

## Friends of Church Stretton Library

### Consultation Background Information

## Town Council Consultation on Library, Leisure Centre and Swimming Pool

Shropshire Council has to make enormous savings in its budget to remain solvent. They are asking Town Councils to assist them financially next year to keep libraries, leisure centres and swimming pools open.

All these services are at risk of closure unless this financial assistance is provided.

Church Stretton Town Council is consulting with local residents to find out if they would support an increase in next year's precept to help save our library, leisure centre and swimming pool.

### Why consult now?

Church Stretton Town Council still does not know the exact amount of money that Shropshire Council will ask for. However, the Town Council has to go ahead with the consultation now so that it has the results in time to set next year's precept. The Town Council begins the process of setting its annual budget and precept in the Autumn which by law has to be completed by January 2025. Once this has been agreed, it is impossible for the Town Council to increase the precept again until the following financial year.

### What is the Town Council precept?

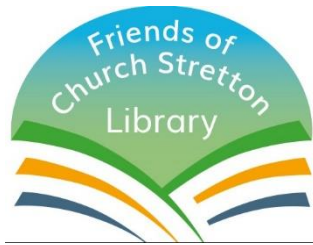
The Town Council precept is included as part of your annual council tax bill collected by Shropshire Council. Shropshire Council passes this money to Town Councils to fund local services such as public toilets, street lamps, crematorium, allotments, playing fields, parks and nature reserves.

### Could Friends fund the library on its own?

Friends of Church Stretton Library could try to increase the amount of money it raises each year. However, it is not feasible to expect that Friends could raise all the money likely to be required. We would also need the Town Council to contribute.

### What are other Town Councils doing?

Over the last ten years, Shropshire Council has been gradually making savings on the cost of running its market town libraries. Five of these have been moved into other buildings and are now managed by outside organisations. Three libraries are managed and funded solely by their Town Councils. In three market towns, the Town Councils have been paying a subsidy to Shropshire Council for their library service for some years. Church Stretton library is one of four remaining market town libraries that so far has not been affected in this way so far.



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#### **Why can't Shropshire Council raise its element of the council tax to pay for this?**

Local authorities are only allowed to raise their council tax at a maximum of 4.99% each year. This limits how much additional money they can raise, but Town and Parish Councils do not have this restriction.

#### **Can Shropshire Council close libraries: I thought they were a statutory service?**

Local authorities have by law, to provide a public library service which is free to access. However, the law does not stipulate how many libraries a local authority has to provide. Shropshire Council could try to keep the principal town libraries open as more people use them and shut the smaller market town libraries.

#### **Could savings be made by reducing library opening hours instead?**

Library opening hours are often reduced as a quick and easy way for local authorities to save money. This can lead to a reduction in the number of people using the library as they find it is not open when they want to use it. The market town libraries are only open three or four days a week, but the principal town libraries are open five or six days a week. If Shropshire Council wants to make savings by reducing opening hours, it would be fairer if it began with the principal town libraries.

#### **Finally**

Friends of Church Stretton Library has been raising funds to support the library for the last five years, through donations and by running events.

We can - and will - try to increase the amount of money we raise each year. However, we cannot raise all the money that is likely to be required by Shropshire Council on our own. We need the Town Council to contribute as well.

Please bear this in mind when completing the Town Council Survey.

You can complete the survey online on the [Town Council website here](#).

Copies of the survey are also being delivered to households by hand over the next few days. Completed surveys can be left in the library, leisure centre, Town Council offices and Vines.

Sheila Davies on behalf of the Trustees.