

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



Front Row Left to Right:

Cllr Serena Sexton (Deputy Chair / Deputy Mayor), Dave Retter (Town Crier), Cllr Tony McCollum (Chair /Mayor), Stephen Hill (Town Clerk/RFO) Heloise Marlow (Deputy Clerk).

Middle Row Left to Right:

Cllr Malcolm Sheen, Cllr Jenny Brown, Cllr Helen Turner, Cllr Lucy Wakefield, Cllr Caroline Kolek, Cllr Jo Fotheringham, Cllr Dave Hayler.

Back Row Left to Right:

Cllr Melvyn Baldock, Cllr Andrew Pearsall, Cllr Robert Sexton, Cllr Sharon Thorne, Cllr Steve Craddock, Not in Attendance: Cllr Roy Coombs. Cllr Cathryn McCollum

Chairman's Report

This past year has been an enjoyable one for me as Mayor of Honiton and Town Councillor. Just seeing and being involved with the many events and organizations within the town and surrounding areas, we should be proud to have so many people who give up their time to make Honiton a lovely and special place to live. Throughout my long working career, I have travelled and lived in many parts of the UK, but Honiton became my home.

It is good to see many of our traditions continue and to still be accepted by many of our younger generation. Change is important but it is also important not to lose or forget the traditions of the past. After all Honiton would not be what it is without them. I ask you just to stop and have a good look at what's around you and what Honiton has to offer. I hear too many times people say Honiton Town Council don't do anything. This could not be further from the truth.

I hope soon to see a Council pamphlet which we can hand to the public who are interested and show what Honiton Town Council carry out every year for our town.

Some of the items which this Council has done or is doing over the last 12 months do take a long time, because we have to abide by procedures and "red tape". Honiton Town Council has taken steps to try and reduce this by making changes within its procedures which I hope will result in a quicker delivery of projects throughout the town.

I would like to thank all our Councillors and especially our staff who have worked very hard to look after our town and achieving the Foundation award for local councils which is just the beginning as our aim is for the gold award. But one step at a time.

Councillors change for many reasons and regretfully we have seen three councillors resign this year all for personal reasons. I would like to thank them for the time they have given and wish them well for the future. We now look forward to new councillors taking their place.

Not many people will know or realise that Honiton Town Council along with most towns in East Devon celebrated its 50-year anniversary this year. In this time, we have seen many changes. As we move forward, we all know more changes are coming with the proposed reorganisation of the District Council and County Council. With this will come many more challenges, but I am confident that Honiton Town Council will step up to them.

**Cllr Tony McCollum
Chair of Honiton Town Council**

Finance & Policy Committee Report

This report covers the financial year 2024-2025. An interim internal audit was carried out in October 2024 and was undertaken using the IAC audit checklist used for all local councils. The Auditor advised that no 'non-compliances' were identified that would give rise to a negative response on the statutory annual internal audit report. Several observations were made, which Honiton Town Council will address during the next 12 months. A challenge to the previous year's accounts has been received from a member of the public, to which the Council has provided a response and is awaiting the result of an investigation, so I will not comment any further at this stage.

A number of resignations from the Council throughout the year has resulted in elections, for which there is a budget set aside for £10k, of which £8k was actually spent.

East Devon District Council determined that the toilets at King Street (category B) were no longer viable for them to maintain. It was decided by Honiton Town Council to take on the transfer of the toilets for the benefit of the residents and visitors to Honiton, as otherwise this would have resulted in their closure. Provision has been made in the next financial year to cover the costs of consumables, cleaning, maintenance and repairs. Costs for this year were limited to legal services and other matters relating to the transfer.

As in previous reports the Council continues to pay £59k per annum for the public loan which was obtained for the construction of the Beehive. During the past year the Council has secured legal services for the negotiation of a new lease for the Beehive (a Council owned building, which is run by a not-for-profit charity known as the Honiton Community Complex), dilapidations survey and accountancy services for the underwriting agreement with HCC, thus providing the Council with the best advice as to value for money. The Council agreed the safety net agreement with their tenant to ensure the continued use of the building as a community and arts venue. The agreement is based on monthly accounts submitted by HCC, which are scrutinised and verified by the Council's accountants.

