

Budget for 2024-25 and our Parish Precept

Although inflation has dropped significantly, the cost of living, driven largely by higher energy prices, means that almost everything costs significantly more than it did in 2022. Not only will that be affecting us all, but it also reflects on the costs of maintaining Ashwell's facilities that are managed by the parish council, as explained in the financial statement contained in the Yearbook (see extract below).

Parish council finances

Actual spend 2023-24

In 2023-24 we expect to get more income and spend less than the £111,912 originally budgeted. The underspend will be around £4,700. The main contributors to this are:

- Increased income from the cemetery
- The actual timing of the build of rabbit-proof fencing at Small Gains meant that the cost came out of the previous year's budget (2022-23)
- A slightly higher level of staff vacancy than anticipated
- Lower Yearbook print costs

Budget 2024-25

As in past years, the approach to the Budget has been to preserve the level of services and make prudent contributions for large one-off costs likely to crop up in the next few years. Once again, there have been inflationary pressures in the economy and it is getting harder to find local contractors to take on work at competitive rates. In the last three years it has not been possible to fully fill the parish council officer positions due to sickness and because of difficulty recruiting. Last year we expected to be able to address this to some degree, but not completely. In 2024-25 we plan to have a full establishment and make a small additional provision for professional accounting support. There have been increases in the fees and charges we make but, apart from burial costs, they have been modest. The parish council's view remains the same: fees are a small proportion of its income and we want to make it as easy as possible for villagers to play sport and maintain allotments, for example. Overall, this approach meant that the parish precept increased by 16.6% (this is the amount that goes to the parish out of your Council Tax). The effect on each household is an additional £17.22 (16.5%) annually for a Band D property.

Where the money will go

The parish spends money on a range of services, classified according to the categories below:

- Recreation Ground, pavilions and playground
- Support for our streets
- Cemetery and burials
- The Springs
- St Mary's Churchyard and the Parish Clock
- Small Gains - sports field and allotments
- War Memorial
- Other parish assets
- Community communication
- Community projects and grants
- Local representation
- Yearbook (mostly covered by advertising income)

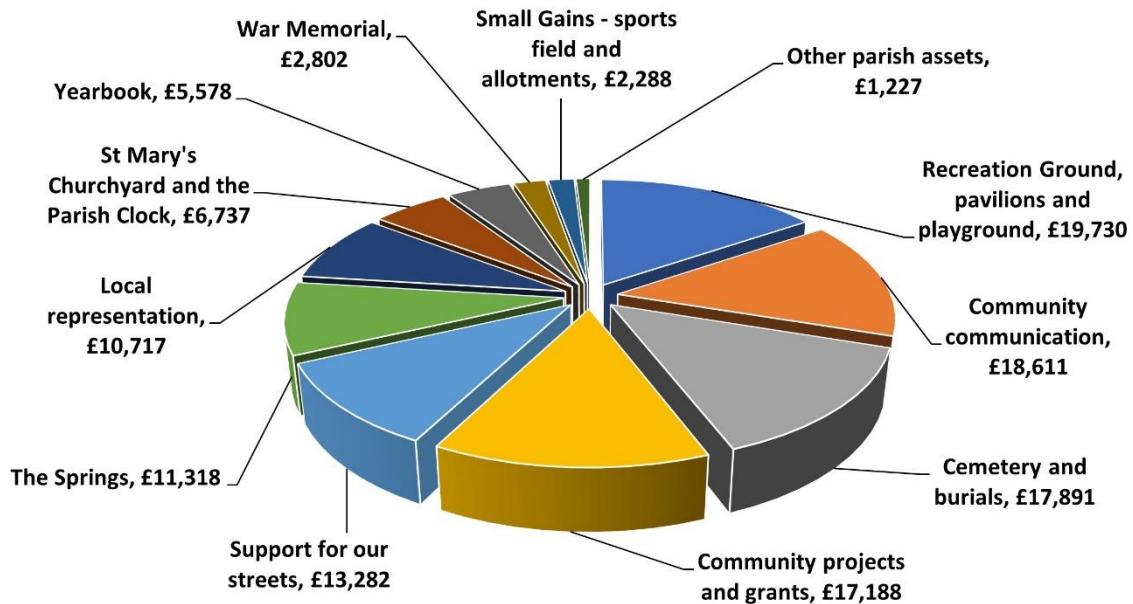
Aside from items like 'Cemetery and burials' whose purpose is obvious, the descriptions of three of our services would benefit from a short explanation.

Community communication. We deal with parishioner requests and queries and look for answers, often by consulting other bodies such as North Herts Council or the county. The parish council also needs to keep up-to-date with developments in public services that affect people here.

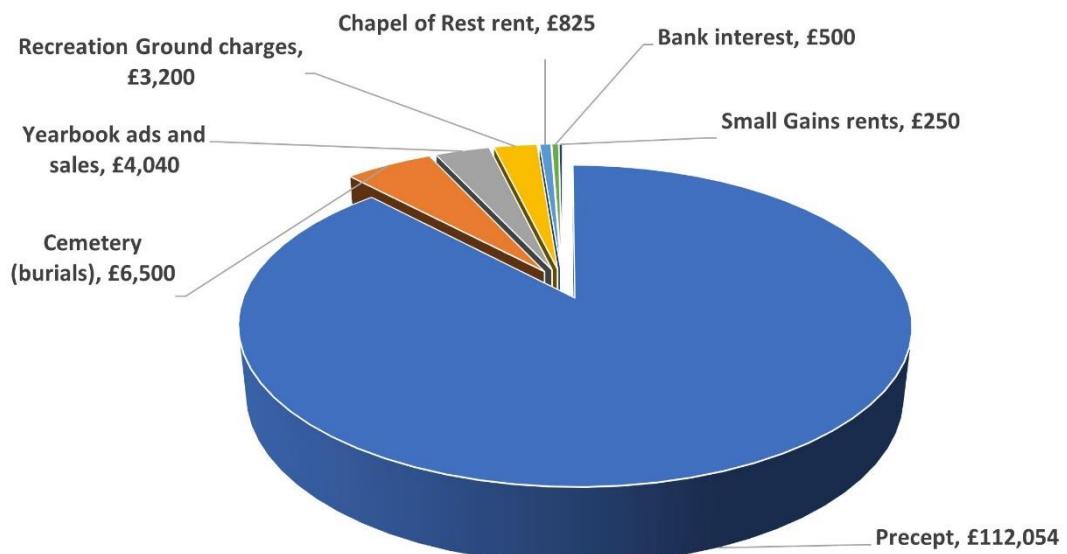
Community projects and grants. In the past, initiatives like the Neighbourhood Plan have taken much time from staff and volunteers alike. This kind of work continues now with the Pavilion replacement project, safer routes to the station, speeding campaign at the school and other initiatives.

Local representation. The council is made up of individuals appointed by a democratic process to represent the local community. It promotes the interests of parishioners by, for example, responding to North Herts Council planning applications on their behalf. In doing so, it has to run meetings and keep records.

The cost of staff time spent on administrative tasks, and of general expenses (keeping accounts, insurance, bank charges, etc) are spread across services pro rata.



Where the money will come from



Norton Mahy (Vice chair)

If you are interested in further detail then please do look on the website

<https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/budgets-and-audits/>

If that doesn't answer your questions, then you can get in touch.