

**Bruton Town Council Budget 2025/26, Town Meeting 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**Introduction**

Bruton Town Council sets a budget each year based on predicted income and expenditure. This enables a 'precept demand', or the amount that needs to be raised to meet predicted expenditure within that year, to be submitted to Somerset Council by the end of January.

Somerset Council includes the amount requested by the Town Council in the Council Tax bill received by householders, usually in March. This amount is listed along with the amounts for Somerset Council, Adult and Social Care, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue and Avon and Somerset Police. The total amount due is split into ten equal payments.

The Town Council budget for 2025/26 was initially considered at the Finance and Resources Committee meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The budget is particularly difficult this year for a number of reasons:

Somerset Council

Somerset Council is currently experiencing some financial difficulties which means that additional costs will be passed onto the Town Council:

- Somerset Council are intending to devolve some assets (open or green spaces such as Riverside Walk, for example) to town and parish councils. Bruton Town Council still seems to be, given our small size, down the list to engage with. No details have been provided yet on what the cost implications of devolving these assets could be.
- Somerset Council intends to charge for some services, for example emptying of waste and dog waste bins that are sited on land that the Town Council is responsible for. The litter and dog waste bins at Jubilee Park, and a bin at Cuckoo Hill Cemetery, will incur a charge for regular emptying, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.
- An Enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot Scheme has been introduced by Somerset Council. This is an 'opt in' service, which will enable parish and town councils to request an enhanced highways services. For example, services such as emptying and jetting of gullies (the grids and water run offs at the edge of roads), re-marking of roads where the lines have faded, sign cleaning, and grass verge cutting.

### Bruton Town Council Assets

There are a number of Bruton Town Council assets that require significant maintenance, or indeed complete replacement, in the near future:

- The Engine Shed requires significant maintenance, and a new roof. These works are urgent.
- The bus shelters (Plox and outside the church) need replacing.
- The maintenance of St Mary's churchyard is responsibility of the Town Council. This includes gravestones, memorials and the perimeter walls. The full extent of what is required is currently being investigated. The cost implication is significant, but unknown at this stage.
- Jubilee Park walls. The condition survey is still to be received, but the likelihood of significant repairs will be required. Again, the cost implication is great, but unknown at this stage.

### **Income**

Bruton Town Council has few sources of income:

- Bank Account Interest. Interest rates have been much higher recently. The interest received from putting funds into a higher rate savings account has therefore been higher than anticipated. From April to November, roughly £1,000 per month in interest has been received.
- Cemetery fees and allotment rents both generate some income, and the rates and fees are reviewed annually. The income from these services is designed to support the maintenance required in these areas, and not to be profit making.

The main source of income is the precept:

The precept, or the amount that the Town Council needs to raise to support the budget that is set, is the difference between the predicted income and the predicted expenditure. Somerset Council uses a formula to calculate this amount, based on the number of properties within the Bruton parish boundary.

If the precept amount (requested by the Town Council) is raised by £1000, this means that the council tax for a Band D property in Bruton will increase by £1 a year (10p per month). If the precept is increased by £100,000, the Town Council part of the council tax for a Band D property in Bruton will increase by £100 per year (£10 per month).

## **Expenditure**

The predicted expenditure includes the assets and services provided by the Town Council, and also the administration to enable the Town Council to function. Each expense area has a 'Budget Line' or name. Budget lines are considered quite closely, by viewing the current expenditure (year to date), and a best guess at what is likely to be spent next year using any information available. Some budget lines are newly introduced for next year, as spending has not been incurred for these areas previously.

