**Annual Report and Accounts for Pitstone Parish Council Year Ending 31-3-2023**

|  | To 31-3-2022 | To 31-3-2023 | Variance to previous year |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Receipts** | £394,221 | £189,150 | -52% |
| **Total Payments** | £366,469 | £166,670 | -55% |
| **Balances Carried Forward** | £150,655 | £173,135 | |

The parish council is financially secure with no loans or debts.  The majority of our capital projects progress with a high level of external grant funding, thus the rise and fall in receipts corresponds with the rise and fall in capital projects being undertaken.

Our accounts are subject to three layers of audit each year.  The first is carried out by council members.  The second is conducted by an 'internal auditor' appointed by the parish council – IAC Ltd. The parish council and the internal auditor's findings are then submitted to an 'external auditor' appointed to us, in our case PKF Littlejohn.  Members of the public can view all audit reports on our website.   This report provides a more descriptive narrative, rather than purely financial.

Last financial year the parish council installed the long-awaited skate park and delivered some other minor projects, so the total cost of capital projects accounted for £236,298 of the total annual expenditure.  This financial year, the capital undertakings have been of lower value, and therefore the total payments for the year have also fallen.  Projects included some minor amendments to the pavilion building including the installation of some protective fencing, installation of sound absorbing panels and built-in racking within the container.   Two memorial benches were purchased (funded by the respective families), 3 further bins (to help deter littering) and a pencil bollard (approved by Buckinghamshire Council) installed outside Brookmead primary school.    Total cost of new assets therefore £11,568.

We made a financial contribution (as did Ivinghoe Parish Council) to Buckinghamshire Council for highway safety improvements outside Brookmead primary school.  Our share equated to £5,250.

The normal council operations continue, and these receive no external grants, so are funded via the precept (or partially offset via income generated from hire of our facilities or advertising in our magazine).  This includes maintaining streetlights, concluding the roll out of LED lanterns, Christmas illuminations, litter picking, emptying dog & litter bins, maintaining play equipment and open spaces, producing Pitstone Parish Post, supporting local community groups with grants, running the Volunteer of the Year Scheme, running the youth café and community car schemes, children's competitions, operating our two mVAS units, running the allotment site, maintaining parish assets, and maintaining the pavilion and football pitches.   Last financial year we were fortunate enough not to need to carry out any pitch renovation works due to the impact of the building works and covid restrictions on the football clubs, but this requirement returned during the 2022-23 year.

In line with the above, the capital projects delivered last financial year generated £212,225 of grant and Section 106 receipts (these are funds provided by residential developers for specific improvements within the community).  This year, there was just the final Section 106 contribution of £4,204 towards the skate park.  We also received the funding from the two families for their respective memorial benches and a donation of £1,500 towards the Community Car Scheme from the family of a previous client.   The previous year we received an £8k covid grant towards loss of income arising from covid restrictions preventing hires, that was not replicated this year.

**Devolved Services**
The parish council undertakes some right of way maintenance, grass verge cutting and siding out on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council (BC) under powers they have devolved to us for these purposes. They pay a contribution of £3,659 towards the delivery of these services, which cost the parish £5,050 to deliver.  However, it does mean that our grass can be cut more frequently, works carried out more efficiently, and we have more control over delivery of these services.  Due to complications arising from changing their Highways Contractors, Buckinghamshire Council extended the last contract for a further year to cover 2023, but have yet to confirm what, or if, there will be a devolved service offering for 2024 onwards.

As a follow up, in 2022 Buckinghamshire Council declined to devolve powers to the Parish Council to cut the grass verge along Westfield Road when they adopted it from Taylor Wimpey, however in June 2023 they granted permission (but not funding) and this has now been added to the schedules for our own contractors.

**Ongoing Projects by Other Bodies/Tiers of Government**
- Hertfordshire County Council continues to work with the Canal & River Trust and Buckinghamshire Council to specify possible cycle route improvements towards Tring station. All roadside options tested failed the required safety audits so a direct straight-line cycle/pedestrian route along Northfield Road was deemed unviable. They are now concentrating on possible improvements to the route via Marshcroft Lane and the canal.
- Buckinghamshire Council continues to work with developers (Taylor Wimpey, Croudace, Nicholas King Homes and Bellway) to fulfil their highway and leisure obligations including the issues surrounding the multi-use games area.
- The Chiltern's Beechwoods in Ashridge were designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as they are of European importance. This gives rise to mitigation measures that must be put in place to protect them from over-use. Local Planning Authorities are working to establish what these mitigation measures may look like, and this means that planning applications for new residential dwellings are taking longer to determine.
- We are waiting for the new Buckinghamshire Council Community Board brief and their new Highways Contracts to become established, to find out how BC, and both Pitstone and Ivinghoe parish councils, can move forward with other aspects of the Safety Scheme.