The Council's biggest outlay is for staffing costs, for the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, 2 part-time administrative assistants, market supervisor and maintenance personnel. Grants for local charities and organisations, including £10k for youth support, have been given out during the course of the year; some of the recipients will be at this town meeting to highlight how the money has been used for the benefit of Honiton residents.

Honiton Town Council compares favourably with other East Devon town councils in terms of the precept, but it holds only minimal assets, limited reserves and has a restricted ability to raise further revenue. The Council acknowledges the need to bolster reserves for future sustainability, the rule of thumb being 3 to 6 months operating costs. Income is generated through the market, allotments, CIL receipts (a levy paid by builders on new developments and distributed by East Devon D.C.) and the contribution made by HCC towards the building insurance. Detailed quarterly budgets can be seen on the Council's website by accessing the agendas for Finance and Policy, and Full Council meetings.

During the past year the Council have held public consultations through open meetings, online surveys and market awareness stalls, the most recent being a surgery in April 2025 for St Pauls ward.

The preparation of the Council's budget is compiled through individual committees putting forward their plans, with approximate costings, for the next 12 months, with a view to financing the various projects they wish to undertake. It is the responsibility of Finance and Policy Committee to balance these budgets in order to fix the precept and recommend the final budget to full Council for the following financial year, which occurred in January 2025.

Policies of Honiton Town Council are regularly reviewed and modified in light of new information and legislation. Again, all these are on the website and can be accessed through the minutes of the Finance and Policy meetings and Full Council.

Cllr Serena Sexton
Chair of the Finance & Policy Committee

Town Management Committee Report

The Town Management Committee only meets six times a year. This is due to demands on officers' time and Council time which can have an impact on project delivery timescales. For this reason we have reviewed our procedures and Terms of Reference and introduced two changes.

The first is introducing the Project Implementation Plan by allocating a lead councillor and lead officer for each Project. Once the Project and budget is agreed, both leads can carry on delivering the Project with help from others if required, without having to get approval on details and report updates to Committee Members and Full Council.

Secondly, if a non-project Decision needs to be made between meetings the Clerk can now contact each Committee Member and agree a Decision by email which will still be reported at the next planned meeting. We have many Projects ongoing from replacing the town entrance signs, upgrading CCTV cameras including live monitoring, Street art, Town Maintenance, Market and yes even Christmas lights, which now includes the large tree switch on ceremony. and much more.

With the upgrading of our CCTV system, we also meet and work closely with our local police to help reduce antisocial behaviour even though Honiton has a very low crime rate compared to other towns in Devon.

Our aim is to make sure our town is a safe and pleasant place to live.

Two major projects which are close to completion are the Kings Street public toilets, which we have taken on to prevent their closure and will still be free to use.

Then there is the Honiton Community Centre (Beehive). We are close to agreeing a thirty-year lease this will allow HCC to plan for the future and apply for grants to help support them.

Cllr Tony McCollum

Chair of the Town Management Committee

Green & Open Spaces Committee Report

Green and Open Spaces Committee are the group of councillors who work towards ensuring that the town looks appealing to both the local community and visitors, by making sure that all the green and open spaces are tidy and well maintained. They work with sports groups with regards their playing spaces, the community with their allotments and ensure that all entry ways to the town are clean, tidy and in the spring/summer months are bright and colourful.

Monies available from the building of new houses have been requested by the town council and are in the process of being allocated to local sports groups for large projects.

The Town Council maintenance man has worked tirelessly to improve areas within the town such as Roundball Hill, for them to become far more accessible.

The water situation at The Allotments has been looked at and work is currently in progress to improve irrigation to the allotments.

