2026-2028

GREAT CHART with SINGLETON Parish Council

BUSINESS PLAN

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY TOGETHER

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1. Executive Summary

Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council serves as the first tier of local government for the communities of Great Chart, Singleton and Chilmington. Our core mission is to support residents in leading balanced, fulfilling lives by maintaining a clean, safe, and welcoming environment for all.

While we are not a business in the traditional sense, we are committed to managing public funds responsibly and transparently. Each year, the Council carefully reviews its current services and future priorities to shape its budget. This process begins mid-year, led by the Finance Committee, to ensure that financial planning is aligned with community needs.

Our key aims and principles include:

- **Opportunity:** Identifying and addressing service gaps left by other authorities.
- **Mission:** Ensuring all residents within the parish receive high-quality, inclusive services.
- **Collaboration:** Working in partnership with Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council, Kent Police, local organisations, and service providers to deliver effective solutions.
- **Governance:** Decisions are made by 11 councillors who meet monthly, supported by a dedicated team of officers
- **Community Impact:** Our goal is to foster a stronger, more connected community by investing in local priorities and enhancing the quality of life for all residents

This business plan outlines how we intend to deliver on these commitments, manage our resources, and continue building a resilient and vibrant parish.

Key Achievements of Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council

Over the past year, the Parish Council has made meaningful progress in delivering services and strengthening community life. Some of the most notable achievements include:

- **Maintaining and Enhancing Local Assets**: The Council has continued to invest in the upkeep of parish-owned facilities, including two play areas and multiple open spaces and the War Memorial in Great Chart. Parish stewards, ensure these areas remain clean, safe, and welcoming for all residents
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Through its lease of the Singleton Environment Centre—managed in partnership with Singleton Spaces—the Council supports environmental education, sustainability initiatives, and community engagement with green issues.
- **Community Events and Engagement:** The Council has successfully organised events such as the annual Big Lunch, which brings residents together and fosters

a sense of belonging. These events are complemented by regular public meetings and open forums that encourage direct dialogue between residents and councillors. The Parish Council also appointed a Community Engagement Officer to enhance the engagement with residents.

- **Support for Local Organisations:** A dedicated grants programme has enabled the Council to financially support local groups and initiatives that benefit the wider community, from youth services to wellbeing projects.
- **Effective Communication:** The Council has expanded its communication channels and is now working towards improving its digital communication with residents. An active social media presence, and regular updates via noticeboards and the website ensures residents are well-informed about decisions, events, and local developments.
- **Financial Responsibility:** The Council has demonstrated prudent financial management, with clear budgeting processes and transparent reporting. It has maintained a healthy reserve while funding key projects and services, ensuring long-term sustainability.
- **Resident-Focused Services:** Initiatives such as free dog waste bags, litter prevention, and mobile speed limit signage reflect the Council's commitment to practical, everyday improvements that enhance quality of life.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** The Council continues to work closely with Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council, and other stakeholders to address local needs and advocate for residents' interests.

Strategic Priorities 2026–2028

1. **Enhance Community Wellbeing & Engagement**
2. **Protect, Maintain & Improve Local Assets**
3. **Strengthen Environmental & Climate Resilience**
4. **Ensure Good Governance & Financial Sustainability**
5. **Develop a Resilient, Skilled and Supported Workforce**

2. Council Overview

What the Council Does

Parish councils were first established under the Local Government Act of 1894. Since then, their roles have evolved significantly. Once responsible for only basic community functions, modern parish councils now play a crucial role in local governance, often serving as a hub for service delivery, community representation, and strategic partnerships with other authorities. In addition to holding regular monthly meetings, the Parish Council is actively involved in delivering a broader range of services that respond to the needs of the parish and its residents.

