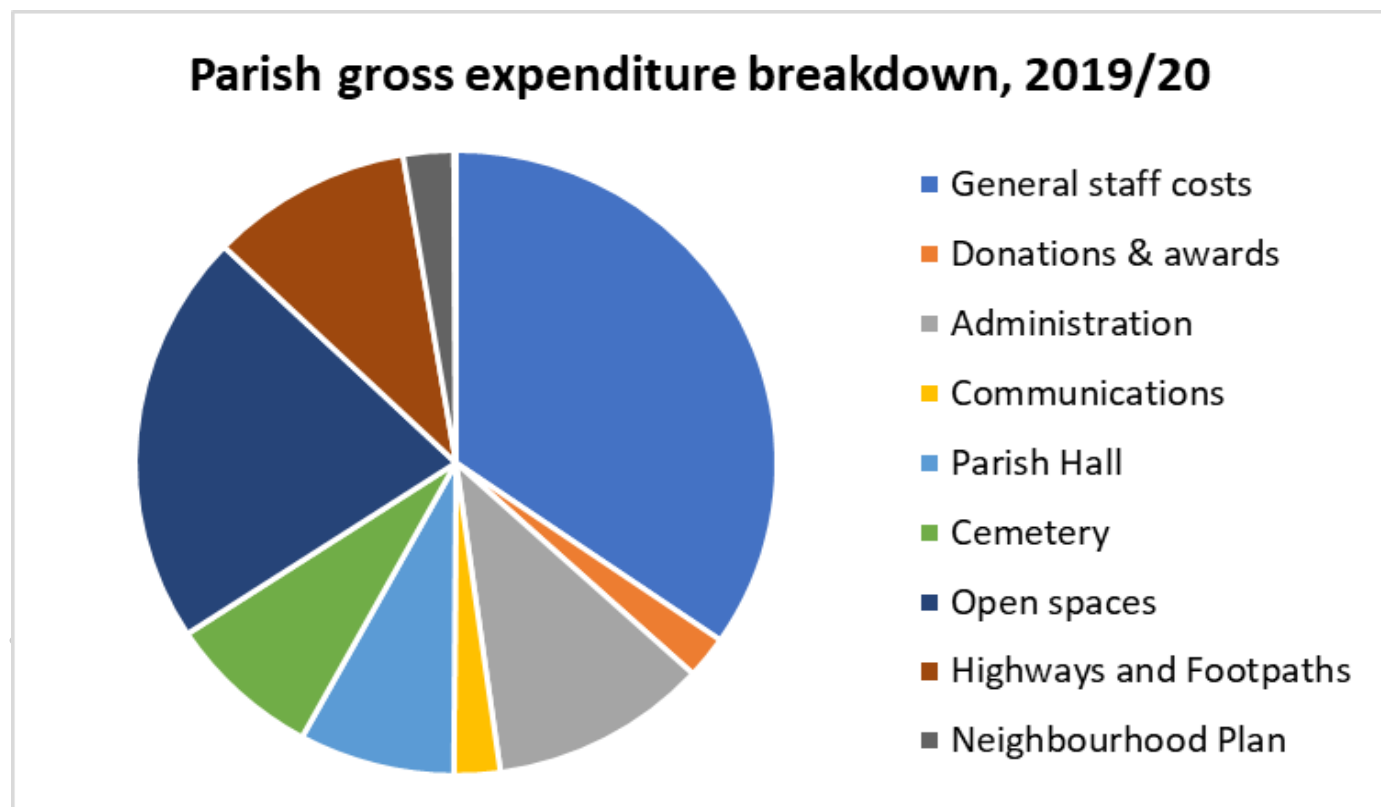
Before going into more detail on the reasons, it is worth pointing out that our share of council tax is very small. In 2020/2021 Band D homes paid £87.64 per year or £1.69 per week. In 2021/2022 this will rise to around £121 or £2.33 a week. Last year this was just 4% of overall council tax and we do not expect the percentage to rise by more than a fraction this year. . . . .

