

Snettisham Parish Council

Consultation on possibility of parish and town councils being subject to precepting referenda.

Snettisham Parish Council is opposed to this idea in principle.

First, our precept varies from year to year:

2014/15 - £74,030

2015/16 - £81,060

2016/17 - £76,460

We value the opportunity to vary our income according to our needs. We believe this offers our residents the security of knowing that they will be charged for those things which make a difference to their lives, and not simply building up reserves.

It had been recommended by some that we should not decrease our precept last year, as we did by more than 5%, in case such legislation was introduced. Were the threat of precept referendums to become reality, parishes would feel a pressure never to reduce their precepts, as it may become impossible to increase them again when necessary. This would have the opposite effect to that apparently intended.

While we are a medium sized parish which would not be affected by para. 3.3.4, though 3.3.6 suggests this could be widened and we would be included.

Para. 3.3.5 refers to an exemption in the event of transferred responsibilities. This is a concern as, in many cases, responsibility has not been transferred, but the services provided by higher-level councils simply reduced. As an example we have had major issues here (a rural parish with a very large amount of footpath) with grass cutting and footpath maintenance being reduced by the Borough and County. Our parishioners have asked us to take this up, but this would not be covered by the exemption - we are taking up responsibilities that are still officially resident elsewhere. Residents expect these functions to be carried out, we take them on, but under these proposals could be financially punished for this. As we operate at the lowest level of government and are not party political, we are able to be – indeed should be – more responsive to the desires of our neighbours.

We also work with many other local parishes, who are often smaller than us. We feel that we should also support their rights in these matters. The costs of referendums would be prohibitive for all. Given that the sums involved are small – ours is c.£1.50pw per band D property – such proposals would really be a case of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Reference in para 3.3.6. to residents being concerned when precepts of £25 (i.e. 50p per week) are increased seems a little exaggerated –



we get more complaints each month about dog mess than we do in a year about the level of the precept....

It may be worth observing also that the Community Infrastructure Levy may be being introduced in our area soon. This would increase our overall income, and do so in an unpredictable way. Spending and income may not be on the same cycle, so the level of reserves may increase while facilitated projects are worked on. We would need cast iron assurances that any audit regime would take this into account as this money is for capital infrastructure development, not paying for day-to-day expenses.

Our freedom in this regard was, I believe, hard fought for in the 1970s, and we would maintain that nothing has changed, other than increased responsibilities, red tape and consequent costs. We also observe that given the huge difference in the sums involved, our residents might reasonably believe that such legislation would be more appropriate and effective if applied to spending by national government.

With kind regards
Simon Bower
Parish Clerk
21/10/2016

