**ALDBURY PARISH GRANTS - BRIEF REPORT**

**APC meeting 4th November 2024**

Under Section 137(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 the maximum amount that APC can give in grants is £10.81 (2024/25 rate) x 716 which is the number of electors in the parish (information obtained from DBC on 31st October 2024) = **£7,739.96**

Section 137 is only available where no other power exists.

The APC’s allocated budget for this financial year is:

* **£700 to community groups applying under s137**
* **£1,800 to parish hall committees applying under s133**
* **£500 towards the upkeep of the Churchyard.**

Section 133 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits a Parish Council to make grants to third parties in respect of community buildings such as village halls:

‘Provision of parish and community buildings

A parish or community council may acquire or provide and furnish buildings to be used for public meetings and assemblies or contribute towards the expenses incurred by any other parish or community council or any other person in acquiring or providing and furnishing such a building’.

Therefore, the Council cannot use section 137 of the LGA 1972 for all grants and must consider using other relevant powers to spend when making grants such as the ones towards the upkeep of village/community halls.

In October the Clerk got in in touch with the following organisations and so far, received 2 applications back:

1. **Tring Station Residents Association - applied for £400 towards the Iron Room** **Hall maintenance** – “ The grant would be used towards the ongoing upkeep of the Iron Room. This year we have repaired guttering and fascias, the front door and broken concrete on the terrace, as well as refurbishing the toilet helped through a National Lottery Community Grant”.
2. **ALDBURY PEACE MEMORIAL INSTITUTE –** application not yet returned
3. **Baby and Toddler Group** – application not yet returned
4. **Friends of Aldbury School –** application not yet returned
5. **Aldbury Memorial Hall – applied for £1,000 –** “Last year the Trustees spent around £20,000 on improvements, including removing the old stage, restoring the parquet floor etc. Though the work has restored the hall to the elegance of its original design it has not improved the acoustics. After taking professional advice the trustees are committed to spending around £2,500 on sound absorbing panels. In order to keep down costs the trustees and other volunteers will instal the new panels. Looking further ahead the trustees are looking at further improvements to the audio facilities, to improve the lighting and to buy new chairs which are more comfortable and more easily stacked.

**Parish Council Funding for places of worship – information obtained from SLCC website News & Publications 5th December 2023**

“As part of the Lords Report Stage of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, the government made an amendment to the Local Government Act 1894 with the aim of clarifying that there is nothing to prevent local councils from funding churches and other places of worship.

The amendment, which will be inserted after section 19 of the Local Government Act 1894 is:

*19A Powers under other enactments (1) Nothing in this Part affects any powers, duties or liabilities conferred on a parish council by or under any other enactment (whenever passed or made). (2) This section does not apply in relation to community councils (see section 179(4) of the Local Government Act 1972*

*Parliamentary Explanatory Note: This amendment inserts a new section into the Local Government Act 1894 to clarify that the powers conferred on parish councils under Part 1 of that Act do not affect any powers, duties or liabilities of parish councils conferred by or under any other enactment (whenever passed or made).*

To seek further clarification, particularly around what funding can be used for, whether it applies to town and community councils in Wales and if it applies to all faiths, SLCC wrote to the Department of Levelling, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

The DLUHC response reiterated that there was nothing in the 1894 Act prohibiting parish councils from funding the maintenance and upkeep of churches and other religious buildings should they wish to do so. Also, that this new amendment clarifies that the Local Government Act 1894 does not affect the powers, duties or liabilities of parish councils in England under any other legislation. It also confirmed that the amendment applies to England only. Furthermore, the amendment does not limit funding to any denomination.

SLCC with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has long campaigned for a change in the legislation. We interpret this amendment as confirming that parish councils can continue to use existing specific powers in respect of church property (e.g. powers to maintain open churchyards and church clocks)”.

**St John the Baptist Aldbury – applied for a total of £2,250 towards the upkeep of the Churchyard**

**£600** – “The grant is sought to contribute to the cost of maintaining the upkeep of the churchyard between the main church door and the gate to the village green to the East and the pathway to the lych-gate to the west The appearance of the Church and Churchyard helps enhance the overall appearance of the centre of the village and is frequently given posi6ve comments by people who have signed the Church visitors’ book. The appeal of Aldbury to visitors is no doubt affected by the overall aesthetic impact of the centre of the village, including the church and the churchyard. The appearance of the churchyard may thus contribute to an economic benefit to the businesses within the village. The Churchyard is also regularly used as a place of reflection and commemoration by members of the local community as they remember a family member or friend who has died and is buried there”.

**£1,300** – “Employment of a contractor to carry out a one-off clearance of the graves area to the Southwest and West of the churchyard of St John the Baptist.

The maintenance of the churchyard falls into two distinct areas. To the Southeast of the church it is laid mainly to grass and is regularly maintained by an external contractor paid for by the Aldbury DCC with financial support through an annual grant from Aldbury Parish Council. This area is often commented on with visitors saying the churchyard enhances both the Church itself and the whole aspect of the centre of the village.

However the area to the South West and West of the church are mainly graves, with a significant number of bulky grave stones. The maintenance here is carried out by a very small group of volunteer residents of the village, both church goers and non-church goers, who struggle to cope with the whole area. There have been a number of comments made to the Church Council that this area looks untidy and uncared for and contrasts unfavourably with the grounds on the opposite side of the lych-gate footpath. Moreover the kerbstones around the older graves become a trip hazard when obscured by long grass and brambles, making it dangerous to walk amongst them.

We believe that a substantial one off clearance of the graves and the area between them would provide a sound basis for the existing volunteer group to carry on their maintenance, but with enhanced results.

We consider that this work will enhance the churchyard and, by default, the centre of Aldbury of which the churchyard is an integral part. The churchyard is not only an access to the church but is also used by people to access the school. The churchyard is also used by residents of Aldbury as a place to visit family graves or to take a few moments’ quiet contemplation. There are also frequent visitors who are in the village and spend some time looking at both the church and the churchyard.

When the proceeds from July’s filming were first announced on Everything Aldbury Facebook, there were several requests from residents of the community that the proceeds be used to maintain this churchyard area”.

**£350** – “Replacement of an existing Red Plum tree which is in poor condition.

During a recent tree survey of the churchyard it was highlighted that a Red Plum tree, near the Southeast corner of the church building, was in poor condition. The advice of the tree surveyor was that this existing tree should be removed and replaced by an alternative.

The existing tree was planted around 1974 and stands approximately 6 metres tall. Aldbury District Church Council have discussed this issue and consider that replacing the existing tree with a mature replacement, flowering, is the best way to maintain the overall appearance of that section of the churchyard”.