

TILEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

Serving the Communities of Birch Copse, Calcot, Denefield and Westwood

ANNUAL PARISH REPORT May 2022

Chairman's Introduction

Due to the Covid epidemic, the Parish Council faced unusual challenges throughout most of the year 2021/22. In spring, changes to Covid legislation meant remote meetings would no longer be permitted. As a result, the Annual Parish Council meeting was brought forward to early May so that it could be held remotely. At the meeting, it was agreed it would be safer not to hold face-to-face meetings again immediately. Instead we would meet informally over the summer and give the Clerk delegated authority to carry out much of the day-to-day work. At our first in-person meeting in September, all decisions made since the last official meeting in May were ratified. Thankfully, since then, we have been able to continue holding face-to-face meetings of Full Council, although our various working parties have generally chosen to continue meeting remotely.

A very big thank you must go to Jacky Major (Clerk), Cindy (Administrative Assistant) and Mark (Maintenance Officer) who worked extremely hard to ensure things continued running smoothly from the time the first lockdown started throughout all the changes and unusual regulations of the year. I'm pleased to say they have now been joined by a new Maintenance Officer, Ian, and an Administrative Assistant, Sarah, which completes the team of five. I am also delighted to announce that Jacky has passed the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA), a foundation qualification for clerks. Congratulations to Jacky who has had to show a great deal of commitment to achieve the qualification, particularly with the added challenges of national restrictions and being short-staffed.

Spring 2021 saw a gradual lifting of national Covid restrictions which meant outdoor sports such as football could be resumed. It also became possible to start allowing restricted use of the parish's three halls which were opened at half capacity and with risk assessments and additional Covid conditions in place.

Over the course of the year, there has been a number of changes on the Parish Council, and we have been pleased to welcome Nigel Furlong-King, Theresa Downes, Julie Slevin and Sandra Vickers as new councillors. They are already proving to be interested and valuable new members.

I am extremely happy to see the new Jubilee Annexe opening up for community use on schedule and within budget. This was an ambitious project to provide a new multi-purpose facility for a wide range of community uses. Whilst we have focussed initially on the needs of local youth, we want to make sure this is a resource for the entire local community. It looks really smart, uses clean energy and was built as sustainably as we could manage. Thanks to the steering group managing this project under Councillor Clive Taylor's leadership.

Councillor Kevin Page
Chairman of Tilehurst Parish Council

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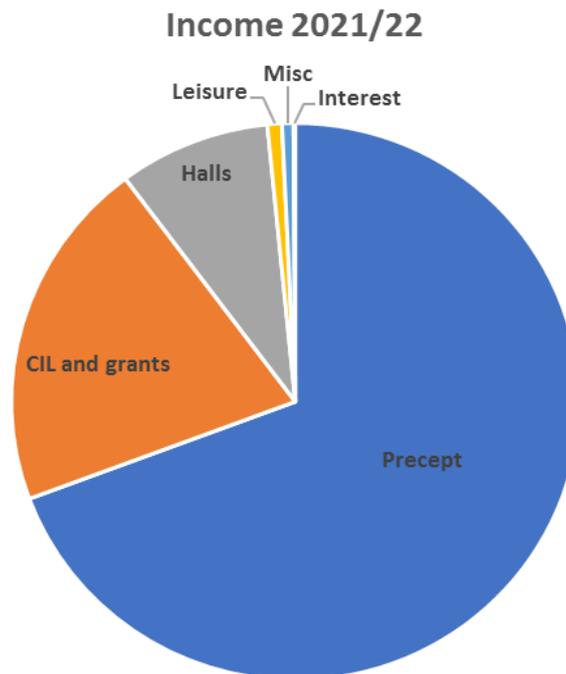
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COUNCIL FINANCES

The Parish Council precept is the part of the Council Tax bill which funds the services provided by Tilehurst Parish Council. For the 2021/22 financial year, the precept (annual charge) for a Band D household was £51.20 and the Parish Council decided not to increase it for the 2022/23 (ie current) financial year.

