



**Flitwick Town
Council**

2023/2024 Precept Report

Introduction

Each January, local councils are required to set a budget for the financial year ahead and decide on the amount of money needed to fund services through Council Tax, known as the Precept. As Councillors and residents ourselves, we are committed to delivering services and facilities that are affordable and valued by the people of Flitwick. As your elected representatives, we are deeply concerned about the broader state of the economy and the very real impact that the cost of living crisis is having on everyone in our community.

About the work of the Council

Innovative services and high-quality events for the community

We've continued to review, revise and expand the services and events we provide for the community, acting on your feedback and ensuring we deliver value for money. Most importantly, we've worked to ensure that everything we do targets the needs and aspirations of Flitwick residents. Our 2nd Annual Residents Survey, which launches soon, will give you all a fresh opportunity to let us know where you think we can improve and what areas you want us to prioritise. Your responses will help us shape what we deliver in 2023 and beyond, just as they did last year.

Looking back, the obvious highlights of 2022 are the free Flitwick Family Fun Day and the Christmas Lights Switch On event at the Town Square around Flitwick's fabulous Christmas Tree, with both events seeing record attendance from across the community. Our regular activities, such as the Over 60's Lunch Club, Stitchers, Forget Me Not and Dance Fitness, continue to thrive, and new services like the monthly Sunday Market are proving successful.

Skate Jam Competition, August 2022



Our Public Realm Team has worked hard to maintain our parks and open spaces taking on tasks ranging from managing the Grade II listed Manor Park to maintaining playgrounds, mowing, planting and dealing with litter. We are also thrilled to see the opening of a new circular walk in Manor Park, reinstated after 100 years by the Flitwick P3 Volunteers and our Public Realm Team.

Finally, we've continued to focus on delivering services for young people living in the town from The Hub on Coniston Road. Regular youth club sessions are offered each week alongside bigger events like the Skate Jam Competition and DJ lessons!

A thriving community

In addition to the things we deliver directly, we have continued to support many community groups across the town financially and practically. This ongoing support includes providing land at a peppercorn rent for the Sea Cadets, Scouts, Guides, Flitwick Gardeners' Association and the Royal British Legion, free use of our buildings and outside spaces for regular groups and unique community-run events like the Flitwick Car Show, and providing community grants.

2022 was a year like no other, and I had the great honour as Town Mayor of proclaiming the new Sovereign to hundreds of people in our Town Square and also paying our respects to Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at a very special candlelit service.

There have been many Civic Events in 2022, including a fantastic original 'Murder Mystery' dinner, the annual Civic Service, a charity wine tasting and finally, the annual Civic Reception celebrating everyone who volunteers in our community to make Flitwick such a fantastic place to live.

Commercial services that add value to our community

We've also continued to provide a range of services at The Rufus Centre on a commercial basis, providing serviced office space for small businesses, hosting meetings and conferences, and providing a venue for weddings and celebrations. In addition, our thriving café has transformed the building into a community hub used by many local residents.

While we're happy that the business has made a significant financial contribution this year, it's important to remember that our business was decimated by the pandemic, making a loss in the past two financial years.

The economic outlook and possible impacts on the business this financial year are very concerning, especially for businesses operating in the hospitality sector. Still, we remain in a solid financial position and are confident that our business strategy will continue to deliver positive outcomes for the people of Flitwick.



Members of the Royal British Legion, Flitwick & District Branch enjoy their monthly breakfast at the Rendezvous Café & Bar

Addressing the cost of living crisis

More recently, we've been working with community partners across the town to identify ways to help people combat the cost of living crisis. We've just launched the first 'Community Fridge' in our area, helping reduce food waste and helping families in our community struggling with food poverty.

We're providing a 'warm space' at The Hub each week, and our two recent free Community Movie Days have been attended by over 500 residents, with another scheduled for February half term.

Financial Planning for the year ahead

Inflation – an impossible problem to mitigate

Elected by residents to make decisions on behalf of the residents of Flitwick, Councillors are this year required to take even more consideration when setting the budget, balancing the needs of the community and the financial impact of any increase to Council Tax against our responsibilities to ensure that the Council remains on a sound financial footing.

We recognise that any increase to Council Tax is a burden, and we have shown restraint in the past by limiting the increase to 3.6% in 2022/2023 and no increase in 2021/2022.

The impacts of inflation, now over 11%, significantly impact our day-to-day operational costs. And it's not just everyday costs that have increased. This has impacted the delivery costs for capital projects like the Heritage Works at Manor Park and the new Nature Park at Maulden Road.

The reality is that after three years of seeking out efficiencies, little more can be trimmed from the budget without implementing significant cuts to the services and events we provide. That said, Staff and Councillors have worked together over the last three months to deliver efficiencies of over £50,000 as part of the budget process.



