

Appledore Parish Council Fourth Quarter Financial Report (January, February, March) and Year End Report 2020-2021

Taking into consideration unrepresented payments but not unrepresented invoices, as at the 31st March 2021 the bank account stood at £105,752.48.

Fourth Quarter Financial Report

Total Income (receipts) for the quarter £71,694.55.

The sale of the council field was finally completed. The cash share of the sale being £70,000 was paid to the council. The remainder being work in kind. The quarters solar panel fit payment of £267.64 was received. Additionally. £344.56 vat refund was applied for and received and Kent County Council granted the council the sum of £701.50 towards the website update required by the latest data protection regulations. The rest is bank interest.

Total Expenditure (payments before vat) for the period £5,244.02

Expenditure was mainly staffing costs but the services that the council provides are labour intensive.

With the return to lock down for a fourth time, the council continued to provide its street cleaning service and the toilets reopened at the start of March with the completion of the refurbishment works.

There has been no further expenditure on Highways Improvements Scheme so the ring-fenced amount remains at £19,238.

The Council Year in Review

The pandemic cast a long shadow over the year.

Starting with council's assets

Public conveniences (an asset and a service)

The public toilets were the most effected. The new electric meter installation was delayed by the first lockdown and was eventually fitted in August. The accidental cancellation of the council's fresh water account by Castle Water in 2019 is still creating difficulties. No bill has been produced by them for the entire year in spite of constant chasing to have the meter read and an invoice produced. The pandemic being the reason that no readers could attend. When a reader finally attended a new meter was required. This has only just been fitted. The public toilets were closed for most of the first lockdown. The council was not allowed to apply to the furlough scheme to assist with staffing costs while the toilets were closed. The provision of the toilets is personnel intensive and the council has been fortunate to have Beverley and Duncan Gray take such good care of the facility. The pandemic guidelines required more labour to provide safe facilities when they reopened. Although Hastings Direct Limited (Martello) had no requirement to start any refurbishment work before all the legal paperwork was completed, they started the refurbishment of the toilets. Again, the pandemic affected the delivery of materials and the later decision to replace the scratched windows should have only meant a couple of-weeks extension to completion, led to a 2-month delay. Many visitors, have commented positively on the modernisation. Another positive is that the broken drain cover outside the toilets is now scheduled to be replaced and some verge posts were installed free by highways which will prevent this happening again. We now have a new cleaner and we thank Beverley for the many years of service.

I was recently asked about how much it costs to run the public conveniences. I have to report that since 2015 there have been various issues: staff, the water and electricity supplies, which

have resulted in fluctuating costs each year. An educated guess would be £3500- £4500. Donations received are a small acknowledgement of thanks for keeping the facility open. The closures during the year lead to reduced running costs of about £1000.

The new car park for Court Lodge and achieving planning approval for the residential development on the council field have been extremely time consuming.

Council Field Sale

The move to virtual meetings slowed the progress of the application through the Ashford's Planning Committee. The difficulties of communicating only by email or phone have made it very difficult to pin down planning officers and Ashford lawyers to obtain responses. The residential development was approved in August 2020 by the planning committee but it has taken till March 12th for the contract between Ashford and the developer/council to be signed off. The contract known as a section 106 agreement sets various terms including developer payments (made during the build) to help with local and regional infrastructure (play areas, allotments, etc) is not a standard one as the parish council will own one of the houses dedicated to be an affordable home. The contract terms were rewritten to exclude the right to buy in respect of this house and the house will remain in the parish council ownership. With the paperwork signed, the cash part of the sale £70,000 has been received and the village hall refurbishment works have started.

Court Lodge Car Park

The new car park in Court Lodge Road has required consultation with the developer Court Developments Limited over highways road signs indicating it, car park drainage and final surfacing and the possible provision of electric charging points. Additionally, lack of building restriction in the sale contract between The Crown Estate and Court Developments Limited has resulted in more time being dedicated to responding to the developers planning applications for further houses on the land.

Council Services

Council services are very labour intensive. It keeps seven councillors and three members of staff very busy dealing with:

Highways Issues

The reduced speed limits scheme main works were completed in the previous year but it has taken regular contact with highways officers to bring the few remaining works to be completed. The 40mph road surface roundel near the recreation ground only just been lost as the area required resurfacing just recently. The council continues forward with sign rationalisation, and proposed gateways. It appears that the pedestrian crossing included within the planning application for the residential development for the council field may not come about as the footfall and traffic levels for the area is insufficient. Throughout the year, potholes, damaged curbs and broken lights have been reported.

Supporting the main local groups: Recreation Ground and Village Hall

With the completion of the sale of the council field, the hall has closed for refurbishment works. These works include essential unseen works required because of the age of the building that have not been addressed before such as complete rewiring and improving insulation to the walls and roofs plus an effective windows and heating system. The provision of three new spaces will provide the hall with greater income than before and lead to the hall becoming self-sufficient. At the same time the council representative will assist the hall committee to provide beneficial services to the community such as coffee mornings and lunches, cinema and more. The recreation ground will also benefit from the sale of council field with £16,000 worth of works

to facility once agreed between the parish council and recreation ground committee and some minor works to the play area.

Street Cleaning

Unaffected by the pandemic, Tom Hennessy kept the roads around the main areas of parish free of litter and as a result the parish has not suffered heavy fly-tipping and littering as reported on the news. However, the quieter lanes and runs to Ashford on the outskirts of the parish have seen an increase in littering and we are grateful to residents who have been collecting the rubbish along these roads.

New Website

On the other hand, the pandemic did facilitate the completion of the new data protection compliant website created so anyone can manage it and to reduce running costs. All councils are required to have a website and publish specific information on it. The previous website was hosted by Kent County Council who as part of a savings exercise decided to discontinue the service. It hoped that parishes would sign up to the new county commercial arm to run it at a fee of £900 a year. The new website will cost around £250 a year. Savings resulting from in-house design of the website by Councillor Vane were donated to the village hall at his request (£355). The county council website commercial arm never took off and the money was offered in grants to parishes to cover website update costs. The grant of £701.50 almost covered the set-up cost for the new website.

Minor Highways Works and Other works

No minor works to highways nor to minor assets were actioned in order to comply with covid guidelines to remain at home but for essential business. Similarly, there was no major unexpected spending so the allocate £1,000 was left virtually untouched but for just under £100 for a beautifully decorated and lit Christmas tree outside the Black Lion. Again, as there were no grant requests, the £1,000 donation budget remained intact.

In addition to the above the council spends as much time responding to planning application consultations locally and nationally and to its residents.

It requires staffing 24 hours 7 days a week. The work load is split between about 25 hours a week by paid staff and the rest is carried out by councillors for free. In order to provide this service, the council needs insurance, legal advice, human resources advice, training on planning, constant updates on the environmental and health issues, internal and external auditor, room hire/zoom, payroll provider, costs for paper, ink, advertising and more. These costs increase year on year. We remained within the budgeted cost (£18,500) though these did include £1,000 towards a new website.

In summary the council expenditure for the year was £24,170 as against its budget of £28,390. Budget income of £28,536 was received plus £70,000 being the cash element of the council field sale. The end of year bank balance stood at 31st March 2021 £ 105,752.48

In brief the 2020 -2021 figures can be showed (rounding up) as follows

Spending		Income	
Public Conveniences	est. £ 3,149	Council tax	£26,000
Council/Street Cleaning	£15,875	Grants (one off /ceasing)	£ 2,594
Hall Loan (last payment)	£ 5,049	Council Field Cash Element	£70,000
Xmas Tree	£ 97	Other	£ 3,379
Total	£24,170	Total	£101,973