ALSAGER PARISH MEETING

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN

ALSAGER CIVIC ON SUNDAY, 23 MARCH 2025

Present:
Councillor J Hearne (Mayor)
Councillor S Butterfield
Councillor J Goodrich
Councillor P Hubbard
Councillor R Kain
Councillor D Longhurst
Councillor R McCarthy
Councillor S Ovenden
Councillor C Venables

J Mason (Town Clerk)

0 Members of the Press
48 Members of the public

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AP24/01 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Fletcher, M Unett and S Helliwell.

AP24/02 Non-Attendance

The following Members did not attend and did not give their apologies - Councillor J Keane.

AP24/03 Minutes of the Previous Annual Parish Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting dated 7 May 2024 were referred to and it was: -

Resolved: That, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council dated 7 May 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

AP24/04 Mayor's Annual Report 2024-2025

The Mayor introduced her report and spoke of highlights during 2024-25. See Appendix 1 for the full report.

AP24/05 Public Participation

The following questions and comments were made:

1. There was a query which had been ongoing with no resolution in reference to the erection of a fence in excess of 2 metres high on Sandbach Road and the resident asked for support. He was directed to Cheshire East Ward Councillor R Kain who took details to resolve.
2. There were many concerns raised in reference to the standard of the roads due to pot holes and poor surfaces across the town. There were several complaints which evidenced frustrations that it was actually dangerous when driving and especially cycling on the roads in the town. Residents asked the Town Council to take actions. The Mayor explained that the roads were not the Town Council's responsibility but Cheshire East highways. Residents wished the Town Council to engage with Cheshire East and see how the monies were allocated to the roads.
   It was explained that the residents should log all concerns on the CE Highways website Fix My Street.
   Councillor R Kain supported the residents views that across the borough 17,000 pot holes were logged.
   A resident wished it to be noted that Pikemere Road had been resurfaced 5 years ago and was now breaking up in several places so it was not always the fact that the roads were not being addressed but also the quality of the work was poor and did not last. The contractor should be addressed.
3. A resident wished to bring concerns in relation to Lawton Road outside Saint Gabriel's Church to be brought to the Councils attention as it was dangerous due to parked cars and there was a lack of visibility for drivers.
4. A resident enquired what the amount of general reserves required to be held by the Town Council and what the figure was at that point in time. He stated it had been published it was £500,000 and felt the figure was excessive when increasing the precept by nearly 11%. Councillor C Venables replied and explained the reserves should be at 25 – 30%.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and there was a break for refreshments.

AP24/06 The Awards Ceremony

The residents of Alsager had been asked for nominations for recognition awards in the Community and the Mayor together with Councillors had decided the most ideal candidates.

These were presented as follows:

- Volunteer Award – Stroke Survivors Speech and Language group
- Community Award – Margaret Keeling on behalf of the Fairtrade Foundation.
- Highly Commended - The Harlequin Cyclist Club.
- Great Neighbourhood Award – Friends of Alsager Station.
- Carers Award - Sheila Davies on behalf of the Luncheon Club and Kath Knight on behalf of the Lonely and Vulnerable in Alsager.

- Green Award – Rose King from Rosie's Refills.
- Lifetime Achievement Award - Margaret Keeling.
- Mayor's Award - Exceptional Group of People – Alsager Round Table.
- Mayor's Award – Exceptional Group of People - Alsager Civic Staff.

The meeting commenced at 4:00 pm and concluded at 6.00 pm.

Signed by Councillor J Hearne
Mayor

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Appendix 1

Alsager Town Mayor's report for the Alsager Town Council Annual Parish Meeting on 23 March 2025.

