

Annual Report

2021–2022



**CHIPPENHAM
TOWN COUNCIL**

Improving the quality of town life

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Welcome from the Chief Executive

In May of 2021 with the local council elections, the Town Council welcomed fourteen new councillors to the Town Council. The officer team arranged a comprehensive series of online training opportunities to ensure that they were equipped to commence their roles as town councillors.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Annual Report.

I hope that it will provide a flavour of our Council and the key events and challenges during 2021/2022. Similarly, to 2020/2021 the last year has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic, this continued to bring challenges at an operational, tactical and strategic level. However, the Council has received slightly more income than was first anticipated at the beginning of the year, this has continued to ensure that the Town Council is managed on a sound financial footing. The council recently set a precept for 2022/2023 which is below inflation but will allow for the continuation of services and facilities whilst helping to fund an ambitious capital programme over the coming year.

I continue to be immensely proud of the staff that I lead, who have continued to adapt to new ways of working and for some others continuing to attend their workplace to ensure that the Town remained clean, green, and safe. The last year was another extremely successful year for the Town Council, we were reaccredited with Purple Flag for the night-time economy, we were also reaccredited with a 'Green Flag' for John Coles Park and won Southwest in Bloom awards for our High Street and John Coles Park.

The last Corporate Strategic Plan covered the period 2018 – 2022, the objectives within that plan period are now complete. I'm really pleased that we were able to deliver virtually everything that we set out to deliver during the plan period, or has been achieved, is ongoing or is planned for completion during 2022. One of the objectives was to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for Chippenham, although this is not yet ready for adoption, significant progress has been made and we hope to go to referendum in early 2023.

We commenced the processes of formulating a new Corporate Strategic Plan for the town council during 2021, that will take us through to 2026 and beyond, the new Corporate Strategic was adopted by Full Council in March of this year. The new Corporate Strategic Plan is very much viewed as continuing the great work of the Town Council, through the provision of services and facilities to our residents but with an added focus on becoming a carbon neutral council by 2030.

I hope that you enjoy reading this annual report.



Mark Smith
Chief Executive

Mayor's Report

I was delighted to be nominated and ultimately chosen by my fellow Councillors to become Mayor for the municipal year 2021/22. I am proud to say this is the fourth occasion I have had the honour to represent the town of Chippenham as Mayor.

Over the past year I can say that I am proud of all the Town Councillors and staff who have continued to work hard to ensure the Town Council is run smoothly and effectively. Twelve of the 24 Councillors who were elected in May 2021 were completely new to the council and their contributions have been refreshing and valuable, but I also pay tribute to those no longer on the Council who provided such sterling service over the years.

The start of my Mayoral term was initially affected just like the previous year by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, with uncertainty and last-minute changes to events and engagements, whether they were our own Civic and Ceremonial events or those in the community.

I particularly appreciated the participation of members of locally based units of the armed services and those from the National Health Service and from voluntary organisations who played such a significant part in the local and national response to the pandemic.

I would also like to recognise the support I have received from my Mayoral Cadet, Police Cadet Harrison Wylie, and Deputy Mayoral Cadet Explorer Scout Alaric Childerhouse and wish them well in their future careers.

I also presided or was present at several other key events in the year including Armed Forces Day, Social Carers Day, Wilts & Swindon Pride Day, Merchant Navy Day, Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday, Holocaust Memorial Day and Commonwealth Day and must thank the Democratic Services Team and other staff at the Town Council for their part in organising these most successful events and in particular arranging for the attendance of most appropriate and distinguished guests.

Thankfully as restrictions were slowly lifted, I was able to get out around the town and meet many local residents in various capacities. At Civic Sunday held in September 2021 I took great delight in presenting Civic Awards and Certificates of Appreciation to some of the local voluntary groups and individuals.

