

Annual Report

2023–2024



**CHIPPENHAM
TOWN COUNCIL**
Improving the quality of town life

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Mark Smith
Chief Executive

Thank you for taking the time to read this Annual Report, I hope that it will provide a flavour of the Council and the key events and achievements of the Town Council during 2023/2024.

Can I also recommend you take a look at the Town Council's website (www.chippenham.gov.uk), it contains much information on the Council's decision making, services, facilities and events which are provided for the residents of Chippenham and the local community.

'We have made tremendous progress on our commitment to becoming a net carbon zero organisation by 2030.'

With the introduction of a Climate and Biodiversity Officer to the officer team, we have made tremendous progress on our commitment to becoming a net carbon zero organisation by 2030.

One of the highlights in the past year has been the future proofing works at Stanley Park Sports Ground to install Air Source Heat Pumps, Solar Panels and a vehicle wash down pad which recycles the water.

We are currently halfway through the delivery of the Corporate Strategic Plan 2022-2026, I am delighted to say we are making excellent progress in achieving our objectives. Many of these successes rely on working collaboratively with local community groups and organisations. This work is vital and I have no doubt will continue into the future.

I continue to be immensely proud of the officer team that I have now led for the last seven years, we consistently invest in the training and development of our staff as we consider them to be our single greatest asset. We have a one team ethos and work well with our hard working and committed councillors and a range of partners and stakeholders across the town.

Mayor's Report

Over the past year it has been an honour to represent the town in my capacity as Mayor of Chippenham. I have had the pleasure of meeting many residents while carrying out my duties.

Through the many engagements I have attended I have been able to visit various local community events, organisations and individuals, witnessing the excellent work and undertakings of volunteers and paid staff to ensure that Chippenham is a welcoming, safe and vibrant community. In addition to visiting local groups in my ceremonial role, I have led the Town on various civic occasions. From raising the Pride Progress flag in support of the town's first Pride festival to leading the town in the annual Remembrance commemorations. On each occasion I found the residents of Chippenham fully supportive and engaged.

Over the course of the year I have supported Doorway, a local charity who assist those people who are homeless or at the risk of being made homeless. I would like to thank all of you who have supported my fundraising efforts throughout the year.

Finally, I would like to thank all my fellow Town Councillors and Town Council staff for their continued dedication and hard work. The positive contribution and impact on the Town and for all its residents can be seen across the Town not just this year but in the future too.

Councillor Declan Basely
Mayor of Chippenham



Leader's Report

It has been a busy, productive and interesting year for me as Leader of Chippenham Town Council, and I have many highlights. The Eco Future Fest was a one-day community festival to celebrate our natural world, share information about sustainable living and to create a positive, hopeful vision of a greener future. It was free to attend with activities, performances, talks, and workshops, which were all well received.

The Coronation of HM The King was a major event in the calendar last year, we screened the live ceremony in the Town Hall and celebrated with some wonderful live music in the Neeld afterwards.

I am also proud of Christmas lights switch on event and Christmas Fringe in Monkton Park, the greening of Stanley Park, the expansion of Chippenham Museum, the development of the Neeld Foyer and the 2nd phase of planting of trees in Monkton Park, more electric machinery and vehicles all aligning with our strategic plan in response to the declared climate and ecological emergency.

I agree with the Chief Executive, the achievements made in the progress into the Corporate Strategic Plan could not have been done so well without the excellent partnership working which is embedded into the work we do.

Special thanks must be given to the team of volunteers who give their time to support service delivery across CCTV, Chippenham Museum, the Neeld and Stanley Park Sports Ground.

Councillor Peter Cousins
Leader of Chippenham Town Council



Human Resources Committee

The HR Committee meet four times a year to discuss staff related matters including recruitment, retention, training, salary and personnel policies. The Committee also appoints three panels; a grievance and complaints panel a disciplinary panel and the Chief Executive's performance panel.

Regular updates are given on sickness absence, which remains lower than the national average and the training and development of our staff and Councillors. The Council benefits from the help of volunteers across our various services, including the Neeld, CCTV, Museum and Stanley Park sports ground. Our volunteers also receive training to support their important work.

We have had a busy year of recruitment, as reflected in our starters and leavers report which is presented every six months. I would like to welcome our new starters and thank all of our staff who have been working hard to cover vacancies while we looked for new people to join our teams.

Our HR policies are designed to provide guidance on how a wide range of topics should be handled within Chippenham Town Council, including the rights and responsibilities of employees. The full suite of policies are reviewed every three

years, but they are also regularly updated whenever necessary. This can be due to new legal requirements or recognising that there are more effective ways of doing things.

