

OLD WOUGHTON

Spring 2021

# News



The Newsletter of Old Woughton Parish Council



**Rainbow over Ouzel Valley**

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# Who's Who in the Parish

## OLD WUGHTON PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish of Old Woughton is divided into 4 small wards.  
Details of your local Councillors are listed below.

### Woughton on the Green North



#### Rob Grindley

Planning, Projects,  
Liaison for Woughton Playing  
Fields/Pavilion, Transport

rgrindley@  
oldwoughton.org.uk

#### Roy Kenyon

Allotments, Finance  
& Budget, Projects,  
Liaison for Transport

rkenyon@  
oldwoughton.org.uk

#### Phil Nash

Allotments,  
Communications,  
OWIS/IT, Projects

pnash@  
oldwoughton.org.uk

### Woughton on the Green South



#### Ray Brown

Allotments,  
Planning, Projects,  
Village Greens/Rights of Way

rbrown@oldwoughton.org.uk

#### Charlotte Hall

CHAIR

Finance & Budget,  
Planning, Projects Lead, Liaison for Parks Trust,  
OWPC Representative - Welfare Trust,  
Communications

chall@oldwoughton.org.uk

### Woughton Park



#### Vanessa Freeman Gwynn

VICE CHAIR

Planning, Projects,  
Liaison for MKC Consultations,  
Parks Trust, Communications

vgwynn@oldwoughton.org.uk

#### Geoff Long

glong@oldwoughton.org.uk

### Passmore



#### Mary Major

Dog Bins,  
Noticeboards, Projects,  
Finance and Budget,  
Liaison for MKC Consultations,  
Liaison Canal & River Trust'

mmajor@oldwoughton.org.uk

#### Jeremy Morrison

Liaison for Canal and River Trust,  
Communications Projects

jmorrison@oldwoughton.org.uk

The Borough of Milton Keynes is divided into larger wards, OWPC is part of the Campbell Park and Old Woughton Ward. Your ward councillors are:

### Clerk



#### Jackie Williams

Finance & Budget,  
Environment, OWIS/IT, Data Protection  
Office, Responsible Financial Officer

clerk@oldwoughton.org.uk

#### Terry Baines

terry.baines@milton-keynes.gov.uk

T. 01908 730314 / 07846 697237

#### Paul Trendall

paul.trendall@milton-keynes.gov.uk

T. 07793 080425

#### Ric Brackenbury

ric.brackenbury@milton-keynes.gov.uk

T. 01908 691691 Civic Offices



Our Next Parish Council  
Meetings Are On Monday:

24th May Annual Parish Meeting

10th May 2021 -AGM  
12th July 2021

VENUE: to be advised

### CONTACT US

<https://oldwoughton.org.uk>

01908 465811

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Friends of  
Old Woughton PC



**Hello and welcome to the first parish Newsletter of 2021, we hope you remain safe and well, as we all manage our way out of this latest lockdown.**

In fact, management is rather the theme for this issue. The eagle-eyed amongst you will already have spotted the leadership changes at the parish council (page 2 refers), and we have the first Chair's column from Charlotte Hall as she moves up from Vice Chair following Andrew Humphries resignation in November. Charlotte talks to us about how she sees her new role as a 'custodian' of Old Woughton.

We are also pleased to be introducing our new Clerk: Jackie Williams (see below), which means that the smooth transition in the management of OWPC is advancing well.

In the centrefold this month we also look at management issues and this time from a financial perspective. The new budget year 2021/22 starts on 1st April and once again the OWPC precept remains unchanged, as it has since the parish council's creation in May 2012. Behind this stable headline figure, the PC has been quietly investing its inherited reserves in the parish in response to your ideas and suggestions and you can see that it makes for quite a list of achievements. However, this phase is now drawing to a close and we all need to decide on the future strategy. We hope you find the information interesting, but if you'd like any more details please contact the Comms. Team: [communications@oldwoughton.org.uk](mailto:communications@oldwoughton.org.uk) and we'll include them in the Summer issue at the end of June and, just to give you a heads up, we'll be asking for your views about parish priorities to be managed forwards – you have been alerted!

In the meantime, why not try our quiz on page 5 and don't worry the answers are all on page 8. Also on the back page, a reminder that May 6th brings the parish elections postponed from last May. All nine of OWPC's seats are up for contest - do please exercise your vote!