**Councillor John Scragg
Mayor of Chippenham**



Leader's Report

I concur with the Chief Executive in my admiration for the Councillors and staff team in the ways they have continued to work collaboratively through another challenging year to deliver services for the local Chippenham community. Partnership working with local groups, organisations, charities and other stakeholders is vital for us to deliver a programme of events and initiatives in the town.

A core piece of work this past year has been the production of the next Corporate Strategic Plan. All Councillors were involved in the process to set the key priorities alongside a public consultation. Thank you to those of you who took part. I encourage you to look at the Council's website for further information.

At the core of the work we do, the Councils aim is to improve the quality of town life. This includes making your encounters with the Town Council accessible and easy for you to navigate. Therefore, the Town Council has embraced technology with 2 new digital systems both with mobile apps for you to use, should you wish.

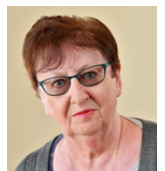
Report-it has been updated enabling you to give us much more precise information so we can manage your report more effectively, the app is called 'My Chippenham'.

In our ambitions for paperless Council meetings we now use Modern.gov Meeting Management Software. You can download the 'Modern.Gov' app and subscribe to Chippenham Town Council to access agendas and minutes in an interactive way.

I hope you continue to engage with us by attending our Full Council or committee meetings or watch them on our YouTube channel to see how decisions are made. Please continue to support our local venues, the Neeld, Chippenham Museum, Stanley Park Sports Ground and all our outdoor play areas and open spaces are there for you to enjoy.

Your Town Councillors are here to represent you, so if there is something we can help you with, get in touch! Councillors contact details are on the website under Your Council and can also be found in our bi-annual printed newsletter 'Talk' which is distributed to 20,000 residential postcodes within Chippenham.

**Councillor Desna Allen
Leader of Chippenham
Town Council**





Human Resources Committee

Following the May 2021 elections, a series of training and induction courses were delivered to our new and returning Councillors, which included Chairmanship training and guidance on attending specific Committees. The role of Democratic Services Officer was made full time to support our Council meetings.

Councillors were also elected to Sub-Committees including the Disciplinary Panel, Grievance and Complaints Panel, and the Chief Executive's Performance Review Panel. The Performance Review Panel meet twice a year to set and review targets for the Chief Executive, which are then used to establish appropriate targets for all the Council's staff in their appraisals.

Thankfully, the Disciplinary and Grievance and Complaints Panels have not had cause to meet this year, and our levels of sickness absence remain lower than the national average.

We are committed to providing ongoing training and development opportunities to our staff and Councillors. In our last Annual Report, it was noted that three members of staff were undergoing the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA) qualification; this has now been achieved.

Throughout the last year we have continued to deal with changing government regulations around the Covid-19 Pandemic. Staff working in our outdoor teams and across all our sites adapted quickly to the latest guidance to keep our services going as safely as possible, and thanks to our Flexible Working Policy, those who can work from home were able to easily transition to do so as required.

We also employed a new Cleaning Assistant to replace our previous externally contracted service, which gives us more flexibility to ensure our venues are kept to a high standard.

In November 2021, all our HR policies were re-adopted by the Committee. Although they are officially reviewed every three years, our policies and procedures are regularly updated to make sure we are complying with the latest legislation and best practice. New policies are also introduced when the need is identified, such as our Leaver's Policy.

A staff survey was conducted for the first time since 2017, to measure if our employees feel fulfilled, engaged, and valued. The results were positive, with improved scores in over half of the questions since the last survey, demonstrating that our staff are proud to work for the Council and happy going into work every morning. Staff were also consulted on some of the lower scoring areas to put together an action plan for further improvement.

Councillor Desna Allen
Leader of Chippenham Town Council
Chair, Strategy and Resources Committee

Strategy and Resources Committee

'The Strategy and Resources Committee serves an important function in relation to the Corporate Governance, Risk Management and Internal Control, Corporate Strategic Planning and the financial and democratic processes of the Council.'

