March 2025 update approved at PC meeting 19 March 2025

ALSTONEFIELD PARISH COUNCIL
RISK ASSESSMENT

Alstonefield Parish Council

Risk Assessment Policy Overview

This document is an overview of the means by which the Parish Council seeks to assess the risks that it faces, satisfy itself that it has taken adequate steps to minimise those risks and thereby enable it to make an adequate declaration in its annual return to the Audit Commission.

There are four appendices which cover all aspects of the Council's risk assessment policy in detail:

- Appendix i explains the process; a checklist covering Normal Business Risk Assessment
- Appendix ii is used by the Clerk to check that all reasonable risks have been considered
- Appendix iii is a Special Events Risk Assessment and is available for use for one-off events which are not covered under normal business activity
- Appendix iv lists the council's assets in detail and sets out a normal maintenance schedule.

The three major areas of risk assessment – loss of financial control, lack of knowledge of regulations governing council actions and codes of conduct and inadequate health and safety procedures covering equipment, and the people who use it, and other assets under the control of the council – are summarised below.

Financial Control

The Council seeks to maintain financial control by a number of mechanisms, the most important of which is a set of rules of financial governance, set out in the Financial Regulations document adopted by the Council at its meeting of 10 August 2022. A summary of the main points of this are set out below:

a) Asset Register

The Council maintains a list of assets – both land and non-fixed assets – which it reviews annually.

b) Bank Accounts

All Council monies are transacted through the Council's current bank account. All monies received are paid directly into the account (eg. Precept) or by the Parish Clerk (eg. Car park monies). Where possible expenditures are made using the Bankline online banking app which requires dual authorisation from authorised signatories. If necessary cheques can also be drawn against the account. Each cheque must be signed by two of the councillors who are authorised signatories to the account (the Clerk is a Bankline authorised person but not an authorised cheque signatory). In addition, the signatories also check and initial the accompanying paperwork (invoices) verifying the details of the expenditure which is detailed in the corresponding Parish Council meeting minutes

c) Annual Budget

The Council produces and agrees a budget each year in December/January and the Precept is set on the basis of this budget.

d) Financial Reporting

At every Parish Council meeting the Clerk (who is also the Responsible Financial Office ["RFO"]) presents a statement of transactions since the previous Parish Council and Bankline payments are agreed and any cheques presented for signature at the meeting. A year-to-date budget versus actual statement of income and expenditure against each of the agreed budget line items is also presented periodically. All the financial reports presented to the Council, if they are not actually included in the minutes, are available for inspection by members of the public upon application.

e) Auditing of Accounts

The Council Chair and Vice Chair act internal councillor auditors who assist the RFO by carrying out a regular check of the accounts against the bank statement. The Bankline App allows all authorised persons to view transactions and statements in real time. The Council has appointed an Independent Examiner who carries out at least one audit session during the year. At the final of these sessions, the Independent Examiner will verify the accounts and all other paperwork contributing to the official audit return, will make their own declaration of assessment of the Council's governance (including verifying the Financial Regulations), which may be qualified by an audit review statement, all of which is then presented for official audit by the Audit Commission inspector if requested. The Independent Examiner's Audit Review is presented to the first Council session following the audit and forms the basis for any reviews and reforms during the following year.

f) Employer's Fiscal Responsibility

The Council ensures that all its employees have proper contracts of employment, complying with all current legislation, and these are audited by the Independent Examiner as part of the annual audit.

g) Best Value

The Council has a set of procurement procedures (detailed in the Financial Regulations) which it follows when placing any order for goods or services. The principal criteria for such orders are best value for money and/or the desire to use local suppliers.

h) E-mails and data protection

The Councillors currently use their personal e-mail addresses for their Parish Council work. The Parish Council is aware that the use of personal devices and e-mail accounts could raise the risk that personal data is processed for different purposes from which it was originally collected. All Councillors are aware of their responsibilities in terms of only using personal data for the purposes which the Council obtained it. The Parish Council has considered the benefits of using dedicated devices and e-mail addresses; however, they have concluded that the cost and effort involved outweighs any benefits to be gained.

