



HIGHWORTH TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Report 2021-2022



Mayor/Chairman's Report

Dear Colleagues

During the last year as Chair of the Council I have continued to learn about how the Council operates and to grow as a person.

With COVID restrictions being relaxed, looking forward to a better year ahead I was able to represent Highworth and the surrounding area.

I visited Mary Tipping to wish her a Happy 100th Birthday. I was asked by the Highworth Lions to present a thank you gift to a fund raiser who raised over £400.00 during their 50th year and I attended RAF Fairford Civic Leaders' Tour.

Sadly, I was asked to bid a farewell to Mary Tipping as the Town Crier just two months after her birthday. The Civic Service was held in St Michael's Church Yard and a tree was dedicated to all those affected by COVID. I have attended Civic Services at Chippenham, Royal Wootton Bassett and Faringdon. The Brownies came to the Council Offices and experienced how a Council Meeting works by taking part in a special one just for them and they came up with interesting ideas.

It was again my privilege to lay the wreath on behalf of the Town Council at the Remembrance Service. I attended a Memorial Service for Councillor Brian Mattock, with the help of the office I organized the Christmas Light Switch On but was called away last minute, so the Deputy Mayor stood in for me. I had a tour of the new Redlands development, attended the High Sheriff of Wiltshire's Charity Concert and I will be attending the RAF International Air Tattoo briefing.

I continued my support of the Skate Park as my chosen good cause with a Christmas raffle, more mulled wine and mince pies for donations on Saturdays before Christmas, another Easter raffle to raise funds, this along with donations from some kind people has raised £9,304.00 over the last two years for the Skate Park. I am pleased to say the Skate Park was built before Christmas and has been well used ever since

Thank you to all who supported the few events I was able to hold and gave so generously.



Richard Williams
Cllr Mayor of Highworth

Chairman's Annual Report

Chairman of Planning: Councillor (Miss) Julie Murphy



Dear colleagues

It has been a challenging year in Planning, all our Councillor's particularly the Planning Committee have been very busy responding to an important Consultation and some large Planning Applications.

Highworth Town Council's (HTC) response to the Swindon Borough Council's (SBC) Emerging Local Plan was very time consuming, the document included housing sites on Roundhills Mead, Lechlade Road, Shrivenham Road and the Old Golf Course with the addition of 866 houses. The Old Golf Course site sparked fierce opposition and at a packed HTC Meeting residents demonstrated their strong views

Councillors have also had to consult on some large Planning Applications along Shrivenham Road which were not in the Local Plan, and in conjunction with an increase in the number of standard applications, for example house extensions it has made this year extremely busy.

Reflecting on the last year there have been some positive outcomes, for example The Emerging 'Local Plan' Public Consultation To explain briefly what this is about, the Local Plan document is part of the Development Plan. The development plan consists of 3 documents.

1. The most up to date adopted Local Plan.
2. An up-to-date Neighbourhood Plan
3. The National Planning Policy Framework

These three documents help to shape development in the future and carry weight in favour of approval at site level. Every 5 years SBC should review their Local Plan and consult with residents and key consultees like HTC before it is sent to the Inspector where the SBC hope it will be adopted. The Emerging Local Plan has gone through several stages of evidence gathering and consultation and was due to go to the last consultation last year with a decision planned for the Plan to be adopted this year.

In July of last year after monitoring the SBC website it came to my attention that SBC had published what would have been the last public consultation of their draft Emerging Plan before it went to the Inspector. It came as a shock that they had included a new site, the Old Golf Course for 350 houses. Following this SBC arranged two public consultations with residents at Warneford School. Highworth Town Councillor's including myself attended both events to ask questions in order for us to formulate a response.

It was agreed at Full Council that I would pull HTC's response together following feedback from Councillor's.

In order to respond it was necessary to read a ream of documents, 58 documents to be precise in conjunction with the draft Plan which was also hundreds of pages long. After two long weeks I read through every document which made for interesting reading, this identified the draft Plan was neither sound, legal or lacked evidence to show duty to co-operate had been met.

These are the three tests for a Local Plan to be compliant which the Inspector will be checking for. HTC's response was agreed on the 7 September 2021 and was sent to SBC before the deadline.

The Mayor, a couple of Councillors and myself attended SBC's Full Council in December last year to hear the draft Plan be debated. Both the Mayor and I spoke at the meeting to urge Borough Councillors to make changes to the Plan before it was agreed to be submitted to the Inspector, based on strong planning evidence. Swindon Borough Councillors voted for the Plan to go to Cabinet in January of this year where a decision would be made.