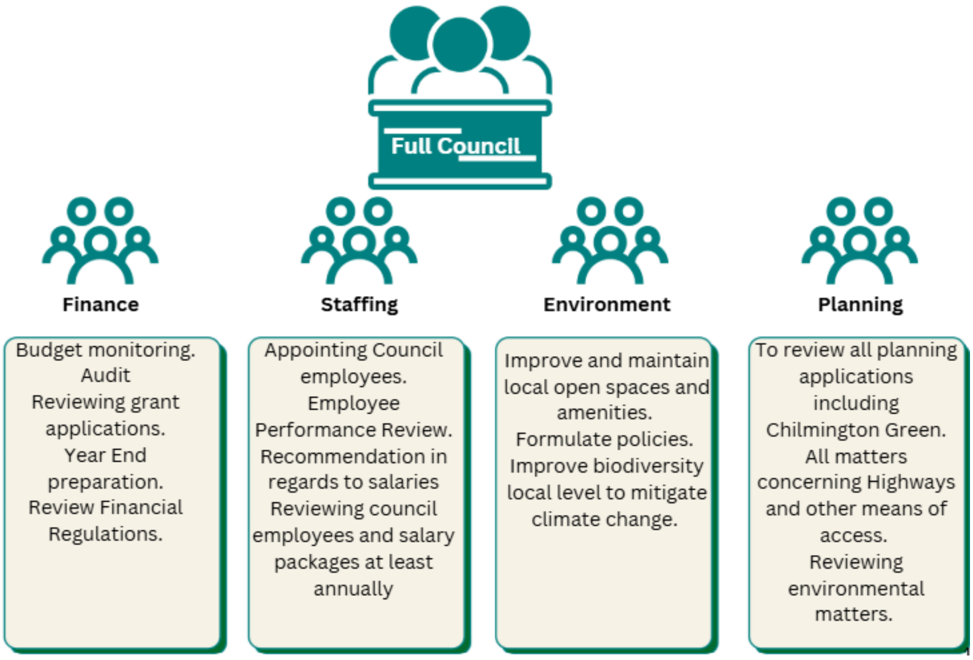


Figure 1 Parish Council structure

Services Provided

Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council has a statutory duty to serve all residents equitably, ensuring that services are accessible and delivered without discrimination. Services may include environmental maintenance, community safety initiatives, recreational facilities, local events, and strategic partnerships to enhance infrastructure and support vulnerable groups.

The Council provides a mix of statutory and discretionary services including:

- Grounds and open space maintenance
- Play areas and community facilities
- Environmental projects and biodiversity initiatives
- Parish events and community engagement
- Support for local organisations through grants
- Communication and information provision
- Partnership working with ABC, KCC, police, health and voluntary sectors

Our Vision, Mission & Core Values

The Parish Council has recently approved its Vision, Mission Statement, and Core Values, which will guide and shape the way we work and serve our community. These principles reflect our commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and continuous improvement for the benefit of all residents.

Vision Statement

Mission Statement

To cultivate our community through engagement, promoting a safe, green and welcoming environment for all.

The Core Values

Inclusivity	**Integrity**
Sustainability	**Collaborative**
Resilient	**Value for Money**

Organisational Structure

The Parish Council is supported by a small team of dedicated staff, each fulfilling specific roles to ensure the effective operation of the council and delivery of services to the community. This team includes the Parish Clerk, who acts as the Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer; the Deputy Clerk, responsible for communications, events, and community engagement; the Community Engagement Officer, who leads projects to strengthen ties with local residents; and the Parish Stewards, who oversee grounds, maintenance and asset care. Their collective efforts are supported by elected councillors, all working collaboratively to uphold the council's mission and values.