Tilehurst Parish Council income and expenditure 2021/22:

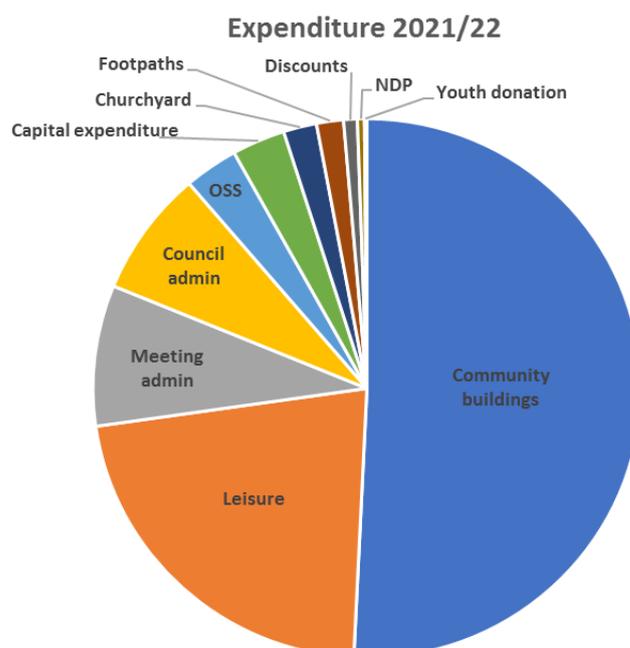
Income	£	%
Precept	284,858	69.33
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and grants	83,958	20.45
Hall lettings	35,468	8.64
Leisure and recreation (football pitch hire)	2,656	0.83
Leases and miscellaneous income	3,395	0.65
Interest received	421	0.10
Total	410,756	100.00



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Expenditure	£	%
Maintenance of community buildings	184,014	50.77
Leisure and recreation	80,540	21.98
Administration of council and committee meetings	30,943	8.45
Council administration (excluding staff costs)	27,658	7.55
Other specialised services (OSS) (ie contract with Berkshire Youth)	11,702	3.19
Capital expenditure (projects/renewal of assets)	11,507	3.14
Upkeep of St Michael's Churchyard	7,175	1.96
Footpaths and street lighting	5,838	1.59
Donations to local organisations and discounted hall use	2,976	0.81
Production of Neighbourhood Development Plan	1,540	0.42
Donation from the youth budget	500	0.14
Total	364,393	100.00



One source of income for the parish is the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) from new planning developments and, over the next few months, the Parish Council will be looking at how best to use these funds to benefit residents.

An ongoing impact of Coronavirus has been that income from the halls has remained lower than usual over the past year. The situation is likely to improve over the next financial year.

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The three buildings which the Parish Council owns and maintains are the Calcot Centre (and new Jubilee Annexe, see below), Cornwell Centre, and Turnhams Farm Hall. All the halls are available for hire by individuals and groups in the community, and there is also a wide range of regular hirers which helps cover the costs of running and maintaining the halls.

If there is any surplus income from letting out the halls, the money is reinvested in the buildings and is put towards the costs of decorating or improving the facilities.

Jubilee Annexe - Following the closure of Calcot Community Association (CCA), it was necessary to completely refurbish the annexe at Highview. The Council put together an ambitious plan to develop a new multi-purpose facility for the local community, as sustainably as possible given the age and construction of the building. The work was funded by a grant for £50,000 from West Berkshire Council which was match-funded by the Parish Council. The end of March deadline for completion was met, and the impressive new facility was officially opened on Wednesday 20 April by Councillor Rick Jones, Vice Chairman of West Berkshire Council for 2021-22.

Following consultation with local residents, the name chosen for the hall is the Jubilee Annexe, and it is now available for hire. We intend that it will also be a centre for local young people and the council is working closely with Berkshire Youth to facilitate this.

Details about all the halls, together with information on how to book them, may be found on the Parish Council's web site – www.tilehurstparishcouncil.gov.uk – under Parish Amenities.