The Strategy and Resources Committee meets four times a year. The first meeting of this civic year was held virtually, however all subsequent meetings have been held face to face. We welcomed several new Councillors to the Committee following the Council elections in May. The Strategy and Resources Committee serves an important function in relation to the Corporate Governance, Risk Management and Internal Control, Corporate Strategic Planning and the financial and democratic processes of the Council.

This year the Council introduced a new Finance Sub Committee to the Strategy and Resources Committee. One of its key priorities has been to oversee the development of the Council's budget for next year. This has been a challenging process to accommodate the strategic priorities of the Council and underlying year on year cost increases. The budget is again set with the backdrop of Covid-19 and Councillors have had to make assumptions on how this will impact next year, essentially anticipating a return to normal activity.

Strategy and Resources is the key committee for recommending the proposed annual budget to Full Council for it to decide on the budget and level of Precept and Fees and Charges for the following year. Full Council has again agreed a balanced Income and Expenditure budget for 2022/23. A lot of work has also gone into the Capital Expenditure budget process, in particular identifying the capital expenditure priorities of the Council.

The Council continues to maintain healthy levels of financial reserves. These are Capital Ear Marked Funds to enable the Council to sustain its infrastructure and facilities well into the future and a general reserve allowing the Council to withstand the impact of unforeseen events; Covid-19 being a perfect example.

Councillor Desna Allen
Leader of Chippenham Town Council
Chair, Strategy and Resources Committee

Chippenham Town Council is ever mindful of how it protects and spends the income that it receives from tax payers to deliver services and facilities to the local community. The Council particularly recognises the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had and continues to have on its residents and communities.

Each year we conduct a thorough, comprehensive budget setting process that is open to public scrutiny. Government measures to tackle Covid-19 have made the budgeting process very difficult over the past few years. This year's budget was agreed by Full Council just over 12 months ago at a point where England went into a national Covid-19 lockdown for a third time. In the previous year the Council had experienced a significant fall off in the income that the Council generates itself directly and it was assumed that this pattern would continue. However, after the end of June 2021 all the Council's venues and facilities were able to be fully open and this has had a positive impact on the Council's finances for the year.

Next year's budget for 2022/23 was agreed by Full Council in January 2022 with Income and Expenditure of £4.2 million, £3.6 million of which comes from local residents via the Precept (Council Tax). The Council does not receive any external financial support either directly from Government or via Wiltshire Council. The budget assumes that the Council's facilities will continue to be open for the whole year. Inflationary cost pressures have also been taken into account in the budget and Full Council agreed to two large capital projects which will see significant improvements to the decarbonisation of the Council's buildings estate and a further upgrade to the Neeld.

Since the Council took over responsibility for maintaining Monkton Park from Wiltshire Council and full responsibility for litter collection and grass cutting across the town, we have invested significantly in staff, vehicles and equipment as a result of our increased responsibilities, and we are delighted by the positive feedback we have received from residents about the improvements we have been able to make. The Town Council continues to maintain the award-winning John Coles Park, as well as the beautifully maintained cemetery at London Road, the town's excellent Museum, the sports pitches at Stanley Park, the Town Hall offices and the Neeld. The impressive range of events and shows that take place at the Neeld are now returning to normal.

In addition, the important range of Civic Events, including Remembrance Sunday and Commonwealth Day, that the Council organises have been able to take place and considerable effort went into once again providing a safe and enjoyable Christmas lights switch on event.

As Chippenham Town Council continues to make improvements to our services and to the town, as a responsible public body, we are mindful to ensure that our finances can sustain this level of quality and improvement well into the future, whilst at the same time minimising the impact of any Precept increases on our residents.

Nick Rees
Director of Resources



Planning, Environment and Transport Committee

I was elected to the role of PET Chairman, as a new Town Councillor, in June. Newly elected Councillors make up half of the PET Committee and have brought fresh perspectives to issues, whilst the Committee continues to benefit from having retained experienced Councillors to help navigate us through the often-complicated planning and transport regimes in place.

