

Honiton

The Town in the Country

TALK OF THE TOWN

THE NEWSLETTER OF HONITON TOWN COUNCIL

December 2013

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Christmas is one of the world's biggest festivals celebrated by millions of people and nations of the world unite in the celebration of the birth of one man. A birth still celebrated more than two thousand years later such was the impact of this man's life on our world.

Christmas is also a time to look back at the year passed, a big year for the community of Honiton and for Honiton Town Council. This year we started work on the long awaited community centre, the Beehive. This project is both beneficial now and for future generations and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many members of our community, Councillors past and present and officers of this Town Council for their years of dedication and hard work in order to bring this project to reality.

Honiton's Bygone Christmas event last Sunday was a great example of everyone working together to provide great day out and raise the profile of the town as a unique shopping experience.

There is a lot going on in Honiton particularly in the run up to the festive holidays but in all the hustle and bustle of the next few weeks can I ask that you spare a thought to those who are struggling to make ends meet. Every day people in the UK go hungry for reasons ranging from redundancy to receiving an



unexpected bill on a low income. Rising costs of food and fuel combined with static income, high unemployment and changes to benefits are causing more and more people to come to food banks for help. The Honiton food bank provides a food box containing a minimum of three days nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food.

Please help feed local people in crisis by buying items from the list and donating them to the Food Bank in Kings Centre.

Lastly may I wish you and your families a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Cllr David Foster
Mayor of Honiton

HONITON MARKET

The history of the market stretches right back to 1257 when Henry III granted the town the right to hold a market although it was probably a lot different in the way it operated then to its modern day counterpart. Over the years the market has gone through a number of changes, mainly in its management, in recent time it has gone from East Devon District Council to Honiton Town Council control. In 2012 the Town Council made the decision to create a limited company, the "Honiton Street Market Company" to manage and develop the street market.

So what does this mean? Well, in simple terms, the Town Council retains the ownership of the market and allows the board of directors the freedom to take on the day to day management and decision making without the administrative constraints of the council. The board of directors are made up of 4 Councillors, 2 market traders, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce. In addition the Market Manager attends regular board meetings as an adviser to the board. Regular quarterly reports are presented to the council detailing the markets financial and operational condition.

Why have markets at all? Part of the answer is one of tradition, for over 700 years the town has been able to provide a market not only for the town people but for the wider community. Yes the market has had its ups and downs but one of the things it strives to achieve is to support the community. As a non-profit making company any profit that is made is put back into the community although the company retain some of the profit to maintain and develop the market. The other aspect to the question is that the market adds vibrancy and an attraction to the town. Some of you may disagree with this especially on a cold wintery day but the market goes on.

There is no denying over the past couple of years the market has failed to meet its main objective to support some of the community needs. 2012 was especially bad with the market making a loss for the first time in many years, with the consequence of starting this financial year with a bank balance of zero. However, things are looking a little better ("not a lot") at the moment, much now depends on the continuing support of the community in using the market and of course the biggest factor the good old British weather. Spare a thought for the market traders who support the town and its tradition by turning up on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays all year round in almost all weathers, they deserve a big thanks.



In the past profits have been used to provide for the activity of Charter Day and in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce the Christmas Lighting. The latter, a topic of much conversation and understandably by some, anger. However, with no profit the market was unable to contribute. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and of course the phrase "if only". It is important that the market continues to develop and strives to meet its objectives and challenges ahead, but we can only achieve this with the continuing support of the community.

The board of directors would like to take this opportunity in thanking the people of Honiton and its community for its support during what has been some difficult times not just in our community but the country as a whole. We will do our utmost to continue with the market and to support the community needs where ever we can.

We welcome your comments either good or bad, without those comments we cannot develop your market to its full potential. Comments can be given to the Market Manager (marketmanager@honiton.gov.uk) or e-mailed to me at l.bayliss123@hotmail.co.uk.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and all of us a prosperous New Year.