Spending increases are certain for some areas:

- The Closed Churchyard. Over the next few years, a significant amount of work is required to make some gravestones and memorials safe. The perimeter walls require maintenance works. A budget line for gravestones and memorials has been created. The budget lines for walls maintenance in future years has been increased.
- Heritage Assets.
  - Engine shed. The roof on the Engine Shed needs replacing. The chimney needs repointing, as do the walls. The building is Grade II listed, and listed building consent will need to be applied for. The initial estimate for the new roof and other works is £25,000.
  - Patwell pump. Some minor maintenance is required, and this is likely to cost a few hundred pounds.
  - The war memorial will require works in the future, to be considered more closely in the next year or two.
  - Bus shelters. Both of the bus shelters need to be replaced at some stage in the next couple of years. This will be reconsidered at budget setting next year.
  - Car park. The Town Council is responsible for a number of car parking areas, which will require maintenance in the future. A sinking fund of £5,000 is to be created to plan for future maintenance.
- Tree maintenance.
  - The Town Council is responsible for a vast number of trees. There are planned works due in the next 12 months, but additional provision needs to be made for any urgent or unplanned works, and future maintenance.

The Town Council provides various services and projects. There are additional budget lines this year, introduced as a result of some services provided previously Somerset Council that will now incur a charge.

- Enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot (EHMP), new budget line. This is an enhanced service provided by Somerset Council, for small highways works such as line painting, sign cleaning, and occasional verge cutting. The Town Council is considering an amount of £2,000 for this enhanced service.
- Emptying of litter and dog waste bins. There are 6 bins that will incur a charge for being emptied, £6.50 per time, which means a charge of £19.50 per week. Each of these bins is emptied three times per week. There is a bin at the Cuckoo Hill cemetery, to be emptied once a week. The Town Council is considering an amount of £7,000 for this service.
- Gully clearance. This service is provided by the Enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot, at a fee of £1,400 per day, for between 80 to 100 gullies to be cleared. There are 783 gullies in the Bruton parish boundary. The Town Council is considering an amount of £13,000 for this service which would will clear most of the gulleys a single time, per annum.

The Town Council has a small team of officers, providing support for the services, assets, projects and actioning the decisions made by the Town Council

- Staff costs
  - The recent changes in Employers National Insurance will mean an increase in the staff costs budget line.
  - Annual pay award. A best guess will be made as to what the agreed pay award is likely to be in the coming year, and the associated increase in pension contributions.

### **Reserves and Contingency Fund**

The Town Council does hold some cash reserves: General Reserves and Earmarked Reserves.

General Reserves is the general cash fund which supports the cash flow for the Town Council and also covers costs for unforeseen circumstances or events. Guidelines recommend that at least three months of expenditure is held in General Reserves, or between 25 to 50 percent of the precept amount. The Town Council General Reserves have been depleted over the past couple of years, and the aim is to build this reserve up gradually to a more prudent level.

Earmarked Reserves are funds that are set aside for particular projects, or service areas. Some may be labelled as ‘sinking funds’. This indicates that this is a contingency fund for future maintenance that will be expensive. It is a way to build up a fund to meet these costs. Earmarked Reserves are reviewed regularly by the Town Council and as part of the annual budget setting process.

### Budget Proposal for 2025/26

Budget Line title	2024/25	2025/26
<b>New spending</b>		
Gravestones		£10,000
Heritage assets (Engine Shed, Patwell Pump, car park sinking fund)		£30,500
Tree maintenance (In year)		£3,000
Enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot		£2,000
Bin emptying		£7,000
Gulley clearance		£13,000
Tree sinking fund (future maintenance)		£5,000
Building up level of General Reserves		£30,000
<b>Increased spending</b>		
Walls Maintenance sinking fund	£5,000	£10,000
Play area	£1,087	£1,691
Other maintenance	£10,610	£15,905
Council administration	£14,451	£18,415
Services and projects	£26,250	£32,337
Staff costs	£77,400	£83,500
<b>All other</b>	£58,821	£51,100
<b>Total expenditure budget</b>	<b>£193,319</b>	<b>£313,448</b>
Estimated Income	£5,694	£7,254
<b>Total required (precept request)</b>	<b>£181,675</b>	<b>£306,200</b>

For a Band D property in Bruton, this means the Town Council amount of the property council tax for 2025/26 would be £304.60. This is an increase of £119.68 from the previous year which is £11.97 per month (10 months) or £2.30 per week (52 weeks).

The 2025/26 proposed budget will be discussed further at Finance and Resources Committee meeting on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025. Recommendations for the budget and the precept taken to full council for final approval on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025. The precept demand will also be agreed at this full council meeting.

**END OF REPORT**