### What we do

It is also important to list all the things we do. We maintain a large amount of green area including Clewards, the "picnic area" by the A20, the sports ground and the area round the Memorial Hall in Charing Heath, the field in Westwell Leacon. We run two full playgrounds plus the skate park area and the swings in Westwell Leacon. We maintain a parish hall, a cemetery (including grass cutting) and public toilets. We cut the grass in the churchyard. We employ a street cleaner as well as a cleaner for the Hall and the toilets. Few parishes do as much.

Cont:-

The following chart shows how expenditure broke down in 2019/2020. Total expenditure that year was £124,414.



### Our expenses are rising

In recent years there has been unrelenting pressure on our costs. As cost pressures rise on counties and districts, more responsibilities are being passed down to parish councils, for example the public toilets. Expenditure that would in past years have been picked up by higher-tier councils is no longer. For example, nearly all the Highways and Footpaths spending in the chart was the cost of the speed limit signs in and near Charing Heath, although in this instance we were fortunate to receive grants from our KCC and ward councillors, some companies and one or two individuals which together funded much of the expenditure.

Legal obligations and their consequences have increased. Risk assessments, data protection, HR issues have all become more complex taking up more time, thus adding to staff costs, and obliging us to seek professional advice where before common sense and occasional informal advice sufficed. Parish councillors now have to be equipped with a parish council laptop for their parish work – before councillors used their own equipment. Our parish hall is ageing and becoming more expensive to run. Sadly, in recent years vandalism has become more prevalent so repairs costs and insurance have risen.

Of course, we take every opportunity to keep costs down and follow normal good practice as regards asking for quotes and tenders for any significant spending.

### Income

Other than the precept, our income from 2021/22 will consist of just lettings from the Hall and cemetery fees plus any small grants or contributions for specific projects we are lucky enough to get from companies or individuals. In the past we obtained grants from Ashford, or from the government via Ashford. In 2013/14 these amounted to around £14,000 – 14% of our income for that year.

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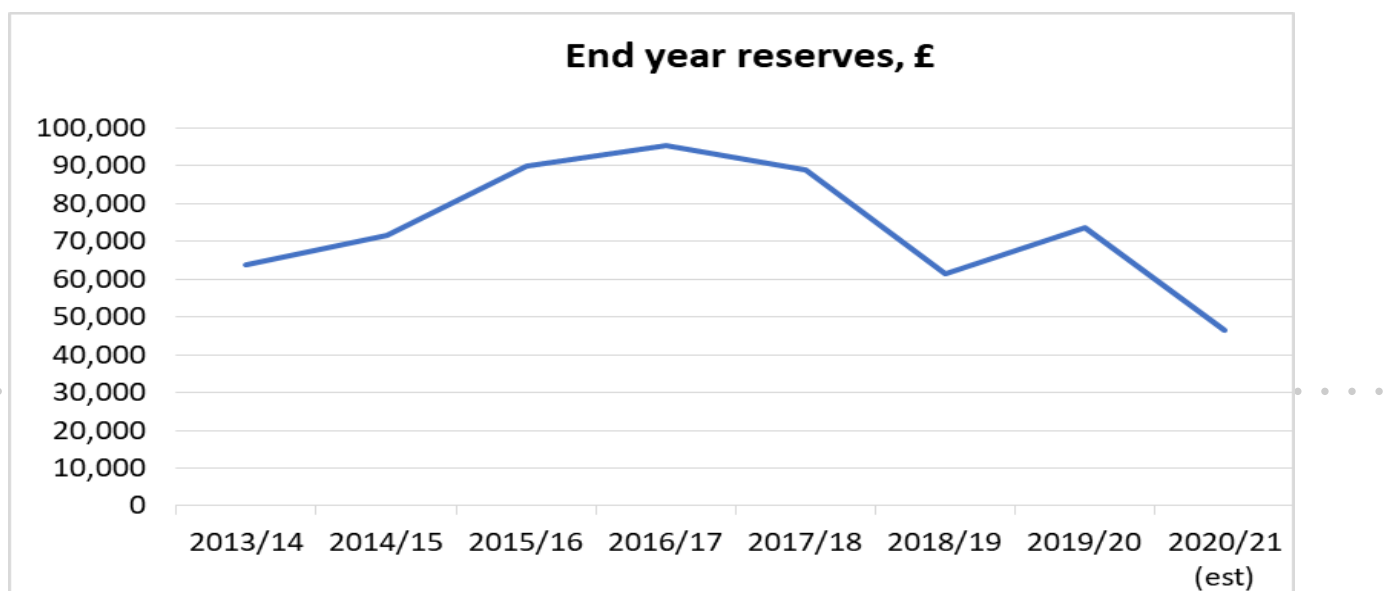
But they have been shrinking and we have been told that from next year they will disappear. Cemetery fees are highly variable but in 2019/20 they only just covered direct costs. Hall fees are limited both by the design of the hall and by the lack of car parking and do not come near covering costs.