PARISH PRECEPT PROCESS AND HOW HONITON TOWN COUNCIL PREPARES ITS BUDGET

Before a precept is set the clerk meets with the Chair of Finance, the Mayor and Finance Committee, The recommendations are then put to the Town Council for approval usually by December/January and then submitted to East Devon District Council. They collate the requests from towns/parishes, police, fire and County by the end of January so that they can legally set the council tax for the district by the end of February. Last year the annual cost per household was £42.90, slightly lower than the previous year because of the introduction of the Council Tax Grant. This grant is obtained from the Government via the District Council and is given due to the changes in the benefit system. The Government decide the amount to be given and not all of it is necessarily passed on by the District Council. It is anticipated that this grant will be reduced by 14% and therefore residents will automatically see an increase in their Council Tax. Comparisons with other East Devon towns show Axminster, Sidmouth and Seaton all charging in excess of £50 per annum in previous years and the National average Parish Precept for Band D is currently set at £50.16. The embargo on rises to council tax has not applied to town and parish councils but this could change. However the Town Council has endeavoured to keep the increase as low as possible. The Town Council primary source of income is provided by EDDC through the precept and the information desk point. The Town Council has in the past raised an element of income from donations and sponsorship however because of the economic climate these have not been forthcoming in the last 1 - 2 years. However the Town Council has where possible continued with providing services which include:

- Supporting community activities such as Charter Day, Hot Pennies Day, an additional Youth worker and awards for student of the secondary school
- Providing grants to a wide range of local charitable organisations to ensure they can continue to help and support the people of Honiton
- Paying towards the flower beds and other floral planters in the town
- Attending twinning events
- Keeping the network of footpaths and lanes accessible and safe
- Working on improving access to and maintenance of Roundball Wood
- Financially supporting the Senior Citizens' Centre
- Seeking areas to build new allotments
- Providing CCTV for the town
- Assisted with the provision bus shelters
- Providing seats and bins

The Town Council has worked hard to decrease direct expenses wherever possible. Various cost cutting exercises such as using less paper and where possible, sending information and correspondence via email rather than incurring postage costs, reducing or reviewing the gas, electric and telephone services and claiming relief and grants where available.

The Town Council, in previous years has provided funding for Christmas Lights from the profits of the Street Market. However after a couple of difficult years for market traders there was insufficient profit to fund the lights this year.

The Town Council are currently looking at their budget for 2014/15. The budget has many demands placed upon it. If the market is unable to provide sufficient funding next year the only way to raise the funds needed would be to raise the precept. This would mean that every council tax payer would contribute a small amount extra, to provide the town with a lighting display for next year.

The Town Council will also need to consider:

CCTV - The system will need to be upgraded in order to improve the quality of the images and the distance those images are transmitted.

Council Expenses - Due to the increase in cost of local elections charged by EDDC further funds will need to be added to build funds for elections which have been dipped into in the past due to costs of previous Town polls and elections.

Environment & Tourism - Flowerbeds maintenance were taken on by the Town Council during the year and met by funds put aside for this reason. During the year the Town Council have written to numerous establishments requesting donations through sponsorship but unfortunately no funds have been received. This is likely to be the case for future years and so only the minimal amount of work can be carried out without receiving further funds. The Town Council has always believed that events such as Charter Day and Hot Pennies are important historic events for the town and would not want to see their demise.

Grants - In these times of cutbacks by local authorities, it is important to be able to support local organisations that may be losing funding due to Government. In the past a large proportion of the grant has been given to the Tourist Information Office in order to continue to assist them in promoting the town.

Promotion - Promotion costs in the past have been kept to an absolute minimum; however, due to increases in the cost of publishing, printing and advertising increases in the budget will have to be considered.

Administration - The Town council will continue to incur telephone, stationary and postage costs but attempts are being made to decrease this as mentioned earlier. The Council's computers need upgrading as they are all running on quite old software and very soon Microsoft will no longer be supporting the old versions. The Council's insurance has been amended to reflect the fact that the Town Council will now own a £2M building and will no longer need to insure the senior citizens centre. However it has been assumed that the additional insurance costs for the Beehive will be met by the management company. Insurance costs are also likely to decrease overall although to start with the Town Council will need to pay to insure both buildings until handover/surrender is complete. However if the Town council do continue to pay for insurance for the Beehive, the costs are likely to be passed on through the lease arrangement and not through the precept.

