

HONITON

TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

Town Mayors Report 2008



The past 12 months will largely be remembered for two events which saw the Town Council in the headlines. The first, the Market 750 celebrations, was undoubtedly the highlight of the year. The second, the Tesco's planning application, was the biggest challenge. Although both events have involved a great amount of time, Councillors have been involved in many other activities. This annual report is an opportunity for you to find out about these activities and more about what the Council has been doing on your behalf.

In July last year we celebrated the 750th Anniversary of the granting of our Historic Market Charter. The week long event commenced with the traditional Hot Pennies Day and was promoted by the Town Council together with the Chamber of Commerce and many other local organisations. We were honoured that The Earl of Devon was able to join us in the celebrations. The whole week was a great success and we will be making this an annual event. Charter Day 2008 will be on 26th July. If you would like to get involved or have a charity stall please contact the Town Council Office.



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The application by Tesco's to have a new store in Ottery Moor Lane has caused great concern, mainly because of the severe effect this could have on traffic flow in the town. To hear from local people the Town Council held a public meeting which saw record numbers making their views very clear. As you know the application was rejected by the Council and we await the decision of the planning committee of East Devon District Council later this year.

(The 750th Anniversary photographs were kindly provided by Mr. Dave Jackson)



Town Clerk: Mrs. L.P. Hargood

Clerk's Assistants: Mrs. C. Bowles and Mrs. C.L. Batty

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Office open 10 am to 1 pm Mon-Fri

The main Town Council meeting is held on the second Monday in the month

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As I mentioned earlier, Councillors have been involved in a great number of other activities and in this document you will find reports relating to The Glen, Roundball Wood, Honiton Tourist Information Centre and other projects supported by the Council. You will also find reports from our two main committees, Planning and Policy. These committees are ably chaired by Councillors Michael Teare (pictured right) and Sharon Holloway respectively. Their ability and enthusiasm is of great value to the council and community as a whole and I would like to thank them for their work throughout the year.



2007 saw the Town Council achieve the prestigious award of Quality Council. This award is an acknowledgement that the Council is well run and in touch with the local community. We are committed to listening to the people of Honiton and if there is a concern or a matter you think we should be addressing, please let us know.

Safety improvements on the A35 Kings Road and Monkton Road have been one issue highlighted, and this year should see a pedestrian crossing and other road safety improvements in place. Community consultation has raised street cleanliness and affordable housing as other areas of concern. We are keen to work with the community and partner authorities to address these concerns and have formed council sub committees to look at the best way to deal with them.

The Town Council in partnership with Devon County Council is also responsible for footpaths and rights of way within the town boundary. We are committed to their retention and improvement and are fortunate to have Cllr Roy Coombs heading up this work. His knowledge and experience is extensive and highly valued by the Council. CCTV is also high on the agenda and following work by Cllr Chris Tratt and the business community the coming year should see the system extended, assisting the police and providing public reassurance.



During the past year the Council has been committed to supporting and raising the profile of young people in the town. The Council awards for Outstanding Achievement by Community College pupils is an example of this, as are the grants we give to youth organisations. Older people are also recognised by the council's support of the Senior Citizens Centre which has seen various improvements through the year.

You may be aware that there has been discussion recently about the possibility of Honiton having several hundred new homes. At present the situation is unclear. However as a Council we will be proactive in our response to possible new developments and the location of a new town, Cranbrook, on our doorstep. We will shortly be meeting with the Chamber of Commerce and others to discuss how we can ensure that the High Street retains its vibrancy and unique character.

Just in case you think we have forgotten about our commitment to allotments and the building of a Community Centre, expect more news in the coming months.

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It has been both a privilege and honour to serve the Council and Town as Mayor during the past year. Honiton is a great place to live, work and relax; I and the council are committed to keeping it that way. We have been actively supporting local organisations and amongst other things have lobbied for improved rail services, the A35 relief road and the retention of hospital services.

As Town Mayor and Chairman of the Council I am very aware of the commitment of both our staff and Councillors. The Council office acts as an information centre not only for the Town but also for the District Council. The office is always busy, especially with the Tesco's planning application, and our admin staff, Carolyn Bowles and Cherie Batty, provide an essential role. I would like to record our appreciation of all their hard work and support.

We have recently said goodbye to our Town Clerk, John Spencer. A good Town Clerk is an essential to any council and we have been fortunate in having one in John. He has raised the profile of the Council and his hard work helped us achieve Quality Council Status.

