

Hi Chris,

Thanks again for your response and apologies for my error in thinking it was your report. I have read several reports lately regarding the PC finances and have mixed them up. That said, it doesn't really matter who wrote the report or who is to blame for the current situation. I am more interested in moving forward to find solutions and greater credibility for the PC.

I shall make enquiries with Morgan to attempt to establish if a social club has been tried in the past. I have lived here since the early days of KH however, and am not aware of anything similar being available. From my experience of working the bar, as previously mentioned, the drain on any surplus was staffing costs. We used agency staff which proved to be expensive. My suggestion is to staff the bar voluntarily - I would be willing to do this and have received offers of help from other volunteers. This would mean that any monies taken behind the bar would be surplus after stock costs.

As you have expressed an interest in exploring my idea, I shall contact Morgan and make enquiries with regard to stocking the bar. I appreciate it's very early days and we would need far more information but I thank you for your positivity.

Kind regards,  
Kim

CLlr Kim Tanner  
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Kings Hill Ward

On 22 Jan 2021, at 16:16, Chris Finlay <chris.finlay@kingshillparish.gov.uk> wrote:

Hello Kim,

Thank you for your reply, and your thoughts about increasing community centre revenues. This is most welcome and we must explore it further, but before I turn to that subject, I wanted to correct some misunderstandings in your email.

#### Authorship of the Report

The report I sent you was authored by Ian Morrell of the Local Council Consultancy (LCC), not by me, although he was appointed to "verify Cllr Finlay's financial report.", which was attached to the report as an appendix (as I may have mentioned previously, I spent three months investigating and documenting the spending of the council from 2016 to 2019).

Ian's role was to investigate the current financial position of the parish council, examine the financial decisions made, the process and its governance, the future management of the sports park, and to then present his own conclusions and recommendations.

It's interesting that you confused its authorship, as did Cllr Petty in his inaccurate article in Downs Mail. I did spend a lot of time on my investigation, but the council decided to seek independent advice to validate my findings and make suitable recommendations.

#### Substantial Increase to the Precept

It is extremely disappointing to have to increase the precept by such large amounts, I agree but, unfortunately, we have little choice (and, by the way, I, too, am a resident).

During the period from 2016 to 2019, our reserves were almost completely wiped out by spending on the sports park / cafe and bar, sanctioned by the sports park committee - the subject of my investigation and the independent consultant's report. You will know the councillors involved as you were briefly part of that committee, I believe.

The reserves should currently be in the region of £350k to £400k, but they are not.

Those reserves were intended to fund unforeseen events (general reserves to fund events, like this pandemic), to maintain certain areas of Kings Hill (commuted sums provided by KCC), and to accumulate provisions for future maintenance items (the 3G pitch is due for replacement in 3 to 5 years at a cost of circa £200k to £300k).

It will take us many years to recover our reserves position, possibly 5 or 6 years, at £50k per year, but that will depend greatly on unforeseen events, and the fate of the 3G pitch. That was the rationale for last year's 15% increase.

Clearly, we were ill equipped to weather the pandemic. With no reserves, and no ability to furlough our staff, we had extremely limited options. We cut ever cost we could, stood down casual workers, whilst trying to maintain the continuity of employment for key office staff such that, when allowed, we could re-open facilities. The fact that we have managed the parish affairs during this unusual period and only sought an advance against next year's precept of £60k is a testament to the prudence of current parish financial management. Clearly, this year's precept increase needs to recognise the continuing need to re-build the reserves as well as repay the advance. Again, unpalatable, but understandable given the events of 2016 to 2019.

I hope that gives you a better insight into the reasons behind the precept increases.

Now to turn to the social club you suggest.

#### Social Club

Thank you for your thoughts about a possible social club at the community centre. It sounds like a really good idea, provided it gets a reasonable patronage. I believe similar events have been started in the past and not got the required level of traction with the residents, and ended up incurring cost for the council.

Via the office, I will ask the community centre staff to delve into the records to establish what problems were encountered, so that we might learn from them and improve whatever we might do in the future. I will also ask the community centre to let us know the revenue we achieve from the hall / bar on a Saturday night throughout a normal year, so we understand the commercial parameters for success. Obviously, we also have the benefit of the new hall which will come on stream soon, too.

Given that you probably know the community centre staff better than I, will you contact them directly? ..... or should I start the ball rolling? Let me know what's best.