Good afternoon, everyone, welcome to our Annual Parish Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what we, as your Town Council, have been up to in the past 12 months; it also gives you an opportunity to ask questions about the services we provide, or to raise any other matters that fall within the Parish Town Council's authority. It is now my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the activities of Alsager Town Council for the Local Government Year 2024/25.
Being the Alsager Town Mayor for a second term is a role that comes with great responsibility and honour. As the public face of the council, the Mayor has the privilege of representing the community and engaging with residents, businesses, and organisations. Having a genuine interest in all that impacts the town, the Mayor's enthusiasm and commitment shine through in every interaction. Always mindful of the dignity of the office, the Mayor upholds the values and traditions of Alsager, ensuring that the town's interests are well-represented. As the first resident of Alsager, the Mayor's dedication to the community is unwavering, making a positive impact and fostering a sense of unity and pride among the residents.

All Councillors are here to represent the town of Alsager and listen to your views. It has to be recognised that we are not responsible for everything in the town. We do not make financial commitments to roads, bin emptying, household waste disposal, libraries or the leisure centres, BUT we are here to help the town and make good decisions on your behalf. We know, as you do, that Cheshire East is facing huge financial pressures, and they are approaching the Town Council for contributions towards their assets. The libraries are under pressure with reduced hours and in some areas closing. The Leisure Centres have shortfalls, the household waste sites are being reduced in numbers and the introduction of car parking charges poses lots of issues.

Cheshire East Responsibilities	Alsager Town Council
Refuse collection	Alsager Civic
Car parking charges	Crewe Road Public Toilets
Library	Allotments
Roads	Alsager Institute
Leisure Centre	Alsager Town Council offices
Planning	Neighbourhood Plan
Grass cutting	Horticultural planters
N/A	Grants to community groups

Cheshire East Council have experienced some hard decisions in achieving a balanced budget and tried to push some costs on to Town Councils.

Alsager Town Council were asked to support the following:

- Car park charges: to pay an annual contribution e.g. £225,000, for Asda/Fairview car park.
    - The Town Council found the figures unreliable and too vague to make such a huge commitment for the next five years but when the charges have been in place for 12 months, we can revisit the decision.
- Library Services: to keep the same level of services at Alsager Library, Cheshire East Council asked for an annual contribution of £22,000, which is £44 per household. Without this the library would have to close 3.5 hours a week.
    - The Town Council has decided against this cost, as it is not sustainable and feel CEC will try to burden more.
- Leisure services: CEC asked for an annual contribution of £20,000 which is £4 per household.
    - Due to lack of information of the consequences of this contribution, the Town Council are unable to make any decisions on this request.

What the Town Council have been able to deliver for its residents:

- COMMUNICATION
    - Delivered a newsletter to all households in Alsager. This ensures that we share all valuable information regarding your Town Council.
    - Sharing information via Web page, we maintain a Facebook page and Twitter feed, which provides information and links to the community.
    - YouTube video which highlights all the assets the Town Council look after.

- GRANTS
    - We contribute up to £35,000 of grants to assist our local community groups. These include events such as the Carnival, Christmas Light Switch on, Music Festival, Pride and many more.
- ALSAGER CIVIC
    - We support the operation of our Civic building by over £100,000. We deliver many community events to support all age groups in the Town with diverse needs.
    - An application is being assessed for a grant for decarbonisation, with £12,500 allocated in the 2025/26 budget to ensure that if successful, we are required to provide a contribution.
    - This month, the banking hub was opened, providing a well needed asset to Alsager.
- ALSAGER INSTITUTE
    - The council were successful in obtaining a grant for £40,000 to install solar panels. This has been completed at no cost to the Alsager residents.
    - We endeavour to make the building sustainable, but the Charity does require officer time and financial support of over £20,000.
- PLANTING
    - To Keep the centre of our town looking attractive we service 8 tall planters and 6 hanging baskets.
- TOWN RANGERS
    - We have recently employed 2 Town rangers and an electric van to keep Alsager tidy and somewhere to feel proud of.
- NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
    - We are currently reviewing the plan to ensure we are proactive with planning applications and achieving sustainable development.

Council meetings

Council meetings have continued to take place at Alsager Civic which provides a central location with accessible access. It has been good to see residents coming along to ask questions and air concerns.

