



Honiton

ANNUAL REPORT 2021 -2022

Chairman's Report

The year for which this report has been compiled has been momentous, in that it started with the Council having been diminished through resignations to just eight Councillors, one of whom was on permanent leave, leaving a significant number of vacancies. As a consequence elections were held in May 2021, which resulted in nine new Councillors being elected. They had an immediate impact on the direction of the Council, by initiating the amendment of standing orders and bringing a fresh perspective to the various committees. I am pleased to say they have injected a new dynamism, together with ideas for innovative projects and ways in which to improve the town's facilities.

In January 2022 Councillor Vera Howard formally resigned and it was unanimously agreed that she should become an Honoured Citizen of Honiton for the work she had undertaken as a longstanding Councillor. Councillor Fiona Hanratty also resigned for personal reasons. In February a group of six Councillors resigned en bloc, leaving eight vacancies in total, thereby triggering a further election in March, when seven new Councillors joined us. The outstanding vacancy will shortly be filled by co-option.

Following the resignation of the Chairman, John Zarczynski, myself and Helen Hurford were elected interim Chair and Vice Chair respectively, until the annual election of Councillors takes place on 9th May. This has been an extraordinary period for Honiton Town Council with an almost entirely new set of Councillors being elected within twelve months. We have all had to learn about the plethora of local government rules and council procedures, which has only been made possible by the considerable help and support of our Town Clerk, Stephen Hill, and his Deputy, Heloise Marlow, for which I give them our wholehearted thanks.

Now that the composition of the Council has been stabilised we have set ourselves a challenging programme of work. We are concentrating our efforts on improving the fabric of the town, establishing a vibrant and attractive market that will bring more business to Honiton, work on climate change issues and raising the profile of the town through publicity and social media.

The Chairs of the respective committees will report on their work programmes, but I can say they are tackling many of the issues facing the town that have been neglected until now. In our attempt to succeed in these projects we have to thank the many private individuals who have worked with Councillors in the various working parties, in particular delivering on climate change and the forthcoming Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

In terms of what we have achieved so far, I can report that the work on the allotments project has now been completed and we have re-joined the Chamber of Commerce, working co-operatively again with local businesses. We have re-established working liaison with the Board of Trustees for the Beehive and we have membership on various outside bodies, including TRIP, the League of Friends, liaison with the Police, the Twinning Association and a variety of other charities. The Council has recruited a new Market Superintendent, Lee Leppington, and we will increase the market's resilience by recruiting a part-time assistant. You will also hear in the financial report of the grants given to a number of charities and associations, particularly those working with young people.

We feel it is important that we understand the issues which our residents consider a priority, and as a consequence we set up monthly surgeries in the market on Saturdays and we also had stalls at the two day Honiton Show, the Craft Fair and the Gate to Plate for the same purpose.

The Deputy Mayor and I attended our first civic ceremony, where we were delighted to witness the various awards granted to members of our local police service. Representatives of the Council also attended the planting of the oak tree in The Glen to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee, and at the beginning of April we had a successful climate change event, that was sponsored by a number of local businesses. During this period we also saw the completion of the external auditors report on the Council's accounts for the years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021, which were not previously able to be signed off due to queries that had not been resolved.

Officers were instrumental in guiding us through the choppy waters we initially encountered and I am pleased to report that the Town Clerk is now confirmed in post and that our Deputy Clerk is now pursuing her training for her certificate in local council administration. We also have to be grateful for the work of the office staff, Carolyn Bowles and Dawn Reed which has been invaluable to the new Councillors, but we consequently needed to increase their hours in order to deliver the objectives we had set out in our work programme. In summary this has been a challenging period for the Council, in particular through having to deal with a legacy of various legal issues, which are now nearing conclusion. Following on from those actions the Council has resolved to maintain the very best standards of behaviour and debate, and we are committed to full adherence to the Nolan Principles which govern public service.

Cllr Serena Sexton—Chairman of Honiton Town Council

Finance & Policy Committee Report

The reserve at £155,000 remains low (compared to other local Councils) and the 2022-2023 budget does not include an amount to bolster the reserve, instead contributions to reserve are from an end of year underspend in 2021-2022 of around £50,000 (figures not finalised yet). The 2022 budget is about building some resilience and looking forward for the future with projects aimed at improving the town for residents, businesses and visitors.

A youth support grant was re-introduced and the grants budget increased overall with grants of £31,000 for local groups including a number of fledgling charities. This was sorely needed for them following the pandemic. We have re-introduced the climate change and arts budgets and the first successful event took place on 2nd April, the Yes 1 event. Additionally, we are now working closely with the Honiton Community Complex to ensure the Beehive continues to operate as a community venue.

The decision to raise the precept this year was not a light one. This budget will enable us to spend some money on the town for the benefit of its people without reducing reserves. Even with the increase to the precept, when comparing to other councils in the area HTC remains comparatively low. The expenditure also compares favourably.

The staff numbers at the Council office are to be increased to give more resilience to the Honiton market and to provide additional support in the office that enables the new Councillors who were elected with a mandate to implement projects. Policies have been updated and implemented to assist the Town Council to run smoothly and effectively. This is a good start for a new Council, however much work needs to be done on remaining policies.

As a new Councillor I have found it refreshing that the Councillors have a positive approach to all the challenges and work well together to try and achieve results.

