

Response from residents to recent leaflet re Precept – Feb 2018

6 responses received to date – 4 in favour, 2 against

1. We live at *****and would welcome any input from the parish council with regards to speed indicators in the village. Well inside the 30 mph, but on the edge of the village. Vehicles pass our house up to 60 mph! There are also deep potholes outside as well. Filling these in would be appreciated. The road conditions in our part of Hereford is a challenge and it is difficult to drive in a straight line sometimes avoiding deep holes. We would support an increase in parish element of council tax if it will improve the situation.
2. Thank you for the update on the situation regarding the funding of maintenance for the ditches and drainage etc

From our perspective we would be very happy to see such work funded at a local Parish level as this would also hopefully go hand in hand with local accountability for the work done and cost. Over the last decade the standard of work done has continuously deteriorated such that what is done is largely ineffectual. By way of example the practice of clearing the ditches by simply piling the silt on the top simply results in the silt being washed back the first time it rains heavily. Similarly the drains are seldom cleaned out such that we've on a couple of occasions been forced to go digging out the one out front because despite contacting the council nothing is done.

We would propose that the Parish council cost out directly employing someone - and not some outsourcing operation- to do the work to a proper standard and then by way of hypothecation set a specific sum to fund it. We would all then see where our money went and it would hopefully lead to more engagement in the state of our Parish along the way. Devolving local services to local Parish councils is in our view the way forward.

3. Simon Whiteman popped in this morning with the note about the Border Group's intention to increase the parish precept over the next few years in order to cover some of the services cut by Herefordshire Council.

We have no problem with the parish council's intention to raise money locally in order to ensure that some local services are retained. It is a monstrous shame that national government has seen fit to restrict the finances of local governments to such an extent that services provided to ratepayers have been substantially cut.

We fully support the parish council's move to commence pothole repairs, although we assume that this would be on local C, D and unclassified roads, rather than A & B roads, which one hopes Herefordshire will maintain more effectively by using the money saved with parish councils taking over potholing on smaller roads (I'd love to change the entry signs to Herefordshire to read: HEREfordshire, YOU CAN: Go potholing!).

We note the intention to take on ditching and drainage; does this mean we'll see some work done on the drains in Walford at long last?

Again, footpaths are an important issue for a county which benefits from a high level of tourism, so we welcome the parish council's intention to maintain them effectively.

4. Thanks for the notice updating us on Council Tax issues. I fully support the proposal that Parish Council element will increase to enable funding of local initiatives, particularly the upkeep of the local roads and lanes.

5. Dear Cllr. Maggie Brown,

If the government gives 5 million pounds to Hereford council for the upkeep of the counties roads why do you find necessary to impose an additional charge for maintenance work which has already been paid for by the government?

I object to paying any extra charges

6.

BGPC, hereinafter referred to as you, has distributed a leaflet about the proposed increase in the precept from which I quote “Herefordshire Council will no longer be providing the parish council with funds for the Lengthsman scheme (which deals with highway problems, like ditching and drainage) or for footpath maintenance. In an area prone to flooding, and with many well-used footpaths, your parish council have decided these services are too valuable to lose.” End of quote.

The withdrawal of this funding presents you with an opportunity to assess what you have been doing and think about the future.

What you have been doing is simply wrong. A great part of lengthsman expenditure has been on clearing roadside ditches and excessive hedge and verge cutting. The latter two activities could be reduced which would cut costs and allow some environmental improvements and regeneration of our verges. The expenditure on clearing roadside ditches should not be made at all as that is a duty of the adjacent landowner. If the costs of these illegitimate activities are removed there is no need to replace the withdrawn grants from the county with an increase in the precept. It would be quite wrong to increase the precept to cover costs which should not be incurred in the first place.

Similarly, the clearing of encroaching vegetation on footpaths is the duty of the landowner and should not be a burden on the public purse.

It may be that the funding you have enjoyed for years has led to a misguided culture and this is now the moment to review that culture and hold to account those who should be accountable. Landowners must accept their duties and cease relying on the public purse to cover what are undeniably their own costs.

You are also about to decide whether to take on extra road maintenance responsibilities via the Enhanced Lengthsman Scheme for which there will be no funding and so the costs must be covered by an increased precept. Residents already pay council tax and it is a duty of the county's contractor to maintain roads. It would be very unwise to take on more responsibilities with their inevitable mission creep and consequent inexorable cost increases. This is quite simply an increase in council tax by stealth. It is also a one sided arrangement as the contractor will control what is to be done and must approve works beforehand. Insurers are strongly advising against parishes taking on these responsibilities and there are other practical problems such as; acquisition, maintenance, ownership, insurance and storage of plant; training and its cost; time and cost of collection of materials from the contractor's depot; management of the lengthsman; quality control (if it is to be the contractor they might as well do the work themselves); what recourse will tax paying residents have if work is poorly done; what will be the complaints procedure; will whomever manages the scheme be agreeable to residents frequently telephoning to report a problem, and will that person be easily contactable? Have you taken advice from other parishes as to their experience of the scheme and would it not be sensible to wait and see how

successfully the scheme works in other parishes before committing to a contractual obligation? You have already shown yourselves to be misguided in your present road maintenance so what faith should we put in your ability to take on even more responsibilities?

Finally, I draw your attention to the farcical situation with regards to sec. 106 money and the restrictions on its use. You are told by higher authority that you may not spend this money on activities that other agencies have a statutory duty to provide. The highways authority has a statutory duty to maintain our roads so you may not spend the relatively large recent sec. 106 windfall of £4,400, and any future sec. 106 money, on maintaining our highways, and yet here you are contemplating raising taxes to do just that, maintain our highways.

It is manifestly unjust that the higher authority that is attempting to abrogate its responsibility to maintain our highways is simultaneously debarring you from spending our money on the same, and thereby possibly forcing you to raise even more taxes. We are not cash cows to be milked to make up an artificially created shortfall arising from an arcane rule with no basis in reality or fairness. Localism was meant to give rise to bottom up governance but here is a glaring example of the very opposite. Instead of acquiescing to the unfair demands and neglect of the county council you should make representations to the opposite effect on behalf of your residents.