

Bruton Town Council supporting budget notes 21st January 2025

Introduction

The 'first pass' at the budget setting started at the Finance and Resources Committee meeting on 19th November 2024. Budget proposals have been discussed further at Finance and Resources Committee on 3rd December, and also 13th January 2025. There was a Town Meeting held on 7th January 2025, to invite residents to attend and ask questions or make comments. The budget is particularly difficult this year for a number of reasons.:

- The impact of devolution of services and assets from Somerset Council still remains largely unknown.
- The introduction of charges for the emptying of some waste/dog waste bins has now been confirmed by Somerset Council, with details of the charges and the precise bins. This is a new cost to the Town Council.
- There are a number of Bruton Town Council assets that require significant maintenance, or indeed complete replacement, in the next one or two years. For example, the Engine Shed (significant maintenance), and the bus shelters (complete replacement, to be considered in the next budget year).
- The closed churchyard, for which the responsibility lies with the town council, requires significant works around the gravestones, memorials and the perimeter walls. The full extent of this is unknown, but the implication is great.
- Jubilee Park walls. The condition survey is still to be received. There is likely to be significant repairs required, but at this stage unknown.
- General reserves have been gradually depleted over the past few years. A mechanism to gradually increase these reserves to a more prudent level needs to be implemented from this year.

Income

The town council income sources are few.

- The low risk, short term investment (CCLA) has increased income this year beyond what was anticipated (from April to November, roughly £1000 per month in interest). It is hoped that this will continue into the next year, but interest rates are predicted to be lower, and the current monthly level of interest will reduce as the year progresses (the account balance will reduce).
- Cemetery rates and allotment rent levels were reviewed in January 2025, and remain unchanged for this year). This income is designed to support the maintenance of these areas, and are not designed to be profit making.

Precept (amount that the council needs to raise to meet the proposed budget expenditure).

The precept amount is determined as the difference between the expenditure budget prediction, and the income prediction. A budget must be set and approved by Full Council each year in January in order to set the Precept Demand. Further information about this can be found in the [Budget Briefing](#) for the Town Meeting on 7th January 2025

Expenditure

Budget lines have been considered, one by one, as per the order on the budget spreadsheet. Generally, the proposed budget level is based on the forecast or actual expenditure for the current year. The new, or significantly increased budget lines will be considered one by one, as per the order on the spreadsheet, in the first instance.

- Churchyard. New budget line for gravestones and memorials. The churchyard walls will be considered as part of walls maintenance reserve, which, to be increased £5000 to £10000.
- Assets (Heritage Assets). This will be a new cost centre, for the main assets of the town council that currently do not feature elsewhere in the budget.
 - Engine shed. Two contactors, of the three approached, have recommended that the roof needs to be fully replaced. This is an involved process –the building is Grade II listed, the conservation officer needs to be consulted regarding the type of tiles that are acceptable. Listed building consent is likely to be required. Scaffolding is required – possibly cantilevered to avoid placing the scaffold in the river. The cost of the scaffold is likely to be 50% of the total cost of the required works. It would make sense to ensure that any repointing is completed whilst the scaffolding is in situ. A guesstimate of the cost is in the budget line.
Update – The Town Clerk is liaising with the Somerset Council Planning South Conservation Officer, to discuss roof tiles and the need for Listed Building Consent, before the contractors are able to provide a more detailed estimate for the works.
 - Patwell pump. To complete the recommended short term works.
 - War memorial. The works on the war memorial are not considered urgent, and there is the possibility of grant funding to support the recommended works. This is to be looked at in the next few years, but not in 2025/26.

- Bus shelters. Bus shelter replacement will be considered during budget setting next year.
- Car park. Car park maintenance (other than Station Road Car Park) will be built into the 'other maintenance' budget line.
- Other maintenance.
 - The 'other maintenance' budget line included the grounds maintenance for areas such as Burrowfield, Mill Dam, Church Bridge. This is to be a separate budget line 'other grounds maintenance'.
 - Other maintenance will now be additional maintenance around the town that cannot be predicted. The arbitrary figure of £3000 now reads £3800, to include car park maintenance.
 - Tree maintenance is a new budget line. Works are planned at Crown Green/Packhorse Bridge, the willow, and the apple tree.
- Christmas Trees. Councillors felt, especially whilst the budget is due to increase significantly, that providing the large Christmas tree only next year, rather than the individual trees, was a prudent consideration.
- Station Road Car Park. The rent is has been calculated using the All Items RPI for December 2024, which was 392.10.
- Council administration. The website outsource budget line is new. This is to outsource the support for the website.
- Services and Projects. An additional line for financing a regular venue for the youth project has been introduced. There are additional budget lines introduced as a result of the services possibly not being provided by, or being charged by, Somerset Council.
 - Enhanced Highways Maintenance Pilot (EHMP), new budget line. This is an arbitrary amount, to consider additional small highways works. For example, line painting, SID post, sign cleaning, occasional verge cutting.
 - Bin emptying, new budget line. Somerset Council have confirmed that the charges for emptying bins next year is £6.50 per bin per collection. Bruton Town Council is due to be charged for the bins at Jubilee Park.
 - Gulley clearance, new budget line. Councillors have suggested one day for gulley clearing, which is £1400 for 80-100 gullies to be cleared and jetted. Councillors wish to observe how Somerset Council is going to manage gulley clearance. (The grid in the gutter at the side of the road, and the drainage tunnels that join them are referred to as gullies.)

- Staff costs
 - Salaries to be increased to take into account the annual pay increase, and also scale point rises for staff.
 - The change in national insurance will be a cost implication.
 - There will be a 'knock on' effect with pension contributions.
- Grants are as listed. Community Grant applications have been carefully considered by the Finance and Resources Committee.
- Reserves. Earmarked reserves were reviewed at the last Finance and Resources meeting, with recommendations to full council on 26th November, which have been actioned.
 - A reserves policy has been drafted. Councillors feel that the level of General Reserves needs to be at the recommended level of 25% of Net Revenue expenditure. This means the difference between income and expenditure, but not including any proposed transfers to Earmarked Reserves. This figure can be considered when the rest of the budget is agreed.

Conclusion

The proposed budget is presented in a spreadsheet format. Actual figures to date are detailed, up to 31st December 2024. Where possible, a forecast for that budget has also been provided.

The proposed budget will be discussed by councillors, and the final figure will be set at the meeting on 21st January 2025.

END OF REPORT