Longer-term we hope that we will gradually be able to find income from other sources; we hope, for example, that the new community facility at Parsons Mead will generate some net income in years to come (although not immediately). But such opportunities are limited. While we are able to borrow on easy terms from the Public Works and Loan Board we are not allowed to use that funding purely for investment.

Most years our “tax base” – the number of people who pay council tax – rises as more people come to live in the parish. 2021/22, as mentioned, is an exception. While most people are not happy with the amount of development there will be in Charing over the next few years it will in due course increase our tax base. This will enable our income to rise without individual residents seeing a corresponding increase in the council tax they pay us.

### **Reserves are perilous**

Meanwhile the struggle to run the parish while limiting the rise in the precept has brought our reserves down close to, or below, the minimum. There are prudential limits to how low reserves can fall and six months’ worth of expenditure is usually considered the minimum our auditors would accept. (Like every parish council we do have to hold sufficient reserves to enable us to operate in the, hopefully extremely unlikely, event of Ashford Borough Council failing and being unable to pass on the precept to us.) As the following chart shows, we could be below that point at the end of the current financial year. Whether we will or not depends largely on the timing of CCTV spending.



We will not be the only parish to increase our precept substantially this year – and those that are not have generally imposed substantial rises in recent years. Overall we believe that we give residents good value for money in all that we do – and please rest assured that we will continue to monitor spending closely and look for all possible ways to limit future increases in the precept.

**Jill**

\*\*\*\*\* New Councillor \*\*\*\*\*

We were delighted to welcome John Watson who was co-opted to the Parish Council in December.

However, we are not always at full capacity and it would be good to have a list of residents who would be interested in joining the council when vacancies arise.

If you feel you could be interested but would like to learn more please do contact Dawne (713599, [cpclerk@charingkent.org](mailto:cpclerk@charingkent.org)) and she can arrange for an informal chat about what it involves.

### If your road has a pothole...

If your road has a pothole or if the pavement is obstructed by vegetation, a drain is blocked, traffic lights not working, the street light is out or any other “highways” problems (including those irritating loose manhole covers that go clunk clunk when anyone drives over them) please use KCC’s online portal to report it: [www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem](http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem) .

This is the most efficient way to get the problem sorted. They aim to rectify routine faults within 28 days and those for traffic lights or where there are safety hazards more quickly. If It is an emergency situation then please call 03000 418181 in office hours or 03000 419191 out of hours. This normally brings a response within 2 hours.

### Food Bank

Our local Food Bank in Ashford will almost certainly be under more pressure than normal during the next few months. Donations of either food or money would therefore be particularly welcome. Tins and packets can be left in the collection box in the porch of Charing Church. If you are unable to carry and leave donations in the Church porch, Malcolm and Joyce Gallagher are happy to come and collect your donations from your home. Please contact Malcolm and Joyce on 01233 712293, or 07803 070853 or email [malcolmgallagher230@gmail.com](mailto:malcolmgallagher230@gmail.com).