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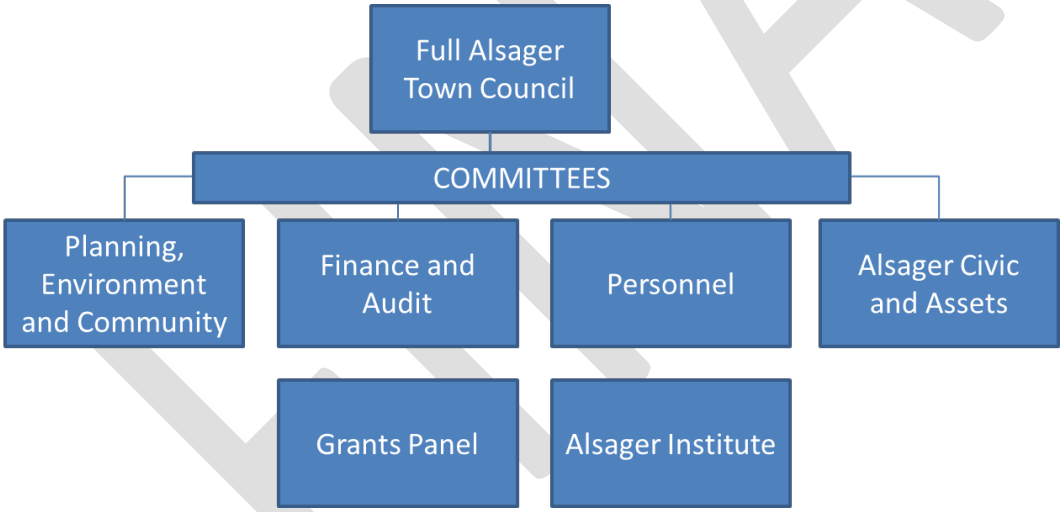
The Town Council

For the second year running Alsager Town Council does not act politically. The Council meetings have been run successfully as a team; Councillors debate and make decisions for the residents, which has been a positive move forward.

The Town Council is made up of 15 Councillors representing the three wards in Alsager: East, West and Central however we do still have 2 vacancies.

EAST WARD	WEST WARD	CENTRAL WARD
Cllr Sue Helliwell	Cllr Rod Fletcher	Cllr Regg Kain
Cllr Richard McCarthy	Cllr Stephen Butterfield	Cllr Julian Goodrich
Cllr M Unett	Cllr Pauline Hubbard	Cllr Jane Hearne
Cllr Jonathan Keane	Cllr Derek Longhurst	Cllr Susan Ovenden
Two vacancies	Cllr Chris Venables	No vacancies

The Council has several Committees:



All members are Trustees of Alsager Institute, a charitable trust managed by the Town Council.

Alsager Town Council serves the town's 15,505 residents and 5922 households (2021 census) by connecting them with Cheshire East Council and other public services to ensure local views are represented.
The Town Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications and key strategic planning policies; however, Cheshire East Council determines all applications.

Town Council Assets

In 2013, the Town Council acquired several town centre assets from Cheshire East Council after consulting with residents. These include:

- Alsager Civic
- public toilets on Crewe Road
- four allotment sites
- indoor / outdoor Wednesday market.

Managing these functions has been challenging, especially since COVID-19 halted activities in March 2020 and the cost-of-living crisis slows recovery.

We are monitoring the impact of CEC car park charges on the town. We oppose these charges and believe that CEC does not fully understand the harm they are causing.

Community Engagement

The Town Council provides a period of public participation at the beginning of its meetings where any local resident can comment or raise a local issue.
The Alsager Town Council Newsletter is delivered to each household in Alsager three times annually.

Residents can contact the Town Council in person at the Town Council offices, by telephone, or by email. Contact details for all Town Councillors are published, and residents are encouraged to communicate with their local Councillor. Surgeries are held on the first Wednesday of each month at the market for face-to-face meetings. The Town Council website is regularly updated to share information with the community. Residents can sign up to receive news updates via email. The Town Council also maintains a Facebook page and Twitter feed to share information and links with the community.

