

Chairman's Report

It doesn't feel that long ago that we were all sat here for the last AGM – it's been a rollercoaster year but a pleasure to have served the town. There are many projects which have been worked on over the past 12 months and whilst particular recognition goes to members who spearheaded those initiatives – purdah dictates a sensitivity towards this.

We saw the creation of the Town Management Committee this year, which will pave the way for this Council to involve itself more in the social and festive events which are enjoyed by so many throughout the calendar. This Committee also hopes to act as a conduit between the Town Council and the Chamber of Commerce as both organisations are endemic to our community's growth. The Market Manager has seen a role change which allows him to play a more central role in the town's growth as well as continuing to promote and grow the Market – he will work closely with this committee.

We have recently set the annual budget for next year which saw no increase in our precept but due to the diligence of the Finance Committee, it's Chair and our Responsible Financial Officer – we were able to maintain in particular the £15k youth budget for a second consecutive year and built on last year's budget of expanding the grant fund. There were also many cost saving exercises carried out which will save this Council unnecessary expenditure without losing any scope.

Final confirmation and lease signing of the allotment site has taken place which allows cost preparations to take place for the provision of this important facility. I'm sure it will be a success and well utilised by our residents. After what has seemed an eternity, we have finally reached an outcome on the Community Use Building's future which I'm sure everyone will be satisfied with. What started as potentially losing the facility and the Council applying for the freehold as a backstop has now culminated in a new organization, consisting of current users, offering to run the facility in house which was unanimously supported in our Chamber.

Planning and Policy matters continue to be dealt with in a professional and constructive way. Many of our procedural documents are, or have been, updated through our committee structures. The creation of the Human Resources Committee also ensures that matters concerning staffing are dealt with correctly and efficiently.

Litigation is still very much at the forefront of council business – we have seen no resolution to either of our disputes with Bailey's Partnership or the Beehive Charity. Cost centres have been created to provide for the financial impact of such activity although other solutions have been and are continuing to be explored.

Thank you to all of our Officers who have worked tirelessly to maintain our 'usual' business criteria whilst also carrying out tasks to do with legal advice and land investigations, to name but a few.

Mayor of Honiton

Policy Committee Report

At the Council meeting held on 11th June 2018, the Council debated the proposition of amalgamating the Policy Committee with the Finance Committee. In the event, it was resolved for these committees to remain independent of each other, with the proposal that the Policy Committee meet twice a year. The first meeting was subsequently held on 28th August 2018. A great deal of discussion centering on the National Association of Local Council's amendments to the model standing orders took place, reflecting the changes to GDPR and other financial aspects. The Policy Committee recommended to the Town Council that the current standing orders reflect the amendments identified by NALC, and this was resolved at the Town Council meeting on 17th September 2018. The Social Media policy was also adopted by the Town Council at that meeting. The policy regarding the Town Council's Risk Register was brought before Council at its meeting on 18th March 2019, and this will have to be thoroughly addressed during 2019/20.

The Policy Committee report last year highlighted the Town Council's concern about the prospective perceived closure of Honiton Hospital. The good news is that the closure of the hospital has been alleviated for the time being, as at the Annual Review of Honiton Health Matters on 24th January 2019, Adele Jones, Integration Director for the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital Trust, made it clear that the intention is to increase the services offered at our Community Hospital. She was very clear in saying that the RD&E Hospital Trust has listened to, and are anxious to work with, our community.

The stagnation of the Neighbourhood Plan has been a cause for concern. Unfortunately, the Town Council has been unable to progress this. An effort to revitalize the Community Engagement Forum, from which it is hoped citizens from Honiton could be enthused to create their Neighbourhood Plan, proved abortive. However, it is envisaged that the new Town Council will discuss the way forward with both these initiatives and a newly formed committee or group will emerge to seriously engage with a plan for Honiton to be fit for the 21st century.

The Policy Committee did not meet for its second meeting this year. It is the remit of the Committee to review policies throughout the year. It cannot be said that this has been done during 2018/19, but with a new Council this can be seriously considered for 2019/20. There is a shift in Government policy to off-load services to Local Authorities, who in turn are having to cope with very difficult financial constraints. The need for the third tier of Government, which in Honiton's case is the Town Council, to accept taking on more services is inevitable. Consequently, it is essential that our community becomes engaged and willing to develop whatever it can to ensure the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our Town. The Policy Committee needs to ensure that policies are robust enough to help with this development.

Chair - Policy Committee

Planning Committee Report

Honiton Town Council is a consultee on planning applications and has delegated the responsibility for making comments on such applications to the Planning Committee.