Malcolm will collect donations from Charing, Charing Heath and neighbouring parishes.

Financial donations can be made via the website [www.familyfoodbank.org](http://www.familyfoodbank.org)

The Ashford food bank volunteers would like to say a big thank you for your donations and support.



### CCTV

The CCTV project is moving forward slowly . Since the last newsletter we have overcome some of the obstacles and are now moving forward . We are now working towards the next stage of the project . We will update you in the next newsletter



## Charing Surgery Vaccinations

It will be early February by the time you read this. A month which is still very much part of winter - often cold, wet or snowy. Or just generally miserable. But at the same time it is a month when the days get noticeably longer and when early flowers and green shoots start to appear in the garden telling us that Spring will come.

Perhaps it is a bit of an analogy for where we are at the moment with all the news being a mixture of gloom, fear and hope. Gloom and fear looking at the ever-rising numbers of cases, hospital admissions and, sadly, deaths. The unrelenting pressure on those working in the Covid wards and those who support them. Economic worries for many, pressures on children not in school and home-schooling parents. But distinct hope with the vaccination programme, now well under way.

When it comes to the vaccination drive, we are hugely fortunate in this parish since both Charing Surgery itself, and the Len Valley practice which a number of residents attend, have been among the leaders in Kent. Charing is the main vaccination hub for its primary care network coordinating Tenterden, Hamstreet and Woodchurch surgeries. All vaccinations using the Pfizer vaccine have been carried out at Charing due to the logistical issues in handling this vaccine while each surgery is dealing with its own patients when it comes to the Oxford Astra-Zeneca vaccine.

By February 6<sup>th</sup> Charing surgery expects to have given a first dose to all patients registered with it in Groups 1 to 4 – that is all those over 70, all care home and learning disability homes along with most of their staff, and those under 70 considered clinically extremely vulnerable (those advised to shield rather than simply being “at risk”). These are the groups the government is aiming to have vaccinated with their first doses by mid-February. There are more details on the Charing Practice website – see <https://www.charingpractice.co.uk/covid-19-vaccine.html>

The rapid pace of the roll out is constrained only by the vaccine supplies. Many attending Charing surgery for their job have commented on the slickness and efficiency of the operation. We do owe the doctors, nurses and administrators involved, including the retired who are coming back to work or those working elsewhere who are vaccinating on their “day off”, a huge vote of thanks for their tireless efforts in making us all safer on top of all the normal work of the surgery. (Not forgetting the volunteers assisting them.)

The surgery would be grateful if, as far as possible, people could avoid ringing them to ask when they will be vaccinated. It is appreciated that everyone will be anxious until they get their appointment but such calls are overloading phone lines. Rest assured that they are running checks as they come to the end of each “group” to pick up anyone who might have been missed. If the surgery does not have your mobile phone number then please email it to [charingsurgery@nhs.net](mailto:charingsurgery@nhs.net) as this helps.

Please also email the surgery if you accept an invitation for a vaccination at a mass vaccination centre, such as the one set up at Folkestone, so they can take you off their vaccination list and offer the jab to someone else. Finally, please do not be taken in by any of the scam calls by people who seem to offer you a vaccine but are only after your money. The vaccination is free and in no circumstances should anyone provide credit card details or click on any email links in an invite.

Currently invitations will be made by the surgery calling patients to invite them to come into the surgery or you may be sent a letter from NHS England giving you the option to book an appointment at one of the mass vaccination sites. Anything else should be treated with suspicion.



### \*\*\*CENSUS 2021\*\*\*

#### Be a part of Census 2021

Census day is 21st March 2021

By taking part and encouraging others to do the same,  
you'll help make sure your community gets the services it needs.

Find out more at [www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk)



#### Road Sweeper

The Parish council would like to welcome Paul Taylor as the new Road Sweeper . Paul works on Thursdays and Fridays. We would like to thank the residents who have made him feel welcome .

The Parish Council would also like to wish Robert Faulkner a happy retirement.