Councillor Responsibilities

The Council seeks to operate all its activities and procedures according to the various regulations governing local councils and to do so in a way which is totally transparent to the electors.

a) Standing Orders and Codes of Conduct

The main regulations governing councillor actions (specific financial responsibility is governed by the Financial Regulations referred to above) and procedures are the Standing Orders document which was adopted by the Council at its meeting of 10 August 2022 and the Code of Conduct document which was adopted by the Council at its meeting in May 2021. The Council also uses the 2018 edition of the Good Councillor's Guide, the current edition of the *Working With Your Council work book* (a guide for Parish Council Clerks). In addition, the Council is a member of the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association which it consults on any matter concerning Council powers and every new councillor is encouraged to attend a new councillor course.

b) Councillor Probity

Every councillor signs a declaration on taking up office attesting to their intention to abide by the Council's Code of Conduct and in addition, signs a declaration of financial and other interests, which details any attachment which may prejudice their ability to be impartial in any discussion. The Clerk holds a copy of these declarations which are reviewed with any changes to councillor appointments. In addition, at the start of every Council meeting councillors are required to declare any interest on any subsequent agenda item and all councillors are aware of their obligations under this stricture.

Health And Safety Procedures

The Council owns no buildings and therefore its health and safety obligations are restricted to its employees (or sub-contactors), any equipment or street furniture it may own and the condition of a playing field and play equipment. which it does own.

a) Harm to Third Parties

The Council assures itself that the Lengthsmen, whether directly employed or sub-contracted, understand their responsibility to carry out their duties with regard both to their own safety and that of the public. The Council has insurance cover to enable it to meet any third party liability that it might face if an accident were to occur and the Council found to be in default of its duties.

b) Equipment and other Assets Assessment

All Lengthsmen equipment owned by the Council is subject to an annual maintenance inspection. Other assets, such as benches, are subject to an annual visual inspection, conducted by two councillors, to verify that they remain viable and safe to use. [See Appendix iv – The Assets Maintenance Schedule.] Specialist equipment – contained within the children's play area – is regularly inspected by a rota of Councillors and a professional safety assessment is carried out annually by RoSPA and any report is considered by the Council for follow-up action. The condition of the playing field is maintained by a team of volunteers who, along with the lengthsmen, report any visible damage noticed in the course of their duties.

c) Adequacy of Insurance

The level of insurance cover undertaken by the Council is scrutinised by the Independent Examiner as part of the annual audit to ensure that the Council is properly insured, including public liability and fidelity insurance.

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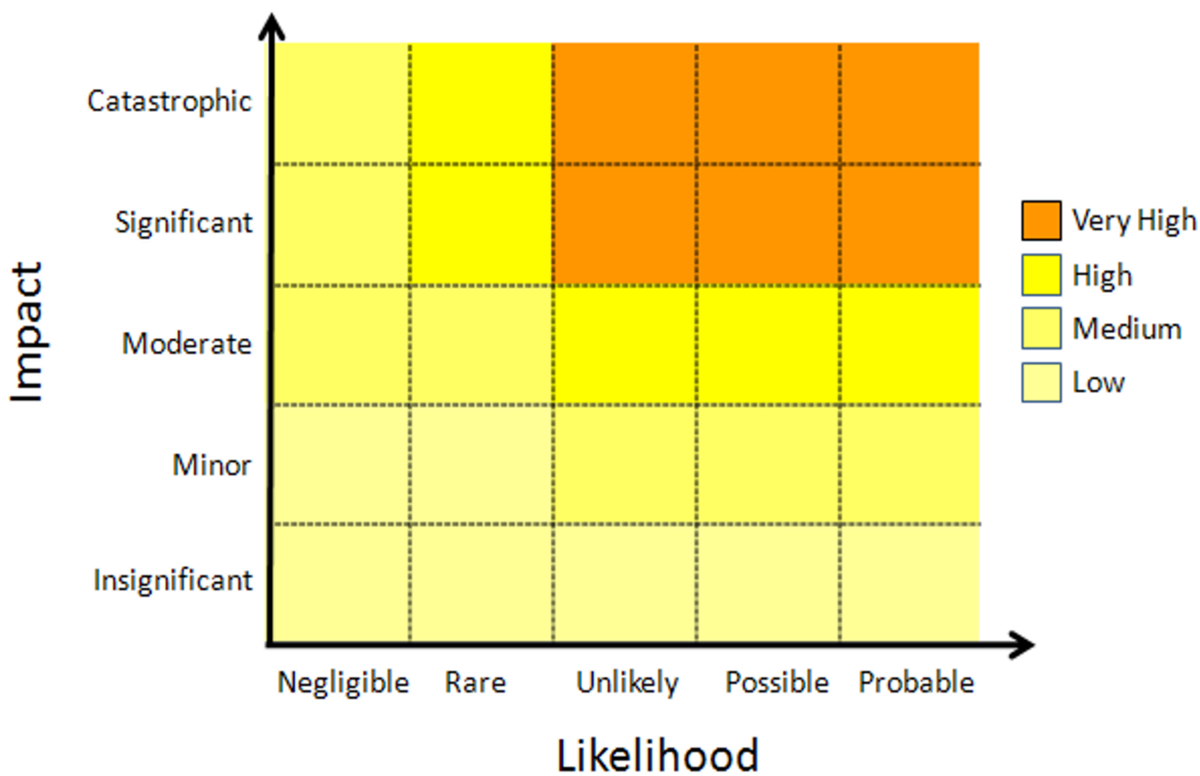
Appendix i – Risk Assessment Process