We are also about to launch a fun competition which anyone can join in with, to create Flowerpot Characters in your gardens, on your balcony, or on your doorstep. This will then become a trail for people to follow and take a look at and vote for. A way to bring everyone together and have fun.

Cllr Lucy Wakefield

Deputy Chair of the Green & Open Spaces Committee

Strategy Committee Report

There has been a lot of work taking place within the Strategy Committee. As town councillors it is easy to think we are making decisions for the whole town and often it is easy to forget to seek the views of those that we represent. To this end, the Strategy Committee are looking to set up a Youth Council so that the views of the youth of the town are fed into decisions made by Town Council. It is in its early stages but we will soon be looking to encourage volunteers to join the working group to create the structure before the youngsters take on the challenge of creating the Youth Council.

We have also been promoting the good work that the town council is achieving by putting news out via our website and on Facebook. A newsletter is written once a quarter and this is also available as a hard copy. Councillors are approaching businesses that can have them on display for the public to read whilst they wait. If you would be interested in finding businesses that would be interested in taking the newsletter and delivering it once a quarter, please get in touch.

Councillors have now re-instigated the councillor surgeries to take place in each ward. The first of these has happened at The Mackarness Hall for St Paul's Ward. The meeting for St Michael's Ward will be taking place in August.

Strategy are always looking at ways to engage with the community. We have an occasional stall on the market for Honiton residents to come and discuss any issues that they have regarding Honiton, with councillor representatives. There are also the Annual Awards, which have been taken on from the Chamber of Commerce when it ceased to be. Additional awards have been added to the existing awards.

We have Project Lead Councillors who are heading small groups towards achieving many things within Honiton. From the Strategy Committee perspective as well as looking at Council Surgeries, Community Engagement and Youth Council, we are also looking at Economy and Tourism, trying to promote Honiton to a wider audience to encourage more people to visit Honiton and support our local businesses and events. To this end, we are trying to encourage more coaches to bring groups of people to Honiton.

A small sub group has been working hard to ensure that The Beehive continue to thrive. The ten year contract that Honiton Community Complex currently hold is coming to an end in September 25. To ensure that The Beehive continues to offer such a diverse range of entertainment, activities and facilities for individuals and small groups to operate, this sub group has been working tirelessly to ensure that the T's are crossed and the i's are dotted. It is hoped that this will ensure that The Beehive can continue to be a hub in the community for a further 30 years.

With the Town Council having already achieved the Foundation award available to Town Councils from the National Association of Local Councils, Honiton is now working towards the Quality award. It then hopes to go on to achieve the Quality Gold status to highlight the strength of the commitment to the local community.

ClIr Lucy Wakefield
Chair of the Strategy Committee

Planning Committee Report

I would like to start by thanking the members of the Planning Committee, for fulfilling the Town Councils role as a consultant on the planning applications for Honiton Town Council.

As well I would like to thank the Office Staff for all their Support to Councillors, their research and liaising with EDDC, the public and Developers.

During this year we have had around 75 planning applications in and around Honiton. Which consist of:

14 Tree applications, 29 Dwellings & Extensions, 2 New homes, 9 Shops & High St. Shop Signage, 4 Industrial buildings, 4 Agricultural buildings.

Other applications which include large sites:

Youth Football Facilities & Pitches, Homes - Otter Moor Lane, 1 Solar Farm, Honiton Community College, Rugby Club.

We have been consulted on EDDC LOCAL PLAN & UPDATE and have responded for areas in and around Honiton.

All Town Councillors can attend and speak at the meetings but only Planning committee members may vote on an application.

Members of the public also have the opportunity to attend and participate in the meetings, this is welcomed and appreciated. You can view the meeting online live via the Honiton Town Council Website.

The Planning committee will continue to work with applicants, the public and EDDC to deliver our considered responses to all planning applications.

ClIr Andrew Pearsall
Chair of the Planning Committee

TOWN CLERK: Mr Stephen Hill DEPUTY CLERK: Mrs. Heloise Marlow
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