So that is all for now, but we would like to close by recording our appreciation for all the lovely feedback on the OWPC Calendar 2021 – we managed to sell out by mid-January!

**THE COMMS TEAM** - Charlotte, Phil & Vanessa

## JACKIE JOINS OWPC

We are pleased to announce the recent appointment of Jackie Williams as the parish council's new Clerk. Jackie started with us in February and the handover from Julian Vischer, our retiring clerk, is now well advanced. All of the contact details for the Clerk remain unchanged (see p2).

*We will hear more from Jackie in the next issue but, in the meantime, we say welcome aboard!*

**I would like to start by once again thanking Andrew Humphries as retiring Chair for his hard work and commitment and here I take a moment to reflect on my new role, where the word 'custodian' seems to fit the bill.**

As we set the budget for 2021/22, OWPC recognised that it has reached a crossroads and as a PC knows how important it is to take time to plan and consult with residents as we look to the next phase of Old Woughton. This is especially important as we continue to live in a time of uncertainty and change: the world has changed; Milton Keynes continues growing and developing; and the Borough itself has had to rapidly adapt to deliver its services and governance through the pandemic. We have also seen our own internal changes with both the retirement of Chair and Clerk.

So, it would seem a natural step against this backdrop to see how best we can serve and deliver our responsibilities within this challenging but exciting time! It is an opportunity to grasp the positives as well as to reflect and learn. We need to work closely with partners and neighbours and drill down to see 'what sort of a PC', you our residents, still want.

I think most would agree that what we do know is that our green and 'rural' parish is special and of huge importance not just to local residents but to MK as a whole. We are a 'destination' for leisure and outdoor activity and being bounded by the canal and Ouzel Valley parklands puts us on a busy green corridor. Gosh how lucky are we to have had this wonderful space to take our exercise and find comfort in quiet corners.

As many of you know, I have a huge passion for the heritage of our parish – and Woughton on the Green being one of the 13 ancient villages taken in by Milton Keynes we are perhaps the best preserved – something which visitors cannot believe exists when they discover us. The green agenda and unique landscape figures significantly, but so too does our need to respond to new ways of working; support of our businesses; new transport arrangements; future technologies; and supporting families and much more.

So, this is not a job for just one person - we are all custodians here. I look forward to continue working with colleagues and you all as we find our way forward and plan the best future of this parish and PC. What we do know is that you have a dedicated and active team and we will not be letting the 'grass grow under our feet!' We will ensure that it is cut, grazed and nurtured...

**Charlotte Hall**

## GEOFF JOINS OWPC

*Welcome Geoff, or more accurately, welcome back!*

Geoff Long submitted his CV to backfill the Woughton Park ward vacancy created by Andrew Humphries' retirement, which reminded us all, were that even necessary, that he had already 12 years of service on behalf of this community as one of our two councillors when the parish was part of Woughton Community Council.

*Cllr. Long's Co-option was confirmed at OPWC's full meeting on 8th March 2021.*



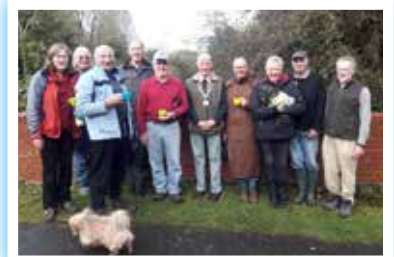
... it's what makes the world go around or so they say, but how does it underpin the work of OWPC? In this edition's centrefold feature, we look at the various aspects of managing the parish's finances – from how funds are raised and monitored, to how they've been invested since our creation in 2012 and what you'd like to see prioritised for the future. It's an issue that most people feel strongly about so do enjoy the short quiz opposite (answers on the back page). In the interests of value for money there is absolutely no prize for getting all the right answers save for self-satisfaction!

## What did **OWPC** ever do for us?

As the first tier of government in the UK, parish councils have a range of responsibilities and some grow to be quite large employing a range of specialist staff like rangers and youth workers. Here in Old Woughton, however, where many of the councillors are retired from paid work, we use their skills to help achieve parishioners' interests in a range of different ways and, hopefully, you will recognise some of these examples as you see us around and about.

