



BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCIL - TOWN CLERK'S REPORT - 2015/2016

This report provides details of the Town Council's services and projects delivered in the past year.

Allotments: The Town Council continues to provide a number of allotment sites in the area and to look for new sites. In total, it has 170 allotments and at the current time there are 41 people in the parish on the waiting list. The Town Council works closely with the Bridport and District Allotments Society on all aspects of the management of the allotments. It is hoping to provide new allotments at St Cecilia's Field later this year.

Asker Meadows: The open space and adjoining New Zealand site are overseen by a well supported community group and there has been a lot of work on the site over the past year. The showground was used during the year by the Circus, the second Jurassic Music Festival and the Food Festival. A planning application has been submitted for the temporary use of the showground only, for car parking on particularly busy days.

Borough Gardens: The Borough Gardens community group, supported by the Town Council, has met regularly on site, making continued improvements to the Gardens.

Bridport Football Club: The Town Council now has the freehold ownership of this land and the Football Club has an existing lease. The District Council manages the car park on behalf of the Town Council, with the proceeds split equally between the Football Club and Town Council. The multi use games arena on the site is free to use during the day and continues to be very popular.

Bridport Local Area Partnership: As a result of its service review into support for community planning, West Dorset District Council reduced its level of funding to BLAP by over £11,000 as from 1 April 2016. The reduced funding means that there is no longer a dedicated Community Planning Officer post. Tessa Greenaway left the Council at the end of March and will be taking up a new post at the District Council. I would like to thank Tessa for all her work for BLAP over the past nine years and wish her well for the future. The Town Council continues to support BLAP and will now do so through the new Project Manager. BLAP continues to successfully represent a membership of 10 local councils and more than 100 local community groups, organisations and individuals.

Car Parking: The Town Council has received planning permission for public car parking on hard standing in Plottingham and this will create up to 26 new parking places. It will continue to work with the District Council to seek to identify additional sites for parking in the town and West Bay.

CCTV: The town centre CCTV contract with Weymouth and Portland Borough Council has continued over the past year with funding from the Town Council and the District Council. A mobile CCTV camera, purchased by the Town Council, District Council and the Police, was also used at locations in the town. The funding from the District Council remains under review but it is hoped that this will continue for future years.

Cemetery: The Town Council manages the Bridport Cemetery. During the year we replaced the roof on the workshop and installed solar panels.

Coastal Community Team: The Town Council was successful in its application for a £10,000 grant to establish a Coastal Community Team (CCT), which is a local partnership formed to produce an Economic Plan for the area. The CCT includes representatives from the Bridport Local Area Partnership, Bridport Area Development Trust, Bridport & District Tourism Association, Bridport Chamber of Trade and Commerce, West Bay Community Forum and West Dorset District Council. The Team, supported by a Project Manager, Brian Wilson, produced an extensive Plan by the end of January, including a large number of projects for the area, which will be the subject of future bids for funding from the coastal communities fund and other funding streams.

Communication: The Town Council issues an annual report on its work, which is widely available throughout the town, along with newsletters. An occasional Market Newsletter is also issued for market traders. The Town Council hosts its own web site and a community web site. A key project in the new Town Plan is to revamp the community web site and make it the main town site for information and publicity. A weekly Town Council bulletin is issued to all town councillors. New notice boards are in place around the town and we continue to look at ways to improve communications and issue publicity.

Community Transport: The Town Council is supporting ongoing work to look at the options for community bus services in the Bridport area. Two meetings have been held with representatives from WATAG, the County Council, Dorset POPP, BLAP and the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group and also representatives from the bus companies. It is proposed to establish a working group to undertake the necessary feasibility work.

Consultation: The Town Council has responded to a large number of consultation exercises from national and local government over the past year, ensuring that the views of the town are taken into consideration on a variety of matters. This included extensive responses to the draft policies for the new District wide Local Plan, responding to changes to the provision of services both at the District Council, through the service review process and at the County Council with proposed changes to youth services, adult social care etc. as well as national consultations.