Financial Information / Funding from the Precept

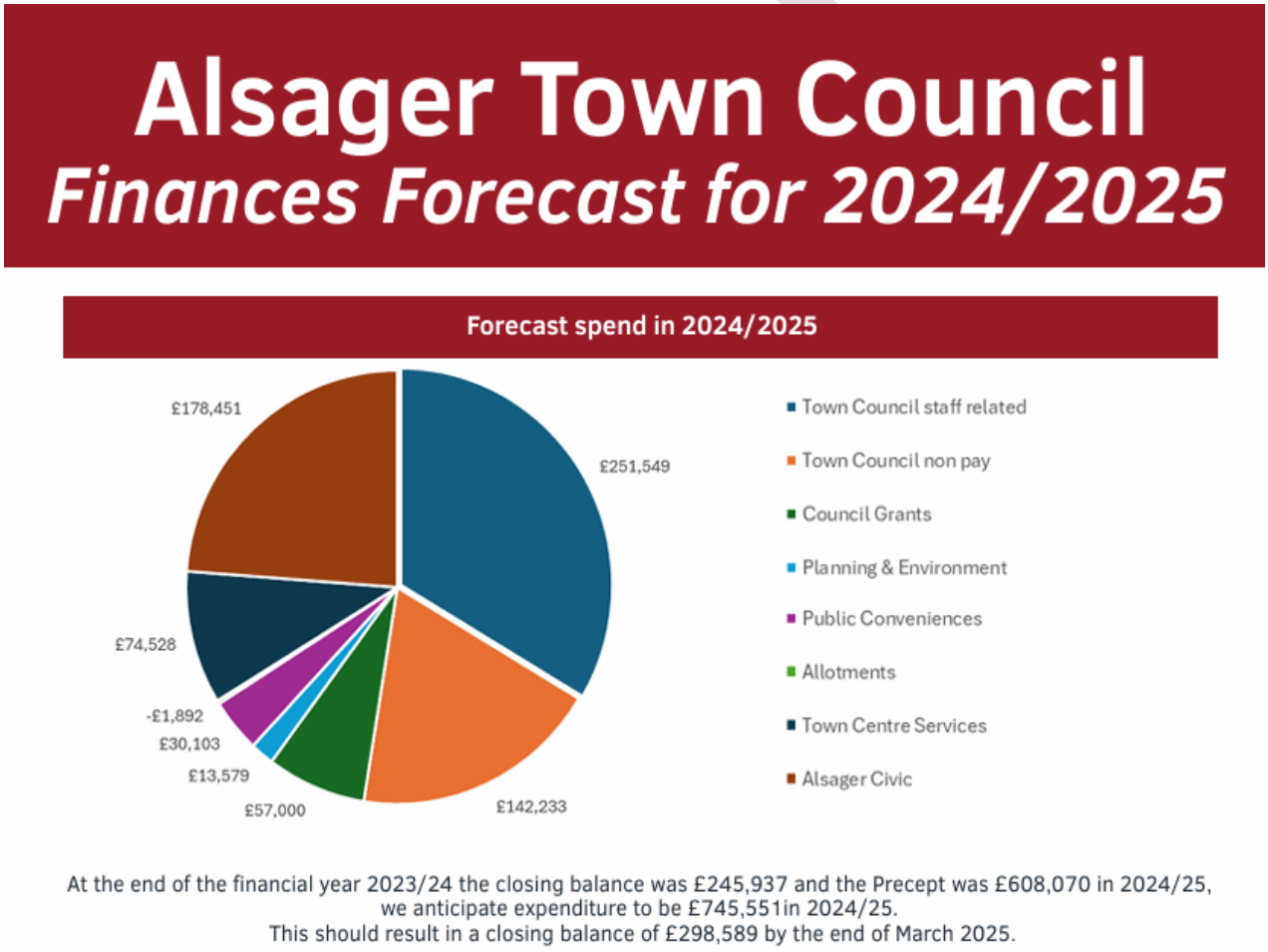
A larger proportion of the Town Council's money comes from a Precept which is added to the Council Tax levy by the Principal Authority, Cheshire East Council. In 2024, the Precept was £608,070 which represents £109.83 per annum (increase of £11.52), per Band D equivalent household. We feel this offers great value for the services provided.

