



**North Weald Bassett
PARISH COUNCIL**

Thornwood Common Parish Hall, Weald Hall Lane, Thornwood, Essex CM16 6NB

Tel: 07572 507591 Email: clerk@northweald-pc.gov.uk

Web Site: www.northweald-pc.gov.uk

Clerk to the Council.

Susan De Luca

11th December 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF NORTH WEALD BASSETT PARISH COUNCIL

You are hereby invited to attend a Meeting of the **Finance & General Purposes Committee** which will be held on **Monday 16th December 2024**, at **7.15pm** to transact the business shown in the Agenda below.

This meeting will be held in the Thornwood Common Parish Hall, Weald Hall Lane, Thornwood. The public and press are invited to attend.

Susan De Luca
Clerk to the Council

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To **RECEIVE** any apologies for absence.

2. OTHER ABSENCES

To **NOTE** any absences for which no apology has been received.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To **RECEIVE** any Declarations of Interest by Members.

A Member with a personal interest in a matter must consider whether it is a Disclosable Pecuniary, Non Pecuniary or Other Pecuniary Interest, and declare it accordingly. A Member who is unsure as to how to declare their interest should seek independent advice.

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

To **RECEIVE** questions from members of the public for a period determined by the Chairman of the Meeting. *Please NOTE if the Clerk has not been previously notified of the Question Council may have to note questions and respond to them after the Meeting.*

5. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2025/2026 🖐

A precept is an order to a billing authority (EFDC) to pay a parish council a named sum which the billing authority draws up by 31st January for the following financial year. The parish council, in calculating its precept, must as far as possible secure that it will suffice for four classes of items, namely:

- Next year's expenditure, including an allowance for contingencies
- Outstanding expenditure incurred in previous years
- Expenditure likely to be incurred before the precepted sum becomes available
- Payments to capital fund, or renewal and repairs fund

Understanding the Budget Paperwork

The budget paperwork attached to this agenda consists of the following:

WHITE PAPER	Income and Expenditure. This gives a picture of Income and Expenditure for the current year (2024/2025), and a suggested budget figure for 2025/2026, along with supporting notes.
CREAM	Earmarked Reserves - current year Provides a breakdown of current Earmarked Reserves as at 30 th November 2024, and estimated final Earmarked Reserve figures as at 31st March 2025
GREEN	Additional Items for Budget Summary of Additional items for consideration for 2025/2026 budget, together with any associated paperwork available at the time of printing the agenda (together with costings if these have been provided by Councillors, or a provisional sum if not).
YELLOW	Final Summary sheet This summarises the expected income and expenditure and provides figures regarding percentage increase/decrease options for the precept for the next year, as well as giving details of how any such increase / decrease in the precept would affect the Parish Council element of Council tax for a band D Property. However, as the Tax Base figure has not been made available, this sheet has not been included within the agenda, but will be viewed live during the meeting.

In order to ensure enough time is available to discuss all areas of the budget, **Members are kindly asked to spend some time prior to the meeting perusing these figures, identifying any areas they wish to discuss in further detail or which requires clarification.** Members are advised to contact the Principal Finance Officer (PFO) **prior to the meeting** if they require clarification on any matter, or if they feel they have identified any errors or omissions. Councillors should also note that attached as part of the WHITE papers is a document entitled 'Reference and Supporting Statements'. These statements can be referenced to the relevant letters / numbers on the WHITE income and expenditure sheets as shown in the example below, and may offer an explanation to councillors queries:

[example]

2023 / 2024 budget paperwork									
Previous year -v- Current Year -v- next year									
		2021/2022		2022/2023 - Current Year				2023/2024	NOTES
		Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Due	Exp Final	BUDGET	
Expenditure									
4019	Hospitality / Chairman's allowance	£ 150	£ -	£ 150	£ -		✓ -	150	
4020	Misc. Expenses	£ 4,000	£ 10,903	£ 4,000	£ 8,660		✓ 8,660	4,000	y
4035	Publicity/Press	£ 1,500	£ 1,404	£ 1,500	£ 179		✓ 179	1,500	
4036	Property Maintenance	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 625		✓		
4037	Grounds Maintenance	£ 600	£ 1,165	£ 1,200	£ -		✓ -	1,200	z

It is emphasised that expected figures are 'estimate' final income and expenditure figures and should be used as a guide when deciding the budget/precept figures for 2025/2026.