Democracy - Working with Young People: The Town Council has hosted meetings this year of the Bridport Area Youth Council, involving students from The Sir John Colfox School and local primary schools and has been working with schools, including Mountjoy School, on the design of the extension to the West Bay Play Area. A new youth group is also in the process of being set up by a former member of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and it is hoped that this group will soon meet with the Town Council. The Town Council supported the Democracy Exhibition last year, part of which was held in the Town Hall.

Elections: Town Council elections were held in May 2015 and the induction process for councillors covered an introduction to being a councillor, how the Town Council works and also dedicated planning training.

Events: The Town Council was represented at the Charter Fair, Food Festival, Melplash Show and the February Community Fair, as well as providing support for the Christmas Cheer Festival and the Hat Festival and processing the road closures for key community events in the year. It also organises the Remembrance Parade in November, which is such an important event for the town. The Town Council provided flags and bunting for the town centre last summer, put up lights at Christmas and enabled event organisers to put up banners on town centre lamp posts.

Environment and Social Wellbeing Committee: The Council's Environment and Social Wellbeing Committee continued to look at options for environmental improvements. During the year, further photovoltaic panels were installed on Town Council buildings at the Cemetery and Mountfield. The Council's existing system of photovoltaic panels continued to perform well and generate income from the feed in tariff. A new solar thermal hot water system was installed in Mountfield.

The Committee also considered a large number of issues related to social wellbeing matters, including co-ordinating the Council's response to the County's review of youth services.

Finances: The Best Value, Scrutiny and Town Plan Sub Committee received reports during the year on all aspects of the financial management of the Town Council, including reports on any issues raised by the Council's Internal Auditor. The Town Council receives regular budget monitoring reports and the Town Council's Budget and Service Review Working Group looked in detail at the budget and the District Council service reviews.

The Town Council agreed its budget for 2016/17, taking account of the reduced funding for community planning, the continued reductions in the grant received by the Town Council, under the localisation of council tax and the need to ensure that the Council was able to respond to pressures on District and County Council budgets and the need to protect local services. The budget makes provision to support and safeguard the Youth Service. The Town Council also considered its estimated budgets for a further three years as part of its medium term financial plan.

The Council's Internal Auditors make three visits during the year and it was pleasing that there were no issues reported, either as part of the internal or external audits.

Governance: The Town Council has a series of policies that regulate its proceedings, including a Code of Conduct for Councillors, Financial Regulations, Standing Orders etc. These documents comprise its constitution and were all reviewed by a working group of members during the year. It also has a number of other key documents that it reviews each year, including its Asset Register, Risk Management Policy, Health and Safety Policy and Investment Strategy. These policies are reviewed each year by the Best Value, Scrutiny and Town Plan Sub Committee. The Town Council also looked at its committee structure and will be bringing in some changes for 2016/17.

Grants: The Town Council agreed to continue funding the Leisure Centre, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Museum and Arts Centre at existing levels and for a further two years under service level agreements. It also provides one off funding for community groups to support the delivery of projects. In total, the Town Council awarded £24,620. It also earmarked one off funding to support proposed redevelopment projects at the Arts Centre and Museum.

Highways and Transportation Sub Committee: The Sub Committee considered a large number of issues over the year and forwarded a number of traffic management requests to the County Council, which, as the highway authority, has to agree all schemes. In the coming year, it will be considering further options for town centre traffic and options for South Street, following a County Council feasibility study. There will be full consultation on the proposals.

The Sub Committee received regular reports on local bus services and made representations regarding proposed changes to services and the loss of County Council support for weekly or twice weekly rural services that serve the town. The Sub Committee was very grateful for the advice it received on this subject from Alan Williams of the

Western Area Transport Action Group. It also looked at the proposed improvements to cycle routes in the town.

The Town Council, in partnership with West Dorset District Council, operated the West Bay/Bridport Park and Ride Scheme again during the summer holiday period, on Wednesdays and Saturdays (market days).

Highway Verge Maintenance: The Town Council undertook the maintenance of highway verges for the first time last year, as part of a Service Level Agreement with Dorset County Council. The SLA states that the work, including in adjoining parishes, is for a minimum of 7 cuts a year and the Town Council receives a grant from Dorset County Council to assist with the work. It was pleasing that we received a lot of good feedback on the work. Richard Pollard joined the Town Council last March as a groundsman, to assist with this work.

