

## CLERKS REPORT – November 2013

### Agenda Items

**5b) Minute 56a) Incident in the Recreation Ground, Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October & Draft Policy for user groups to facilitate the landing of air ambulance** - Cllr. Brett Norris has been investigating the incident between the Mere Reserve Football team and the Emergency Services that took place in the Recreation Ground on Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> October. He has received accounts of the incident from the Manager of the Mere Reserve team, the Referee and a witness. The accounts vary slightly and it is difficult to confirm and provide a complete break down of events that led to this unfortunate incident. It would appear that once the Football team were aware that the emergency helicopter wanted to land in the Recreation Ground then the football game was stopped and the pitch cleared. However, after the helicopter had landed and the medics were dispatched, the referee took the decision (without consulting with the police who were present) to restart the match to finish the last few minutes of the first half of the match. This decision necessitated the PCSO to intervene and order the game to be stopped and the pitch to be cleared again in the interests of public safety and so as not to delay the air ambulance when it needed to take off. It would seem, at this point, that some of the players started to argue with the PCSO. Eventually, the players left the pitch, waited for the air ambulance to leave and then continued with the game without further incident.

It would seem that the Mere Recreation Ground and the Duchy Manor Sports Grounds are used as suitable landing places by the air ambulance and this is something that the Parish Council would wholeheartedly support. Therefore, to avoid this sort of incident happening again, perhaps the Parish Council ought to adopt a policy procedure which should be sent out to all organised groups using the recreation ground and the Duchy Manor Sports fields.

The Parish Clerk has provided a draft policy for members to consider below:

### Policy for the clearance of sports grounds and recreation grounds in the event of air ambulance landing

Organised user groups of the Mere Peace Memorial Sports & Recreation Ground (Mere Rec) and Duchy Manor Sports Ground should be made aware that these open spaces are regularly used as landing sites by the air ambulance in the event of emergencies. The Parish Council supports the use of these open spaces by the air ambulance and would therefore expect organised user groups to co-operate with the emergency services to facilitate the use of the grounds and to enable the emergency services to carry out their work as quickly and efficiently as possible and without impeding them in any way.

- If you become aware that the air ambulance wants to land in the sports ground, please clear the area as quickly as possible. You may be aware that the air ambulance wants to land because the helicopter is circling the site or there may be other emergency vehicles or personnel in the area that ask you to clear the site in order for the helicopter to land.
- Remove any loose items/articles from the area such as plastic bags, boxes, bicycles and anything else which may be blown about by the downwash from the helicopter's rotor blades. This downwash can be quite strong.
- Keep all personnel/public at least 50m clear of the touchdown point.
- Once the helicopter has landed and shut down, it may be necessary to permit some vehicles, such as ambulances, to drive fairly close to where the helicopter is parked. Please check that all vehicular exits are clear and allow the medics to exit the ground as quickly as possible and remember that they may want to transfer a casualty to the helicopter once they have had a chance to assess the emergency/casualty.
- Keep the ground cleared until the air ambulance has left the site.

- On Take-Off, ensure all personnel/public are at least 50m clear of the helicopter. Do not let people near the landing site until the helicopter has definitely flown away. If the pilot has an engine problem during the first part of the take-off climb, the helicopter may return suddenly to the landing spot.

**6a) Highway, Traffic & Transport Priorities** – Draft Plan attached

**6b) Budget/Expenditure report at 30.9.13** attached

**9a) Proposals for siting and building specification for a club house in the Recreation Ground for Mere & District Railway Modellers (proposals attached)**

**11b) To approve report on Staffing Panel Meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2013 (Confidential Report attached)**

**11c) Council Tax Support 9 Impact on Town and Parish Councils** - Wiltshire Council is asking all Town & Parish Council's for consultation regarding the Localisation of Council Tax Support. This is a complex issue but one which each parish & town council will be affected by and will have to make a decision about how to cope with and so it is important that we respond:

When the parish council works out its budget and decides the amount it will collect in council tax from its residents the total amount is the precept. Wiltshire Council collects the parish council's share of the council tax (the precept) on their behalf (as it does for the police, fire etc). This means that there is just one demand but it is broken down for council tax payers so they can see how much they pay to each authority. After Wiltshire Council has collected council tax from residents it pays a lump sum (or sometimes in two parts) to the parish council. The total precept is split according to the amount paid by each council tax band and the council tax base is the average amount per band D property.

