



Cheswick Green Parish Council

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## April 2017 Update

### 2017/18 Precept

It has been brought to the Parish Council's notice that a questionnaire has been circulated within the Parish, apparently on behalf of Cheswick Green Residents' Association (CGRA), asking for a response on three options relating to the increased Parish Precept for Year 2017/2018. For those who have not seen a copy, the three options were:

- Q1 Rejection of the increase and a requirement that the increase is reversed
- Q2 Acceptance of the increase on condition that the Precept is reduced in future years
- Q3 Acceptance of the increase with no condition

There is clear indication in the wording of the questions that it was designed to achieve a specific outcome.

It is not clear as to which households received a copy of the questionnaire, although it is certain that at least 50 households in the Parish were not included in the circulation.

The author of the questionnaire reports that a total of **154** were returned. The most recent information available is that there are **984** dwellings in the Parish. Therefore, this is a return rate of a little over **15%**

The results of the questionnaire are reported as:

- Q1 108 votes - this is of the order of **11%** of the dwellings in the Parish
- Q2 38 votes - this is of the order of **4%** of the dwellings in the Parish
- Q3 9 votes - this is of the order of **1%** of the dwellings in the Parish

What is not stated is that some **85%** of the dwellings made no response. From these figures, it is difficult to justify the author's description of the result as an "Overwhelming Majority"

It is not clear as to who within CGRA authorised the content or distribution of the questionnaire. The Minutes of the March CGRA meeting recorded that:

***"The phenomenal increase in Precept was universally condemned, it has been brought to the attention of SMBC and local ratepayers attention, though, whilst all are shocked by the level, it seems that there is little that can be done to curb the excess.***

***It is felt that residents would nonetheless wish to both register their discontent and point out that once reserves had been recouped the precept must be reduced, GA to draft letter to PC and also for circulation to residents."***

Neither of these records give any authority for a questionnaire to be circulated in the name of CGRA, yet it was produced and circulated with that authentication, and no letter has been received by the Parish Council as stated in their Minute reproduced

above.

Furthermore, the questionnaire went ahead after the precept had been submitted, and residents were notified by the Parish Council newsletter. The fact this cannot be altered was clearly recognised in the CGRA minute quoted above. So why then ask people to vote to reject the increase and require it to be reversed?

The way in which this situation has been misrepresented by CGRA suggests that it is continuing its campaign of disinformation about the lawful activities of the Parish Council.

As was fully explained in the Newsletter issued by the Parish Council, the main reason for the increase in the Precept was to rebuild the recommended level of financial reserves - which were drained by the significant expenditure needed to make the Village Hall roof safe - and to put the funding of future maintenance and refurbishment of the Village Hall on a secure footing. The intention is that the reserves will be fully restored over several years. The cost of the roof repairs was over 90% of the 2016/17 Precept.

The only viable alternative to funding the roof repairs was to effectively abandon the Hall, leaving it unusable until funding could be found from some other source - a member of the Parish Council spent considerable time looking to see if there was any funding available, to no avail. Members of the CGRA committee were well aware of this situation, yet chose to attack the Parish Council for its alleged profligacy, rather than being grateful for its intervention to restore the Hall to full use.

The mention in the CGRA questionnaire about the increase in "expenses" paid to Parish Councillors was inaccurate.