Cotswold Sports Centre – West Berkshire Council leases the Sports Centre from us and, as part of the Lease Agreement, the Parish Council contributes 50% of the deficit in running costs. This year, that payment amounted to £12,748.42.

The Lease Agreement itself is due for renewal, and this is a task for the Clerk, with advice from the solicitor and support from Parish Councillors.

St Michael's Churchyard, Tilehurst – The churchyard on New Lane Hill is deemed "closed" as it has no capacity for further planned burials. In February 2017, the Parish Council agreed to take on the costs of and responsibility for general maintenance of the site. This includes grass cutting, tree work, and so on, but excludes the lychgate (roofed gateway entrance) and actual graves. The Parish Council budgets £12,500 per annum for Churchyard maintenance.

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PARISH COUNCIL FACILITIES

Recreation grounds and halls

The recreation grounds are used for various activities including the hiring of the eight football pitches to five local adults' six children's football clubs.

Sadly, there have continued to be fairly regular acts of anti-social behaviour at all sites around the parish. Incidents range from graffiti, setting light to bins and playground equipment, to dismantling benches and pulling down guttering. Although we can deal with some of the damage and repairs in-house, the effect of vandalism is still a significant cost to parishioners.

Over the past year, the CCTV systems at all sites have been improved and updated. The footage is very helpful in deterring and reporting incidents of anti-social behaviour and recordings have enabled the police to identify the culprits.

In parallel with the CCTV enhancement, the Parish Council entered into a contract with youth services charity "Berkshire Youth" to provide evening and school holiday detached youth work services in our parks. A working party was also set up involving councillors, council staff, youth workers and local police to review and implement changes to reduce anti-social behaviour.

At Calcot, the ravine alongside the footpath from the car park to the Bath Road flooded late last year. It was found that the culvert was blocked, and this was reported to West Berkshire Council, who owns the ravine. Once the problem was fixed, the Parish Council was able to make good the damage to the footpath itself.

Greenham Trust celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2022 and to mark the occasion – and to support the Queen's Platinum Jubilee – it offered free trees to local projects, charities, community groups and parish councils. The Clerk submitted an application and Tilehurst Parish Council was given 25 small (60-80cm) bird cherry trees (*Prunus avium*). In February, six trees were planted at Calcot, with the remaining 19 being put in various locations at Cornwell recreation ground. Sadly, many of the trees have now been uprooted and vandalised.

New contractors have been appointed for the grounds maintenance and for the grass cutting at all recreation grounds and play areas for the next three years.

Councillors have recently completed a survey of the recreation grounds and play areas with a view to improving facilities over the coming year. All decisions made by the Parish Council will be recorded in the minutes of meetings which may be found on the council's web site.

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COMMUNITY

Support

The Parish Council continues to support various groups in the community by allowing them to use parish sites for events:

- Barton Rovers Football Club used Turnhams Farm recreation ground for its Annual Tournament
- Westwood Farm Community Association holds its Easter Farm at Cotswold recreation ground and will also hold an event to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee there
- Westwood Pre-school playgroup will hold its summer fayre at Cotswold recreation ground in June
- A donation of £500 was made to Tilehurst Junior Youth Club
- Reading Age UK received a £1,000 donation.

This year marks Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee and various events will be held at recreation grounds in the parish. Additionally, the Parish Council put aside £1,000 to assist local organisations and groups who are arranging celebration events from Thursday 2 to Sunday 5 June 2022.

Engagement

The Parish Council also aims to engage with the community when possible, for example over choosing the name for the refurbished annexe at Calcot.

Community engagement was also undertaken before putting in new fencing at Turnhams Farm recreation ground. As a result, the decision was made to install a gate which will usually be locked open but can be locked closed should it be necessary.

Policing

Since the relaxation of Covid restrictions, regular meetings between the Clerk and PCSOs have been re-established. These discussions provide a valuable opportunity for two-way communication on local issues and ways of tackling them, as well as being a way for the Clerk to seek informal but important advice.

