

## **Council Tax 2021-22 - commentary and comparators**

### **Introduction**

The Parish precepts have now been published for all Parishes - along with those for Kent County Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Police and Fire Service.

Taken together the Band D Council Tax for a Hawkhurst resident is £1,998.20 - the Hawkhurst Parish Council element of this is £114.33 or 5.7%.

### **So, what services does the Parish Council provide?**

We are custodians of the Parish cemetery, two halls which are used by a variety of community groups, and the building where the Kino is based. We are responsible for: sports pitches; children's' playgrounds at Heartenoak and KGV; the new Multi Use Games Area on the KGV; Ockley and Hensil allotments; and, 165 street lights across the Parish.

We support community initiatives. This year we were instrumental in setting up and supporting the Hawkhurst Community Support Group and their Food4Families project.

In addition, we reduced or waived charges for clubs and societies using our facilities and made various grants for things like the Community Fridge and we cut the rent for the Kino to help them survive.

We also scrutinise planning application to try and influence the planners in Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and work to protect the parish from over-development, vehicle gridlock at the Highgate junction and consequential air pollution.

### **Precept increase**

Despite increasing the Band D Parish charge by £23.08 a year, Hawkhurst still charges less than others - roughly a tenner less than Sandhurst, £20 less than Cranbrook, £30 less than Goudhurst and £40 less than Paddock Wood. Overall, we are mid-table when comparing council tax bills for TWBC's 16 Town and Parish Councils - Hawkhurst is ranked 7<sup>th</sup>.

The tyranny of small numbers means that because the increase is off a small base the percentage increase is stark. But the context is a historic very low parish charge rate, that did not allow for the proper maintenance of community facilities - and adding less than £2 a month to the average (Band D) property still means Hawkhurst provides value - charging between 11% and 36% less than neighbouring parishes.

### **So why has the Parish precept total increased by £42,509?**

Well, the tax base has reduced as we expect more people to claim exemption and/or reduction from Council Tax, and there have been various adjustments in day to day spend - with some things added and others postponed or cancelled, but principally it is because of three things.

**Firstly**, we have been very cautious about projected future income - which we expect to fall by £23k. We do not expect to return to pre-pandemic levels of income from our sports facilities, meeting rooms and the Kino until 2022/23.

**Secondly**, a one off £30k restoration project for the Parish Cemetery. We had hoped to spread the cemetery project over two years - but the pandemic meant a delay so the whole project will be done this year. Like the recent restoration of the old tennis court to create a fantastic multi-use games area, we are steadily making good on things that had been left to deteriorate.

**Thirdly**, the preparatory work for a potential Community and Sports Centre needs professional architects plans and supporting documents that pass muster from the planners. Whilst we have a special reserve for some of the costs, £35,000 is needed from the Village Fund to enable us to put a fully costed and plan to the village next Spring.

**Parish Council tax comparisons – Band D is mid-point in Council Tax**

Parish	Band D Council Tax last year (2020/21)	Band D Council Tax this year (2021/22)	Year on year Change	Compared with Hawkhurst
Sandhurst	£121.61	£126.85	+£5.24 (+4.3%)	£12.52 (11%) more than Hawkhurst
Cranbrook & Sissinghurst	£134.62	£134.35	-£0.27 (0%)	£20.02 (17.5%) more than Hawkhurst
Goudhurst	£143.02	£146.24	+£3.22 (+2.3%)	£28.69 (25%) more than Hawkhurst
Paddock Wood	£156.16	£155.65	-£0.51 (0%)	£41.32 (36%) more than Hawkhurst
Hawkhurst	£91.25	£114.33	+£23.08 (+25%)	