Land Transfers: Additional land at West Bay was leased to the Town Council to enable the work to go ahead on the extension of the play area and the Town Council is also looking to complete the transfer of land at St Cecilia's for new allotments and additional land at Flaxhayes.

Lengthsman: The post of Lengthsman is funded by the Town Council and the local councils participating in the scheme - Bothenhampton & Walditch, Symondsburry and Bradpole parish councils. The work of the Lengthsman includes gully clearing, repairing notice boards, removing fly posting, grass cutting, removal of weeds and repairing benches throughout the town and similar tasks. Ed Wootton joined the Town Council in June 2015 as the new Lengthsman.

Market: The Town Council manages the market and in 2015/16 there were an average of 29 stalls on Wednesdays and 65 on Saturdays, which was slightly down on the previous year. The weather though was particularly poor on a number of Saturdays and generally the market continues to do very well and the Town Council is keen to look at new ways to promote and support the market. The Town Council was grateful to the Traders' representative, Roy Gregory for all his work although it is now looking for new representation as Roy has stood down from this role. The Council has also asked if the District Council could review the licence agreement and fee to manage the market.

Market & Business Liaison Sub Committee: The Sub Committee includes representatives from the Bridport & District Tourism Association, Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Market Traders' Forum and the Bridport Local Area Partnership. The Sub Committee continued to receive reports on the market, town events and to co-ordinate town publicity and promotion.

Mountfield / Millennium Green: The Town Council's offices were moved to the second floor of Mountfield. Options for the use of rooms further down in the building are being looked at, to build on the use of the building as a "one stop" shop for local services with the District Council, County Council and Magna Housing already in the building, along with the Town Council. Plans are also being looked at for further improvements at Mountfield.

The Town Council and Millennium Green Trust are reviewing the current management agreement for the gardens and Coneygar Hill and the Trust is working on a new management plan for the area. The grounds are being used more for events, including the Hat Festival and this coming year, the Charter Fair. The new northern access to Coneygar Hill is proving to be very popular with walkers.

Neighbourhood Justice Panels: The Town Council continued to work with Bridport Police, Dorchester and Sherborne town councils, Housing Associations and West Dorset District Council on the roll out of Neighbourhood Justice Panels across West Dorset. It is hoped to secure the long term future of this successful project.

Neighbourhood Plan: The Town Council is working with Allington, Bothenhampton and Walditch, Bradpole and Symondsburry parish councils on Vision 2030, the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan. The delivery of the Plan is being co-ordinated by a community led Steering Group, overseen by a Joint Committee of all the participating councils. The Town Clerk provided interim project management support, but it is hoped to appoint soon to the new Council post of Project Manager, that would cover this important project. There was a lot of consultation last summer and the seven working groups have been working hard on the evidence base and potential draft policies, which will then go out for further consultation later this year. This is a key project for the area and there is to be a lot more consultation in 2016.

Priory Lane - Community Orchard: The Bridport Community Orchard Group manages the Orchard site and hosts a number of popular events during the year, including the Apple Day and Wassailing events. The Orchard Group also manages the land at the top of Park Road. The sites are managed in partnership with the Town Council.

Partnership Working: The Town Council continues to work with a large number of partners, including local community groups, the Police, Chamber of Trade, Tourism Association, County Council, District Council, Magna Housing and many other organisations.

The Town Council appoints representatives to a large number of local and regional bodies and officers also attend networking meetings, including the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC), Society of Local Council Clerks etc. We also have regular meetings with District Council Chief Officers and worked with DAPTC and the County Council on producing a document entitled "Working Together". This sets out a number of recommendations for how County and District councils should work with town and parish councils when considering delegating services, transferring assets etc.

Planning: The Town Council is a consultee for planning applications. Over the past year, 196 applications were reported to its Plans Committee and comments passed to West Dorset District Council. The Town Council also invited the developers of Vearse Farm to its Plans Committee prior to that Committee considering the outline application for the site. The Plans Committee welcomes comments from members of the public.

Play Areas: The Town Council maintains a number of play areas, including the very popular West Bay Play Area and has just started work on the extension to that Play Area, which will be fully accessible. A new all-weather table tennis table has also been installed at Plottingham.

