



Report from the Leader of Bridport Town Council 2017/2018

I said in my report last year that these are challenging times for local government and the services we all value and that remains the case. This past year has seen a lot of work in preparing for new unitary councils in Dorset, which we now know will be going ahead in 2019. This will see a major change in local government structures in Dorset and will undoubtedly have implications for towns like Bridport. I will speak more about this later in the report.

I would though like to start by saying that, once again, the Town Council has continued to deliver more services in the town whilst also working to deliver its Town Plan projects.

This has been the first full year of Town Council management of the Tourist Information Centre. The Town Council was able to secure the future of the TIC, which is now established as an integral part of the town and it continues to expand the range of services and support that it offers both to visitors and residents.

The Town Council has continued to support and fund key town organisations including the Arts Centre, Museum, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Leisure Centre and the Youth and Community Centre. However, most of these bodies (with the exception of the Youth and Community Centre) receive substantial funding from the District Council. This discretionary grants funding is under review as part of the preparations for the new unitary authorities. The Town Council is working hard to ensure that future support for these bodies can be maintained. The Youth and Community Centre has since September 2016 been managed by a Charitable Trust. With the commitment of its volunteer Trustees, the support of the Town Council and the wider community, it has successfully secured the future of this important local asset.

As well supporting these larger organisations, the Town Council's annual grants programme also provides funding for smaller one off projects.

The Town Council continues to support the Bridport Local Area Partnership (BLAP). This year BLAP has taken the lead in convening a Liaison Group to work with the Town and parish councils, looking at how we can work together to safeguard and deliver services after local government reorganisation. As always, the Town Council remains very grateful for the hard work and commitment of the BLAP Chair, Maureen Jackson and the very many volunteers in the Partnership.

This has also been an important year for the Neighbourhood Plan. Following a major public consultation last summer, the project is now moving towards completing the draft Plan for further consultation later this year and the referendum/adoption in early 2019. All the councils involved in the Plan received an excellent presentation last October from the Steering Group's Chair Phyllida Culpin, who, along with a large number of dedicated volunteers, has been such an important part of this project. The Plan covers five parish areas and I must also thank all the councils for their continued support.

The various projects supported or promoted through the Coastal Community Team were worked up during the year. In the next year or so we should see the projects being delivered including improved cycle access to West Bay, new interpretation facilities and, later this summer, the opening of the West Bay Discovery Centre at the Methodist Chapel. As the Town Council's representative on the Bridport Area Development Trust, I have

been very pleased to be able to work with the Trust on the Discovery Centre Project, which will be a significant attraction in West Bay.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Bridport Area Development Trust for its achievement in bringing the Literary and Scientific Institute back into use. Also the Bridport Museum Trust for the fantastic refurbishment of the Bridport Museum. Both projects had funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, were very challenging and ambitious and show what a great job volunteers do to invest in Bridport's historic community assets.

The past year has seen the Town Council deliver on its promise to undertake a consultation exercise into town centre traffic and specifically to seek views on the temporary closure of South Street. This consultation generated a lot of interest and a large number of responses. I was very pleased at how the consultation exercise was conducted and we are now looking forward to working with the Chamber of Trade and other key stakeholders in the town, to consider how we take forward the many issues raised in the responses. One of which was public transport and this past year has seen the Town Council work with WATAG and BLAP representatives to look at the options for community bus services in the area.

We also consulted on play areas including the skate park. We have set aside funds to improve these areas and to support the community bus project. We will also continue to invest in renewable energy projects.

As I mentioned at the start of my report, this past year has seen a lot of work in preparing for new unitary councils in Dorset. This includes looking at the future of West Dorset District Council services, that it has identified may no longer be funded. The services so far identified are tourism (which we already do), public toilets, discretionary grants, economic development and possibly funding for town centre street cleansing. We have been meeting regularly with the District Council, as part of a Programme Board with other town councils, seeking to agree a package that will enable these services to be transferred to the Town Council, alongside the transfer of assets to provide a regular income stream to support the services. We need to be aware though that it is possible, if we cannot agree a package, that these services could be lost, so this continues to be the key priority for the Town Council. Our track record shows that we can deliver projects and more services in the town but to do so we need additional funding. We look forward to reaching agreement with the District Council on this later this year.

As always, I am grateful for the support of the Council and the hard work of all of our staff and also, as my report has shown, for the support and dedication of our many community volunteers.

Thank you

Sarah Williams
Leader of the Council
2017/18