Chris Finlay  
Councillor  
Kings Hill Parish Council

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Enhancing the lives of the Kings Hill Community

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From: Kim Tanner <Kim.Tanner@tmbc.gov.uk>  
Sent: 20 January 2021 14:49  
To: Chris Finlay <chris.finlay@kingshillparish.gov.uk>  
Cc: Khpc Clerk <clerk@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Sarah Barker <sarah.barker@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Anthony Petty <anthony.petty@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Neil Sherlaw <neil.sherlaw@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; David Waller <david.waller@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Christopher Brown <Christopher.Brown@tmbc.gov.uk>; Millie Langridge <Millie.Langridge@tmbc.gov.uk>; Nicolas Heslop <Nicolas.Heslop@tmbc.gov.uk>  
Subject: Re: KHPC - F&HR committee

Hi Chris,

Many thanks for taking time to respond and for providing the report compiled by yourself.

It's good to hear that you are ready to make good progress as soon as the pandemic allows, and I have everything crossed for a more stable financial position for the PC going forward.

My concerns lie primarily with the substantial increases to precept which have been met by residents for several years now, and I have made comparisons for Band D levels with those from other wards within the borough of Tonbridge & Malling. I can confirm that for the coming year, Kings Hill's precept request is the second highest (I believe it was the highest last year), and the only ward to submit a higher request, even with next year's precept included, charges it's residents less than half that charged by KHPC.

I am very aware of the opinions of residents and, being a resident myself, agree that it is reasonable to expect a far smaller increase, if any, in future years.

One of my ideas for bringing in a greater income is to create a club where residents could come for a drink and maybe a bit of a dance every Saturday evening. I acknowledge that it shouldn't compete with the Friday night activities of the cricket club, or cannibalise the income of the Spitfire pub. It would be possible though to offer somewhere for families to go when the pub is closed to children at 8pm. Membership would be essential to control numbers, and would be an additional source of income generation to that taken by the bar.

I know from past experience that staffing is the main cost, and I could man the bar myself with voluntary help, having done it many times in the past, free of charge.

Theme nights along with quiz nights, race nights etc could also be on offer.

A member's weekly lottery could also bring income and offer a bit of fun to residents and I am aware that the PC already holds the relevant licenses to allow for this. It is clear that many residents, like myself, use neither the Sports Park nor the Community Centre and yet are expected to pay for them. I feel it would be positive to offer yet another option to playing football, mother and toddler groups and fitness classes. Of course, time is of the essence and it would be prudent to have this ready to go as soon

as lockdown ends. Many residents are desperate to get out and socialise and this situation could be used to your advantage.

I'd be happy to expand on my ideas if you feel it would be of interest, but either way, I sincerely wish you all the very best in turning things around.

Kind regards,  
Kim

Cllr Kim Tanner  
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Kings Hill Ward

On 10 Jan 2021, at 14:46, Chris Finlay <chris.finlay@kingshillparish.gov.uk> wrote:

Hello Kim,

Thank you for your recent emails regarding the parish finances and the operation of the Community Centre. As chairman of the Finance Committee, I thought it might be sensible for me to address and allay the concerns you express, as many of those concerns have already been addressed and, but for the pandemic, we would be on a solid path to recovery.

For background information, I joined the parish in July 2019, joined the Finance and HR committee in September 2019 (as we were budget setting for 2020/21), and subsequently was appointed chairman in May 2020. Prior to retirement, I ran my own 50 person IT consultancy firm, for 30 years, selling out to the staff in Mar 2017. One of my many roles was to manage its finances, which I successfully steered through two recessions.

#### Depleted Reserves

There has been much said about the depleted reserves, as though these disappeared overnight. They did not. I spent three months of my own time investigating where these reserves went, and then the parish subsequently decided to engage an independent specialist consultant to review our position. His findings and recommendations are contained in the attached report (which you may not have seen), and categorically identifies that over spending at the Sports Park throughout the period from 2016 to 2019 is the root cause, driven by the Sport Park Committee at the time (the composition of which can be found in an appendix to the report). The parish has adopted the consultant's recommendations in full.

Less of a focus at the time, but changes are also being made to the catering services, to mitigate the operational interference by councillors that also occurred during those same 2016 to 2019 years and that also exacerbated operating costs.

I should mention that the reserves were a combination of operational reserves, commuted monies with designated use, and provisions for high maintenance cost items. In October 2019, almost all of these reserves had been consumed. The budget setting exercise for the 2020/21 year took this into account.

2020/21 Budget Setting

The budget setting exercise for 2020/21 was clearly focused on recovery. The finance committee examined all the income and expenditure and recommended changes to maximise income and minimise costs. As you may recall, some of those changes were not received favourably.

The removal of the football club's priority booking, the removal of the pricing discount, and the encouragement to get other teams to use the Sports Park were all designed to maximise the income (the discounts and priority booking rules were all agreed in prior years with the Sport Park Committee). The removal of the groundsman in favour of a contract service significantly reduced expenditure.