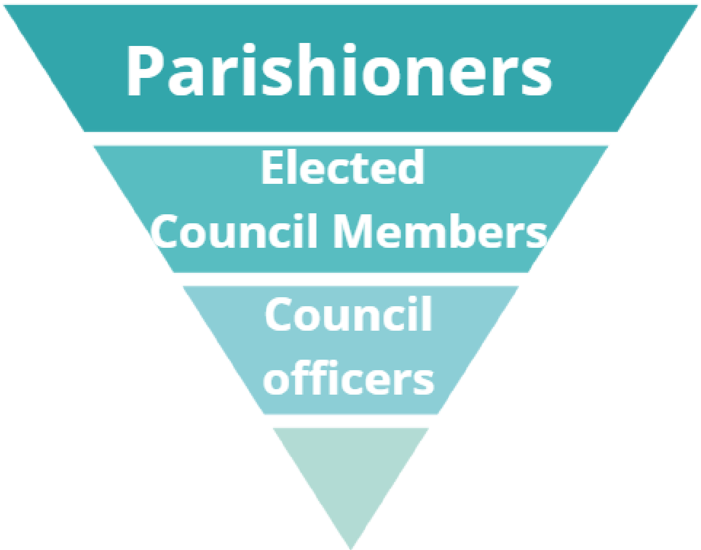


Figure 2 Organisational structure

Financial Management and Objectives

The Parish Council's primary income raised through a local tax known as precept, which is allocated by Ashford Borough Council (ABC) on behalf of the parish. The precept is paid in two instalments per financial year and is used exclusively for the benefit of the local community.

Precept for Financial Year 2025-2026 - £391,235

Use of funds: All income is reinvested in the parish through service provision, community projects, or allocated to reserve funds for future use.

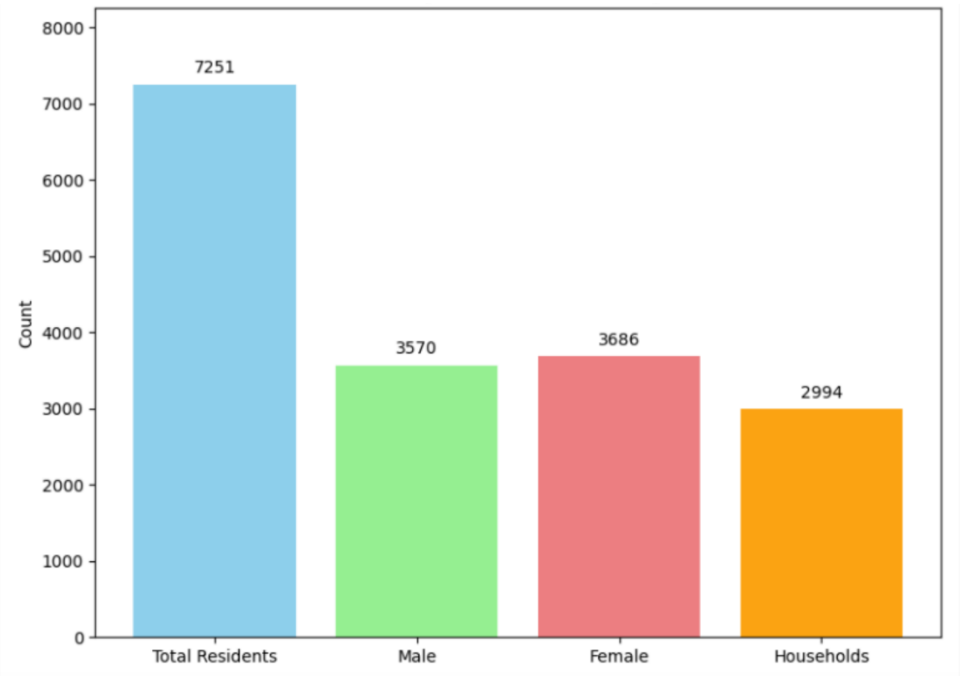
Budgeting process: The council prepares an annual budget based on planned projects and service needs. This forecast determines the precept request for the coming year. Under legislation, all expenditures must be for the direct benefit of parishioners and must comply with strict financial governance standards.

3. Population Profile

Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council serves a diverse community. Understanding local demographics ensures services meet need.

