

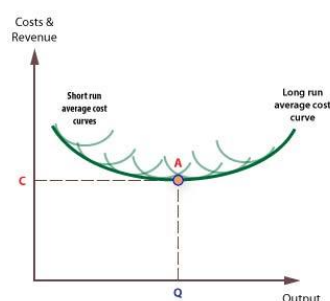


Batheaston Parish Council

PRECEPT SETTING 2021/22

OPTIONS FOR RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT PROPOSAL FOR APPROVAL

1. Neither this council nor any of its councillors were elected by residents and thus we have a priori no mandate to set a precept level.
2. During last year's precept setting, we identified that our cost-income ratio is likely in the trough of a U-shaped utility curve, where on the one end "small is beautiful" (low costs) and on the other end "large is efficient". This dead zone in the middle is often observed in business.
3. Our current position permits us to run a complete administration – consuming c80% of our budget – and to redistribute most of the remainder without value-added as grants back to the community.
4. At last year's precept setting, we argued this level and the proposed increase on the basis that we had not increased the precept for several years, that it was low in comparison to other parish councils and that we would deliver on strategic initiatives.
5. Most of these outcomes have however not come to pass, in part due to COVID-19 but importantly also because we have found engagement, problem-solving and and governance challenging.
6. COVID-19 is also creating increased anxiety about livelihoods and financial stability in our community, and online commentary suggests the precept may face a much higher level of scrutiny.
7. This raises the question of how we will consult with our residents on the 2021/22 precept. There are 2 approaches:
 - a. We decide the precept and we make the public case for it, accepting the risk the set level may not have legitimacy;
 - b. We involve residents in setting the precept, accepting the risk residents may choose a level materially different from today.
8. The latter approach is called participatory precept setting and it is the way the best councils engage with their residents. The appendix to the paper sets out how it could be done.
9. Council is asked to decide in favour of either 7a or 7b.



Participatory precept setting

10. A communication would be sent to all residents via email, social media, website and Local Look setting out the strategic options for and levels of the precept. This would read something along the lines of:

As you may know, your Parish Council each year sets a local tax called precept, collected via your overall council tax and used to fund local community actions. Our current total precept is £50,400. We normally just decide whether to keep this precept flat or increase it a bit, but in light of COVID-19 and our desire to be more transparent and accountable, we want to get your input on 3 different options we have for the precept 2021/22:

1. **Continue as we are** with a total precept of £50,400. This allows us to run a complete administration (at a cost of c80% of the total budget) and to redistribute the remaining 20% without value-added as grants back to the community.
2. **Back-to-basics**, reducing the precept to near £25,000. This allows us to run a small administration and focus on basic community maintenance such as grass cutting of the football, managing Rhymes pavilion, maintaining playground equipment. We would have less council meetings and organisations would be required to raise funds directly from the community rather than via us – as many already do.
3. **Community asset build**, increasing the precept to near £75,000. The additional money would be ring-fenced to build new community assets, to be decided with and in the community. We would have many more consultations with you, to get your inputs on priorities, your involvement in making things happen and your views on our performance. In towns and parishes where this model has taken hold, the results have typically been a much greater sense of community and well-being.

The monthly payments (10 months) for each option, and the difference between them are shown in the table below (ed: table calculated on 2020/21 households; figures will be marginally different):

Precept, £ per month	Property band							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
(1) total	2.97	3.47	3.96	4.46	5.45	6.44	7.43	8.91
(2) total	1.47	1.72	1.96	2.21	2.70	3.19	3.68	4.41
(3) total	4.44	5.18	5.92	6.66	8.14	9.61	11.09	13.31
(2) vs (1)	-1.50	-1.75	-2.00	-2.25	-2.75	-3.25	-3.75	-4.50
(3) vs (1)	1.47	1.71	1.96	2.20	2.69	3.18	3.67	4.40

What we want to ask you to do is to go to input your preferred rank-order of these options here [\[link\]](#). Polling will close on 5 January 2021. We will make your preferences and how we have taken them into account deciding the precept 2021/11 public later that month.

Please note that this poll is not a formal referendum, but for input only. A referendum requires a much bigger and more costly organisation, to ensure that everyone is invited, can vote in a way that suits him/her and is authenticated. We don't meet those standards in this poll, nor can we under current COVID regulations. But we hope that you will participate to make the result as representative as possible. It matters!

11. B&NES has all of the infrastructure for community polling (reach, polling, authentication, analysis) and could run the process on our behalf. B&NES would contact residents via email with the brief and link to our polling tool where residents will be able to express their preference rank-order. BPC may not have

access to underlying data and analysis; we would receive the rank-order results and an assessment of their representativeness.

12. In addition, we would promote participation through our communications platform:
 - Reach: we contact residents through all of Local Look, social media, website and email and point them to the poll site where we can explain the options in more detail;
 - Polling: we host the polling software (off-the-shelf commercially available) on our domain
13. Polling would be open from 15 December 2020 until 5 January 2021.
14. We would need to assess representativeness of the results on the basis of the following data:
 - Share of residents participating;
 - Share of participation and distribution across property bands, age bands, tenure, employment/economic activity, and location (e.g. High Street, Elmhurst & St Catherine, Northend, Bannerdown).
15. The results would not be binding to a precise number, and Council would need to take a view of how to incorporate the results into setting the 2021/22 precept.
16. The commitment of Council would be to make the results and representativeness statement public.