Additional Useful Information for Councillors and/or for which decisions may be needed

EXPECTED INCOME FOR 24/25 VERSUS BUDGET

The total income for the current financial year is expected to be higher than budgeted for (budgeted £269,283 versus expected £300,246, including precept receipt – an expected increase of around £30,963). This can be broadly accounted for as follows:

- Interest received (bank and investment) – Budgeted to receive £5,000, but expected is £14,900
- Receipt of Neighbourhood Plan grant of £5,970
- Receipt of Rural Prosperity Grant for Parish Hall for Windows - £5,414
- Hall hire income – An additional £3,200 versus budget
- Insurance payout for Street light 6019 - £4,729

EXPECTED EXPENDITURE FOR 24/25 VERSUS BUDGET

The total expenditure for the current financial year is expected to be higher than budgeted (budgeted £258,600 versus expected £291,727, a difference of £33,127). This can be broadly accounted for as follows:

- Tax and NI (admin) – budgeted £21,500, but expected £26,128 – a difference of £4,628 – NJC salary increased, additional staff member and under budgeted
- Neighbourhood Plan works – expected £7,007 (was not budgeted for as had agreed not to progress, plus any expenditure comes from EMR)
- New windows Thornwood Hall - £6,768 (some grant funding was received as detailed earlier in the agenda, however the Parish Council had to pay 20% of the cost)
- Street Lighting – budgeted £4,700, however expected spend it 21,457. Due to replacing two new columns and associated UKPN of both, plus retrospective payment for another

ITEMS FOR NOTING

WEALD COMMON

Councillors are asked to NOTE that following the planting of around 2,500 trees on Weald Common in 2023, the Parish Council continues to manage this project in accordance with the funding agreement as follows:

- Replace any tree that dies for the first 5 years
- Ensure planted trees are kept free from competing vegetation and grazing animals
- Maintain the tree protection
- Maintain the area
- Ensure trees are protected against herbivores for the obligation period

An annual funding payment continues to be received via the Forestry Commission (and will do for the next 8 years) and its annual maintenance is budgeted for, as well as holding funds specifically earmarked for the project.

PUBLIC WORKS LOAN

Councillors are asked to **NOTE** that the final payment for the public works loan originally taken out 40 years ago for works associated with the Queens Hall will conclude on 31st March 2025.

CHANGES TO EMPLOYERS NI

Following the Governments budget announcement regarding lowering the threshold at which employers NI is paid, Councillors are asked to **NOTE** that the expected increase in employers NI for 25/26 is roughly £2,900 per annum. This increase has been factored into the proposed 25/26 budget figures. It should be noted that NALC continues to lobby Government regarding the impact this change has on Parish and Town Councils, so far without success.

STREET LIGHTING ELECTRICITY SUPPLY COSTS (UMS)

Councillors will recall from recent Parish Council meetings that the Parish Councils fixed 3 year contract with Npower for supplying electricity to the parish council owned street lights ceased on 30th November 2024. The Clerk and PFO have been working with Utility Aid (who are working with NALC) to try and secure a new fixed rate contract, however at present nobody is offering a fixed rate due to upcoming changes in how the unmetered supply is set to be calculated. Taking into account what has happened to other Councils, it is expected the costs will increase by around 150% from 1st December 2024. As such, the cost to continue to provide lighting to the Parish Council owned street lights is to set to rise from around £7,500 per year to around £16,000. These costs have been factored into the 25/26 budget, however staff will continue to look for a favourable fixed rate.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

BOWLS CLUB

Following a lengthy delay, the finalisation of the transfer of land and the Bowls Club near to Weald Common is imminent. The North Weald Scouts have formally approached the Council asking that consideration be given to using the facility as a new Scout hut. It is understood that there is a restriction on the land detailed in the transfer dated 1998 that requires the land only to be used as a bowling and social club (the permitted use). Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** the future use of this site, if consideration should be given to the process of removing the restriction on permitted use, and the legal costs of doing so.

CCTV

The Parish Council is currently under a three year service level agreement with EFDC for the monitoring and maintenance of the CCTV outside the shops in North Weald. This agreement ceases in May 2025 with an option to extend for a further 3 years. This has previously been discussed at Parish Council in terms of both ownership and if the Parish Council should self manage this CCTV. The current costs are £325 per year. Councillors will need to **CONSIDER** if any funds should be set aside should the decision be made to take on this CCTV, and if so how much.

VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNS

This Parish has a very active Community Speedwatch Team. Given the prolific and constant speeding issues on both Upland Road and Weald Bridge Road, Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** the purchase and installation of two flashing Vehicle Activated Signs at these locations. If agreed, the procedure would be to go via the Local Highways Panel for formal agreement from ECC Highways, however if the Parish Council fund the signs, a result will be achieved considerably quicker.

AIR AMBULANCE

As per minute reference C24.109, the Chairman would like the Council to consider a donation of £500 to the Air Ambulance following members of this Councils visit to their base on North Weald Airfield in September. It should also be noted that the Parish Council is providing the Thornwood Common Parish Hall free of charge for the EFDC Chairmans Chairty Quiz in February 2025, with all proceeds going to the North Weald Air Ambulance.

HASTINGWOOD EMR / VILLAGE HALL FLOOR

Attached to the agenda is a proposal from Hastingwood Councillors Cllr Mrs Etherington and Cllr Irvine regarding monies for Hastingwood Village Hall floor. Councillors will recall that it holds three Earmarked reserves for Hastingwood, with agreement reached at the December

2023 F&GP Meeting that these funds should continue to be earmarked for 24/25. Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** this request.