A similar exercise was undertaken with regard to the Community Centre although, in truth, in the year prior to the pandemic, the Community Centre had been operating at breakeven with occupancy rates between 65% and 80%, consistently. Regardless, an exercise was carried out to look at maximising revenue and minimising costs (obviously, the new hall which is due to come on line soon will increase our capacity to hold more events, and consequently increase our revenues). We do not consider the community centre performance to be a problem, in normal circumstances.

In December 2019, the precept was set to 15.1%, for the 2020/21 financial year. Given all the changes, and the prevailing operating conditions, this would have achieved a small operating surplus and would have enable the parish to start rebuilding the reserves.

#### The Pandemic

Clearly the pandemic has had a major impact everywhere. Within the parish, we have had to close the Sports Park and the Community Centre at various times, without knowing when it might end. Everything has become rather hand to mouth. As stated in our application for an advance against next year's precept, this cut our income by 50%. Also, you may not know that furlough payments were denied us (given that we were supported with precept monies).

#### 2021/22 Budget Setting

Given the massive impact to income, and the continuing constraint that COVID rules have on our normal operating conditions, and income, it was again necessary to compile another budget that relied on a significant precept increase. Hence, setting the precept level at 23.7%.

#### Staff Costs

There has also been concerns raised with high staff costs, which again is also being addressed. Throughout the pandemic, casual staff have generally been stood down, and operational hours reduced or removed altogether. Natural wastage has also helped to reduce staff costs (two posts), and the remaining officers have absorbed that workload, at no additional cost to the council. Making further staff redundant is not an easy option if it is our intention to re-start the same service sometime later. We have tried to maintain a continuity of staff so that we can resume working when instructed to do so by government. If the transfer of the Sports Park to TMAActive goes ahead, it will also have a significant and beneficial impact on staff costs.

#### In Conclusion

Apologies for the length of this response, but as you can see, KHPC has not been standing idle, and we do believe we have a clearly defined strategy to recover from the position that the profligate spending of the 2016 to 2019 period did to our reserves. We are happy to share these details further with you, although I trust the attached report will provide a wealth of information, too.

Regards,  
Chris Finlay  
Councillor  
Kings Hill Parish Council  
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www.kingshillparish.gov.uk

From: Kim Tanner <Kim.Tanner@tmbc.gov.uk>  
Sent: 09 January 2021 12:15  
To: Khpc Clerk <clerk@kingshillparish.gov.uk>  
Cc: Sarah Barker <sarah.barker@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Chris Finlay <chris.finlay@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Anthony Petty <anthony.petty@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Neil Sherlaw <neil.sherlaw@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; David Waller <david.waller@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Christopher Brown <Christopher.Brown@tmbc.gov.uk>; Millie Langridge <Millie.Langridge@tmbc.gov.uk>; Nicolas Heslop <Nicolas.Heslop@tmbc.gov.uk>; Sharon Shelton <Sharon.Shelton@tmbc.gov.uk>; Martin Coffin <Martin.Coffin@tmbc.gov.uk>; Matt D BOUGHTON <boughtonm@parliament.uk>  
Subject: Re: KHPC - F&HR committee

Dear Julie,  
Many thanks for your response despite the fact that I find your comments disappointing.

Firstly, whilst I understand perfectly that the Community Centre falls within the responsibility of the Amenities Committee, my concerns are with regard to your financial position and could, I am sure, be discussed by the Finance & HR Committee long before March. As you mention, any recommendation from Amenities would need to go to them anyway.

I must also mention that I'm finding it difficult to "rest assured" as you suggest, when you are taking an advance from TMBC and requesting a precept of 23.7% for the coming financial year. I used to hold the position of Financial Assistant within KHPC and remember very well that the finances were consistently very healthy, and with significant reserves and investments in place. I am always in favour of a positive attitude, however with the finances now completely depleted, I feel it is time to face reality.

I read the report you talk of when deciding how to vote at TMBC with regard to granting the loan to you, after which I unfortunately cannot share your optimism. My understanding of the report was that your current financial position has resulted due to a catalogue of errors and mis-management before the additional impact of Covid-19.

As a resident, I am feeling great frustration, and you cannot fail to be aware that I am far from alone in this. Your response only adds to that frustration, in particular when you talk about 'best ever' performances. Clearly 'best ever' performances are still not good enough and I cannot agree that the pandemic is mainly to blame. I have been involved in many meetings during the last year between the Parish Council and KH Football Club, when it was openly admitted by your members long before the pandemic struck that finances were desperate.

As explained, I hold a wealth of experience and have offered to assist free of charge, however from your lack of urgency as is consistently the attitude of the PC, I can only assume that my concerns are far greater than yours.

I sincerely hope that you find a way to avoid requesting such an inappropriately high precept in future years, as residents of KH are clearly understanding of what this means for them nowadays. You know where I am should you choose to discuss my ideas.

