

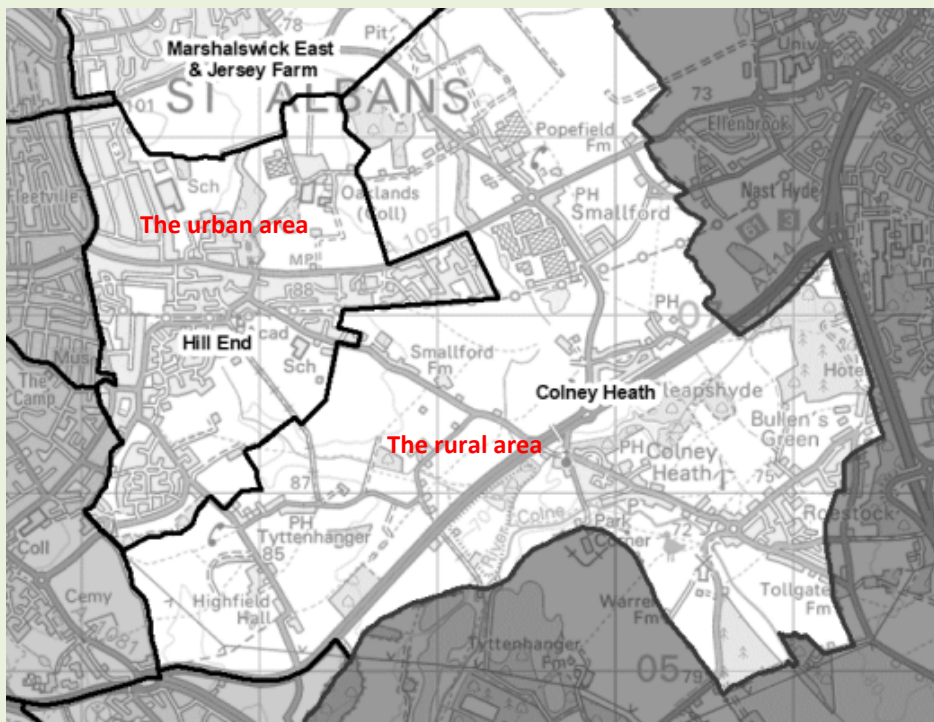


Issued by the editors, Mike Redfern and John Clemow, Trustees of the Colney Heath Village Hall, CIO, 28 Dec 2022  
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## SPECIAL EDITION December 2022

### THE FUTURE FOR TYTTENHANGER, SMALLFORD, SLEAPSHYDE AND COLNEY HEATH VILLAGE

St Albans City & District Council have altered the boundary of Colney Heath Parish to create a smaller Parish Council for the area shown as "Colney Heath The rural area" below. This aligns with the District Council ward for Colney Heath and includes Tyttenhanger, Smallford, Sleapshyde and Colney Heath Village.



SADC noted that "It is therefore likely that a smaller parish focused on the rural areas of Colney Heath, Tyttenhanger and Smallford will better reflect community identities and interests, and more effectively serve the residents of these areas" (and of course Sleapshyde)

**The change will take effect when the new Parish Council is elected in May 2023.**

**The Parish Council will comprise 7 Councillors, 1 for Tyttenhanger and 6 for the rest of the Parish.**

### WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR PARISH COUNCIL?

e-mail your ideas and suggestions to [michaelredfern2006@gmail.com](mailto:michaelredfern2006@gmail.com)

## A BIT OF HISTORIC CONTEXT

### THE URBAN EXPANSION

Colney Heath Parish was a rural area on the edge of St Albans City, originally part of St Peters Rural Parish. In 1988 it had around 1,600 households. The "Highfield Estate" was developed in the early 2000's on the sites of two closed hospitals. The development extended the urban area of St Albans City over the Parish boundary. This increased the number of households in the Parish to about 2,500 today, almost all of the increase being in the urban area.

Currently c54% of the households in the Parish of Colney Heath are within the Hill End ward of the District Council, the "urban area" on the map on page 1. They contribute c54% of the Parish Council's income from the precept (the precept is the part of Council tax that is allocated to the Parish Council).

In May 2022, the rural area comprised 1,176 households and 2,123 electors

### THE AFTERMATH OF THE "JOHN DEAN AFFAIR"

In 2015 "discrepancies" in the Parish Council's accounts were noted and the Council was reported to the police for fraud by a trustee of the Village Hall. The police dropped the investigation when the Clerk, John Dean, died.

The Parish Council subsequently issued their "Report in the Public Interest" in April 2021 recording more than £100,000 of cash had not been accounted for.

The Parish Council has since proceeded with some vigour in its approach to issues to be resolved, spending very substantial sums on legal fees on a number of disputes with individuals and community groups, many (arguably) avoidable. At the same time the Parish Council became administratively meticulous and risk adverse. The Council has a determined style of decision (or inaction as the case may be) seeming impervious to opposition, and disliking criticism.

### URBAN v RURAL TENSIONS

#### Interests and identity

The interests and identity of the rural area residents are different from the urban area residents. The rural residents have many community groups and tend to identify with their local rural community; the urban residents tend to identify with the City.

#### Inequality

The Council tax contribution by the urban residents is clearly unfair as they contribute more than half of the Parish Council's income but have almost no facilities or services provided by the Parish Council.

