

Waterbeach Parish Council



Clerk: **Belinda Westwood**
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**The Old Pavilion
Recreation Ground
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**Cambridge
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10th January 2023

To Ms. Rebecca Plane - Engagement Lead
15 Westferry Circus
Canary Wharf
London E14 4HD
PKF

Attention: Rebecca Plane – For and on behalf of PKF Littlejohn LLP

RE WATERBEACH PARISH COUNCIL - OBJECTIONS TO 2021/22 AGAR - REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Dear Rebecca,

Waterbeach Parish Council have looked at the objections raised to the AGAR by the Objector and wish to submit the following response:

Lack of RFO (Objections 1a and 1b)

Until July 2021, the position of Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) was held by the previous Clerk, Miss Shelley Mason. She resigned from the Waterbeach Parish Council (the Council) and Mrs Westwood was appointed to the position of Clerk. At the time the Council employed a Finance Officer, Ms. Sandra Thompson, when she was offered the position of RFO, she declined. However, she continued as Finance Officer until she, in turn, resigned from the Council in January 2022. The Council have since made a formal appointment of RFO with the current Clerk, Mrs Belinda Westwood, we can assert that Mrs Westwood has de facto filled the role since the resignation of Miss Mason. In this she has been initially supported by Ms Thompson, and by Mrs. Carol Whitehouse who deals with all the bookkeeping tasks, as well as by the Chair of the Finance Committee, Councillor Michael Williamson. She is now further supported by Mrs. Libby White, who is consulting to Waterbeach Parish Council through CAPALC.

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Approval of the budget (Objection 1a)

The objector appears to be raising objections to the method of generating and approving the budget for 2022-2023. However, the assertions in the Annual Governance Statement are for the 2021-2022 budget. The objection is thus not relevant to the Annual Governance Statement for 2021-2022.

Order book (Objection 1a)

It has previously been explained to the objector, all except the smallest purchases are accompanied by a written order, usually in the form of an email. The objector asked to see a number of purchase orders for randomly chosen purchases and, unfortunately, the filing system was unable to locate these without considerable extra work on the part of the staff. The Council realises that this is a deficiency in record keeping and intends to review the purchase system probably by linking it to the Scribe accounting software which is used to maintain the Council's financial records.

VAT (Objection 1b)

At the end of March 2022, VAT had been claimed up to the end of December 2021. Evidence of this has been sent to the objector. Since then, due to lack of a Finance Officer, the Council has fallen behind with its claims; work is currently being undertaken to close the gap.

Fixed assets and leases (Objection 1d)

We find it difficult to understand the statements made by the objector in regard to the Asset Register. In particular, we do not understand the comment that the quoted link implies that the asset register is not satisfactory. We shall respond in more detail if clarification is required. The objector also seem confused about the nature of the asset register and its relationship to the insurance schedule.

The Council owns two pieces of land that are occupied by third parties. It is accepted that:

- The land to the rear of the Beach Club is used as a beer garden by them and a formal lease was drawn up which expired in 2013. Since then, largely because the Council has had a series of Clerks, renewal of the lease has never been actioned. The annual rent is quite small (£100 per year) and it is questionable whether the legal fees to generate a new lease would be value for money. However, it is accepted that there is a minor technical infringement of Financial Regulations.
- The Tillage Hall is situated on Council land and the matter of agreeing a formal lease with the limited company and registered charity 'Waterbeach Tillage Hall' has not been processed as quickly as it probably should have been. Again, the matter has never risen to the top of a Clerk's in-tray.

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A draft lease is in existence and is being considered by solicitors acting for each party. The intention is that the Charity is granted a 25 year lease at a peppercorn and the Council accepts that the ball is in their court to deal with the latest iteration.

Level of General Reserves (Objection 5)

The figures supplied in the explanation of high reserves spreadsheet were taken from the balances at 31 March 2021, adjusted by the income and expenditure during 2021-2022. This led to a S106 balance of £798,448 and a general reserve balance of £260,981.

Detailed analysis of all the S106 agreements carried out by our Finance Officer during the time she was with us indicated that this S106 balance was actually under-estimated and should have been £822,197. This leads to a General Reserve balance of £237,232.

The precept for 2021-2022 was £168,092 and so this balance equates to 1.4 times the precept. The Council has been concerned that it has high general reserves and over the past few years has been working to reduce this balance by budgeting for a deficit. However, in 2021-2022, largely because of the loss of a Clerk in July, spending on planned projects did not take place and, as noted in the spreadsheet submitted to explain high reserves, the Council ended 2021-2022 with a surplus. The plan looking forward will be to set budgets that aim to reduce the General Reserve by keeping any increase in precept to a level that will help to achieve this.

I trust that you find the above in order and look forward to your response, we also wish to thank you for your time in working with us to get this objection resolved.

Should you need any further information, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

Kind Regards,

Belinda Westwood

Parish Clerk to Waterbeach Parish Council

SIGNED: Bwestwood