

# Didcot Town Council

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## Guide to the Town Council element of your council tax for the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

In 2022/2023 Didcot Town Council will receive £118.25 for each band D household. This is a small increase of £5.16 per band D property for the Town Council element of your Council Tax.

Didcot Town Council's part of your council tax bill is collected by South Oxfordshire District Council and this leaflet explains how the figure is arrived at and where the money goes.

The economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic continues to make the financial year more challenging than a "normal" year. The Town Council suffered a reduction in income of around £300,000 in the previous two years due to uncertain hiring conditions at the Civic Hall and lockdowns. At the same time, Willowbrook was handed back to us without warning by the contractor and we have had around £130,000 of unbudgeted expenditure on repairs and necessary improvements to make the building compliant and safe to open to the public. The Town Council's other costs have remained largely the same which has required careful financial management. During 2021/22 the Town Council has continued to integrate with the Didcot Civic Hall operation for efficiency and we are working to make the venue return to a vibrant Town asset. Bookings are increasing but we anticipate it will take most of this coming financial year to get back to pre-covid levels of income. The Town Council constantly seeks and strives to improve services and provide the best value to the community for the small proportion of the total council tax bill collected by South Oxfordshire District Council.

This is a summary of our budget for 2022/23.

### Budget Summary for 2022/2023

Expenditure	£
Finance and General Purposes Committee	617,715
Grant Aid	45,000
Didcot Civic Hall	192,250
Environment & Climate Committee	383,574
Projects	109,254
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,347,793</b>
Less General Income expected	(100,231)
Less expected grant income – S106/CIL	(6,000)
Equals: total expenditure to be collected via Council Tax (the precept)	1,241,562

Dividing this precept figure by the tax base of 10,499.4 gives the Town Council's component of Council Tax for a Band D Property as £118.25 per year.

In more detail, the following describes how we have spent money in 2021/2022 and how we will spend money in 2022/2023.

## The Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Town Council draws its income from relatively few sources and the Council Tax precept is the biggest source of revenue. The Council continually scrutinises expenditure and works to identify potential savings as well as other sources of income, particularly accessing relevant grants for some projects. One impact of the pandemic is the loss of contract income from the Willowbrook Leisure Centre – an annual loss of around £83,000, as well as additional running costs. In addition, the Civic Hall income has shrunk by around £190,000 and is only now beginning to build up again. The Town Council are pleased to have worked with the NHS to use the Civic Hall for Covid-19 inoculations throughout the year, and this has helped to bring in at least some income to cover essential bills – but the cost in utilities with the doors open in all weathers has negated this.

A major cost is the £123,000 paid annually to service the original loan of £1.83 million used to refurbish and extend the Civic Hall and Town Council offices.

The Council maintains reserves that are earmarked for future maintenance or renewal of its buildings in recognition of the need to undertake remedial work to some of its aging assets.

There is further detail below about the Environment Committee's expenditure but otherwise the Council recognises that Didcot residents want to feel safe so there is an annual contribution towards CCTV (£9,500). The Council will continue to run Willowbrook in-house whilst the economic climate improves to allow us to procure another company on a long term contract. Grant aid to voluntary organisations and groups that can bring benefit to Didcot's residents is being held at £45,000 plus a new Community Projects cost centre to provide funding for other initiatives in Didcot that will benefit residents.

Since April 2021 grant aid has supported:

- Didcot Food Festival
- Didcot Library
- Be Free Young Carers
- Citizens Advice
- Didcot Baptist Church
- Free Christmas Dinner Project
- Oxfordshire Play Association
- Sustainable Didcot – Wildlife Cafe
- Didcot Baby Monday
- Plus more applications being processed

## The Environment and Climate Committee

The Environment and Climate Committee oversees outdoor services, which delivers the management and maintenance of parks and recreational open green spaces owned or leased by the Council and sports, leisure and recreational activities.

Amongst its on-going projects for 2022/2023 the Council plans to progress the following:

- Improvements at Ladygrove Lakes
- Improvements at Kynaston Road Cemetery
- Tendering to build the new Community Pavilion at Edmonds Park
- Progressing the new Splash Park at Edmonds Park
- Improvement of the play area at St Anne's Court
- Wildflower and bee-friendly planting
- New sand pit with play train at Ladygrove play area
- Planting trees to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee

In the 2021/22 financial year, the Committee has been working closely with other standing Committees of the Council to progress the following projects:

- On-going programme of water treatment at the Ladygrove Lakes
- Completion of a new path to improve access to Stubbings Land from Great Western Park
- The purchase of the first electric vehicle and strimmers for use by the Outside team.

## Our sites and day to day maintenance

Our large sites are at:

- Edmonds Park
- Ladygrove Park
- Smallbones Recreation Park
- Marsh Recreation Ground
- Great Western Drive Park
- Loyd Recreation Park
- Stubbings Land
- Millennium Wood
- Kynaston Road Cemetery
- Ladygrove Lakes
- Allotment sites:
  - New Road
  - Broadway
  - Wantage Road
  - Cockcroft Road
  - Mereland Road

Including some smaller sites, the Council manages a combined land area of over 100 acres. In terms of allotments the Council administers over 420 plots in conjunction with a user liaison groups that reports regularly on problems and successes.

An excellent team of full time grounds staff, led by the Outdoor Services Manager, maintains land owned by Didcot Town Council.

The work of the team includes:

- Tree care and annual planting
- Allotment maintenance
- Litter clearance
- Cutting grass and hedges
- Maintaining flower beds
- Play area equipment repairs and inspection
- Sports pitch maintenance
- Vehicle and machinery maintenance

## The Property & Facilities Committee

This is a new standing Committee that has evolved from the previous Civic Hall Management Committee. The Town Council found that new responsibilities with Willowbrook and the building of the new Pavilion in Edmonds Park demanded a new Committee to look after the future management of these and other buildings.

Amongst its on-going projects for 2022/2023 the Council plans to progress the following:

- Solar roofing at the Civic Hall; Willowbrook and the Outdoor Services Depot in Edmonds Park
- LED lighting at the Civic Hall and Willowbrook.
- Tendering to build the new Community Pavilion at Edmonds Park
- Tendering to build the new Splash Park at Edmonds Park
- Improvements of new play area at St Anne's Court
- Management of the Fleet Meadow Community Building

An excellent team of staff at both the Civic Hall and Willowbrook Leisure Centre are led by the Property & Facilities Manager and his Deputy. The team are also running organising several civic events including the parade on Remembrance Sunday; the Platinum Jubilee commemorations; the Town Fayre and events to help the Didcot Mayor to raise money for the Mayoral charities.

## **Feedback**

Didcot Town Council would like to hear your views and any comments you may have on the services provided or what you would like to see in the future.

Comments may be emailed to [council@didcot.gov.uk](mailto:council@didcot.gov.uk), or in writing to Didcot Town Council, Town Council Offices, Britwell Road, Didcot, Oxon OX11 7HN, or hand them into the Council Office on Britwell Road. In order to ensure you receive a response, and so that we can verify you are a Didcot resident, please provide your name and full address.

### **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AT DIDCOT CIVIC HALL**

**7.30PM ON WEDNESDAY 23rd MARCH 2022**

**Every Didcot resident is invited to attend.**

**Please forward your questions to the Town Council by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022**