Key Demographic Highlights

- **Total residents**: 7251
- **Growing young population** due to housing developments
- **Increasing older population**, requiring improved accessibility and wellbeing services
- **Diverse community**, with varying needs across estates and neighbourhoods



Source: https://censusdata.uk/e04012785-great-chart-with-singleton/ts001-number-of-usual-residents-in-households-and-communal-establishments

Implications for service planning

- Higher demand on open space, play areas and facilities
- Need for accessible pathways, benches, and inclusive design
- Greater emphasis on wellbeing, safety and community connection
- Continued focus on communications tailored to different groups

4. SWOT Analysis & Mitigation Plan

The SWOT analysis provides a structured overview of the Parish Council's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. This framework helps identify areas where the Council is performing well, where improvements are needed, and what external factors may influence future operations. This analysis informs strategic planning and helps ensure the Council remains responsive to the needs of the community.

Mitigation Plan

The mitigation plan outlines practical steps to address the Parish Council's identified weaknesses and external threats, ensuring the organisation remains resilient and responsive.

Workforce development & succession planning: Ensuring staff are trained and prepared for future roles, so the Council can operate smoothly even as personnel change.

Formalised partnership working structure with ABC/KCC: Establishing clear collaborative arrangements with Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council to improve joint services and projects.

Improved risk management and business continuity planning: Introducing stronger processes to identify risks and ensure that the Council can continue operating during unexpected events.

Maintaining and growing reserves responsibly: Managing financial reserves wisely to guarantee stability and fund future initiatives.

Commissioning specialist support when required: Bringing in expert advice or services whenever specialist knowledge is needed to address specific challenges.

5. Strategic Priorities & Actions

The following section outlines the Parish Council's key strategic priorities and the actions planned to achieve them. By focusing on areas that matter most to the community, these priorities provide clear direction for future decision-making and resource allocation, ensuring the Council continues to make a positive impact for local residents.

Priority 1: Community Wellbeing & Engagement

Objectives

- Improve connection with residents
- Deliver inclusive, accessible community events
- Enhance communication and transparency

Key Actions

- Expand the online parish newsletter & social media reach
- Deliver a yearly programme of community events
- Introduce resident surveys & consultation mechanisms

Performance Measures

- Engagement rate on digital platforms
- Attendance at parish events
- Satisfaction survey results

Priority 2: Protect, Maintain & Improve Local Assets

Objectives

- Ensure all assets are safe, well-maintained and future-proof
- Deliver planned improvements and lifecycle replacements

Key Actions

- Develop a 3-year Asset Maintenance & Investment Plan
- Undertake annual play area inspections with documented improvements
- Implement biodiversity plans for open spaces

Performance Measures

- Percentage of assets inspected & compliant
- Resident feedback on open spaces
- Delivery of programmed upgrades

Priority 3: Environmental & Climate Resilience

Objectives

- Support biodiversity
- Build resilience to climate risks

- Promote environmental awareness

Key Actions

- Establish new biodiversity areas and planting schemes
- Support Singleton Environment Centre as a community hub
- Install environmental monitoring and litter reduction schemes

Performance Measures

- Number of environmental improvements delivered
- Carbon reduction initiatives implemented
- Increase in biodiversity zones

Priority 4: Good Governance & Financial Sustainability

Objectives

- Maintain strong financial management
- Improve transparency and accountability
- Ensure compliance with statutory duties

Key Actions

- Strengthen internal control processes
- Review policies annually
- Develop a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

Performance Measures

- Successful internal & external audits
- Reserve levels maintained in line with adopted policy
- On-time publication of statutory information

Priority 5: Workforce Development & Resilience

Objectives

- Ensure the council has the skills and capacity needed
- Support staff wellbeing and development
- Safeguard business continuity

Key Actions

- Clerk & Deputy CPD, including CiLCA/equivalent
- Training programme for Parish Stewards (machinery, play inspection, biodiversity)
- Develop business continuity & succession plans

Performance Measures

- Annual training hours completed
- Workforce stability & satisfaction
- Reduction in service disruption risks

6. Communication Strategy

Effective communication is essential for the Council to engage with staff, residents and the wider community. This strategy sets out a multi-channel approach to ensure information is accessible, timely and relevant, supporting business continuity and community involvement. By utilising a range of platforms and monitoring key performance indicators, the Council aims to maximise its reach and foster positive relationships throughout the parish.