BACKGROUND

In this document, risk is defined as a product of the likelihood and impact of a given hazard or threat. Greater risks are associated with hazards or threats which have a higher impact and medium to high likelihood. Conversely, low risks will reflect hazards and threats where the impact is low and the likelihood is low to medium. The more difficult cases are those hazards and threats where the likelihood is low and the impact very high, or vice versa. Simple categorisation of these latter risks is often difficult. They require a more sophisticated means of measurement involving judgements about the overall risk associated with certain combinations of likelihood and impact.

Typically, these judgements are presented in a risk matrix:

RISK RATING MATRIX



Definitions of Risk Ratings

- **Very High Risk (Intolerable Risk)** – these are critical risks requiring immediate attention. They may have a high or low likelihood of occurrence, but their potential consequences are such that they must be treated as a high priority. Strategies should be developed to reduce or eliminate the risks.

- **High Risk (Substantial Risk)** – these are significant risks. They may have high or low likelihood of occurrence, but their potential consequences are sufficiently serious to warrant appropriate consideration after those risks classed as 'very high'. Again, consideration should be given to the development of strategies to reduce or eliminate the risks

- **Medium Risk (Moderate Risk)** – these risks are less significant, but may cause upset and inconvenience in the short-term. These risks should be monitored to ensure that they are being appropriately managed and consideration.

- **Low Risk (Tolerable Risk) –** these risks are both unlikely to occur and not significant in their impact. They should be managed using normal planning arrangements and require minimal monitoring and control unless subsequent risk assessments show a substantial change, prompting a move to another risk category.

Risk Assessment Outcome

TOLERABLE RISK	No additional controls are required.
MODERATE RISK	Efforts should be made to reduce the risk, but the costs of prevention should be carefully measured and limited. Measures to be introduced within reasonable time period
SUBSTANTIAL RISK	Activity should cease until risk has been removed. Measures to be introduced as soon as possible
INTOLERABLE RISK	Activity must cease until risk has been removed. Measures to be introduced immediately.

Appendix ii – Normal Business Risk Assessment Checklist

Category	Details	Risk Weighting	Controlled (Y/N)	Action
1 Assets				
Insurance Cover for the Council	Fidelity Theft Personal Injury Public Liability Slander/Libel External Assets Sub Contractors Insurance for Clerk's premises Equipment			
Information security	Protection of sensitive data Data Back-up Back-up storage			
Assets Viability	Annual risk assessment review Equipment Inspection log – annual review Legislative (H & S) compliance			
Asset Register	Annual review			
2 Finance				
Cash Loss	Cash handling procedures			
Handling VAT	VAT reclaim procedure			
Budgeting (precepts)	Financial status review Annual precept setting process Contingency level appropriate			
Grant funding	Procedure for grant applications and monitoring			
Devolution of Local Government	Greater workload for Councils and employees Increased need for collaborative working with other parish councils or clusters of PCs			
Conformation with legislation	Financial Regulations review Goods/services purchase controls Payments approval/control Ultra Vires actions by Council Knowledge of accounting requirements Knowledge of sources of income			
Banking arrangements	Control of signatories Review of accounts			
Gifts	Register and regular review			
Salary payments	Paid in accordance with Council			

