

**19<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

## **Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer Bulletin**

**Paul Barton, Interim Parish Clerk and Responsible Officer for Audlem Parish Council is pleased to provide the community of Audlem a report on his last six months in office.**

It is exactly 6 months since I was asked to help out at Audlem Parish Council following the departure of the former Clerk. Sadly for me, it has been very challenging, in that for the whole duration of my time as the Interim Clerk, I have been unable to spend any time in the village or get to know, and meet any Parishioners, except those few that I have 'met' on Zoom meetings. I really look forward to the day when I can get back to having my 'coffee' mornings in the village again.

Since August there have been quite a few changes to the Council which is resulting in the Council having something of new feel to it. A number of new Councillors have joined and several more people have expressed an interest in joining the team, which is another positive sign.

This last week has also seen the Parish Council website having its long awaited update (complete with the usual glitches!) which the Council and its Members are working hard on and will use this as a major upgrade in the Council communication plan to keep residents better informed.

The Council Members have been very busy recently with a new Councillor training programme in full swing, which will be running throughout the year (on Zoom sessions of course), as well as a program of activity to update Parish Council practices and procedures, as legislation forces ongoing change.

One of the most significant of those was a major update to the financial bookkeeping management of the Parish Accounts. This started last April when a dedicated financial software program called Scribe was purchased by the Council which was designed exclusively for the use of Town and Parish Councils. This has been gradually rolling out since then as we all (including Councillors) become more familiar with its capabilities and we are all looking forward to the financial year end accounts which are forecast to be much simpler to extract than in previous years.

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Financially, Audlem remains in a very strong financial position, with prudence having been the watchword for many years, as it has looked to take on and improve the amenities within the community. The Council has benefitted during the year from grant monies from Cheshire East towards the upkeep of the Public Conveniences which remained open for much of the year and reopened in Autumn, and also a small Calor gas grant obtained by an eagle-eyed member of the Turnpike Field Working Group.

In addition the Turnpike Field has benefitted from help and some financial support (grant) from the Cheshire Wildlife Trust in developing the two new ponds, with the Council funding the ongoing maintenance which will be part of the fabric of this amenity.

The accounts are freely available for inspection through the Clerk with the following giving some indication of the current position.

INCOME 2021		EXPENDITURE & COMMITMENTS to 16 FEB 2021	
Precept	£52,152	Parish costs	£63,607
Other income (Grants etc)	£13,640	Grants outstanding	£5,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£65,792</b>		<b>£68,607</b>

The Council has carried forward ringfenced funds which were earmarked for expenditure, much of which is for the development of the Turnpike field, some of which has now been spent (items include tree surveys and fencing, both for health and safety reasons) but not yet showing as deducted from the ringfenced sums.

These include:

Turnpike Field (including donations held)    £77,683  
Asset replacement and renewal                £7,500

This financial year has been difficult in every sense of the word as Covid restrictions have had a huge impact in the shops, cafes and pubs but also with problems in trying to organise meetings (and 'Zoom' meeting are just not the same.....or not practical) with outside organisations including Cheshire East, United Utilities and the Canals & River Trust and many more.



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Most recently Councillor McLaren Brown has done a fantastic job alleviating a very serious flooding problem on the Longhill Moss for which we are all grateful.

As we move towards Spring, and I can see the green shoots of crocus, daffodils and primrose in my garden, your Council Members are working hard across a wide spectrum of areas and everyone is working towards the day when 'Covid' and 'lockdown' will be words put into history. Like many organisations, your Council and its Members are looking forward to returning to something approaching normal, but with an added determination to see the projects that have been held back, now moving into the forefront of this year's action program.

*Paul*