The Council will continue its multi-channel approach to maximise reach, including:

- Parish magazine online
- Blogs, Website updates, and accessibility improvements
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)
- Noticeboards and printed materials
- Public meetings, forums & community engagement events

Communication

Communication Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) provide a measurable framework for assessing the effectiveness of the Council's communication strategy. By tracking these indicators, the Council can evaluate its reach, engagement, and impact across various channels, ensuring that information is delivered efficiently and resonates with staff, residents, and the wider community.

- Website visit increases
- Online newsletter distribution & engagement
- Social media reach and interaction
- Resident perception metrics

7. Facilities & Assets

The Council is responsible for a range of facilities and assets that support the local community's wellbeing and environment. These include play parks, open spaces, and essential maintenance infrastructure, all managed to ensure accessibility, safety, and sustainability. Through careful planning and ongoing investment, the Council aims to maintain and enhance these assets for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

The Council maintains:

- Two equipped play parks
- Allotments at Hillcrest – Great Chart
- Multiple open spaces
- Dog waste disposal points and bag dispensers
- Grounds maintenance equipment
- Leasehold responsibility for Singleton Environment Centre
- War Memorial
- Noticeboards and benches

A full **Asset Register**, **Condition Survey**, and **Investment Plan** will guide maintenance and upgrades over a rolling 3-year cycle.

8. Financial Plan 2026–2028

The Financial Plan 2026–2028 sets out the Council's approach to managing income, expenditure, and investment. It is designed to ensure the continued provision, maintenance, and enhancement of community facilities and assets, such as play parks, open spaces, and the Singleton Environment Centre. The plan provides a framework for financial sustainability, guiding the allocation of resources to support core services, maintenance programmes, and strategic improvements for the benefit of residents and visitors.

Income

- **Precept 2025–2026:** £391,235

Expenditure Categories

- Salaries & administration
- Grounds & equipment maintenance
- General maintenance
- Parish projects and grant funding
- Communications and community engagement
- Asset improvements

Financial Strategy

- Maintain reserves at a safe and responsible level
- Plan for lifecycle replacement of assets
- Mitigate inflation and contractor cost increases
- Explore grant funding opportunities
- Deliver value for money through structured procurement

Reserves Policy

The Council will hold:

- **General Reserve**: 3–12 months' operating expenditure
- **Earmarked Reserves**: asset replacement, environmental projects, community facilities, and unexpected liabilities

9. Governance & Assurance Framework

The Governance & Assurance Framework sets out the Council's approach to maintaining robust oversight, accountability, and transparency across its operations. By adhering to established policies, regular reviews, and audits, this framework ensures that the Council's activities are conducted ethically, risks are managed effectively, and progress is tracked and reported. It forms the foundation for sound decision-making and sustainable management, ultimately supporting the Council's commitment to good governance and continuous improvement.

The Council will:

- Review this Business Plan bi-annually
- Report progress quarterly to Full Council
- Maintain a comprehensive Risk Register
- Undertake regular internal audits and implement recommendations
- Review all policies when they up for renewal
- Ensure training for councillors on governance and ethical standards

10. Financial Overview

The Parish Council's financial strategy for the period 2025–2029 reflects a balanced and forward-looking approach to sustaining services, maintaining assets, and investing in the local community.

Precept income is projected to increase steadily over the four-year period, rising from £391,235 in 2025–26 to £492,057 by 2028–29. This planned growth provides the financial stability required to respond to rising costs while continuing to deliver essential services and community support.