We anticipate expenditure of £745,551 in 2024/25.

The final year end accounts for 2024/25 will be approved by the Town Council later in the year and will be published on the Town Council website.

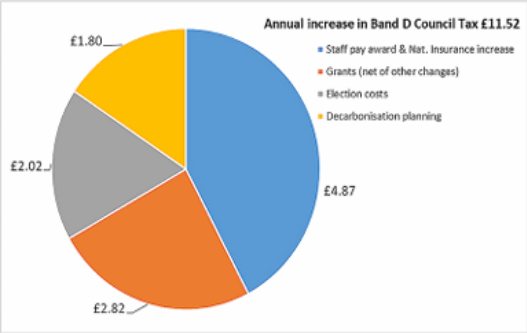
It is disappointing that we have had to provide funding for the local elections for East Ward councillors. Although this is a democratic right, this costs the council £14,000 per time (because of the low turnout of voters, this equated to over £400 per vote).

It is my opinion that these funds would be more effectively used for the benefit of Alsager. If individuals are interested in joining the council, they could be co-opted at no additional cost.



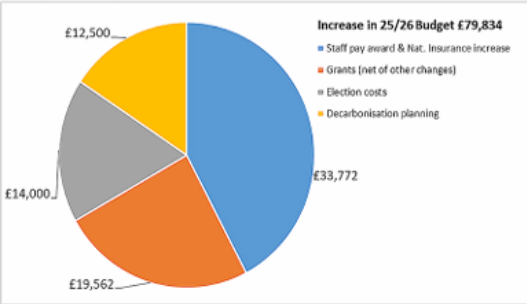
Increases in Budget and Council Tax

INCREASE IN COUNCIL TAX FOR 2025/2026



2025/26 Band D Council Tax	Increase
Staff pay award & Nat. Insurance increase	£4.87
Grants (net of other changes)	£2.82
Election costs	£2.02
Decarbonisation planning	£1.80
Totals	**£11.52**

INCREASE IN BUDGET FOR 2025/2026



2025/26 Budget	Increase
Staff pay award & Nat. Insurance increase	£33,772
Grants (net of other changes)	£19,562
Election costs	£14,000
Decarbonisation planning	£12,500
Totals	**£79,834**

Changes to 24/25 Budget	Change £	Chart
Staff costs - pay incr	£18,698	£33,772
Staff costs - Ers NIC	£15,074	
(F&G) Election EMR	£14,000	£14,000
(C&S) Civic solar panels	£12,500	£12,500
Staff costs - add. 12hrs GA	£11,176	
(F&G) T/Council nonpay inflation	£968	
(C&S) Public conven.	-£6,975	
(C&S) T/Ranger related costs	£5,749	
(C&S) Civic	-£2,866	
(PEC) Neighbourhood plan	£1,000	
(F&G) Grant funding	£25,000	
Increase in Taxbase	-£14,490	£19,562
Total changes	**£79,834**	**£79,834**

The Council Pledge

- To continue to exercise its power of influence on matters best serving the communities of Alsager.

- To work with the community on delivery of the adopted Alsager Neighbourhood Plan.

- To continue to build on the success of Alsager Civic following its refurbishment in its service delivery to the community of Alsager and its deficit management.

- To consider the viability and challenges faced by the Wednesday Market.

- To continue to explore with Cheshire East Council, the transfer of the office premises to the Town Council.

- To maintain the General Power of Competence of Local Councils, Quality Council status and to continue to develop the Town Council's work as the first tier of local government and community leader for Alsager.

Review

It has been a tough year for Alsager Town Council. There have been many things to report, but the list is extensive. The staff have conducted themselves admirably through some difficult times, and their dedication is commendable.

Special thanks go to Julie Mason, in her role as Town Clerk, who has delivered over and above expectations.
The support and volunteer efforts of all Councillors have been invaluable, not only for Council meetings but also for community projects. Thank you to each one of you for your contributions.

21 March 2025
Councillor Jane Hearne
Alsager Town Mayor