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### \*\*\*DOG FOULING\*\*\*

The parish council has received numerous complaints about the increase in dog fouling within the village. As lockdown continues there has been an increase of dog walkers from surrounding areas and the parish. The main area of concern is School Road, there is a dog bin by the Cemetery gates next to the vestry. We would ask dog walkers to clear up after their dogs .

The dog warden has been contacted and will be patrolling the area.



## Charing Christmas Lights

### Donations in memory of Ralph Blake

Benita and the Blake family are amazed and touched at the amount raised by donations in memory of their much loved Ralph. To date **£1370** has been received. The Blake family and the "Ladies of the Lights" would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who so generously donated. It is a lovely gesture from Ralph's family to support the Christmas Lights in this way.

The "Ladies of the Lights" would like to thank Sharon Barkley from Charing Heath for her most generous donation of **£320**. Sharon raised this money by making and selling face masks in an array of Christmas themed fabrics and donated the proceeds to the Lights Fund. Sharon's nimble fingers are busy again making masks and raising funds for the NHS.

We would also like to thank the many villagers who donated money to the Lights Fund, we have been overwhelmed by the fundraising and donations we have received. We are so lucky to be part of such a wonderful community.

### *The Ladies of the Lights*

## Charing Parish Council Website

**[www.charingkent.org](http://www.charingkent.org)**

Our website is an important platform to communicate all things Parish Council. It has information on who your Parish Councillors are, Agendas & Minutes of our meetings, how to contact us, Local Business Directory & Documents.

Our website has to meet certain standards i.e. Disability, access, auditor approval and forms an integral way to communicate to our community.

We are in the process of updating certain areas of the website, so some changes will be taking place over the next few months.

If you would like to be added to the Business Directory then please contact the clerk at [cpclerk@charingkent.org](mailto:cpclerk@charingkent.org)

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## Charing Cemetery

The Parish Council have developed a separate area within the Cemetery for the specific interment of ashes.

Plots cannot be pre purchased but are available on request from the clerk at [cpclerk@charingkent.org](mailto:cpclerk@charingkent.org) or Tel 01233 713599 for further information.

### \*\*\*Vandalism \*\*\*

The village has seen an increase in vandalism and “Anti social behaviour” over the last few months. This has occurred in various areas within Charing & Charing Heath. Residents houses, gardens and cars have also been targeted. The Parish Council ask that all incidents, regardless of how minor

are reported on 101 to the police, or report on [www.kent.police.uk](http://www.kent.police.uk) reporting online can be done within 10 minutes. All reported issues are automatically passed on to our PCSO who will look into each issue. The more incidents that are reported the more police presence we get within the parish. If residents are not reporting then we are seen as a village with minor issues and our PCSO spends more time in other parishes.

Our PCSO has 9 other villages as well as ours and allocates time within his weekly shift pattern.



#### Parish Councillors - Charing

Mrs Jill Leyland (Chair)	713798
Lady C Bain Smith (vice chair)	712594
Mrs A Gudge (vice chair)	714068
Mrs S Easun	07761448607
Mr J Gilliver	john@charingkent.org
Mrs S Hawkins	07841978748
Mr T Hayward	07803161631
Mrs J Strike	07855064707
Mr T Reed	713136 or 07767861003
Mr J Watson	877751

#### Rural Community Warden

Peter Beadsley 07977981990

**PCSO** Kyle Farnfield (Charing) 101

**PCSO** Kyle Farnfield (Charing Heath) 101

#### Parish Councillors Charing Heath

Mr D Bennett	712054
Mr C Prinn	07872190187

#### Borough Councillors

Mr G Clarkson (Charing)	712081
Mrs C Bell (C/Heath)	07970885065
Mr C Simkins (County Cllr)	756705

#### Parish Clerk

Mrs D Austen 713599

#### Burial Clerk

Mrs H Evers 632671

#### Charing Parish Newsletter

##### Editor: Dawne Austen

Contributions or correspondence for upcoming Newsletters

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