### VOLUNTEERING

- OWPC has a Volunteering Strategy and supports groups and activities
- litter-picking events are organised in each ward across the year
- towpath working parties support our Canal & River Trust partnership



### COMMUNICATION

- all councillors will undertake casework for any parishioner
- Newsletters are produced quarterly and feedback is always sought
- Noticeboards are placed in each of OWPC's four wards
- a Notification Service is managed to distribute urgent information
- The Parish website provides local information and access to archives



### PROJECT WORKS

- OWPC has achieved three new village green designations
- local budgets support initiatives in each of the four wards
- 16 bins have been provided for litter and dog waste
- fairy lights now go up in the village (and can be booked for events)
- Ye Olde Swan registered as a Community Asset



### GOVERNANCE

- all 9 councillors attend full OWPC meetings bi-monthly, it's where decisions are taken and the public has the right to ask any questions
- councillors respond to policy consultations by other partner bodies and share local knowledge with other PCs via MKC's Parish Forum
- councillors represent the parish's interests (eg at planning meetings)
- management of the Patch has been devolved to allotment users and is now self-financing



# Financial life of Old Woughton Parish Council

## BIRTH OF A PARISH

Our parish officially started life on the 1st of April 2012 and, following elections on the 3rd of May, the first AGM was held on the 9th of May. At this meeting several names for the new parish were proposed and the name Old Woughton Parish Council (OWPC) was finally selected by vote.

## FINANCING A PARISH

The cost of running a parish is met by levying a local tax known as a parish precept. Technically, a precept is an order from one authority to another requesting the rate of tax to be charged on its behalf. Put more simply, it is essentially a parish "Council Tax" collected on a parish's behalf by the higher authority in our case this being Milton Keynes Unitary authority.

## OWPC PRECEPT

The precept is collected along with Council Tax and, as such, its details need to be submitted to Milton Keynes Council early in the year. This allows MKC time to make the necessary calculations to allocate the precept amount amongst the council tax bands. For that reason, for our first financial year 2012/2013, we received the precept in line with that requested and levied by our previous local authority which was Woughton Community Council (WCC). OWPC thus received for 2012/13 a precept of £59,931.

It was obvious that OWPC would require a much smaller precept for its needs, but it was decided prudent to wait until the pattern of regular operational spending became clearer before making a drastic cut. Therefore for our second financial year 2013/14 the precept was approximately halved to £29,273.

In 2014/15 a precept of £9,103 was set, the aim being to cover regular operating expenditure and for capital projects to be funded out of the reserves available to OWPC as a result of the initial "windfall" precept. Your Council has not requested any increase in the precept since then. Very small variations which are not under our control may occur. For example, the way MKC calculates the amounts based on fluctuations in payments by some households which do not need to pay the full amount of Council Tax/precept. The effect of these variations, which can be seen on the annual Council Tax account you receive from MKC, is negligible on the amount each household pays.

## INITIAL REVIEW OF OWPC FINANCES

OWPC conducted a review of costs covering inherited and forecasted future spending.

The only significant inherited cost was the Patch allotments manager who was responsible for all aspects of running the Patch Allotment. The ownership of these allotments passed to us being physically situated within OWPC Parish boundary. Total costs for this staff amounted to over £5,000 p.a. but it was apparent the incumbent required additional hours to allow them to perform the job fully. The resultant costs would have been out of all proportion to OWPC's envisaged total costs. The Patch Allotment Association of tenants had previously started to converse with WCC with a view to management of the allotments being devolved to the PAA and, they were willing and keen to perform many on-site tasks such as showing prospective tenants round the site. Non-on-site administration could easily be performed by an allotment team of a couple of Councillors using a comprehensive database which was quickly was set up.

## ONGOING OPERATING COSTS

For the third financial year 2014/15, as noted above, we settled on just over £9,000 as the precept amount calculated to cover predicted annual recurring costs. These costs include, for example, employing a clerk, emptying dog bins, running the information systems, maintenance (notice boards etc.), insurance and venue hire (during non-Covid19 times). In the years since 2014/15, inflationary rises have seen these annual costs rising to about £13,000. Rather than raising the precept in line with the increases, these increases in recurring costs have been subsidised from our reserves.