Cllr Theresa Howard
Chair of the Finance & Policy Committee

Planning Committee Report

In June 2021, members resolved to delegate the Council's responses to planning applications in consultation with the relevant ward Councillors in either St Michaels or St Pauls. There have been in excess of eighty applications that Honiton Town Council have been consulted on. These applications vary considerably, from applications for a new fence, extensions, new dwellings, alterations to listed buildings and tree pruning. In January 2022, a meeting of the planning committee was held via Zoom where I was elected Chair and Cllr Sexton Deputy Chair. Members of the planning committee resolved to continue with the system of delegation until May 2022. Planning committee meetings will resume in person from 24th May 2022 onwards.

Under the system of delegation over 80 responses have been sent to EDDC in respect of planning applications in and around Honiton. One of the most prominent applications relates to the development of the Honiton Cattle Market in Silver Street. Honiton Town Council have objected throughout the planning process to the proposed retirement flats and these objections have been provided to the Planning Inspectorate who will be determining the application instead of EDDC. Honiton Town Council is a consultee in the planning process with regards to all planning applications, apart from with regards to advertisement consent applications, for which Honiton Town Council has delegated authority to determine those applications.

Honiton Town Council will continue to work with EDDC, applicants and members of the public to provide reasoned and fair responses in respect of all planning applications submitted.

Cllr Helen Hurford
Chair of the Planning Committee

Town Management Committee Report

The terms of reference for the town management committee were agreed at the full Council meeting on 13th December 2021. Its aim is to identify and deliver projects that are a benefit to Honiton town. The committee is made up of Councillors but can have non-Councillors as members (subject to not deciding on financial matters). The committee can also set up working groups on specific projects which can include members of the public.

Currently the committee consists of seven Council members and has set up the following working groups:-

Christmas Lights working group (active)
Market working group (active)
Street Art (pending)
Allotments working group (active)
Queens Platinum Jubilee working group (active)
War Memorial (active)

The works programme is finite and prioritised by committees and agreed by full Council. The committee has met monthly and has recently agreed to meet every two months, the next meeting will be on June 9th. It is also worth noting that all committee members are also members of other committees including outside bodies or work.

Christmas lights are not just at Christmas, it is an all year around project as they need to be maintained, repaired/replaced, stored and organise the following years display. The market is open all the year round and after the last two years now needs a lot of attention along with the regeneration of the High Street. The allotments are now up and running but still need fine tuning with extra requirements. The Queens Jubilee is a very time-consuming project due to the bank holiday celebrations and thankfully we have several highly active members of the public within the working group, without them and the Councillors involved it would not happen. The War Memorial needs a full clean as it has not been done for many years, my thanks to the Honiton Scouts who have cleaned the bottom of the memorial every year, but it is time for a top to bottom clean.

The committee is keen to hear from any member of the public that would like to know more about our projects and want to get involved.

Cllr Tony McCollum
Chair of Honiton Town Management Committee

Green & Open Spaces Committee Report

The committee have been busy inspecting footpaths in and around Honiton. Some repairs and replacement signage have been reported and work is now underway to have these issues resolved. Roundball Hill woods has been in need of repair for some time now. Our contractor who is also assisting with the footpath repairs is also going to be repairing the footpath and handrails in the wood.

We have also been discussing the lack of street furniture around Honiton. A new town information board has been installed in the Lace Walk car park and we will shortly be installing some new benches and a bin in Honiton. These have been provided under the 'Welcome Back' funding received from East Devon District Council. HTC is responsible for the bus stop on Sidmouth Road which is also in need of repair. A specification for the work is in the process of being obtained prior to repair work commencing.

Cllr Kate Cloke
Chair of the Green & Open Spaces Committee

Strategy Committee Report

As we approach the end of an historic year for Honiton Town Council, we have a lot to celebrate especially from the angle of the strategy committee. This committee was established in September 2021 to fill a vital gap in the services of the Council: developing strategies and increasing our public engagement to ensure we always look forward with transparency, integrity, and strong leadership.

I want to thank all the Town Councillors, as well as the brilliant Council staff, for supporting myself and the committee in starting this work. Since its inception, the strategy committee has been working at full pace to begin the much-needed transition towards a full Town Council strategy and future plan. The committee was tasked by full Council to have a wide-ranging brief of responsibilities, covering everything from health and wellbeing, to climate change and neighbourhood planning, to public engagement and many more items in between.

The committee has established a climate change working group, which has been working tirelessly towards the goal of a net-zero Honiton by 2030. It also played a large part in setting the future-facing work programme and budget for the year, prioritising visible and positive projects that fulfil both manifesto commitments from elected Councillors, as well as taking heed of suggestions from our Council surgeries.

The Committee has also begun the difficult job of establishing a well overdue community strategy, which will shift the focus of the Council's work into line with the views of the whole community. This will require a monumental effort from all Councillors, working closely with you as community stakeholders, in ensuring our priorities are also your priorities. I am proud to announce our intention to go out to public consultation on a draft community strategy within the next few months.

Alongside this, we have begun work looking at a long-term strategy for the Beehive, the Town Council owned community centre on Dowell Street. As we get ever closer towards the 2025 date for the renewal of the building's lease, the strategy committee is working hard to ensure the continued successes of the building, whilst also keeping a close eye over possible opportunities to improve all aspects of the building's use for the benefit of the whole community. All of this hard work has been, and will continue to be, looking towards the aim of a full Council strategy within the next twelve months. This will ensure the continued successes of our new Town Council, representing a massive shift by the community and for the community.

As the chair of this committee, I look forward to the crucial work that will take place over the coming year, and I look forward to hearing from any residents with any questions or ideas to benefit our great town in the country.

Cllr Jake Bonetta
Chair of the Strategy Committee