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Neighbourhood Plan

The Parish Council is working on a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), so that the community has a say in how Tilehurst develops. A steering group was tasked with gathering evidence, engaging with the community, understanding legal requirements and producing a plan.

Over the past year we were happy to welcome new members to the Steering Group. For the first time we are operating at full strength with ten members, of whom three are Parish Councillors and the rest are local volunteers.

The goalposts have moved several times while we've been working on the plan with new government ministers each setting different expectations around local planning. Despite this, we have made good progress and, following on from the informative residents' survey and further engagement and consultation with West Berkshire Council, we are now very close to a consultation period where we'll be inviting your feedback on the NDP. You should be hearing more about this shortly, and we are looking forward to seeing your response to the consultation.

Youth survey

In the summer of 2021 and in conjunction with our youth service partner Berkshire Youth, the Parish Council undertook a comprehensive survey of young people aged 11 to 18 years primarily attending our two secondary schools at Little Heath and Denefield. The survey questions covered a wide range of subjects many of which were included following consultation with young people at both schools.

Over 1,100 young people participated, way exceeding the planned target of 100, and the results have provided a wealth of information for both the Parish Council and other local government departments. Young people told us they want more activity focussed clubs and youth clubs in the Parish and considerable improvements in our parks ranging from seating, lighting, equipment and improved safety.

The Parish Council has two working parties now meeting regularly to implement changes at all our parks and to introduce youth activities at the new Jubilee Annexe in Calcot. Look out for changes and initiatives during 2022 and going into 2023.

Future Projects

At a meeting early in the new financial year, the Parish Council will review projects to be undertaken over the coming year. The decisions will be recorded in the minutes which will be made available on the web site.

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PLANNING

As well as the usual domestic applications for changes and improvements to homes in the parish, there has been a number of larger proposed developments in the area.

- Pincents Hill – After being refused by Eastern Area Planning Committee, this application was referred to District Planning Committee which, after consideration, also refused it. Tilehurst Parish Council objected to the application at all three consultation stages and made representations in person at both West Berkshire planning meetings. Many parishioners expressed their objections at Parish Council meetings during the 3-year duration of this application.
- Pincents Manor – The planning application for 50 care apartments has yet to be decided. The parish council has not objected to this proposal but has raised questions on certain aspects including access, parking and public transport.
- Calcot Golf Course – The potential developer and the golf club have recently held a public consultation to seek views before the likely submission of an application for up to 66 homes. As with all large applications the Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group has been listening closely to the views of parishioners on this proposal and will continue to do so.
- Stonehams Farm – The development of 66 new houses at Dark Lane is nearing completion, while the application for a 64-bed care home has been approved although work does not yet appear to have commenced.

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THE PARISH COUNCIL

Tilehurst Parish Council is made up three separate wards and can have up to 18 councillors in total. Current councillors are:

Ward	Councillor
Tilehurst North (maximum eight councillors)	Mr K Page – Parish Council Chairman Mrs R Reynolds Mr T Marino Mr G Dennis
Tilehurst Central (maximum nine councillors)	Mr C Taylor – Vice Chairman of Council Mrs M Murnane Mrs J Lane Ms A Foster Mrs T Downes Mr N Furlong-King Mrs J Slevin
Tilehurst Calcot (maximum one councillor)	Mrs S Vickers

This means there are six vacancies on the Parish Council as at April 2022. Anyone who would like to know more about the role or who wishes to apply should please contact the Clerk by e-mailing clerk@tilehurstpc.co.uk or calling 0118 941 8833.

Meetings of Full Council are held on the second Tuesday of each month and members of the public are welcome to attend. Every meeting has an allocated time for questions from members of the public. If you would like to watch a meeting or ask a question, it would be helpful to advise the Clerk in advance. Agendas and minutes of meetings may be found on the Parish Council's web site – www.tilehurstparishcouncil.gov.uk