

Council reports December 2020

7.1 **External Audit Report** – Information on website - RFO report to follow

7.2 **Council and Committee meeting 2021** – Cllr Escombe

Proposed meeting dates for 2021

January

CSCWG 18th (Monday 4th is first day back)

Full Council 11th

SAP NA

FAS 25th

Council planning - only if required – 25th

February

CSCWG 1st

Full Council 8th

SAP 15th

FAS NA

Council planning - only if required – 22nd

March

CSCWG 1st and 29th – so no meeting in April due to Easter

Full Council 8th

SAP NA

FAS 22nd

Council planning - only if required – 22nd

April

CSCWG Na

Full Council 12th

SAP 19th

FAS Na

Council planning - only if required – 26th

May

Election 6th May 2021

AGM – 17th new council – reset meeting dates for 2021/22

Council planning only if required – 17th following AGM

NOTE: PAG meetings on a Thursday prior to council meeting to consider planning applications and report recommendations to council

Annual Parish Meeting –

If an Annual Parish Meeting is desired – last years was cancelled - it would need to be before 24th March 2021 otherwise “purdah” would apply in the leading up to the Parish Elections
The Annual Parish Meeting is likely to be via zoom.

Proposed

- Agree meeting dates as outlined above
- Consider Annual Parish Meeting

7.3 Cemetery Restoration project – Cllr Green

Background

In 2019 it was brought to the Parish Council's attention that several grave kerbs had been dumped to the side of the cemetery grounds. The names that appeared on some of the kerbs were from those buried in Section C. The clerk reported this to the Full Council advising that the Parish Council had a legal duty to fully repair the criminal damage done to that part of the cemetery. The Full Council voted to restore the graves and a project was established to investigate what had happened, to recover the kerbs and other grave items and to revert to the Council with a fully costed plan.

Actions completed

1. Discovery

The discovery phase was completed in early 2020 with kerbs and other grave goods unearthed. These were logged and details that appeared on the kerbs noted. In total 134 graves are affected.

2. Legal notices

The legal advice from KALC was that that law requires that once it was discovered we must highlight the issue and remedy to relatives of all those affected. This was done through the posting of notices about the issue at the Cemetery and on our public noticeboards, along with notices on our website and other social media. The legal advice was that we also had to write to the last known address of relatives whose graves are affected, and informing them that we were taking responsibility for restoration at our expense. Relatives had six weeks to comment if they so wished. This was a huge research and administrative task and took some months

to trawls through a range of ledgers and other documents. This task was completed two phases. The first phase was completed in March 2020 and the second phase completed in October 2020. Several relatives responded positively, including some who had previously complained about the situation to a previous Parish Council.

3. Complete records and resolved queries

We now have a completed the check on all record of all the plots in Section C. We know who is buried where, whether they have a grave marker or not and whether we have a rescued kerb with their name thereon.

There were two queries that took time to resolve. One related to details on a recovered kerb. It was initially thought that it related to a grave plot in Section A. Upon further investigation there was a discrepancy between the various written records and an electronic file produced several years ago and the lady was in fact buried in Section C.

The other query related to a plot owned by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which originally for a German airman, Alois Lehner. In 1960 the remains were exhumed and transferred to a German War Cemetery in Cannock chase.

4. Physical preparation

Some additional physical preparation work has been done. For example, two leylandii trees that have over 20 years or so overgrown part of Section C and interfered with the graves have been removed and the hedging and barbed wire fencing between Section C and the woodland cemetery removed. This boundary is being replanted by Cllr Hunt.

Future actions and timescale

The next phase is the physical restoration of the grave sites. Earlier this year we sought quotations from several firms for the work. Only two firms agreed to bid and visited the site. Yew Tree, based in Bodiam, was chosen based on price, quality and flexibility. The discovery phase was completed at the start of the year. However, plans for the restoration were delayed as we went into the first lockdown.

A further site meeting was held on Tuesday 24th November.

Five actions are now recommended. The aim will be to start the work as soon as practicable and for it to be complete by June 2021. So, the project overlaps this financial year and next.

- i. The area where the Kerbs are needs to be cleared of vegetation. (Nov/Dec 2020)

- ii. The Kerbs cleaned and organised in sets to see which plots have complete or partial kerb sets restored. (Dec 2020 / Jan 2021)
- iii. Kerbs and lettering repaired or renewed as required and installed. (Feb - May 2021)
- iv. Plots that require grave markers rather than Krebs to be agreed and installed. (April / May 2021)
- v. The ground within and around each grave to make good, levelled and re-turfed if necessary, to improve both appearance and ease of mowing. (May)

For, those without named kerbs then we put a simple grave marker which will have the name and dates for those buried in the plot. It may be that some of the kerbs that are not associated with a named plot could be used (we have 130 kerbs without names) - but this is difficult to assess now. So, we have prudently budgeted for all of those to have a new grave marker. This project will also require a high degree of input and double-checking to ensure that this is done right first time.

The total cost of making good the damage of the past is not cheap, but it is a one-off cost which required to spent to meet our legal and moral responsibilities. At the end of the process we will have a better looking cemetery and this project sits alongside other work being done to improve the cemetery, and its appeal to local residents.

The prices given at the start of the year have been maintained. However, the extent of using unallocated kerbs in place of new grave markers depends on the condition of the stones that are not required to make up the broken kerb sets with names thereon, and this in turn affects the extent of a potential discount on the purchase of tablets. We have therefore had to be prudent in our assumptions.

Estimate maximum costs is:

Preparation	£600
42 kerb graves at £300 each	£12,600
92 grave markers at £200 each	£18,400
Levelling/re-turfing	£400
 Maximum estimated cost	 £31,000

Recommendation

To proceed with the project as described.

