

FULL COUNCIL

SUPPLEMENTARY BACKING PAPERS FOR MEETING 9th DECEMBER 2025

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Personal Statement for the position of co-opted Parish Councillor for the Hammerwood Ward

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make my personal statement for the representative from Hammerwood for the Parish Council.

I have lived in the vicinity of East Grinstead since 1984 when I moved to a small cottage in the grounds of Standen. Since then I have toured the surrounding villages, moving to Ashurst Wood in 1988, to Cowden in 1997 and then to Hammerwood in 2015. I had intended only to stay here for two years, renovate my property and move to somewhere more suitable – whatever that might have been. Unfortunately – or fortunately – I have become so involved in village life that I cannot envisage moving from here.

When I moved to Hammerwood I had recently finished working full time in London as Head of HR for an investment management firm. Virtually all my working life has been in financial services in the City when I worked long hours, including travelling, which did not allow me any time to become involved in village life. I decided that the best way to become involved in a new community was to volunteer for everything, so I became secretary to the Hammerwood Hall Committee, which is fundamental to the village. We run a number of events throughout the year which are well supported and enjoyed. While we must make a profit at the end of the year not least to maintain our 100-year old hall, our focus is on keeping the community together and if we only break even from an event but it was well supported, then we have done our job.

Hammerwood is a small community of around 100 souls but, as with many rural communities, they are spread far and wide. I moved here with a young labrador puppy which meant I was constantly walking the local area and met everybody in the vicinity – and wider. This has helped to bring the outliers of the village into the community and join events that they would not previously have known about. I maintain the Hammerwood communication network through email to keep everyone informed of local issues of interest and events. This was never more important than during the pandemic when everyone felt so isolated and unsure. I was able to provide details of local suppliers who were doing deliveries and to keep people connected with each other.

Hammerwood church closed in 2016 and many of the small congregation moved to Forest Row for their worship. However, from my perspective I do not feel any connection with Forest Row and I believe this view would be supported by other residents of Hammerwood. By becoming part of the Parish Council I would be a voice for Hammerwood. I am well known by everyone and well placed to communicate widely in the area. I am also a driving force for action within the village. I have recently worked with a small committee of residents to repair and resurface Hammerwood lane, which involved managing processes, communicating with and influencing others to the best outcome for the village. I believe I would be an asset to the Council and to represent the interests of Hammerwood.

I am passionate about nature and the countryside and conservation, but my main passion is my two labradors.

Linda Skinner

ADVICE NOTE ON THE BUDGET 2026-27

The draft budget for 2026-2027 has now been through both the Committee stage and scrutiny by the Chairs of Council and Committees, and is submitted for consideration by Full Council.

The current year raised the precept from £650,000 to £670,000, a percentage increase of 3.08%. That included a sum of £50,000 towards the general reserve, as I felt a contingency of £200,000 against the Council's net liabilities of £620,000 was insufficient to comply with best practice for a relatively high spending parish. In the event, the overall budget ran a surplus by the year end which enabled us to make some helpful adjustments to the nominated reserves.

In revenue terms, the current year's budget was intended to be something of a 'steady state' exercise, covering inflationary increases in basic commodities, services and staff costs, while allowing several larger sums against infrastructure improvements. By and large that has been achieved, with overheads kept within general inflation, and important works done on the VENUe building, the Hambro Hall, and our streetlights, and much needed replacement furniture for the Community Centre. The current figures show that we have received most of our budgeted income for the year, and that overall expenditure is at forecast level, so we can expect to break even by the year end. The nominated reserves, however, are mainly intact.

For the revenue budget of 2026-27, I have followed substantially the same format, namely to have regard to predicted inflationary increases, while allowing for service expansion in several critical areas, principally involving care for the village open spaces, which have long been a cause of comment, but also for 'people-based activities' such as the youth service and the sponsored counselling initiative.

The net result is a predicted difference between operational income and expenditure of £664,565, which would therefore require a minimum precept of £665,000. However, Council is now embarking on several larger scale projects, again based around the village environment, some of which will involve infrastructure work as well as installations - much in the way that the new swings needed an access path as part of the project. We need to retain the existing nominated reserves against their original purposes, and keep an eye also on the possibility of asset acquisition as part of the local government reorganisation programme.

Detailed plans and costings have yet to be produced, but this promises to be an active year for such projects, and an additional £30,000 added into the reserves against 'open space development' would appear to be justified, since it is for the enhancement of the environment from which the whole community benefits.

This will result in a precept of £695,000, which I would advise strikes a fair balance between maintaining the existing assets and services in a responsible manner, while allowing for a justifiable investment of funds in community asset upgrades and enhancement. At the same time it represents only a 3.7% increase over the previous year, which percentage is positioned exactly between the two current official measures of national inflation.

DOD / Parish Clerk & RFO

4th December 2024

What are PODS?