	regulations PAYE/NI handled appropriately			
Procedures	Accounts monitoring undertaken by: Quarterly bank rec'n review by Chair Bi-annually – Independent Examiner Annually – Audit Commission			
3 Public Liability				
Exterior Furniture	Adequate insurance			
Playing Field	Regular visual inspection			
Play Areas	Monthly check and annual RoSPA inspection			
4 Legal				
Meetings	Conducted legitimately			
Minutes	Signed and retained appropriately			
Agenda	Sufficient detail of business Issued on time			
Meeting Summons	Councillor's awareness of responsibilities			
Training	Continual Professional Development			
Devolution Impacts	Changes to legalities and responsibilites may result. Stay informed and share developments reviewing risks as decisions are made.			
5 Members' Liability				
Declarations of Interests	Register lodged with SMDC – reviewed annually Agenda items declared at each meeting			
Hospitality				
Resolutions	Resolutions clearly understood before voting. Clerk's advice – if given and overridden must be minuted			
6 Council Liability				
Lone person working	Compliance with employment law			
Contract of Employment	All employees/subcontractors issued with appropriate contracts			
Duty of Care	To employees			
Councillors	Councillors are adequately advised of their responsibilities Councillors knowledge re culpability			
Code of Conduct	Reporting of interests and Code of Conduct issues administered by SMDC			
7 Health and				

Safety				
Responsibilities	Members Employees Public			
COSHH				
8 Town and Country Planning				
Consultation	Plans presented at council			
9 Contracts				
Monitoring of contracts	Performance Payments			
Letting of Contracts	Compliance with legislation			
Site inspections	Regular inspection of sites managed by Council			
Conditions of Contract	Contracts reviewed annually			
10 Administration				
Public accessibility	Clerk available for consultation (by prior appointment only) between 9.00am and 5.00pm Monday and Friday.			
Procedures	Defined by the Clerk/Approved by Council Documents storage			
Archiving	All records (required to be kept) are kept either digitally or in storage at the Village Hall			
Website	Reviewed and updated regularly by the Clerk and Chair/Vice Chair			
Standing Orders	Reviewed annually			
Press comments	Chair only			
Data Protection	Ensure legislative compliance			
11 Bye Laws				
Introduction	Establish procedure			
13 Playing Field				
Control of space	Exclusive use of space controlled through booking procedure			
Public behaviour	Permanent notice displayed			
Hirers	Hirers given terms and conditions at time of hire			
14 Freedom of Information				
Access to information	Council policy is total transparency. All minutes published and web site up-dated. Supporting papers available on request to the Clerk			
Release of papers.	The Clerk is the Proper Officer for the			

Copy documents	release of papers which will be charged for at cost explained at the time			

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Appendix iii – Special Events Risk Assessment

Location:

Briefly describe the risk:

Describe the hazards associated with the task/activity:

Persons at risk from the task/activity:

Existing controls available to combat identified hazards:

Level of risk identified:

New control measures required:

New risk level after implementation of control measures:

Date for implementation of new measures:

Date to be reviewed:

Date of Risk assessment:

Person responsible for ensuring compliance:

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Appendix iv – Maintenance of Assets

All powered equipment is kept and maintained by the Alstonefield Lengthsman under a contract for services. Other assets, detailed below, will be assessed annually by two Councillors to ensure that it is still viable and safe for use.

This check will be carried out before the last day of September each year. In addition, the playing field has a regular visual inspection and the play area is subject to a monthly safety check by a rota of councillors and a formal annual RoSPA examination.

Powered equipment:
Mountfield SPR 555v mower
Stiga Pro 48 Multiclip mower
Trimax Striker 190 mower (for the playing field)
Stihl FS 120 strimmer
Husqvarna strimmer (used by Peter Frost; stored and maintained by Rupert/Colin)
Wheelbarrow, various petrol cans, etc

Safety Equipment:
Helmet , eye protectors and ear defenders and harness for the Stihl strimmer

Gates, fences, posts, chains and walls

Exterior Assets
Benches x 5
- Children's play area
- Garden
- The George Green
- The Smithy
- The Copper Beech green
- The playing field

Noticeboards x 5

Fingerposts x 2

Honesty Boxes
Playing Field Car Park
Toilets' Car Park

Children's Play Area:
Equipment – multi-play, twin balance beam, spring horse and swings and rubber chipping surface.