A week before the Cabinet meeting HTC met with the Leader of SBC and the Cabinet member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport and Planning to question them on the draft Emerging Plan, particularly the Old Golf Course site. I think the members of Public who were present will agree SBC were challenged as we demonstrated that the Plan had not met the three tests.

On the 21 January 2022 at SBC Cabinet Meeting, I had the opportunity to speak once more. When it came to the vote almost every Member of Cabinet voted to remove the Old Golf Course from the current Emerging Local Plan. The Cabinet Member for Planning explained to the Public that the Plan would be amended and then be put out for re-consultation after changes were made. It is looking likely the public re-consultation will take place in December of this year at the earliest. We will watch this space for the release of the updated draft Plan and prepare ourselves for another long read in order to prepare a response.

We will notify residents when we are aware of this and encourage everyone to respond, regardless of previous comments they may have made. It is imperative that you send in your comments again so when the final version of the new Local Plan is reviewed by the Inspector your comments are easily accessible.

Although HTC is pleased the Old Golf Course has been removed from the Plan it is far from over. SBC have confirmed they have not decided on the future use of the land which could still be built on and they will come back to us later in the year.

This has not deterred us in trying to make progress in the meantime, so a workshop has been set up by the Neighbourhood Plan Committee to be held on the 21 May to capture as much feedback from residents on this site, along with all other open spaces to include as evidence in our updated Neighbourhood Plan.

HTC have also set up a Working Group which includes Councillors and members of the 'Action Group for Save the Old Golf Course' to try to work with SBC to ensure the future of the Old Golf Course is preserved for residents in the future. We have also requested to meet with our Borough Councillors and MP to discuss the site and are awaiting a date.

Large Planning Applications

Disappointingly the Gladman application of 250 houses on Shrivenham Road was approved by SBC in September of last year after a battle with SBC on highway safety and capacity grounds. This then opened the floodgates for them to approve another 60 houses on the opposite side of the road using the approval of the Gladman site as the reason for their decision. However, following this an application for 33 houses at Wrag Barn was refused. Although HTC sent in valid planning reasons for refusal for all 3 applications and I represented the HTC at Planning Committee where 2 of the 3 were approved, it is important for HTC to represent the views of our residents and we will continue to do so, however frustrating the outcome is at times.

HTC is not against development in the right place if it is not detrimental to the Town. We try to cover all outcomes as we are not the decision maker, on this basis have without prejudice successfully secured financial contributions for the benefit of residents when applications have been approved.

In conclusion we have had some disappointing outcomes this year, but some big successes too and we will continue to bang the drum for Highworth residents to be heard to ensure our beautiful Town is safe guarded for the future.

Thank you to residents, Councillors and office staff in supporting the Committee with all your feedback over the year. I hope to be able continue to represent HTC on the Planning Committee in the forth coming year.

Thank you.



Julie Murphy
Councillor/Chairman of Planning

Chairman's Annual Report

Chairman of Environment & Leisure: Councillor Ken Saunders



Dear colleagues

Firstly, I appreciate I am Chair of the Environment & Leisure Committee but we are a Committee of 9 Councillors. The credit for our successes belong to each and every member of this Committee.

COVID made the first part of the year very difficult. Thankfully the relaxation of restrictions has meant that we as a Council have been able to meet face to face and this has helped us to discuss and operate more effectively.

Grounds staff

I would like to thank the Ground Staff for all the effort and good work they have put in during the last year. They have continued to deliver a high level of service. Changes within the team have taken place. Liam Coombley has taken on the role of Grounds Manager and despite several staffing changes has successfully rebuilt the team into an efficient cohesive workforce, for which he is to be congratulated.

Successes

There were some notable successes. Among them were:

The Annual Firework Display, which had the largest recorded attendance and I believe for the first time made a profit. Our thanks go to Councillor (Mrs) L Vardy for leading on this event.

The switching on of the Christmas Lights was moved from the Friday Night to an all day Saturday event that was exceptionally well attended and my thanks go to all those Councillors who stepped up to help on the day.

The May Day celebrations were once again a huge success, with the High Street and the Market Place packed with people all day.

Our thanks and congratulations go to the May Day committee who organised the event.

After 12 years of putting on wonderful events, Sandra Rendall and a number of the May Day Committee are retiring and are looking for new committee members to continue with the organisation of this much loved and well attended event.

Cycling

Whilst a number of cycle racks have been installed at strategic points around the town and the number of residents regularly cycling has dramatically increased.

We are unfortunately, no further forward, in getting SBC to install a much needed and vital cycle link between Highworth and Swindon.