Matt - I have copied you into my response for info. Whilst I realise there is so much going on within Parliament at the moment, I wonder if at any time in the future you could refer to Tom with a suggestion to cap precept requests in line with the cap that Borough Councils have to work with. I have spoken to you previously with regard to the unacceptable level of increase we have to meet year on year in Kings Hill and this cannot continue. For your information, the request for the coming year equates to an increase of 23.7%.

Kind regards,  
Kim

Cllr Kim Tanner  
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Kings Hill Ward

On 8 Jan 2021, at 10:15, Khpc Clerk <clerk@kingshillparish.gov.uk> wrote:  
Dear Kim,

I have consulted with the Chair of the Finance and HR Committee and it is agreed that in the first instance your comments will be considered is at the Amenities Committee.

The Amenities Committee has the delegated functions of managing the Community Centre, any initiatives or plans agreed by the Amenities Committee are then put before the Finance and HR Committee for scrutiny.

Unfortunately, the agenda for the next meeting has already been published so I'm not able to add any items to it. Your letter will be added to the next meeting in March.

In the meantime, be rest assured that the parish council has been carrying out a variety of cost cutting measures over the past 12 months and continues to review these at meetings. It may be useful for you to read the financial investigation report which details why the parish council had such depleted reserves before the pandemic outbreak. Had the pandemic not struck the income ratios at both KHCC and KHSP were on target for a 'best ever' performance. As you said, these are unprecedented times.

[https://www.kingshillparish.gov.uk/Finance\\_4467.aspx](https://www.kingshillparish.gov.uk/Finance_4467.aspx)

Stay safe.

Regards,

Julie

Julie Miller  
Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer  
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Tel: 01732-870382  
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-----Original Message-----

From: Kim Tanner <Kim.Tanner@tmbc.gov.uk>  
Sent: 07 January 2021 12:01  
To: Khpc Clerk <clerk@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Sarah Barker <sarah.barker@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Chris Finlay <chris.finlay@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Anthony Petty <anthony.petty@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; Neil Sherlaw <neil.sherlaw@kingshillparish.gov.uk>; David Waller <david.waller@kingshillparish.gov.uk>  
Cc: Christopher Brown <Christopher.Brown@tmbc.gov.uk>; Millie Langridge <Millie.Langridge@tmbc.gov.uk>; Nicolas Heslop <Nicolas.Heslop@tmbc.gov.uk>; Sharon Shelton <Sharon.Shelton@tmbc.gov.uk>; Martin Coffin <Martin.Coffin@tmbc.gov.uk>  
Subject: KHPC - F&HR committee

Good morning all,  
Happy New Year!

You will now know that the Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board within TMBC voted last night in favour of granting the advance requested by yourselves. Cabinet are still to approve the payment but I do not envisage any problem with that.

If you tuned into the meeting via YouTube, you will have heard me mention that I would be making enquiries with regard to your plans to improve your financial position in future. As your precept request for the coming year is extraordinarily high, and has been far higher for several years than other precept requests within our borough, I feel very strongly that this cannot continue year on year.

Should tmactive decide to take over the management of the Sports Park from you, I would hope that this will alleviate some issues. I am aware, however, that the Sports Park is not the only drain on your finances.

Staffing costs are very high in my opinion and probably should be reviewed, although I realise this is a matter for you to decide. I also appreciate that the pandemic has had a huge impact on income, but financial issues existed long before March of last year and I feel the Community Centre, presumably to be your only remaining facility, could be utilised even more to generate greater income and offer something extra back to the community.

I realise that during normal times, the Community Centre is hired out extensively during the week, however there are still opportunities for the Parish Council to host events during the weekend which could bring in additional monies. I have ideas in this regard and would be willing to assist voluntarily if you so wish. You may or may not be aware that during my working life I had to help my commercial customers who were struggling to turn their businesses around, and I can offer some expertise in this field. I stepped in to manage the Community Centre for almost a year in the past when the previous manager resigned, during which time I organised 2 Christmas Fayres, 2 Pantomimes and various other events. I also helped out in the cafe at the Sports Park on several occasions during my time as Parish



Councillor when you had staffing problems. I mention this as a reminder of my experience within the Parish Council.

I appreciate that you have no obligation to offer information to me, but I am keen to see your position improve and more importantly, I think it is imperative that residents are no longer required to cover deficits going forward. It is surely time to roll up our sleeves together in order to save your current situation from worsening. I shall aim to tune into your next committee meeting scheduled for 27th January 2021 if my diary allows, when I would be happy to share my thoughts, or alternatively, you may prefer to meet electronically prior to that.

Here's hoping for a much brighter year and for the vaccine to save us from further despair,

Kind regards,  
Kim

Cllr Kim Tanner  
Kings Hill Ward within Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council