

## WE WANT SERVICES – HOW IS THE MONEY FOUND?

Your Parish Council recently set its budget for the next 12 months. So, how does what happens in Westminster affect everyday life here in Buckland Brewer ?

The Council Tax cap, which you might have heard about, does not apply to parish and town councils. Consequently, district and county councils (in our case, Torridge and Devon), and more recently the Police Authority, are trying to offload responsibilities to parishes and are withdrawing grant funding. For example, we now have to purchase our own salt and grit our own roads, despite the safe management of the highway being a statutory duty of County Councils. We've consistently declined requests for our parish councillors, who already give their time and efforts free of charge, to fill potholes.

Against this background, the Parish Council is doing all it can to encourage growth in Buckland Brewer, and, as any type of government funding is based on population, this will make a small contribution towards attracting government grant money. This is very relevant to our bigger services, e.g. medical and social care, education, transport, community grants, etc. The Buckland Brewer Settlement Plan is being incorporated in the Torridge and North Devon Local Plan, which should see at least 100 new properties being built between now and 2031. New growth, especially if it attracts younger families to the parish, will help to build a sustainable future and possibly help maintain our school, pub and shop.

Although offloading responsibility to parish councils has meant a general increase in the Parish Precept in recent years, there have been two boosts to funds recently that have helped to keep the increases to an acceptable level. After many years of negotiation, the Council secured an annual rental of £3,000 from Arqiva for the telecommunications mast at Thornhillhead. There was also benefit from a generous annual donation of £2,000 over 19 years from the Heywood family in recognition of the impact to the community of the wind turbine. A large tranche of money from the same source also pushed the new village hall build over the finishing line.

Next year will see the completion of work on the new community field and an agreement with the Flying Start Federation for their use of the field behind the school as a playing field. The Council has established an annual Education Support Fund to help support university and college students living in the parish and is boosting the level of grant support for the village hall and the community shop, which are both important contributors to community life. Budgets have also been approved to help the new badminton club get off the ground and to provide sufficient funds for the Battle's Over commemorations in November. The Council is also keen to see an updated version of the Parish Plan which expires this year. The next Plan should cover 2018-2031 to coincide with the Settlement and Local Plans. A meeting was held on 31<sup>st</sup> January to get the scheme started and it is hoped that it will be developed over 18 months and published by volunteer members of the community, as was the last one.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> January, the Council finalized its budget plans and set a precept of £11,715. This is a 5% increase but there was no change at all last year so this is broadly in line with inflation. The average band D tax rate will be £35.77, an increase of £1.70 per household per year (the price of a cup of tea in Starbucks).

Patrick Blossie, Parish Clerk, February 2018