New legislation regarding the right to request flexible working, and carer's leave were introduced this year. The Council already had a flexible working policy in place which has been successful in many areas, allowing staff to adjust their working hours while still offering the same quality of service to the Chippenham community.

Another focus over the past year has been neurodiversity, introducing training and a new policy for managers to support any staff who are neurodivergent, so that we can provide a comfortable working environment for everyone and help our employees thrive.

We also look to provide benefits to staff beyond the statutory minimum requirements, such as our enhanced maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave policies that were agreed this year. These benefits help us to recruit and retain staff in a competitive job market.

Councillor Desna Allen
Chair of the Human
Resources Committee



Strategy and Resources Committee

The Strategy & Resources Committee meets six times a year and serves an important role in relation to the governance, risk management, strategic planning, financial and democratic processes of the Council.

Councillors review the Risk Management Strategy annually and recently adopted a policy on the use of artificial intelligence, to mitigate the risks this new technology presents.

The Finance Sub-Committee works to develop the annual budget and reports back to the S&R Committee, which considers the final draft budget and makes recommendations to full council on income and expenditure, capital expenditure and the level of precept for the next financial year. In this way, the Council continues to find a balance between continuing to provide the same levels of service, sustaining our infrastructure and facilities and keeping a general reserve to withstand the impact of unforeseen events.

The S&R Committee also oversees the Civic Matters Sub-Committee, which looks at any matters relating to the Mayor and the civic traditions of the town. This includes reviewing nominations for the annual civic awards, presented to individuals

or local groups in recognition of outstanding service to the community. This year's awards ceremony will take place in July.

In 2022 full council adopted a new Corporate Strategic Plan for 2022 – 2026. The S&R Committee receives quarterly updates on the Council's progress towards achieving the aims of the plan, which focuses on providing accessible and inclusive services to promote health and wellbeing, collaborating with partners in the future development of the town, helping to create a carbon neutral and environmentally sustainable future, maintaining and enhancing our green spaces, and providing a clean and safe environment.

The plan also includes promoting Chippenham as an attractive and vibrant town, celebrating its rich history, heritage and culture, as well as maintaining effective and efficient governance and management of resources.

Also reporting back to the S&R Committee is the Council Donations Sub-Committee, which hears from applicants applying for either a climate and ecological donation or a community donation to support their work in the Chippenham community.

This year, more work has been done towards addressing the climate emergency, including adopting a new climate strategy and action plan. This will be moved forward with the help of the newly formed net zero working party to focus on reducing the Council's carbon footprint, and community environmental forum to engage with residents around reducing carbon emissions, plastic and waste, and restoring biodiversity.

Parental leave policies that were agreed this year. These benefits help us to recruit and retain staff in a competitive job market.

Councillor Peter Cousins,
Chair of the 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 cost of living crisis is having on its residents and communities.

Each year the Town Council conducts a thorough, comprehensive budget setting process that is open to public scrutiny. This year's budget round has been especially challenging given the current levels of inflation and the consequent impact on the Council's running costs. Heads of service have sought to identify budget savings or to maintain budgets at current levels to achieve real-term savings, where possible, in order to mitigate the

overall impact of the cost increases. This year's Income and Expenditure budget for 2024/25 of £4.8 million was agreed by Full Council in January 2024 with £4.1 million coming from local residents via the precept (the Town Council element of the council tax). The Council does not receive any external financial support either directly from Government or via Wiltshire Council.

The two large capital projects in last year's budget, namely environmental energy efficiency improvements to the Stanley Park building including solar panels and air source heat pumps and the new vehicle depot now situated on site, and the upgrade to the Neeld to create a new entrance, bar and kitchen facilities, have now been completed. Work on another significant project in this year's capital budget was to install an additional 3G pitch at Stanley Park which is now ongoing.

The Council continues to maintain the award-winning John Coles Park and make improvements to Monkton Park, and is responsible for litter collection, grass cutting and road sweeping across the town. It also operates the cemetery

at London Road, the town's excellent Museum and sports pitches at Stanley Park, and provides an impressive range of events and shows that take place at the Neeld. This range of facilities and services is quite rare for a Town Council. In addition, the Council organises an important range of civic events, including remembrance Sunday and Commonwealth Day, and community events such as the Christmas lights switch on, and a celebratory summer 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.

Gillian Ballinger,
Head of Finance,
Responsible Finance Officer



Planning, Environment and Transport Committee

It has been my first year as Chair of the Planning, Environment and Transport (PET) Committee. The Committee meets every three weeks to provide consultation responses on all planning applications in Chippenham to the Local Planning Authority. Policies in the Draft Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan are now being referenced in many of those consultation responses in the run up to the Plan referendum.