## CAPITAL SPENDING

Initially the reserves gave us the opportunity to provide much needed investment into the Patch allotments. In parallel, as a result of time spent by the PAA and the OWPC allotment team, occupancy was steadily increasing and with it rental income was also rising, mitigating the cost of new investment. Ultimately therefore, on a total turnover of £33,000 on revenue and capital expenditure, during the period from 2012/13 to 2017/18, at which point devolved Management commenced, the net cost born by the reserves amounted to just £3,800. There had also been a saving of some £25,000+ on staff cost.

Outside the Patch allotments, despite projects such as providing each ward with new or refurbished notice boards, capital spending remained low during the first seven financial years at the end of which our reserves, or cash balances, stood at £56,000. The situation had not gone unnoticed by

our auditors and it was strongly "suggested" that our reserves were far too high when compared to our precept.

The decision was made to allocate a budget to each of the wards to spend for improvement projects. It was at this point that a survey was published in the Parish Newsletter asking for project suggestions. The most popular practical suggestions for each ward were taken forward, some otherwise good suggestions were unable to be considered further due to their impinging too closely on MKC tasks. For the last and this financial years, 2019/20 and 2020/21, these ward projects have been proceeding. Work completed or in progress include landscaping work, provision of a defibrillator, tree replacement and putting up bat boxes.

## RESERVES

OWPC has decided that we should aim to achieve a reserve figure of £18,500. It is anticipated that by the end of this financial year our reserves will have dropped to about £30,000. In addition to capital spending, the reserves are also, as previously noted, subsidising the excess of annual operating expenditure over the precept money we receive.

## FUTURE YEARS

Subsidising our annual costs means that, even if we do no future capital projects, at some point in the future it will be necessary to increase the precept to cover the annual operating costs. The decision has been made that in these difficult times, subject to the minor variations mentioned previously, we will not be asking MKC to levy an increased precept on our behalf for the coming financial year 2021/22. After that, small annual increases will gradually close the gap to cover our annual costs.

## Quiz

- Q1** – why was £59,931 so significant for OWPC in 2012?
- Q2** – in how many years since has OWPC raised its Precept?
- Q3** – how much does it cost parishioners to run the Patch allotments?
- Q4** – could OWPC operate with no budget?
- Q5** – could we save money with fewer councillors?
- Q6** – how much do our neighbours raise?

# News from the Towpath



Early one morning in 1794 the good people of Woughton noticed something new in the neighbourhood: namely a large “army” of men and women digging the Cut alongside the old manor house and cutting a line through the parish heading south towards Simpson - the Grand Junction Canal had arrived! In the 1920s, several canal companies in the midlands and south east banded together to form the Grand Union Canal Company. Roll forward 226 years to the present day and the Canal is now managed by the Canal & River Trust (CRT), a registered charity responsible for the navigable river and canal network across the U.K.

The OWPC has adopted the section of the towpath running through the length of the parish from bridges 85a to 90c, which means the PC helps the CRT repair and improve the towpath by organising working parties and led by CRT employees. To-date we have repaired the towpath from bridge 90b north to bridge 90, and on towards bridge 89, where the towpath is probably at its worst and requires significant extra work.

To keep up momentum we meet regularly with the CRT Liaison Officer and are already planning (Covid permitting) to re-commence working parties. In future we hope the CRT Narrow Boat “Arcas” and her butty (a barge that is towed), will be repaired to transport materials etc. In conjunction with OWPC, the CRT are also embarking on a campaign to encourage use of the towpath for recreation by all residents. This will be linked with a recent survey by the CRT to assess the works required along the towpath to make it more user friendly (trim back hedges, repair towpath surfaces etc).

Residents will shortly see something else new as the community narrow boat “Electra” (run by the charitable Milton Keynes Community Boat Trust), will glide silently along the canal through Old Woughton, as silently as the original horse drawn boats with its fully electric propulsion system. She will cover the 11 miles of the pound (a pound is a stretch of canal between locks), between Fenny lock and Cosgrove lock. There will be a variety of cruises for rambling; bubbles and bites; and historical cruises. The Community Boat has also been supported with a grant of £200 from OWPC. We await developments and these will appear in the Parish newsletter as they occur.

For more news about ‘Electra’ go to [www.facebook.com/MiltonKeynesCommunityBoat/](https://www.facebook.com/MiltonKeynesCommunityBoat/)



Cllr. Jeremy Morrison



Congratulations to Cllr. Morrison for passing his Certificate in Community Boat Management, which means you may well spot him in ‘uniform’ steering ‘Electra’ cruises from the new marina.