Pods stands for **P**oint **O**f **D**irect **S**upport. The name draws inspiration from nature. Think of the pea pod that contains and protects those sweet, abundant green seeds until they are ready for harvest. Consider the whales, dolphins and porpoise. How they move in their pods, protecting each other, socialising, strengthened in numbers.

Human PODS are for everyone!

- They can be **specific** – think of groups of parents, young people, elders, community leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, etc. Supporting each other through similar life stages and goals.
- Or **general** – a glorious mix of ages, experiences and perspectives, each learning and benefitting from the other.

Both provide..... Practical and emotional support, inspiration, accountability, connection, motivation, safety and friendship.

They counteract....Procrastination, isolation, disconnection, conflict, inertia and self sabotage.

Basic Flow Structure of PODS

The structure and flow of a PODS group is universal. The specific content is unique to every group.

A 90 minute PODS meeting with 6 people in would flow like this...

- 12 minutes gather and greet. Everyone share one thing they are pleased to notice since the last meeting. (2 minutes per person, timed)
(This might include sharing goals attained since last meeting – accountability)
- 40 minutes – the time is divided equally between all present. One person acts as time keeper and each person takes a turn to be listened to by the rest of the group in accordance with the agreements on listening as laid out.
- 15 minutes – Sharing a goal for the week ahead. (2 mins per person)
- 15 minutes – Asking for/offering/receiving support
- 8 minutes – Sharing appreciations for the group and ourselves. Final words and goodbyes.

Locations

Wherever a PODS group decides to meet, the space should be:

- Comfortable – chairs for the whole group, warm, tea making facilities, appropriate lighting.
- Spacious – large enough to fit a circle of chairs plus some additional space for moving freely in.
- Private – discussions remain confidential to the group and not overheard by others.

Great places for PODS

- **Private Homes** - PODS groups may choose to rotate around homes or remain in one location. Each group negotiates and decides for themselves.
- **Community Centres**, church halls and meeting spaces. Any hire costs should be agreed with all PODS member. Responsibility for bookings, setting up and tidying up afterwards to be agreed in each PODS group.
- **Online** via video conferencing apps such as Zoom, TEAMS or Jitsi – again, any costs involved should be agreed ahead of time.

Example PODS

The following are fictitious examples of how various PODS group might be used.

An 'Elders' PODS group

- One member celebrated at the beginning that she had been able to have the relationship repair call with her daughter that she had shared as her goal in last weeks meeting
- One person used the longer listening portion of the flow to share life memories. One used his time to share a current health struggle and one to celebrate herself as her 70th birthday approached.
- One member set a goal of finally clearing out their messy cupboard, something that was hard due to arthritis in their hand. They asked for support with this. Two members said they had capacity and they arranged to meet up in the week and complete the task with tea and chat included.
- During the closing three people said they felt less alone being able to come to the PODS meeting, one said they felt lighter having a place to share, one said they felt proud of themselves being able to receive support as this had been hard for them to do and one shared that they appreciated the new friendships they were growing.

A Community Leaders PODS group

- A project leader celebrated the sign up of six new members to her veg growing scheme. A Council member celebrated having supported a new grant application over the line.
- A Youth Worker used the longer listening portion of the flow to work through some challenges he's experiencing in his work. (He know that this will be treated confidentially but still avoids using names or identifying details as per the conditions of the sharing that he has learned.
- A leader from an elders befriending group set a goal of finding three new companions for some of her groups. One of the group said that her niece was looking to do some voluntary work and offered to make a connection by the weekend.
- During the closing two people expressed gratitude at how much more they were accomplishing since joining the PODS group. One appreciated the new connections that were forming and another shared their personal sense of pride at the good work they were doing locally.

Sheet1

Overall Costs

Cost Element	Time	Rate per week	Total (8 weeks)
Single PODS Group (Specific)	90 mins x 8wks	50	400
Single PODS Group (General)	90 mins x 8wks	50	400
Single PODS Group (Training)	90 mins x 8wks	75	600
Prep & printing materials	5 hours	35	175
Administration	5 hours	35	175
Advertising (Jan & Feb)	2 months	103.2	206.4
			1956.4

To run a single PODS Group	Time	Rate per week	Total (8 weeks)
Single PODS Group (General)	90 mins x 8wks	50	400
Prep & printing materials	2 hours	35	70
Administration	3 hours	35	105
Advertising (Jan & Feb)	2 months	103.2	206.4
			781.4

To run a single PODS Group plus training group	Time	Rate per week	Total (8 weeks)
Single PODS Group (General)	90 mins x 8wks	50	400
Single PODS Group (Training)	90 mins x 8wks	75	600
Prep & printing materials	5 hours	35	175
Administration	4 hours	35	140
Advertising (Jan & Feb)	2 months	103.2	206.4
			1521.4

Advertising in Ashdown Forest Living (19k reach)	Cost per month (incl.VAT)	Per 6 months
16 th Page	38.4	230.4
8 th Page	67.2	403.2
¼ Page	103.2	619.2
½ Page	202.8	1216.8 (6 month package gets one advertorial)