Getting the Neighbourhood Plan to this stage has been a major achievement and is, I believe, a best practice example of the Town Council working in partnership with the local community throughout. I look forward to the Neighbourhood Plan being adopted and its planning policies being used by both the PET Committee and the Local Planning Authority for the benefit of our communities.

It is an exciting time ahead for Chippenham town centre, with major transformation envisaged in the coming years at Emery Gate and through the Chippenham Avon Project. As the town centre transitions from a shopping centre to a mixed-use destination, the PET Committee have commented on a number of town centre residential apartment applications including at Nos.

1 Market Place (formerly Burtons), 56/57 Market Place and the Bear Hotel. The Committee have repeatedly raised the issue of adequate bin storage provision for new residential dwellings in the town centre, and considered living conditions (such as room sizes) and reduced parking requirements where residents would be able to benefit from active travel. Other proposals which have led to significant debate and/or 'call-in' requests to the Northern Area Planning Committee of Wiltshire Council include Langley Park and land south of Stanley Lane.

Against a backdrop of significant changes to the planning system this year (revised National Planning Policy Framework, Biodiversity Net Gain regime etc.) the PET Committee have pushed hard for improvements to be made to residential schemes to incorporate low carbon and wildlife friendly features in building design and for adequate cycle infrastructure to be provided. Examples include major residential schemes on land east of Showell Farm and at land south of Stanley Lane, to which the Committee objected due to it being outside the settlement boundary.

I am pleased that with the appointment of a new Tree Officer, the Committee

regains that valuable technical advice to add to our consultation responses on tree applications.

The PET Committee has responded to some important consultations this year. Most notable was the response to the Regulation 19 consultation of the Wiltshire Local Plan Review. The response was supportive of many of the local plan review's forward-thinking policies on sustainable construction and low carbon energy and biodiversity, while raising concerns regarding the lack of references to climate change, the over-estimation of Wiltshire's housing need and insufficient emphasis on ensuring that new developments provide new or enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes. Other consultations responded to included Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities, the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), the A350 dualling and the Wiltshire design guide.

The PET Committee has received an increasing number of highways

improvement requests this year. These are submitted by Chippenham residents, considered by the PET committee and forwarded for determination by Wiltshire Council's Local Highway and Footway Improvement Group (LHFIG). In 2023/24, the Committee spent or committed a total of nearly £13,000 in financial contributions towards highways improvement schemes that improved cycle and pedestrian access in the town. However, there is a backlog of schemes and opportunities to at least partly solve this are being explored.

My thanks are due to the officers who support the PET committee and to my fellow councillors for their thoughtful and constructive contributions.

Councillor Clare Cape

Chair of the Planning, Environment and Transport Committee



Amenities, Culture and Leisure Committee

The Amenities, Culture and Leisure (ACL) Committee continues to oversee and deliver a diverse range of services across Chippenham, improving the quality of town life for present and future generations. The committee held its first meeting of the municipal year on 12th July 2023. This year's highlights include:

- The installation of a water refill station within the High Street. This project was conducted in partnership with Wessex Water and will reduce the need for single use plastics.
- The installation of two chess benches within John Coles Park – facilitating a peaceful playing space within a beautiful setting.
- The investment of the future high street fund allocation towards further bus shelter reglazing within the town centre, additional hanging basket infrastructure at New Road and a renewed Christmas light offer.
- A proposal to support the refurbishment of the Borough Parade toilet facility. This work would see the Town Council take on management responsibility from Wiltshire Council and include a £100,000 investment into the complete refurbishment of this town centre facility.

- Approval for capital funding towards the recarpeting of the existing 3G all weather pitch (AWP) at Stanley Park. These essential works will help deliver a safe playing surface, and will take place alongside the delivery of a new 3G AWP – a further project delivered in partnership with the Football Foundation. Once delivered Stanley Park will become the only dual 3G AWP site in Wiltshire
- The formation of a working party to review and improve the Councils grass cutting strategy. The group provided some very useful feedback and the new strategy, renamed the 'Open Space Management Strategy', has been finalised and is pending approval. Key improvements relate to the communication of the strategy, and includes interactive mapping of the Councils wildlife areas.
- Agreement to carry out essential conservation repair to the Towns war memorial, including the addition of new plaques to remember Chippenham's civilians and animals lost to war.
- The provision of vibrant events across the town including the popular John Coles Park centenary and Festival of Christmas.

I am proud of what we have achieved this year and pleased to see a range of new projects in progress. I would like to thank members of the committee for their valuable input, as well as the Council's officers for their professionalism and flexibility in delivering such excellent services for the Chippenham community.

Councillor Declan Baseley
Chair, Amenities, Culture
and Leisure Committee





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