

## **Newsletter - Barton Parish Council - Budget Statement – January 2004**

We want to tell you about the 2004/05 Precept and to outline the basis on which it has been decided.

Do you remember last year? A 'Letter to all Households in the Parish', in January 2003 told you that a Precept amount of £20,000 was being requested; that an application for a loan, from the Office of Deputy Prime Minister, had been made – the decision was delayed pending the outcome of a Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiry in respect of 'allotment' land; that it was possible there would be no Precept in the Council Tax year 2004/05.

At the end of February last year it was learnt that the December 2002 Public Inquiry did not support the CPO. A decision was taken by the Parish Council, at that time, not to appeal and the loan application was not pursued. Legal and other costs in respect of the Public Inquiry coupled with further legal expenses in connection with a defamation claim totalled some £23,000. These accounts were paid in the Council Tax year 2003/04.

Largely as a result of the above our finances came under pressure. Normal running costs in the year have been contained at circa £4,500. At the beginning of the 2003/04 year we held funds of £6,700, of which £3100 was grant money for the Village Plan (see above) and Barton Institute. You will gather from these figures that the level of expenditure incurred has impacted heavily on our financial resources. Were it not due to the existence of £600 grant monies and the goodwill of Alan Spivey, our hardworking Clerk, in not drawing down part of his salary, we may well have been overdrawn at the bank.

We must remain positive. What has happened cannot be changed. We still have challenges ahead of us and need to ensure that we are as well prepared as we can be in the circumstances. In deciding the Precept amount we have taken a number of factors into consideration:

- The Village Hall grant of £600 must be replaced together with a further £655 approx to ensure that the Clerk's salary and expenses for this present year can be covered.
- Negotiations in respect of allotments are at an advanced stage. The Parish Council having previously acknowledged a demand for allotments must provide. On a worst case scenario £1,500 costs have been built into our budget in this respect.
- Barton Institute and the Playing Fields Association play an important role satisfying a wide variety of needs of Barton residents. There are few homes that do not benefit from their existence in one way or another. The Institute, unlike the PFA, falls under our care as Custodian Trustees. We are responsible for the fabric of the building. Sadly, following years of neglect the building now requires a major overhaul to bring it back into a good state of repair. Michael Charlton has very kindly, at NIL cost to the village, produced a Survey and Report on the premises, for this we are very grateful. The report in summary details a list of areas needing attention at a projected estimated cost of some £27,000. Together with the Village Hall Management Committee we are currently considering ways in which this can be financed – grants, loans, etc. Whilst we will set in place a form of budgeting for maintenance in the future, we are also creating a fund to help carry out the work detailed in the report. We are setting aside £2,000 plus the £600 grant monies currently held and a further £675 grant that has recently been approved and received, for the building, through County Councillor, Michael Heseltine. There is much to be achieved and we are hopeful that by 2008 (centenary Year) the work will be completed.
- Normal running costs to cover items such as grass-cutting, insurance, salary, etc. account for the remainder of our budget for the next year.

In allowing for the above a precept amount of £9,800 is judged appropriate for the 2004/05 year. This decision has been not reached without much soul searching. We are well aware of the level of feelings that existed at this time last year when the last Precept was set. If we do not take steps, now, to place our financial affairs on a proper footing for the future then we will only be putting off the evil day.

We have strived hard in this past year to find an acceptable way forward on all fronts and hope that by providing Newsletters you feel that we are keeping you informed about what we are doing and achieving. A level of change in local government, at a higher level than us, is beginning to impact on what we as a Parish Council are responsible for. This places additional pressures and challenges on our shoulders. Remember, we are unpaid servants and some of the decisions we have to make will not always be popular. Regrettably setting the precept is one of the least pleasant decisions that we have to make, so please do not think that it is done without regard to your feelings. We care for the village and see it as being something special that needs looking after.

**Peter Wood (Chairman), Barton Parish Council**