

GREAT EASTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Sir Alan Duncan MP
Office of Sir Alan Duncan
33 High Street
Melton Mowbray
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Dear Sir Alan,

Local Government Finance Settlement - Parish Councils

I am writing to you to ask that you raise Great Easton Parish Council's concerns about the proposal in the Draft Local Government Finance Settlement relating to 'capping' of Parish Councils and the requirement to hold a local referendum in instances where a Parish Precept is proposed which is in excess of the capping limit prescribed by the Government.

Whilst the proposal in the Consultation Paper would seem to exclude very small Parish Councils from this requirement, the Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC) has suggested that there is a possibility of the capping requirement being extended to all Parish Councils. The LRALC is also lobbying on this issue and the Great Easton Parish Council strongly endorses its representations.

Great Easton Parish Council wishes to place on record its strong opposition to universal capping of all Parish Councils. It is a council which is both well aware of its financial responsibilities to local taxpayers and is financially well managed. However, particularly in response to the Government's Localism Agenda it is facing increasing demands from its residents to promote improvements in the services and community facilities which other local authorities are no longer able to provide.

Great Easton is a village with a population of some 800 residents and some 290 dwellings. Its precept in the current year is £5686. That is equivalent to £19.63 per annum for a typical Band D property or 38 pence per week. The precept has not been

increased for at least five years.....indeed, it has decreased (was £6000 in 2011/12). In real terms, there has been a decrease for all local residents over that period in the Parish Council share of the overall council tax bill.

Much of the current precept is to meet what are essentially fixed costs: Clerk's salary; insurance; audit fees; street lighting ; grass cutting; election costs; and legal fees. There is little available to meet discretionary costs such as contributions to very worthy local causes. Our costs have been managed despite inevitable increases in some of the above costs.....increases which are often beyond the Council's control.

In summary, were a capping limit of say, 2% to be applied to a Council such as Great Easton, that would allow an increase in precept of £118 per annum (some 40 pence per annum for a Band D property or less than 1 pence per week). The cost of a referendum would be prohibitive for the Council of the size of Great Easton which does not hold excessive reserves (they are at the recommended prudential level).

Finally, the Parish Council has embraced the Government's Localism Agenda and is in the final stages of consulting with residents on a Draft Neighbourhood Plan. That Plan itself has been drafted following extensive consultation with residents and other interested parties, including developers. The Plan will meet the new housing requirement allocated by Harborough District Council and has also raised other matters relating to transport, the environment and community facilities which residents wish to see improved. Whilst the Parish Council fully recognises it will be unable itself to fund many of these improvements, it does wish to be in the position of being able to promote and 'pump prime' some key initiatives identified in the planning process. Failure to do so will undermine the Neighbourhood Planning process which is a key component of Localism. A capping limit of say 2% could effectively remove from the Council, the opportunity to respond to the local democratic wish to see the Parish Council delivering some small but important improvements.

I should be grateful if you would make appropriate representations on behalf of Great Easton and all small Parish Councils.

Yours sincerely,

David Gibley
Parish Clerk