Quality Council: The Town Council has been an accredited Quality Council, able to deliver and support projects, using the General Power of Competence, which the new Council adopted in May. During the year, the Quality Scheme was replaced with the Local Council Award Scheme and at this stage the Town Council will not be applying for the new accreditation due to other commitments, but this will be something that will be looked at in the near future.

Riverside Gardens: The Town Council continues to maintain this popular open space.

Salt House: This venue continues to be well used and the Town Council now has the freehold ownership of the building and the adjoining Green, following its transfer from the District Council. During the summer, the popular West Bay Wednesday evening markets were held once again on the Green and in the Salt House.

Staff: Regular staff meetings and annual appraisals are held for all staff. The Town Council supports the apprenticeship scheme and has had apprentices with the outside team and also this year had an Office Apprentice, Claire Peters-Way. Claire has obtained her qualification from Kingston Maurward College and has now been appointed to a full time post in the office. Bobby Harris, who previously worked as an apprentice with the outside team, joined the Town Council this year as a member of the permanent ground staff. In October, the Town Surveyor, Daryl Chambers received the Spirit of Bridport award in the St Mary's School awards, in recognition of his work on behalf of the community.

We have a very good and dedicated team of staff at the Town Council, both in the office and working outside.

The Town Council is a Living Wage Council (Living Wage Foundation) and it receives an annual review of staffing at its Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Tourist Information Centre: During the year, the Town Council has been in discussion with the District Council about the future of the Bridport TIC, in light of the service review of tourism services and the need for the District Council to make savings in this budget. The Town Council has put forward a proposal for the Town Council to manage the TIC and it is hoped, subject to an agreement on the transitional funding to support the transfer and that this will happen by September 2016. The intention would be to look to maintain and then build on the existing highly regarded service and this will also help with the management and promotion of the Town Hall.

Town Hall: The Town Hall is open to the public six days a week. The meeting rooms are popular, with the venue being well used and the Tourist Information Centre is a key feature of the building. During the summer, the Town Hall hosted the Democracy Exhibition and once again, the building featured in the Dorset Architectural Heritage Week.

External Funding: The Town Council relies on partnership funding for many of its projects and over the past year has received funding from a variety of sources, including from West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council (for the West Bay Play Area) and Government grants for the Coastal Community Team and Neighbourhood Planning. Grants and partnership funding continue to make an important contribution to the delivery of the Town Council's projects.

Town Plan: The Town Plan provides a framework for the development of the Town Council's future policies, schemes and the formulation of budgets. The priority projects are reviewed each year and the Council receives regular progress reports on project delivery. The new updated Town Plan is due to be formally adopted by the Council in April 2016.

Youth Centre: The Town Council has been supporting and participating in a working group that is looking to safeguard the future of the Youth Centre and Youth Club, in light of the decision taken by the County Council to withdraw from supporting youth centres. There has been a lot of work to produce a Business Plan for the Centre, to be run by a new independent Trust. An interim Trust is to be established and then it is hoped to register the new Trust with the Charity Commission, to enable it to take on the management of the Centre from September 2016. The Town Council has agreed a total of £15,000 towards supporting the Centre, £5,000 of which will go towards Youth Club services.

The Weather: The Town Council continues to work on the production of a Community Resilience Plan and is now part of the West Dorset District Council Emergency Planning arrangements. It holds a supply of sand bags which it can deliver in the Bridport area in the event of potential floods. It has also recently taken delivery of a 4 wheel drive vehicle, which will help it to respond during bad weather.

West Bay: the new Water Sports Centre was formally opened in May 2015 to house the Canoe Club and the Gig Club. The Town Council continued to support the West Bay Forum and is looking to provide some environmental enhancements (planting schemes) from the Coastal Community Funds. One of the projects in the CCT Economic Plan is to identify additional parking and working with the District Council it is looking to identify possible areas for temporary parking around West Bay. The Town Council works closely with the Harbour Master on events in West Bay.

Conclusion: This report is a summary of the Town Council's work over the past year. I would like to thank all the Town Council staff for their work and commitment during the year and thank the Town Councillors for all their continued support.

5 April 2016

Bob Gillis
Town Clerk