Flitwick Community Fridge at The Rufus Centre

Flitwick Family Fun Day, Millennium Park, June 2022





Over 60's Christmas Lunch Club, December 2022

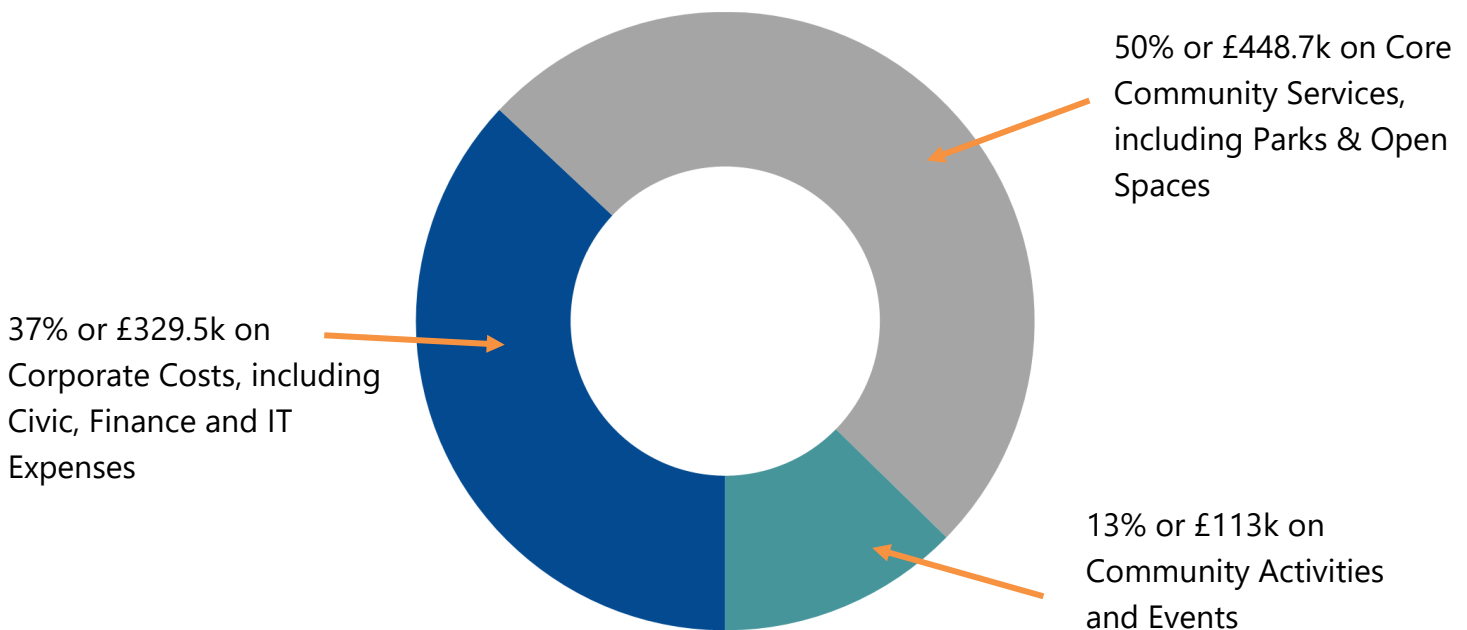
Precept for 2023/2024

Councillors have set the Flitwick Town Council precept for 2023/2024 at £1,001,205, an overall increase of £115,641 or 13%.

In real terms, this will result in a Council Tax charge of £198.97 for each Band D household, an increase of £21.00 for the year or £1.75 per month.

Our Service Delivery Plans for the year ahead

We are budgeting a net expenditure (excluding borrowing costs and capital funding) of £891k on service delivery predominantly funded from Council Tax, with approximately 63% or £562k of our spending focused on Community Services:



We plan to deliver a wide range of community activities and events, including the Over 60's Lunch Club and our popular Youth Club based at The Hub. The Flitwick Family Fun Day will remain a free event, returning to Millennium Park on 10th June, recognising the value of providing a fun event for the community to come together that won't break the bank.

The Christmas Lights Switch On will return to the Town Square, and there will be a new Christmas lights theme thanks to a new contract currently being tendered.

'Proud Ampthill & Flitwick' (Proud AF), our grant-funded joint initiative with Ampthill Town Council, will launch on 9th February. Proud AF will offer a range of new services and events for the LGBTQ+ community and allies, allowing us to serve yet another group of residents in our community.



We will continue to financially support the Scouts, Guides, Sea Cadets, Flitwick Gardeners' Association and Royal British Legion by providing land at a peppercorn rent and free or subsidised meeting space for many other local groups and charities at The Rufus Centre. You'll also see the Council continue to focus on ways we can support residents through the cost of living crisis as long as this is needed.

Funding new projects and services

This year, the contribution to our Rolling Capital Fund, which we use to fund investments in new projects and services, has been reduced to £50,000, challenging our staff to focus on identifying alternative funding to allow us to proceed with additional new projects and services.

Funded projects that will be delivered in the coming months include:

- Lighting at the Skate Park to improve personal security and to allow young people to use the space on autumn and winter evenings.
- Installation of monitored CCTV at the Skate Park and the Town Square.
- Improvements to the Town Square, including smart new benches and bins.
- Heritage works at Manor Park to rebuild and restore the original gates and other improvements to the park as part of the management plan.
- The development of the Nature Park at Maulden Road (financed by FTC and S106 money) is now moving forward, with the design work completed and plans coming together for work to start.

We are fortunate to have a strong community spirit in Flitwick, and we look forward to working with residents to help build on this further. We know that any level of increase to taxes is never welcome, but we hope you'll understand the reasons for this decision and see this as a worthwhile investment in our community.

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'A. Snape'.

Cllr Andy Snape, Town Mayor 2022-2023

