# Thurston Grounds Management Proposal

## Thurston Parish Council

**Paper:** Agenda item 11a
**Reason:** To receive and consider Cllr Millest's report on the proposed investigation into Parish Council involvement in the management of open spaces on new developments and determine approval of a working group to investigate the feasibility, benefits, risks and sustainability of such a proposal
**Presented to Council:** Full Council meeting 4 November 2026
**Date:** 1 October 2026
**Author:** Cllr Millest

# Motion

**That Thurston Parish Council resolves to:**

1. Establish a **New Developments and Open Spaces Working Party** to investigate the feasibility, benefits, risks and long-term sustainability of Parish Council involvement in the management, maintenance and ownership of open spaces and communal assets within new housing developments across the village.
2. Task the Working Party with:
    - Engaging with residents of existing and future developments.
    - Engaging with developers, management companies, local authorities and relevant service providers.
    - Reviewing Section 106 agreements and planning obligations associated with major developments.
    - Assessing opportunities for the Parish Council to adopt, manage or support the management of open spaces and community assets.
    - Reviewing legal, financial, operational and insurance implications.
    - Exploring options for future developments that may avoid long-term duplication of charges to residents.
    - Examining examples of successful parish-led or resident-led management arrangements elsewhere in the UK.
    - Identifying opportunities to secure appropriate commuted sums or financial contributions from developers to support long-term maintenance obligations.
3. Request that the Working Party report back to Council with recommendations, financial implications and any proposed implementation options before any commitment is made to assume responsibility for land or assets.

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## Background

As Thurston continues to grow, the village is increasingly supported by a mixture of traditional parish-managed open spaces and privately managed open spaces within newer housing developments.

Many residents of newer developments currently pay:

- The Parish Council precept; and
- Separate estate management charges to private management companies.

This has created a situation whereby many residents contribute twice towards the maintenance of public-facing open spaces, whilst other residents contribute solely through the parish precept.

The Parish Council has an opportunity to explore whether a more unified and transparent approach could deliver better value for residents, improve accountability and ensure that more maintenance expenditure remains within the local community.

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## Scale of the Opportunity

There are currently approximately **1,396 properties either completed or under construction** across Thurston's major housing developments:

### Completed Developments

| Development | Properties |
|---|---|
| Grange Park | 129 |
| College Park | 248 |
| Hakewill Mews | 59 |
| Cavendish View | 252 |
| Thurston Park | 175 |
| **Total** | **863** |

### Developments in Progress

| Development | Properties |
|---|---|
| The Hedgerows | 112 |
| Thurston Grove | 210 |
| St Peter's Chase | 210 |
| **Total** | **533** |

**Overall Total 1,396 Properties**

Using a conservative estimate of **£300 per household per year** in estate management charges:

- Estimated management company income: **£418,800 per annum**
- Equivalent parish-managed model at £100 per property: **£139,600 per annum**
- Potential resident saving: **approximately £279,000 per annum**

Whilst actual costs vary between developments, this demonstrates the scale of expenditure currently leaving the local economy.

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## Potential Benefits of a Parish-Led Approach

Should future developments, or developments transferred into local control, become managed through a parish-led arrangement, potential benefits may include:

- Reduced costs for residents.
- Greater transparency and accountability.
- Local democratic oversight.
- Improved value for money.
- Maintenance spending retained within the local economy.
- Greater consistency in maintenance standards.
- Improved biodiversity and environmental management.
- Enhanced control over play areas and community assets.
- Potential opportunities to invest savings into wider village improvements.

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## Affordability and Impact on the Parish Precept

A key concern is whether taking responsibility for additional land would create an unreasonable financial burden on existing residents.

Initial analysis suggests that where open spaces are adopted through properly structured Section 106 arrangements, including suitable commuted maintenance sums, the impact on council finances may be manageable.

It is estimated that:

- A one-off increase of approximately **1-2% in the parish precept** during the first year of adoption, in addition to any normal annual increase, may be sufficient to support the transition.
- Thereafter, ongoing costs could be incorporated into the Council's normal budgeting process without requiring further exceptional increases.

This approach would:

- Remove duplicate charging arrangements for many new-build residents.
- Share maintenance costs more equitably across the community.
- Keep expenditure under local control.
- Allow maintenance standards to be set by locally elected representatives.
- Improve long-term planning for village-wide assets and green spaces.

## Key Questions to Investigate

The Working Party should consider the following questions:

### Existing Developments

- Have all opportunities for public adoption been fully explored?
- Were all Section 106 obligations complied with by developers?
- Are there circumstances where open spaces could be transferred into community control?
- Could existing Residents' Management Companies work more closely with the Parish Council?

### Future Developments

- Can future planning agreements be structured differently?
- Can long-term estate charges be reduced or removed?
- Can open spaces be transferred directly to the Parish Council from the outset?
- What commuted sums would be required to make adoption financially sustainable?

## Legal and Operational Considerations

The Working Party should investigate:

### Section 106 Agreements

- Existing adoption clauses.
- Developer obligations.
- Long-term maintenance responsibilities.

### Residents' Management Companies (RMCs)

- Governance arrangements.
- Resident control mechanisms.
- Potential transfer pathways.

### Land Transfer Requirements

- Transfer of freehold ownership.
- Land Registry updates.
- Covenant and rentcharge implications.

### Insurance and Liability

- Public liability requirements.
- Asset management responsibilities.
- Health and safety obligations.

### Financial Requirements

- Adequacy of developer-funded commuted sums.
- Long-term maintenance budgets.
- Procurement and contractor requirements.

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## Suggested Scope of Initial Investigation

The Working Party should undertake:

1. A review of all major Thurston developments and their management arrangements.
2. A review of relevant Section 106 agreements and planning obligations.
3. Engagement with residents and Residents' Management Companies.
4. Engagement with developers and managing agents.
5. Financial modelling of parish-led management options.
6. Legal advice regarding transfer and adoption mechanisms.
7. Benchmarking against successful examples elsewhere.
8. Production of a report setting out viable options, risks and recommendations.

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## Conclusion

As Thurston continues to expand, there is a risk of creating a growing distinction between residents who pay only the parish precept and those who pay both the precept and substantial private estate management fees.

Investigating alternative management arrangements could provide an opportunity to:

- Deliver better value for residents.
- Improve transparency and accountability.
- Retain more money within the local economy.
- Enhance stewardship of public spaces.
- Create a more unified approach to managing community assets across the village.

This proposal does not commit the Parish Council to taking on any land or liabilities. It simply seeks to establish a Working Party to investigate the available options and report back with evidence-based recommendations for future consideration.

## Resolution

**Thurston Parish Council therefore resolves to establish a New Developments and Open Spaces Working Party to investigate the feasibility, financial implications and long-term sustainability of Parish Council involvement in the management, maintenance and ownership of open spaces and communal assets within existing and future housing developments, and to report its findings and recommendations back to Council.**