#### A difficult Parish

The "John Dean Affair" coupled with tensions arising from differences in interests and identity, and the inequality in benefits, have led to unhappy decisions and conflict between the urban area Councillors and the rural area Councillors. Since the last election in May 2019 6 Councillors, all in the rural area, have resigned.

In December 2019 the Scouts were evicted from the building they built with their own money. The renamed "Roestock Hut" has stood empty and unused for 3 years, an unfortunate legacy.

## A RURAL PARISH COUNCIL

Many residents will recall when Colney Heath was a rural area Parish. With the Clerk Dudley Wood, and then Caroline Pluck, residents in all the rural areas were well served by Councillors focused on the interests and concerns of the rural area residents. The evidence is in the quarterly editions of The Chronicle.

The community dynamic has changed; the "clock won't be turned back to the good old days".

However, the opportunity is a Parish Council that is committed to the interests of residents in the rural area and supporting the community.

#### SOME RURAL AREA INTERESTS AND CONCERNS

- the protection of the Green Belt
- housing developments on green fields
- traffic congestion and speeding
- enhancement of the local natural environment
- the neighbourhood plan
- Parish owned assets for common benefit
- lack of public transport
- support for isolated elderly and the vulnerable
- activities for children and young adults
- police response to anti-social behavior and crime
- vibrant community organizations and clubs
- the importance of village pubs and village halls
- sense of community in village life

**What are your suggestions? Which interests and concerns do think are most important?**

e-mail your ideas and suggestions to [michaelredfern2006@gmail.com](mailto:michaelredfern2006@gmail.com)

## THE ELECTION IN MAY 2023

Due to electoral boundaries Tyttenhanger will be represented by one Councillor. The remainder of the new Parish will be represented by 6 Councillors.

It is hoped that the new Parish Council will adopt a more constructive approach to governing the rural area community. This will of course depend on the people prepared to stand for election and, if there are more candidates than places on the Parish Council, on the choices of the electorate.

It is hoped that candidates from each of the settlements within the new Parish area will stand for election, that they have the energy and skills, and are committed to working together. The new Parish Council will face many problems consequent to the alteration of the boundary, and high expectations from parts of the community that have been frustrated by the current Parish Council : the Scouts, "Lake Dean" next to the village hall, bollards preventing the annual Fair on the Common to name a few instances.

## THE BUDGET FOR THE NEW PARISH COUNCIL

The current Parish Council has to set the budget for the financial year April 2023 to March 2024 and apply to the District Council in January 2023 for the precept income to cover the planned expenditure. The new Parish Council will inherit this budget.

The rural area households currently pay c£95,000 in precept tax.

The budget was agreed at the Parish Council meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022 <sup>[1]</sup>. In summary the budget for the new rural area Parish Council is as follows.

	£
Precept	173,450
other income	4,600
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>178,050</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	
Staff wages	(note a) 82,500
Administration	16,407
Democracy	(note b) 11,300
Legal	(note b) 7,670
Neighbourhood Plan	2,300
Open spaces	23,991
Colney Heath Common	11,500
Recreation grounds	12,500
Environment total	(note c) 47,991
Community	(note d) 10,025
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>178,193</b>

### Notes

- a. Understood to include c£8,000 for the Common Ranger
- b. Another administration cost
- c. This is the total of expenditure of the "real stuff on the ground" to which the Ranger's wages should be added.
- d. £1,650 is required for St Marks closed graveyard maintenance, the rest is optional (eg £1,000 for Remembrance Day)

The Parish Council's budget means a significant increase in the precept tax – for Band D properties from £85.92 per year to £152.97 per year. This increase can be seen as "only £5 per month" or an 81.5% increase in the current precept tax.

Whichever way the increased tax burden is viewed – a "trifle" in cash terms for the well off, or a real burden for those struggling with the cost of living crisis,

### WE SAY

the Parish Council's proposal is disproportionate to the reality of the new rural Parish Council. Examples of six rural Parish Councils in Hertfordshire with a similar number of electors to the new rural Parish indicate annual administration costs of

staff wages average	c£26,000
administration expenses average	c£10,000
<b>totaling</b>	<b>£36,000</b>

Compare this with the current Parish Council's proposal for administration staff and expenses of c£110,000

The current Parish Council has developed an impressively complex administration exemplified by 64 policies totaling 361 pages<sup>[2]</sup>. Compare this for example with one of the rural Parish Councils in Hertfordshire which has 7 policies totaling 47 pages.

What could the Parish Council budget look like in future with a simplified administration like similar sized rural Parish Councils

Precept and other income	no change	100,000
Expenditure		
Admin staff wages and expenses		36,000
Common Ranger	no change	8,000
Environment	no change	48,000
Neighbourhood Plan	no change	2,300
Balance left for Community		5,700

### WE SAY

If the electorate wants more expenditure ask them what for? And how much more tax do they want to pay?

This will be an "interesting" discussion for the new Parish Council.

What do YOU SAY? e-mail [michaelredfern2006@gmail.com](mailto:michaelredfern2006@gmail.com)

[1] <https://www.colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Item-78-CHPC-Budget-v3-December-2022.pdf>

[2] <https://www.colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk/policies-of-the-council/policies-of-the-parish-council>