We have recently appointed a new Town Clerk, Lyn Hargood. Lyn is bringing valuable skills and experience to the Council and we look forward to working with her in the future.



Lyn Hargood & John Spencer

Town Councillors are busy people. They attend Council meetings, sit on outside committees and charities and represent the Council at many organisations. But being a Councillor is not all about attending meetings. In fact a lot of valuable work goes on unseen between meetings. Honiton benefits by having a hard working dedicated team of Councillors. I certainly appreciate all they do and appreciate the support I have received from them over the past year.

I would especially like to acknowledge the work done by Cllr Alf Boom on the Glen project, Cllr Liz Tirard on the TIC and Roundball Wood and Cllr's Michael Teare and Sharon Holloway for their work on the Community Complex project.

Following the May elections we said goodbye to some Councillors and saw new members join the Council. We are pleased that we now have three District Councillors sitting on the Town Council: Cllr's Vivienne Ash, Peter Halse and Chris Tratt. Through their work we are establishing closer relationships with the District Council which can only be good for the Council and Town alike.

Finally I would like to thank my Deputy Mayor, Cllr Chris Tratt. I have known Chris for many years. He is a good man, committed to the town and his support to me has been invaluable.

Please remember that we as Councillors are here to represent you. We are always keen to hear your views. If you want to contact us you will find our details in this report.

Cllr Vernon Whitlock
Honiton Town Mayor

POLICY COMMITTEE REPORT by Cllr. Sharon Holloway

Over the last year Honiton Town Council's Policy Committee has made a number of important funding decisions to benefit Honiton businesses and residents and in particular our young people.



In June, the Policy Committee agreed to provide Honiton's Tourist Information Centre with a grant of £10,000. This decision was taken to avoid the closure of the valuable business and tourist resource which the TIC provides for Honiton and the surrounding rural parishes. The TIC's directors had been forced to manage a very difficult funding regime since the withdrawal of its East Devon District Council (EDDC) grant two years ago. The Town Council grant is enabling the TIC to operate on a far more secure financial footing and to develop its business plan to be better able to sustain itself for the long-term.

September's Policy Committee meeting saw the annual discussion on the setting of the Precept and grants for local voluntary organisations. This year the Council agreed a modest rise in the Town Precept from £97,590 to £100,000, with additional costs such as the TIC grant being paid for from reserves.

There was however, a significant rise in the money allocated for local organisations from £4,850, last year, to £6,050 for 2008/09. Over 20 local organisations will be benefitting from Town Council Grants this year. Councillors have especially prioritised organisations working with young people such as the Youth Town Football Club, the Under 8s Tag Rugby Team, Honiton Twirlsters, Honiton Town Band and Devon Wheels to Work. The Council also gave grants to TRIP, Honiton Library and the Citizens Advice Bureau in recognition of the very important services these organisations provide for our community.

In addition to the above grants, the Policy Committee also agreed to fund a termly prize giving event to celebrate the achievements of students at Honiton Community College. Ten students a term are to be awarded a £10 book token and a certificate from the Council. Councillors felt strongly that it was important that the Council maintains close links with the Community College and invests in showcasing the good work going on among the Town's youth. For similar reasons the February Policy Committee decided to sponsor a Youth Arts' event, to be held in the Autumn, in conjunction with Devon Youth Service and the Thelma Hulbert Art Gallery.

As well as grants, the Policy Committee discusses the funding of and maintenance of some of Honiton's physical landscape and furniture. This year the Committee agreed to fund a number of maintenance jobs for Roundball Wood, as well as the cleaning of bus shelters and the provision of additional dog waste bins (normally provided by EDDC). Probably, the Council's biggest decision in this area, however, has been to extend the Town's CCTV system to provide additional cameras and to enable more effective working with the local police to tackle vandalism on local businesses and anti-social behaviour.

The Committee has also initiated the setting up of two working groups on Housing and Street Cleanliness and has agreed to lobby EDDC to use any future Section 106 monies to provide new toilets for the town.

To finish, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for all their contributions to the Policy Committee this year. Meetings this year have been particularly productive and a pleasure to chair. Secondly, I would like to extend a huge thank you to John Spencer for all his invaluable work in making these meetings run so smoothly.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT by Cllr. Michael Teare

Honiton Town Council's Planning Committee meets two times a month to consider planning applications that concern Honiton. The committee, which all Councillors are members of, make recommendations to East Devon District Council. Usually these are in the form of either approval or refusal with comments; although we sometimes choose to comment only or agree to abide by the decision of an officer of East Devon District Council who may have specialist expertise. Going forward as a Quality Council, we will now decide on applications to display advertisements and for work on trees rather than just make a recommendation.

