

## West Hill Parish Council

# Financial Reserves Policy

APPROVED WHPC Meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025 25/231 (d)

### 1. Purpose of a Financial Reserves Policy

West Hill Parish Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs of the organisation but has no legal powers to hold reserves other than those for reasonable working capital needs or for specifically earmarked purposes. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Parish Council will determine and review the level of such reserves, and how they will be used. Local government legislation requires parishes to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure, when calculating their budget. However, there is no specified minimum or maximum level of reserves that an authority should hold, and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer (Clerk) to advise the Parish Council about the level of reserves, and to ensure that there are key protocols for their establishment and use.

Reserves can be used for long-term planned or exceptional (unbudgeted or higher than expected) expenditure on the following conditions:

- The expenditure must not be recurring
- Income in reserves from the sale of fixed assets ('capital receipts') such as the sale of land, can only be used for capital projects, such as the acquisition and enhancement of land, building, vehicles, plant and equipment.

Budget allocations can be moved from one budget line to another during the course of a financial year, with approval from the Parish Council, as long as the total expenditure for the financial year is not exceeded.

### 2. Types of reserve

Reserves can be categorised as earmarked (held for a specific purpose), general (held to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows or unexpected events), or ringfenced (held for one purpose only and cannot be transferred).

#### 2.1 Earmarked reserves

Earmarked reserves are a means of building up funds over several years to deliver a defined project, predicted liabilities or for known significant expenditure. They are not to be used for emergency operations. Earmarked reserves must be reviewed and/or established by the Council at the annual budget setting meeting. Any changes to the proposed use of reserves must be agreed by Council. The RFO will note earmarked reserves movements at the end of the financial year.

Earmarked reserves are held for specific projects or purposes, or to meet known or predicted liabilities, for example:

- Renewals – to enable the Parish Council to plan and finance an effective programme of equipment replacement. These reserves are a mechanism to smooth expenditure so that a sensible replacement programme can be achieved without the need to vary budgets.
- Carry forward of underspend – some expenditure is budgeted for projects, but is not spent in that financial year. Reserves are used as a mechanism to carry forward these resources.

## **2.2 General reserves**

General reserves are funds which do not have any restrictions as to their use. These reserves can be used to smooth the impact of uneven cash flows, offset the budget requirement if necessary or can be held in case of unexpected events or emergencies. The Parish Council considers a prudent level of general reserves to be the equivalent of 6 months' annual expenditure.

If in extreme circumstances general reserves were exhausted due to major unforeseen spending pressures within a particular financial year, the Parish Council would be able to draw down from its earmarked reserves to provide short term resources. Even at times when extreme pressure is put on the Parish Council's finances, the Council must keep a minimum balance in its general reserves sufficient to pay three months' salary to staff. Agreement from full Council is required to move funds from the general reserves.

## **2.3 Ringfenced reserves**

Ringfenced reserves are grants allocated for a specific project only, this money must not be used for any other purpose.

## **3. Review of reserves**

Given the opportunity costs of holding reserves, it is critical that reserves continue to be reviewed each year as part of the budget process to confirm that they are still required and that the level is still appropriate.

Previously ADOPTED at WHPC Meeting 7th May 2024 24/159

## WHPC Allocation of Financial Reserves at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

WHPC Meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025 25/231

1. **Purpose of this paper:** To recommend the allocation of reserves at the end of 2024-25 financial year.

### 2. Background

The Council was formed on 1 April 2017. It therefore had no reserves at this time and has been slowly building up its reserves since then. The Finance Working Group presents its recommendations for the allocation of balances at the end of the financial year on 31 March 2025.

For many years, the Parish Council has been seeking to:

- a. create a new pedestrian access from West Hill Road onto the Village Hall site. This project was determined by the community through consultation in 2019. At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, the Parish Council is awaiting the findings of DCC's consultation on a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) (parking restrictions). If the TRO is approved, it is hoped that construction will take place in 2025.
- b. Secure land for community recreation purposes.

The Council has been building reserves for both of these long term projects.

### 3. Reserves at Year End 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

The Finance Working Group considered the financial position of the Council at the end of the financial year. Subject to agreement of the accounts by the Council, the balance at the end of the year will be **£ 134,091.62**.

The reserve is now more than twice the Council's Precept, £56,875. The Council mindful that it is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs of the organisation but has no legal powers to hold reserves other than those for reasonable working capital needs or for specifically earmarked purposes.

### 4. Recommended Allocation of Reserves

It is proposed to allocate the balance, after providing for the general reserve, to reserves as follows:

Appendix 1 – Year on Year analysis of Reserves allocated by WHPC

Recommendation	Change from 31.3.24	
<b>General Reserve:</b>	£29,000	+£1,000 The operational budget for 2024/25 was set at approx. £58,000. Of this, £30,000 is for staffing costs. The Working Group considers it prudent for the Council to maintain a minimum general reserve equivalent to 50% of the non-discretionary expenses for the year. Therefore, the Working Group recommends that the General Reserve should be set at <b>£29,000</b> .

<b>Earmarked Reserves</b>		
1. Village Hall Path Commissioning	£23,847	+£847 Construction expected 2025-26. The project is also eligible for CIL monies funding.
2. Replacement playpark equipment	£10,000	+£0 Begin to build replacement fund: s106 + CIL monies also available
3. Open spaces (playing field)	£12,000	No change. The Council continues to seek land for community recreation purposes.
4. CIL Monies	£29,836	Allocated from developments by EDDC
5. Neighbourhood Plan	£10,000	+£5,000. Project to develop a new Neighbourhood Plan underway. External professional analysis, reports and support may be deemed necessary.
6. Provision for election expenses	£6,000	+£483. WHPC will be charged by EDDC for costs for an election arising from a Casual Vacancy.
7. Contingency (10% total reserves)	£13,409	+£49.
<b>Total Reserves at 31-Mar-2025</b>	<b>£134,092</b>	

Notes:

1. Village Hall Path project: This is an ongoing project. At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023/4 the commissioning phase is underway and construction is expected during 2024. Awaiting DCC Highways TRO decision.

**5. For consideration**

Councillors are asked to approve the allocation of reserves for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

Finance Working Group 27<sup>th</sup> May 2025