

Notes on the main comments made at the Extraordinary Parish Council meeting during Public Participation

Rev. Ivan Selman, Chairman of Doverly Manor Committee, explained how the Manor was probably the oldest and one of the most important buildings in the village. The Management Committee relied on rents from the tenants of the building (Museum and Billiards & Snooker Club) and the Parish Council to maintain and insure the building and had very limited means of raising money in other ways. He therefore felt it to be very important that the Parish Council did not reduce the amount of support given to existing facilities.

Jim Adlington felt that collection boxes could be placed in local shops and pubs with the aim of raising £30 per day which would cover the shortfall and prevent organisations from failing. The Chairman felt that most of the organisations affected already raised quite a large proportion of their own funds (and gave as an example The Friends of Porlock Visitor Centre) and that the Parish Council funds were more in the nature of backup, but that none the less all organisations would have to look at ways of raising money.

There were several other areas of concern raised by several people, such as would the administrative load of undertaking devolved services increase the cost of the parish office which is already one of the highest items of expenditure.

It was suggested that a straw poll be taken on whether Library users would be willing to pay a small sum for each book issued. The Chairman confirmed that feedback on this type of question was available in the data from the original Library questionnaire issued by the Parish Council, and that generally people had been very willing to pay towards the running costs of the Library by whatever means.

Mark Wilton felt that second home owners should pay quadruple rates on their properties. He also queried how the Recreation Ground managed to spend £9Kp.a – this query was answered by Cllr. Keith Jacobs, Chairman of the Management Committee, who gave a brief breakdown of the main expenditure and also invited anyone interested to inspect the accounts. Dr. Wilton concluded by stating that he would like to support raising the precept and felt that this was the fairest way to preserve services.

Roger Beasley, asked for clarification on the Parish Council's reserves and this was given by Cllr. Malcolm Sage, Chairman of the Finance Committee who explained that the Council was obliged to keep in reserve a sum equating to approximately half the level of the precept. A considerable portion of the reserves were in the form of Government Stock which would be redeemed next year, but these funds could only be spent on capital projects, and a further sum was earmarked for specific projects such as maintenance of the Old School building . MR. Beasley felt it would be financially irresponsible not to continue grants to village organisations. The Chairman confirmed that the Parish Council would not disagree with this, but that payment of grants amounted to 25% of expenditure and it would not be possible to prop up a cost structure which relied on raiding reserves year on year, although he did confirm that the Council would be looking at the level of reserves held.

Mike Rowe felt that the community was fortunate in the level of services and facilities available and that to raise the precept would give greater control over these facilities.

Miles Robinson asked if it would be likely that Parishes could take control of Car Parks, but Cllr. Jon Freeman (WSC) explained that this funding represented the District Council's greatest resource and that without it they would be in an even worse financial state.

Tony Pinnington felt that the precept support was very small in relation to how much organisations such as the Village Hall Committee raised themselves and he felt that there was considerable disparity in the level of grants given. He suggested that Committees should bid for the level of grant they required.

A member of the audience did not feel that the PC should be given a blank cheque to raise the precept and asked at what level of increase the Parish Council would feel it had a mandate from the community. The Chairman confirmed that £30K would be the maximum and that beyond this the community would be consulted again.

There followed a minor exchange of views on how best to raise funds and at the request of a member of the audience the Members of the Parish Council introduced themselves and gave brief details of background etc.

There then followed a show of hands which was overwhelmingly in favour of raising the precept rather than cutting support to village services and organisations.