# Headed Paper

# *Chiseldon Parish Council*

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**Transitional Period**

2016 has seen a lot of change within Chiseldon Parish Council. With the Borough Council withdrawing funding for non-essential services such as regular grass cutting in public areas, shrub maintenance and litter picking, the Parish Council took over the provision of these responsibilities under a transitional funding agreement. These services were a frequent feature in responses to the Parish Plan survey and we firmly believe that, through well negotiated sub-contracting, a better quality of service is now being provided.

As we move into 2017, the Parish Council needs to build on the work done in the previous year. The parish is expected to take on further responsibilities for services as the Borough seek to make further savings to pay for social care.

Over the next twelve months, the Parish Council intends to spend the precept on the following:

**Environmental and Conservation**

Our Environmental Committee is very active within the community and continues to provide a quality service in maintaining the public areas of the Parish through careful subcontracting to local firms. In addition, the Council leases the Washpool area from the Burderop Estate to provide an important natural area for all to enjoy. Support is given to the Washpool Area Restoration Project by way of an annual grant and the purchase of insurances for the volunteers and the work done there.

**Recreation and Youth**

The Recreation Committee provides youth services by bringing in the BIOS youth van each week which provides a focal point for the younger members of our community to engage and socialise.

The Recreation Ground and Hall are also key services provided by the Parish Council and over the years, certain areas have begun to show their age. The Recreation Hall floor needed to be replaced in late 2016 due to its progressive collapse and during repairs other issues with the structure were identified which urgently need to be attended to. We have therefore set aside monies in the 2017/18 budget to make repairs that should extend the life of the recreation hall for some 5-6 years. During that period, further funds will be moved to reserves to put towards removing and replacing the building with a more flexible community space as the existing building reaches its final end of life.

The sports fields and pavilion are also assets which over the years have been neglected and we will begin putting funds aside to deal with the drainage problems which make the fields, at times, unusable. Our overall aim being that work can begin on the project at some time in 2018. We will also renovate and refurbish the sports pavilion to bring it up to a modest standard where our sports teams can at the very least take a shower in hot water.

**Protecting Other Assets**

The Parish Offices are the hub of administration for the council and are in a former chapel in the cemetery off Butts Road. The building has for a long time been unfit for use as an office, and while a persistent damp problem appears to have abated, the temperature in the building regularly dips below 16⁰c leading to the Parish Clerk having to work from home. We have put money aside in the budget to lower the office ceiling, re-carpet the office areas and replace the heating with a solution that can provide a working environment which is safe and appropriate for our employees.

**Listening to our residents – parish appearance, speed and parking**

The look and appearance of the Parish were key issues raised in research for the Parish Plan and our Environment Committee has agreed to part-fund an information board for Strouds Green in conjunction with the History Society and replace notice boards in Hodson and Ridgeway View. It has also put monies aside to fund planters and hanging baskets to enhance the look and feel of the parish.

Finally our Parish Plan research indicated that a key concern for a majority of residents is the volume and speed of traffic using local roads. It has been decided that rather than look at individual roads in a piecemeal fashion, a traffic sub-committee will be formed that will put together an overall strategy for the parish to tackle these concerns. A budget item of £8,000 has been allocated to this sub-committee in order for them to bring in professional traffic consultants as and when necessary to help formulate the overall plan.

**Planning for the future**

This year’s budget was a challenging decision for the Finance Committee as it needed to not only cover the costs of the day to day running of the council, but needed to look further forward in time to begin saving funds for larger projects that would be impossible to take on in financial year. While, inevitably, there has been a further increase in our precept, the 2017/18 level puts us on a par with many other local parishes and the new parishes recently introduced by the Borough Council. It also puts us on a strong footing for future years to provide more and better services to our residents.

**Precept – what it means to you**

We have set our annual precept in the 2017/18 financial year at £105,000 on a tax base of 1,144.4 equivalent Band D properties. Therefore, a Band D property within the Parish will contribute £91.75 to the Parish Council during the year.

* Annual increase based on Band D of £27.78 or just under £0.54 per week
* This means that the total bill for band D property will be £91.75 vs £63.97 last year.
* The final precept for the parish as a whole will be £105,000 for 2017/18 financial year and will leave a small surplus of around £9,000 to cover unbudgeted work in the Parish.

While any increase in the precept is unwelcome, this level does put the Parish Council in a better position to weather future storms and look at other areas where the Borough Council has made cutbacks such as in the provision of libraries or future service transfers.

If you have any questions relating to the precept, please feel free to contact our Clerk, Clair Wilkinson at clerk@chiseldon-pc.gov.uk

