I am pleased to report that the Parish Council met its statutory Reporting and Audit requirements for 2021-22 and the accounts for that year were duly processed by External Audit in early 2022-3.

The Finance Advisory Group recommended a zero-increase Precept budget of £11,200 for 2022-23; I am delighted to report that Council remain on projection to meet that challenging target, despite rampant inflation pushing up many items of expenditure. In order to recognise the strains being placed on individual households the FAG recommendation has seen the local 2023-24 Precept request cut by £800 (7.1%) to £10,400, making 2023-4 an even more fiscally challenging year ahead.

Main expenditure items remain Staffing, Mowing and Insurances. A part-time Clerk is retained for eight hours a week, remunerated at the National JNB Green Book Scale 6 (one point above the lowest permissible rate for Clerks.) The National Pay Award this year was finally agreed at twice the anticipated rate, resulting in a pre-tax £1/hr gross rate increase. The Mowing Contract, which predominantly supports maintaining St Mary’s and the Village Hall Paddocks, has been renewed with local providers Streetwise for the 2023 & 2024 seasons. The Parish Council as Guardian Trustee of the Village Hall Trust undertook an insurance revaluation during the year and as a result increased the level of Buildings Insurance held with Zurich. This same Insurance schedule provides a level of indemnity Insurance for Councillors and for those acting in working groups on behalf of the Parish Council. Agreement was also reached with the Village Hall Committee to remove elements of insurance double-cover (and thus cost); the VHC now retain contents insurance, whilst the PC retain buildings insurance for the Hall. Other significant costs over the year included new Pads and a Replacement Battery for the De-Fib and support for various village celebrations, including our late Queen’s Platinum Jubilee.

The Parish Council operate three bank accounts with Unity Trust Bank: the “current” account contains the Annual Precept and any in-year recovered VAT and grants, so is the annual expenditure account. A separate “Reserve Account” contains any excess of Income over Expenditure accumulated over many years; it is used to fund or support specific projects, with a current aim to maintain this fund at £18k. The third account covers ring-fenced monies allocated to the Village Defibrillator, housed in the telephone box outside The Martins, to enable upkeep and replacement as required.

As at 08/03/23 the Current Account stood at a total of £2,635.37. Known liabilities to the end of the financial year and expected incomes imply a working balance of £1,296.54, with several funding requests (Paddocks’ provision, Duck Race & Wild Flower planting) still expected against that total. Any Income over Expenditure is transferred at the end of each financial year to the Reserve Account. As at 08/03/23 the Reserve Account stood at £23,460; approved projects already potentially reduce this balance to far nearer the intimated £18k balance, with capital released as projects are delivered. The “De-Fib” account stood at £2357.40, offering the potential of full unit-replacement if so required.

The accounts are overseen and available to view online by all Councillors, and reported at each Council Meeting. Cllr David Clark has served as Head of FAG and Financial Lead on behalf of Council for many years, operating the Unity Trust Accounts against PC Standing Orders and any awards made at Council meetings. Cllr Clark will be stepping down from Council in May, so as RFO my thanks to him for establishing and overseeing such an exceedingly robust and transparent financial operational and reporting system. Mr Mike Garrett acts as the Independent Auditor; he may ask questions of the accounts at any time & also performs an end-of year audit before the annual accounts are offered for Public Examination and then finally sealed with the External Auditors. The RFO is always open to help answer any questions on the Parish Accounts as required.