DOG BIN EMPTYING RECHARGE

Councillors are aware there are two dog bins which the Parish Council empty and recharge the costs to St Andrews School and North Weald Village Hall. Whilst historically this agreement was reached as a result of these two organisations requesting the dog bins and agreeing to pay for emptying, they are both used by all members of the community and not just patrons of both facilities. As such, the Council is asked again to consider ceasing the recharge for this emptying (cost of £520 per year).

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Earlier this year the Parish Council agreed to progress their Neighbourhood Plan. As at 30th November 2024 the Earmarked reserve stood at £18,594. The costs up to 31st March 2025 are expected to be around £7,000, however grant funding has been received via Locality of £5,970 towards this project, and as such it is expected that at 31st March 2025 the Earmarked reserve will be around £17,564. Taking into account that it is possible that further grant funding could be obtained in 25/26, and the balance of the EMR, it is proposed not to precept for any funds towards the Neighbourhood Plan, and that all costs should come from the Earmarked reserve. Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** this.

PERMANENT OFFICES

The Parish Council is not expected to secure new permanent premises for an office in 2025/2026, however it is possible that another room may be available at the Queens Hall early 2025. If this is the case, it is proposed that the Parish Office be formally relocated to the Queens Hall as a permanent base, with office staff no longer using the Thornwood Hall as an office or it being open to the public. Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** this matter.

LITTER BIN QUEENS HALL

1. To **CONSIDER** the installation and emptying of a litter bin on the Memorial Playing Fields to stop people placing rubbish in the dog bin, causing it to overflow.
2. To **CONSIDER** moving the dog bin by the old pavilion site to the far end of the Memorial Playing Fields.

SLEEPERS GARDEN OUTSIDE SHOPS

It is expected that a number of replacement sleepers will be needed for the garden outside the shops in North Weald next year, and there will not be sufficient funds in the EMR to pay for this. Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** this.

VE DAY CELEBRATIONS

8TH May 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of VE Day, and it has been previously agreed that this Council should mark the occasion which will occur over a 4 day weekend. Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** agreeing a sum of money to be used for these celebrations.

NEW DOG BIN, GREEN AT ELM GARDENS

Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** installation of a new dog bin on the green at the end of Elm Gardens. If agreed, Councillors would also need to consider the additional annual cost of emptying (£290).

LITTER BIN AT SENSORY GARDEN

To **CONSIDER** the purchase, installation and emptying of a litter bin at the Sensory Garden, Weald Common.

EARMARKED RESERVES

Earmarked reserves, which are set aside for specific purposes and for savings for future projects, should be realistic and approved by the council. However, the amount of general reserves should be risk assessed annually and also approved by the council. It is recognised general good practice that the minimum level of General Reserves a Parish Council should hold is between 25%-100% of the precept. Larger councils would be nearer the 25% end. The current predicted figures for 31st March 2025 show that the level of General Reserves (i.e. those reserves that have not been placed into an earmarked fund) is expected to be around 29% of the account balance, and 54.6% of the precept. This is within acceptable limits. The Parish Council has a high level of Earmarked Reserve (71% of the account balances but greater than 100% of the precept). Councillors are asked to **CONSIDER** the Earmarked Reserves, and if any changes or movements are necessary. Councillors are however asked to note that this build up of Earmarked reserves is as a result of prudent financial management and the Clerk taking every opportunity to source any funding opportunities that are available. Such funding may not be forthcoming in times of a less affluent economy, for which we are expected to be entering.

BUDGET / PRECEPT CONSIDERATION

Councillors are asked to **NOTE** that for the current year (24/25), the Parish Council element of the Precept for a band D property was £89.37/year (~£1.71 a week). This represented a 1% increase on the prior year. The calculation to get to this is the amount the Council request in precept is to divide the precept amount by the tax base (no. of houses EFDC are expecting to collect council tax from), which for last year was as follows:

$$\pounds 234,852 / 2,627.80 = \pounds 89.37$$

Normally, by this time the Parish Council has received the tax base figure for the following year, however the PFO has been advised by EFDC that this will not be available until mid December. As such, at the time of printing the agenda the PFO is unable to provide guidance as to what figure would represent a NIL increase. This matter will therefore need to be considered on a live basis during the meeting, subject to the tax base information having been received.

The District Council has asked to be notified of the Precept request by **31st January 2025** and Members are therefore asked to **CONSIDER** the proposed 2025/2026 budget and precept figures and **AGREE** a recommended precept figure to be put forward to full council in January 2025 for ratification.

Previous precept agreements are listed below:

2024/2025 – 1% increase
2023/2024 – Nil Increase
2022/2023 – 3% increase
2021/2022 – Nil Increase
2020/2021 – Nil Increase