Administration expenditure represents the largest area of spend, increasing from £293,111 to £349,235 across the period. This reflects the ongoing investment in staffing, governance, and core service delivery, alongside increases in operational costs and statutory responsibilities. The gradual rise demonstrates a controlled and sustainable approach to managing the Council's core functions.

Investment in maintenance remains a key priority, with general maintenance budgets increasing steadily year-on-year. This ensures that parish assets, facilities, and infrastructure are adequately protected and maintained, reducing the risk of more significant costs in the future and supporting a safe and attractive environment for residents.

Spending on ground maintenance equipment and tools also rises over the period, with a notable increase in 2028–29. This indicates planned reinvestment in operational capability, enabling the Council to maintain efficiency and resilience in service delivery.

A significant feature of the financial plan is the continued and enhanced investment in projects and local amenities. Funding increases from £48,000 in 2025–26 to £75,500 by 2028–29, demonstrating a strong commitment to community development, local facilities, and environmental initiatives. The uplift from 2026–27 onwards reflects an ambition to deliver strategic projects that provide long-term value to the parish.

Overall, the financial overview demonstrates a prudent and sustainable approach, balancing income growth with controlled expenditure increases. The Council continues to prioritise service delivery, asset maintenance, and community investment, ensuring that financial planning supports both current needs and future aspirations.

BUDGET FORECAST

Category	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
Income-Precept	£391,235	£446,221	£451,374	£492,643
Administration Including salaries grants and other expenditures	£293,111	£299,371	£321,885	£349,235
Ground Maintenance Equipment and tools	£7,500	£8,000	£9,000	£15,000
General Maintenance	£42,000	£45,250	£48,989	£52,908
Projects and local amenities support	£48,000	£68,600	£71,500	£75,500

Figure 3 Budget Forecast

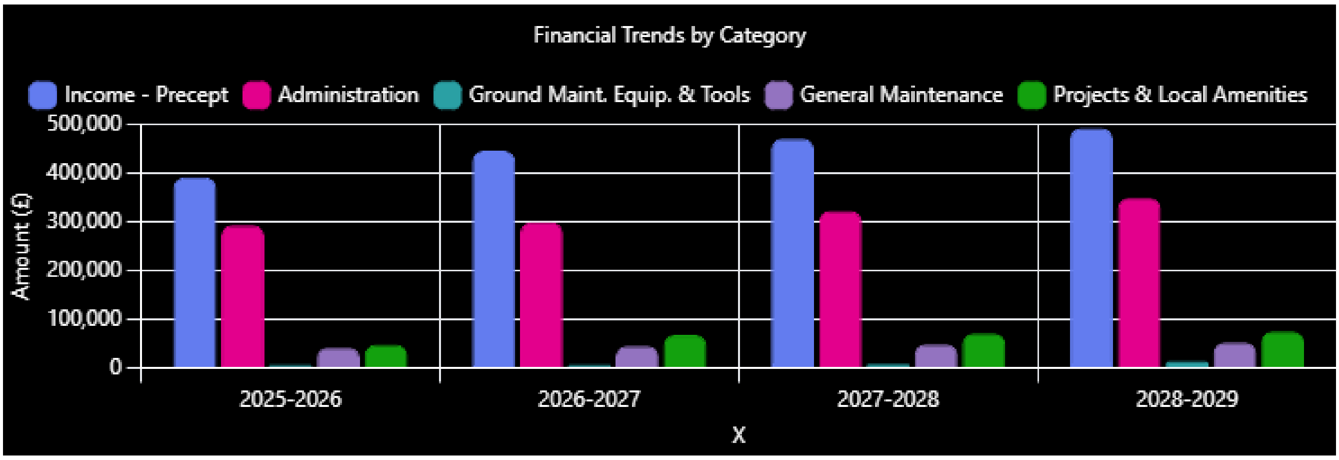


Figure 4 Financial Trends by Category