Council tax benefit payments have changed in that in the past, the benefit residents received was paid to local councils so councils would not notice any shortfall. The precept was divided between all council tax payers whether or not they actually paid it but received benefit. Following the Localisation of Council Tax Support, the amount of precept is divided by only those paying their council tax, meaning either;

- a) The amount of precept has to be divided by fewer people because it does not include those on benefit, meaning that those paying have to pay more
- b) The council has to cut the precept so that the demand on fewer people is not higher, therefore potentially cutting services, or
- c) Wiltshire Council receives a grant from central government to cover its shortfall for the above reasons.

Government said that it is expected that a share of the grant is paid to cover parish and town councils' shortfall but this was never legislated and therefore remains optional. Last year Wiltshire Council covered parish councils' shortfall but this year the grant from central government intended to cover these shortfalls is being cut (and is expected to be cut further year on year). The current consultation to parish and town councils is to consider what to do about the grant going forward. There are suggestions that parish councils in the future may be capped by central government meaning that they will not be able to put up the precept by a large percentage without a referendum. This means that if Wiltshire Council continues to give the grant and then in a few years it runs out, parish councils may find it difficult to put it up a large amount because of capping. It is not confirmed whether this will happen or not but it is worth considering when responding to the consultation.

I have detailed below Wiltshire Council's consultation questionnaire and I have taken the liberty of showing my provisional thoughts in italics:

A. What level of grant does your Parish Council think would be reasonable given the shortfall of funding being provided by the Coalition?

Options a) nil

b) reduce by Settlement Funding Assessment reduction

c) other

*The Parish Council feels it would be reasonable for Wiltshire Council to pass on the grant as reduced by the Settlement Funding Assessment – given Wiltshire Council's estimates, we calculate that for 2014/15 this would be an 18.2% reduction on last year's grant and that for 2015/16 it will be a further 26.8% reduction and for 2016/17 a further 7% reduction and for 2017/18 a further 7% reduction.*

B. Should all councils be supported to the same extent, or should the grant be concentrated on those Councils where the impact is greatest?

*The Parish Council feels that all Town & Parish Councils should be supported to the same extent as it ensures that every council, large and small, will receive something, even if it isn't as much as last year.*

C. Does your council support Town & Parish Councils being independent and not relying on a grant, if so over how many years would you wish to see this achieved?

*In an ideal world Parish & Town Council's should be independent and autonomous with the ability to raise a precept as it sees fit in the knowledge that it is accountable to its electorate. However, with the threat of capping being introduced by the Coalition Government we may no longer have the luxury of being independent. Whilst a grant is still being submitted by the Government, on the understanding (if not legislated) that it should be passed on to fund parish and town councils, then that should be the case. Wiltshire Council should remember that they are expecting Parish & Town Councils to provide or supplement a lot of services that were, prior to the recession and cut backs, not expected of us. Here in Mere, we have taken on responsibility for the two car parks in order to stop the introduction of car parking charges. We have taken on responsibility for the public toilets in order to stop them being closed. We have taken on the transfer of two assets (a bowls club and a band hut). We have been asked to make financial contributions towards Highway & Transport Schemes that we have submitted to our Community Area Transport Group, we are now expected to part fund fingerpost signs and many of the Area Board Grants that were previously approved for Parish & Town Councils are now refused on the assumption that they can raise the money through their precept. If we find ourselves in a situation where grant funding is ceased and we are capped, we may not be able to raise money through our precepts and we may find ourselves in a situation where we cannot maintain services and will be forced to hand them back.*

D. If you received no grant or a reduced grant would you favour a large increase in precept in 2014-15 to compensate for this or would you look to spread this over the next four years?

*If we receive no grant or a reduced grant we may feel it necessary to increase our precept by a larger percentage than we would like but I think it is unlikely that we would have the luxury of spreading this over the next four year due to the impending threat of capping. Some Parish & Town Councils are advocating large increases for 2014/15 in the probability that capping will be introduced before 2015/16. However, the threat of capping, if not introduced for 2014/15 is likely to be determined by the amount that Parish & Town Council's increase their council tax in 2014/15. In other words, if a large percentage of Parish & Town Councils increase their precepts by large amounts this coming year, then the Coalition Government will almost certainly introduce capping before the 2015/16 tax year.*

E. If the Coalition were to introduce a precept cap does your Council have sufficient reserves to compensate for a reduction in grant?

*The Council has sufficient reserves to operate, function and carry out its statutory duties. However, capping and a reduction in grant may result in the reduction of services, facilities, grants etc. (please see answer to 'C' above).*

F. Have you plans to reduce your budget over the next four years?

No

G. Are there any other issues you think we should consider?

## **Information Items**

### **The following planning applications have been determined:**

Application: 13/03679/TCA

Location: 1 The Grange, Water Street, Mere. BA12 6DZ

Proposal: T1 Beech, fell and remove.

Decision: No objection.

Decision Date: 17.10.13