Building work has continued at a pace over the past year in our town. Residential care homes have opened at Flowers Manor and Middlefields House, second Lidl and Aldi stores have opened at Pewsham and Methuen Park, and houses continue to be built at Rowden Park, North Chippenham and Hunters Moon.

With these developments and others, the Committee's comments, and sometimes objections, to planning applications, have repeatedly stressed the need for new development to be more wildlife friendly, be of sustainable construction, achieve high quality design, and incorporate low carbon energy features, cycle storage and electric vehicle charging infrastructure as the norm. We continue to receive helpful technical advice from our planning and arboricultural officers in our considerations of planning and tree applications.

In October, the PET Committee responded to a trio of Wiltshire Council consultations on draft documents: the Climate Strategy, the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, and the Bus Service Improvement Plan. We welcomed the content of these strategic documents and made further suggestions for improvements.

Throughout the year the PET Committee has considered various requests for highway improvements made by the public, part funding requests for:

- chicane removals in various locations to enhance the accessibility of paths for cyclists;
- accessibility improvements to Parliament Street;
- a speed limit review of Hill Rise/Barrow Green; and
- four pairs of dropped kerbs in Queen's Crescent area.

The Committee has also considered various waiting restrictions requests, and has made, and will continue to make, suggestions for new dropped kerbs throughout the town, to be funded by means of a substantive bid.

The re-modelled road junctions at Station Hill/New Road and by Hathaway Retail Park have been an ongoing headache for commuters, cyclists and pedestrians, and the PET Committee has written to Wiltshire Council to voice its concerns over traffic and highway safety at these junctions.

Finally, I was pleased to see the draft Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan reaching a major milestone in February, when it out to its first public consultation. I look forward to hearing the community's views on the 23 local planning policies that are proposed. Amongst these are draft planning policies which seek to ensure that development proposals:

- protect and enhance local green spaces, trees, woodlands, hedgerows, the River Avon, and the special historic character of the town centre;
- are designed to be carbon neutral and of sustainable construction; and
- prioritise active travel and public transport infrastructure.

Depending upon the consultation feedback, and the extent to which any objections can be resolved, the PET Committee can begin referring to these draft policies in our comments on future planning applications.

Councillor Gemma Grimes, Chair, Planning, Environment and Transport Committee



Amenities, Culture and Leisure Committee

Despite the ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ACL Committee has sought to deliver an impressive range of services for our community. We have seen our venues reopen at The Neeld, Chippenham Museum and Stanley Park, and our grounds and street scene teams have continued to keep Chippenham clean and green.

The ACL Committee held its first meeting of the year on 2 June 2021 and has continued to meet face to face as required by legislation. This year's highlights listed below include;

- Approval of the Tree Planting Strategy, setting out a 5-year plan of how the Council intends to plant over 2300 trees, and establish a residential tree planting scheme.
- A comprehensive public consultation and review of the 'Dogs on Lead' requirements for users of John Coles Park.
- The 'Festival of Christmas' – a celebration which included the Christmas lights switch on, Meet Santa in The Yelde Hall, Artisan Market, Street Performers and the popular 'Winter Wonderland' light walk through on Island Park.

- Planting of Chippenham's first Tiny Forest – a community project involving the planting of 600 trees in Monkton Park carried out in partnership with Earthwatch UK and Siemens Mobility UK.
- Approval of the Grass Cutting Strategy – setting out how the Environmental Services team will address the balance of high-quality amenity space with the need to protect biodiversity. Developed in partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, the strategy introduces the development and trial of mini wildflower meadows.
- The further expansion of allotment provision within the Town through the adoption of the new Birds Marsh View allotment site.
- Approval to proceed towards an improved offer at The Neeld – including a new entrance and bar area.

I am proud of what we have achieved this year and pleased about the range of new projects in progress. I would like to thank the Council's team of staff and officers for their professionalism and flexibility in delivering such excellent services for the Chippenham community.

Councillor James Bradbury
Chair, Amenities, Culture
and Leisure Committee





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