# Ward Projects Update

## WotG N&S

Last November ten new trees were delivered to replace the dead and dying trees along the verge in Baskerfield Grove. Old trees were removed and the 5 Juneberry and 5 Chinese Red Birch trees were planted for us by Serco. Tubes were inserted to facilitate watering of the base of the root ball in prolonged dry periods. A job for residents!



## Passmore

During 2020, a project to clean the mud, grass and moss from the footpaths within the estate was progressed and MK Highways agreed to undertake the task within their own budget. So, building on the 2019 consultation, we then looked at the canal path behind house nos 62 to 74, which had been severely neglected. After consultation with MK Landscapes it transpired that the land immediately behind the houses was within the existing Serco contract and this became the project for 2020 /2021. The growing relationship between OWPC and MK Landscapes also led to the removal of two dangerous trees, whilst the hedge height was reduced to give much needed visibility around a blind bend into the cul-de-sac between house nos 54 and 74.



Land along the canal was very overgrown with many self-set saplings

## Woughton Park

‘New wild flower bed on the village green’



# Our Four-legged Friends!

As we come out of hibernation and head on out to enjoy our wonderful green spaces it seems appropriate to see how we can help The Parks Trust and support their work looking after the parklands, paddocks and livestock.

There is no doubt that there is an increase in visitor numbers to our parish and it is a haven for dog walking and many other leisure activities. We are lucky to have grazing animals which as the PT state: 'are great for helping to graze our land as they do it far more sensitively than mowers allowing beautiful wildflowers to grow and insects to thrive'.

## They go on to ask us to remember to:

'keep your pet on a lead around the grazing livestock – no matter how well trained they are they may give chase.' Indeed it is an offence to allow a dog to worry sheep.

The picture here shows our very own PCSO Tracey Jones... helping rescue one of two sheep which had been chased into the river by a dog (who had never done this before).



1) Did you know it is the Parish Council that provides the dog bins?

2) Did you know that dog fouling can be harmful to human health; after three weeks the mess becomes infectious. People, especially young children can get worms infections (Toxocariasis). It is also harmful to grazing animals.

We have been helping MKC by replacing and updating these signs - do let us know if you find one that needs replacing.

For more information and guidance from The Parks Trust on such matters as Professional Dog walking and more canine matters go to [www.theparkstrust.com](http://www.theparkstrust.com)



## MK Marathon Weekend

1st to 3rd May 2021



As we go to press the organisers of the MK Marathon Weekend are very confident that they will be able to stage their 10th Anniversary event this May, although final confirmation for their event licence has yet to be received. As a result of the pandemic the organisers have gone to great lengths to ensure the event is Covid-safe with a whole range of measures in place that have been adopted by other event organisers.

One of the measures in place to reduce the number of road closures and volunteers required is changes to the marathon route. The marathon is being run on Monday 3rd May and now involves two laps around a circuit, the half-marathon only one. The circuit this year goes round the parish rather than through it as in previous years. It does cross the canal from Peartree Bridge into the Green, but then heads left across the top of Verley Close and then goes along the canal. On the way south the circuit follows the River Ouzel, but does cross back into the parish as it passes Standing Way and goes through Woughton Park on its way south to Simpson. There should therefore be relatively minor disruption to traffic on the Green, but it will occur twice.

The other races over the weekend do not go through the parish. For full details of the event visit the MK Marathon website at <https://mkmarathon.com/>

**We'd be very interested to hear from any residents who participate on the Marathon Weekend events to learn about their experiences.**

*Photos always welcome!*



## NO 18 BUS SERVICE

DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT (DRT)  
BEGINS IN MILTON KEYNES ON 1ST APRIL

This new 'MK Connect' service is replacing many of the routes that the Council currently pays for (including the No 18 Service) and will be provided by Via.

MK Connect works like a minibus that comes when you want, where you want — book a ride straight from your phone, get picked up in minutes, and be dropped within a short walk of your destination.

Passengers with a wheelchair or disability will always be matched with a fully accessible vehicle, and the service is accessible to passengers with vision, hearing and other requirements.