This report is for the Council year from April 2018 to March 2019 inclusive, during which period there were 18 meetings of the Committee held to consider planning applications that had been submitted by the Local Authority, East Devon District Council, to the Town Council for possible comment.

In addition to acting as a consultee on planning applications, applications for consent to carry out work on Listed Buildings, on trees covered by tree preservation orders and on some trees in the Conservation Area, even though not covered by tree preservation orders, the Committee has the responsibility for making decisions on advertisement consent applications as that role has been delegated by East Devon District Council to Honiton Town Council.

Applications refused by East Devon District Council, or in the case of advertisements, by Honiton Town Council can be appealed by applicants resulting in a Planning Inspector deciding whether to allow, or dismiss, an appeal. Supporters or objectors concerned by local authorities planning decisions are not able to appeal such decisions.

Regarding advertisements, the Committee seeks to ensure that new advertisements comply with Honiton Town Council's *Design Statement and Policies for Fascia Boards and Hanging Signs Guidance Notes* including *Policies for Advertisements in Honiton Town Centre Conservation Area*.

The proposed residential development of the former site of Halse of Honiton was refused by East Devon District Council, so new proposals for the site are awaited. A much smaller residential development in the town centre was refused, due in part, to the adverse impact it would have on trees. The Town Council as allotment authority for the Parish of Honiton successfully submitted a planning application for new allotments off Battishorne Way and objected to the development of the previous allotments site in Clapper Lane which has reached the stage where the applicants' appeal against refusal is still being considered by a Planning Inspector at the time of this report.

The Town Management Committee, set up in 2018, now deals with items such as Public Rights of Way claims, seeking to replace the footbridge near Oaklea which was removed in 2010 and bringing back the tollgate removed from Copper Castle in the 1920's.

Finally, I thank the office staff and Committee members, in both cases current and former, for fulfilling the Town Council's role on planning matters during the time I have chaired the Committee since May 2015.

Chair - Planning Committee

Finance Committee Report

Our Council has made significant progress during the year in improving internal controls and financial procedures. Our finances are healthy and the Council has recommended no change in our Council precept for 2019/20. This was the first year for a while, where we had a full complement of Council staff, which enabled us to start to address several historic issues, whilst improving internal procedures. We have performed a detailed review of our financial procedures and updated them, prior to approval by the Finance Committee and Council. The recent complimentary comments by our independent internal auditors confirmed our belief that the Council is making good progress in this area. The Town Clerk and his staff, fully supported by Councillors, must be given the appropriate credit for their contribution to the improvements made during the year.

The major financial risks to the Council relate to historic disputes about the construction of the Beehive and a financial dispute with the tenant of the Beehive. The Council heavily subsidises the running costs of the Beehive by charging the tenant a rent of £1 per annum, whilst incurring an annual cost of approximately £60,000 relating to repayments on a twenty-five year mortgage. Honiton residents might consider the current financial subsidy from the Council to the Beehive tenant generous. They might also question why Honiton Community Complex, whilst successful in many respects, but reporting a financial loss of £7,000 in 2017/18 and predicting a further loss of £18,000 for 2018/19, believes it appropriate to initiate legal action against the Council likely to incur costs of £50,000 for each party. There were considerable efforts, so far unsuccessful, made by several Councillors and Council staff to progress these disputes to ultimate resolution. We are in the position where our legal advice confirms our understanding that we have a strong legal case in both disputes. The Council wants to resolve these disputes with the minimum of cost, if possible, prior to the Local Council Elections in May, but this is dependent on the other parties also making pragmatic decisions to resolve these disputes. This would enable the new Council to address the future needs of the town without working on historic disputes.

Progress continued on several fronts during the year, with a lease agreement signed for land for allotments in Honiton and these should be up and running during 2019/20. As required under the original transfer of the land to Honiton Town Council, parking charges for the Beehive car park will also be implemented in the future.

There are several challenges facing the town, particularly the related issues of regeneration of the town market and town centre. Initial actions are in place, led by the Council with support from the Honiton & District Chamber of Commerce and East Devon District Council, but these efforts will need to be maintained for many years and there will be new future challenges to ensure the continuing commercial success of our town centre. A prerequisite for the Council to be in a position to fully address these future challenges, requires them to be in a secure financial situation and to have resolved past historic disputes. Additional work is required in 2019/20 to complete a full review of the risk register and to update the asset register of the Council.

I would like to thank all Councillors for their efforts on the Finance Committee in achieving the progress made in 2018/19

Chair - Finance Committee