To add £31,000 to the village fund budget to provide for the one-off cost of the cemetery restoration project. Any underspend achieved due to the reuse of Krebs or further discounts obtained on bulk supply of grave markers to be transferred to reserves, from which the initial sums may be spent this year as the project goes over two financial years

7.4 **Draft Allocation of Council reserves – RFO report to follow**

7.5 **Draft Council Budget 2021/22 for discussion – RFO cover report and spread sheets to follow**

Council Tax 2021-22 - some Background facts, figures and comparators

TWBC have now published the tax base for the coming financial year for each Parish. The extra houses which add to the local tax base have been offset in all but one Parish by an increase in people claiming Council Tax relief. The average decline in tax base is 2%. Hawkhurst's tax base falls by slightly more than average at -2.3%. The largest fall is Sandhurst at -4%, and Paddock Wood is the only one to have an increase in their tax base (+0.1%).

I have used the revised tax base figures to recalculate what the 16 Parishes would have charged this year, if they had the same spend but been subject to the new tax base. For example, our Band D figure would have been £93.42 (up £2.17). This would have changed our ranking from the 10th cheapest, to the 9th. (We swapped ranking with Horsmonden whose Band D charge would have gone up by just 15 pence.)

Looking at our near neighbours in more detail is probably more helpful. In the table below I shown the precept for this year and the Band D Council Tax. I then shown the effect of the change in the tax base to get a Band D figure if no Council increases their precept. I then look at what happens if Hawkhurst is the **only council** to raise its precept by 2%, or 2% plus increase the sum for the Village Fund. This I believe provides a worst-case comparison.

The % increase on the current charge is high. However, this is the tyranny of a small numbers as any change on a small number is a big percentage. However, in terms of how the overall tax burden is for residents it is less stark. If we assume that TWBC, Kent Fire & Rescue, Police all increase their tax by 2%, and that KCC take advantage of the Government's offer to permit up to 5% extra on KCC bills for social care costs, that implies, taken with a Hawkhurst increase to £112.50 that the overall Band D Council Tax in our Parish is about £1,950 - up from £1,855.47. An increase of £105.47 or 5%. Although,

bearing in mind this also accounts for a growth in the number of poorer families that no longer pay Council Tax.

Another thing that it is worth considering - when thinking about the commitment to build a new Community & Sports Centre - today a £2.5 million PWLB loan over 25 years would cost £120,861.98 in annual interest charges. However, if we net off £65,000 (Village Fund in the tax base) then that leaves £55,861.98 to find. This adds a further £27.47 to the Band D Council tax. So, in the medium term our Council Tax is projected at £139.97. This is in the middle of the £126.71 to £156 range for our neighbouring Councils and would place us 3rd in the Borough. Again this is a worst-case comparison as it assumes all others have no increase in spending, although it also assumes that £2.5m is the right sum and does not take into account any subsidy needed for the running costs.

	Precept amount for 2020/21	Band D Council Tax this year (current tax base)	New tax base - no change to precept amount	Compared with Hawkhurst if no precept change	Compared with Hawkhurst if precept up by 2%	Compared with Hawkhurst if precept changes by 2% plus £35,000 added to Village Fund
Sandhurst	£73,900	£121.61	£126.71 (+4.2% over this year)	£33.29 (+36% higher than Hawkhurst)	£31.42 (+33% higher than Hawkhurst)	£14.21 (+13% higher than Hawkhurst)
Cranbrook & Sissinghurst	£356,300	£134.62	£136.14 (+1.1% over this year)	£42.72 (+46% higher than Hawkhurst))	£40.85 (+43% higher than Hawkhurst)	£23.64 (+21% higher than Hawkhurst)
Goudhurst	£194,610	£143.02	£145.95 (+2.0% over this year)	£52.53 (+56% higher than Hawkhurst))	£50.66 (+53% higher than Hawkhurst))	£33.45 (+30% higher than Hawkhurst)
Paddock Wood	£461,642	£156.16	£156.00 (-0.1% over this year)	£62.58 (+67% higher than Hawkhurst))	£60.71 (+64% higher than Hawkhurst)	£43.50 (+39% higher than Hawkhurst)
Hawkhurst	£189,966	£91.25	£93.42 (+2.4% over		£95.29 (+4.4% over this year)	£112.50 (+23.3% over this year)

			this year)			
Hawkhurst ranking out of 16 Parish/Town Councils (note smaller Parishes are typically lower, e.g. Frittenden ranked 16th has a precept of just £17k.	10th	9th		9th	7th (i.e. mid ranking)	

7.6 Hawkhurst Cemetery Policy – minor update - Cllr Fitzpatrick

Hawkhurst Cemetery aims to have a natural feel to it and there is a disproportionate number of plastic decorations which are becoming features. FAS Committee therefore suggest an amendment to the current Cemetery Policy as the aim is to write to relatives to remove such items in the New Year.

“Persons shall be allowed to place on any grave space floral decorations (BUT NOT TO PLANT FLOWERS OR SHRUBS OR PLACE ANY EXTRANEIOUS OBJECTS). The Board reserves the absolute right to remove anything they consider undesirable or unsightly. The board also reserves the right to remove any inscription attached to floral decorations which is in their opinion objectionable”

7.7 Request to do metal detecting at KGV - Discussion

7.8 Review of S106 list – Cllr Escombe report to follow

7.9 Scouts design competition for village “slow down” road signs –Cllr Escombe

7.10 Community Litter pick – Macdonald’s offer of support – Discuss Cllr Cory

Confidential

13.1 Confirmation of Local Designated Green Spaces for Local Plan – Cllr Escombe report to follow