**Service hours:** Monday-Saturday 6am-11pm.  
Sunday 9am-6pm.

**Price:** £3.50 during peak hours  
(7am-9am, 4.30pm-6.30pm),  
£2.50 at all other times.

Concessionary cards and AllinOne cards will be accepted on DRT at the same times as on buses.

**For more information on which routes are impacted and further information go to <https://www.getsmartertravelmk.org/on-board/demand-responsive-transport>**





*“You’re joking - not another one!”*

Maybe Brenda from Bristol was right in 2017 when she felt that elections came around too often, but here at Old Woughton Parish Council our latest terms are nearly up and all 9 of your current councillors will retire in May.

All are eligible to contest the elections on **Thursday, 6th May**, but have you ever thought of standing yourself? The process is straightforward and you are supported through it by our Clerk. There are only seven fixed meetings in the year, and then it’s down to you to get involved in the things that interest you locally. So, if you would like to explore this opportunity further please contact: **clerk@oldwoughton.org.uk** or any of the serving councillors listed on page 2.

The polling station this time will be in St.Mary’s Church to ensure COVID safety.

In the 4 wards, vacancies for the period 2021-2025 will arise as follows:

**Parish Ward**

Passmore - 2 seats	Woughton-on-the-Green (North) - 3 seats
Woughton Park - 2 seats	Woughton-on-the-Green (South) - 2 seats

**They also served**

The current Old Woughton P C was elected in May 2016. Your serving councillors are listed on page 2. We also acknowledge the contribution of those who retired mid-term and whose good works on new village greens, bin provision, noticeboards, towpath repairs and so much more we continue today:

Mike Blomley & Judith Howson – Passmore Ward  
Richard Freeman & Andrew Humphries – Woughton Park Ward

**There has never been a long-standing vacancy on OWPC – let’s keep it up!**

# CityFibre

CityFibre, will be extending its original £40m MK build, bringing gigabit speed connectivity to even more homes in Milton Keynes this year and this spring they are coming to Old Woughton Parish. Look out for the green information leaflets and letters which will be coming through your doors later this month!

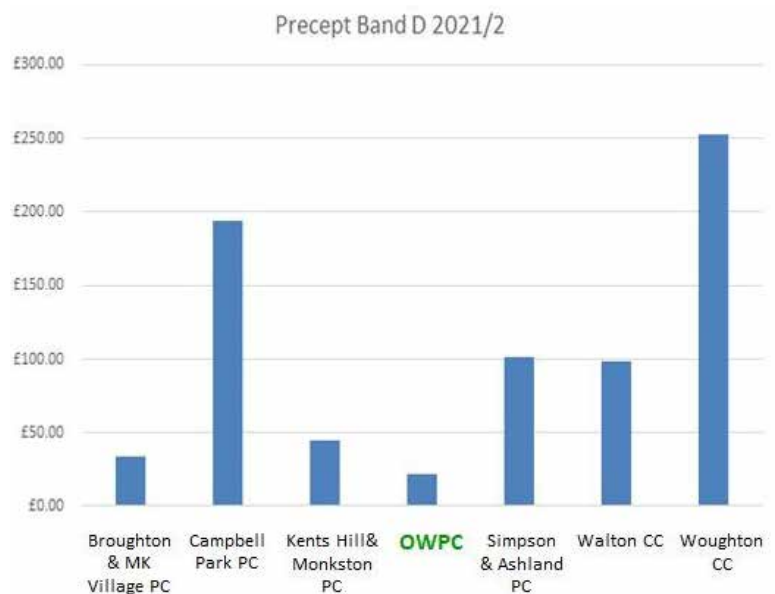
We expect works to commence in May/June and will take approx. 6 weeks, and service speeds of up to 900MB will be available this summer via Vodafone.

If you wish to be kept fully informed on timings and service availability directly, please register your interest via the **www.cityfibre.com** homepage (postcode checker).



### ANSWERS TO QUIZ (on Page 5)

- A1** – it was the Precepted funds transferred to OWPC on its establishment
- A2** – none, there has never been an OWPC increase in 9 years
- A3** – no running costs since the allotments are self-funding from the tenants’ rents.
- A4** – it could tick over with very minimal expenditure, but what would be the point?
- A5** – all parish councillors are volunteers. The Clerk is paid 7 hours a week.
- A6** – see graph below



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