Normally we would expect to receive applications for extensions and improvements to domestic properties, change of use and alterations to commercial premises where our brief is well understood. To ensure that any development is sympathetic to the character of the town, especially for properties with Listed Building status and/or in the conservation area whilst recognising that times change and progress need not be a bad thing.

The application from Aldi and the four related applications from Tesco fell outside our normal sphere of operation. The application from Aldi met with favour in general but we were unable to recommend it because of the effect it would have had on the Turk's Head junction which already has considerable traffic and related pollution issues that need addressing.

The applications from Tesco represented significant potential change and development which needed very careful consideration. There was a substantial amount of supporting documentation to be reviewed before the application could be considered and I would like to thank my fellow Councillors. It was clear from the planning meeting that Councillors had put a lot of work into making sure that the application was considered to the best of our abilities; in such cases a remarkable amount of effort, and that was greatly appreciated.

It is our job as Town Councillors to listen to what people in the town and surrounding villages have to say and to act in their best interests. Inevitably people will feel we get some things right and some things wrong but I thought the whole related exercise - the public meeting (with the remarkable turnout), the drop-in sessions when the plans were on display and the planning meeting itself were a very positive demonstration of how well things can work and really established links between the town and the council. It is great to live in a community where people care about the Town they live in.

Moving forward, we are conscious that the lack of affordable housing is a considerable issue for some people and the Town Council has set up a steering group to explore the contribution we can make to finding solutions. We will also continue to press for the much needed improvements to the roads infrastructure which have been highlighted in recent weeks but were already well known thanks to the efforts of local residents and councillors.

Finally I would like to record my thanks to my deputy Cllr. Liz Tirard for all her help, especially in preparation for the Tesco planning meeting, coping with the paperwork, the logistics involved and scrambling around an industrial estate on a Sunday morning. Also the officers at East Devon for all their assistance and their professionalism and dedication. The same can easily be said of our, now retired, Town Clerk John Spencer and we are certainly fortunate to have found such a good replacement although I have to point out to Lyn that not all Planning meetings will be as remarkable as her first which was the Tesco planning meeting. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the outgoing Mayor, Cllr. Vernon Whitlock, on all that he has achieved in his time in office, taking the town forward, with the exception of one week last summer when he took us back 750 years.

THE GLEN



Since the last Town Meeting, the funding received from O2 and the Conservation Foundation has been used to paint the gates at both entrances to Glen. The group “Friends of the Glen” have continued to meet and over 40 people are now on the mailing list. Funding has been received from the National Lottery “Breathing Spaces”: £9,100 is being spent on new signage, an advertising leaflet, new planting, information boards, training of volunteers and devising a logo for the Glen. This follows a public consultation exercise which was successfully undertaken with the support of local newspapers. Additionally the Town Council have made a special contribution of £2,500 towards improvements in the Glen.

The Town Council has received special recognition of its work for the Glen in a Celebration of Achievement Award from East Devon District Council, which included a cheque for £150. We have received excellent co-operation from the staff of the District Council “Street Scene” department, especially Mr. Mark Pollard who is working closely with the Town Council.

Special mention must be made of the support and help being received from young people, including students from Honiton Community College and Honiton Youth Club. Local scouts are assisting with making bat and bird boxes to be attached to the trees in the Glen. We would like to thank staff of the College, youth leaders and scout leaders for their co-operation.



Finally a wonderful open air concert by the Town Band during Charter Week 2007 was much appreciated by an audience of over 250 people, the first of many, In fact the second is planned for Charter Day 2008 on Saturday 29th July (weather permitting)!

Cllr. Alfred Boom

St. Michael's Ward Councillors

A.B. Boom	548745
Mrs. S.A. Casson	45367
P.E. Fleming	43388
R.H. Gaughan	44073
M. McGuire	46266
Mrs. J.F. McNally	44073
J.B. Taylor	07799 691455
M.J. Teare	46463
V.C. Whitlock	43959

St. Paul's Ward Councillors

Miss V. Ash	42028
R.E. Coombs	47347
R.A. Farnham	44723
P. Halse	43854
Ms. S.R. Holloway	45329
Mrs. V.A. Howard	47127
Mrs. M.D. Morgan	46933
Mrs. E.M. Tirard	41023
C.T. Tratt	43138

PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP (P3) SUMMARY REPORT

The maintenance of Honiton's public rights of way has continued to be co-ordinated by the Town Clerk and Councillors Coombs and Gaughan. Signposting of the paths is an important requirement and with the signposting of Footpath 4A at the end of Chapel Street, all Honiton's public footpaths are signposted at junctions with metalled public roads. Hutgate Lane, the subject of drainage and resurfacing work and one of the four lanes maintained by this Council, is now signposted and this includes a junction signpost where the two sections of Footpath 14 join the lane.