Premises - With the move to the Beehive all existing costs for electricity, heating, water, maintenance, security, fire inspections and existing rent paid to EDDC, will be transferred towards the rent that the Town Council will need to pay the Beehive. Before handover of New Street can take place the Town Council as tenants will need to carry out dilapidation work as identified by the Landlord, EDDC. The figure is estimated to cost approximately £12,000 but the Town Council will endeavour to keep the costs down to a minimum. It is not yet known if the Town Council will need to pay rates separately to those incurred by the Beehive.

Staffing - Cost of living rises are kept to minimum (a 1% increase was given in 2013/14 following 3 years of no rise) and the Council is committed to some incremental rises. Wherever possible, admin staff overtime has been reduced to cut costs.

Reserves - The general reserves currently stand at £53,590 which is below the auditor's recommendation of 50% of precept.

Other Considerations - The budget is usually very tight and there is not a great deal of room for manoeuvre without reducing grants/services to the town.

Income - EDDC reduced the level of funding for the Information Desk this year and it is possible they may reduce this further. Should this happen the Town Council may need to reduce the opening hours to the public and reduce our staffing costs accordingly and thereby offer a more reduced service ourselves. The Town Council will no longer receive any rental income from individual organisations that have hired the senior citizen room.

We would be interested to hear what you think of this suggestion. Your views can be passed to the Town Council on 01404 42957 or email on towncouncil@honiton.gov.uk.

BECOMING A COUNCILLOR

What is the role of Honiton Town Council?

Honiton Town Council is an elected tier of government which is vital in representing the interests of the local community it serves and improving the quality of life and the local environment. It is one of over 8,000 parish councils in England. Although other Councils, such as Devon County and East Devon District, have legal duties to deliver a range of services such as education, town and country planning, environmental health and social services, Honiton Town Council has a role to play in influencing these decision makers and can often deliver services to meet local needs. Issues that particularly concern the Town Council are planning, highways, community safety, housing, street lighting, allotments, playing fields, community facilities, street cleanliness, seats and shelters, rights of way. Over the past couple of years Honiton Town Council has been responsible for:

- Consulting residents on a wide range of issues
- Providing CCTV for the town
- Assisting with the provision of bus shelters, seats and bins
- Commenting on a range of planning
- Taking responsibility for advertisement applications in the town centre
- Supporting community activities such as Charter Day, Hot Pennies Day and the Youth service
- Providing grants to a wide range of local charitable organisations to ensure they can continue to help and support the people of Honiton
- Fighting for better road infrastructure, especially the A35/eastern bypass and Turks Head Junction
- Paying towards the flower beds and other floral planters in the town
- Attending twinning events
- Keeping the network of footpaths and lanes accessible and safe
- Working on improving access to Roundball Wood
- Financially supporting the Senior Citizens' Centre
- Seeking areas to build new allotments
- Commenting on a range of policy documents from Government and other organisations

To carry out its work, the Town Council raises an annual precept. This is added to the community charge imposed by the County and District Councils. The finances of the Council are very carefully controlled and audited to ensure that public money is not wasted.

Could I be a Councillor?

The diversity of parish and town councils is their strength. Each can make a unique response to the needs of their community with a sensitivity that is more difficult for principal authorities to achieve. The diversity of the Town Council often arises because Councillors have different enthusiasms and interests. The Council needs a range of skills to work as a team. To be a Councillor you must be over 18, a British citizen (or a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union) and living or working within a 3 mile radius of Honiton. The Town Council meets monthly in the evening and twice monthly to look at planning applications. There are also a number of committees and working groups on which Councillors may wish to serve but a Councillor's role is also about working in the community and being available to the residents. Councillors' time is voluntary although an annual allowance is paid to defray the day to day costs such as travel and postage. So if you want to do something positive and hope to make a difference by influencing decisions that affect Honiton, maybe you should think about putting yourself forward by contacting the Town Council office stating your interest. The closing Date is 6th January 2014

TOWN CLERK: Mrs. Chetna Jones
DEPUTY CLERK: Mrs. Sarah Jenkins
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COUNCIL MEMBERS

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G. ELLIOT	Bon Heur, Sidmouth Road, EX14 1BE	42968
D FOSTER	17 Roundball Close EX14 2NU	45106
Mrs. S. GROVES	8 Gronau Close, EX14 2YT	47654
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Miss V. ASH	3 Hillside, Combe Raleigh, Honiton EX14	42028
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