The surface condition of Footpath 4 by East View Cottages and a dangerous drop on Footpath 22 at Oaklea still cause concern but otherwise, improvements noted in previous years have continued.

We have been able to concentrate more on allied matters. Sections of two footpaths have had streetlights adversely affected by vegetation; these with the co-operation of DCC have been dealt with. Two of our lanes have been colonised by the invasive alien plant Himalayan Balsam; control measures have been carried out for three years and the seed bank of this fast growing plant will be diminishing. Our work should have a beneficial effect on the River Otter as the balsam can result in bank erosion. We are aware that many residents are upset by balsam removal but the plant also has a devastating affect on native wild plants and therefore indirectly on insects too. If Honiton attempted to provide sanctuary for the balsam it would tend to defeat the efforts of landowners and other bodies further down the valley to control the problem. We also monitor the few privately maintainable highways such as Wadmore Lane and this Council's boundary posts.

The co-ordinators have increasingly become involved with walkways and cycleways in the town, which are often wrongly thought to be covered by the Parish Paths Partnership agreement. There are often the same problems as with public footpaths. A check is being made to ascertain whether all of the walkways are registered by DCC and if there is any doubt, as was the case with Ducks Path, routes will be put forward for consideration during the current Definitive Map Review.

Involvement of the two councils, landowners and users, provides the basis of Parish Paths Partnerships. An important part of these partnerships is not only maintenance and improvement but also promotion and what is termed celebration of public rights of way. Now that the latest edition of the Honiton and District Official Guide has been published, we hope to produce publicity material covering our paths and lanes. I did mention last year that details of one circular walk produced by this Council are available from the TIC and the Council Office .



Not everyone celebrates public footpaths and walkways as for some they are a matter for concern and any residents' concerns are matters we take seriously but our walking routes do provide healthy exercise and a means of reducing motor vehicle use.

Cllr. Roy Coombs

ROUNDBALL WOOD AMENITY WOODLAND REPORT

Roundball Wood continues to be well used by residents and its status as semi-ancient woodland is attracting increasing attention. The Wood, and the three permissive footpaths that lead to it from White Bridge, Upland Chase and Roundball Lane respectively, are regularly inspected by the Wardens and great care is taken to preserve its character while enabling residents and visitors to enjoy its scenic and natural value.

During the last year the Wood has featured in a national project called the Woodlands Heritage Champions Project run by a group at Sheffield Hallam University under the leadership of Dr. Ian Rotherham. The Project focuses on the natural and human archaeology of woodlands, and Roundball Wood was selected as the centre of study in the South West of England. The object of the project is to produce a manual for people interested in studying and preserving their local woodlands, and day workshops attended by the leaders of the project, local volunteers and countryside workers were held in March and September last year in Honiton. The Wood was declared to be of great natural and scenic interest and a case study written by one of the Wardens features in the Manual.

We have done some research on the history of the Wood which has existed within its present boundaries since before 1844, when it was described as 'pasture and wood'. Reports on the wild flowers and the ferns in the wood have been written and it is hoped that further studies of its flora and fauna will appear in the next few months.

The Council has approved an extensive programme of work at the Wood and on the associated footpaths to improve public access and enhance its amenity value generally. This includes renewal of the boundary fences, improved way marking, and better footways over problem areas including the steep bank above the kissing gate leading to Roundball Lane. It is also planned to install a series of information boards. In addition Combe Estate has agreed that the Council may take in a small but attractive and interesting area of hedgerow and coppice between the northern boundary of the Wood and the butts, and we are now awaiting an estimate of the cost of fencing off this area to include it in the Wood.

However our 'mission statement' remains the same – to preserve this precious part of the countryside for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.

We would like to thank the Wardens, Ron Webb and Richard Howe, who continue to be the "caretakers" of the wood. I am the liaison Councillor for the wood and work with the Wardens in any way that I can. We are grateful for the co-operation and interest of the Marker Estate, which is both the Council's landlord for the wood and the owner of Roundball Hill and surrounding land.

Cllr. Liz Tirard