Skate Park

The Skate Park Project came to fruition in December with its official opening.

Since then, the high use of the Park, not only by locals but from visitors all over the South West is testimony, to and justification for, all the hard work put in to this project.

On behalf of the Town, I would like to thank the Skate Park Group and the Town Council staff for all of their hard work and the Town Councillors for the support they have given to this project.

It was a long time coming, but between them they have overcome numerous obstacles and in doing so demonstrated the strength of Highworth's community spirit.

Play Areas

Inspections revealed the need for a number of essential safety works to some of the items of play equipment was required. These works have been carried out successfully. Community engagement is well under way to establish the need for more inclusive equipment and to understand what upgrading and development of existing equipment is required. Funding streams are being investigated.

Travellers on the Lower REC

During the summer a large number of travellers moved onto the Lower Recreation field and stayed for several days before being moved on by the Police. This caused a great deal of local concern.

Our thanks go to both the Grounds Team and the Office Staff who were on hand from the start and their actions helped control the situation.

The Office staff are in continued negotiation with SBC over future preventative security measures.

Allotments

The demand for allotments continued with 40 applicants on the waiting list. 18 allotments were relinquished this year and 17 of these plots were taken up by people on the waiting list.

The Grounds Team need to carry out some remedial clearance work before the 18th plot can be released.

Inspections of all the allotments have been carried out and contact made with those holders who were in danger of breaching their terms and conditions.

A further inspection will take place in the next few weeks and action will be taken where appropriate.

Environment

A further 10,000 Trees have been planted in Pentylands Country Park this spring, no further large-scale planting is currently planned.

The Old Golf Course

Following a successful campaign by members of Save The Golf Course Group, The Old Golf Course was taken out of the Local Plan.

It was agreed that our Borough Councillors together with our MP will work with the HTC and the Action Group to find a viable solution to the future of the Old Golf Course.

IN CONCLUSION

Last year I said:

“Highworth has a huge range of talent, knowledge and expertise. If the Council and residents can work together, there is no limit to what can be achieved. I look forward to seeing what the next year will bring.”

I have not been disappointed, Highworth has a wonderful community spirit, residents are prepared to fight for what they believe is right and they have proved that if they are prepared to get together and speak out, they will be listened to.

My thanks go to the Committee, and the both the Office and Ground Staff for all the work they have put in over the past year, we could not have achieved all we have without you.



Ken Saunders
Councillor/Chairman of Environment & Leisure

Chairman's Annual Report

Chairman of General Purpose & Finance: Councillor Keith Smith



Dear colleagues

This year has been the beginning of a new era in the life of HTC. With the appointment of a new fully qualified Town Clerk at the end of March change was bound to happen - and so it did.

A whole new fully integrated finance package was developed between April and September. An Assistant Clerk was appointed in June and two new part time administrative staff were in post by Christmas.

The early main aim was to ensure that everything the Council undertakes should be 'open' and 'transparent.' To help achieve this the Council website was totally revised, and a Facebook page set up together with Instagram and Twitter, giving residents access to much more information.

How has the Finance and General Purposes Committee contributed to the change?

June

It was agreed to join the Association of British Markets. This will help the Council to review its procedures for the Saturday Charter Market. A number of important policies were reviewed ready for re-adoption including Model Standing Orders. This ensured the Council was able to function in an orderly fashion and according to statute.

July

We celebrated the inaugural meeting of the new F&GP Committee which now consists of no more than 9 Councillors. Among other decisions taken it was agreed to support Visit Highworth Limited for another year and to continue to subscribe to Visit Wiltshire, an important website that ensures Highworth can spread its message far and wide.

September

Work continues apace on bringing the Charter Market management up to date. Councillors reviewed the general Financial Reserves and agreed that they were too low, asking the Town Clerk to increase them to a median level as soon as possible.

October

Work began in earnest on the Precept for 2022/2023. Among other requirements considered to take to Full Council were communications costs; Local Council Award Scheme; Parking Attendant and a Loneliness Strategy. The Wifi system in the Council Offices was unfit for purpose and the Town Clerk was seeking to update it, this has now been completed.

November

With the new finance package almost in full operation F&GP Committee can now approve payments prior to being paid, rather than post-payment. It was agreed to look at upgrading the CCTV system in the Town.

Councillors recommended the draft Precept be presented to Full Council.

January

The Charter Market continues to thrive and the Office Team now have a viable system for booking casual enquiries.

February

The main area of discussion was Cil/S106 expenditure. Councillors will now review projects to ensure that the funds are spent in a timely, efficient and productive way.

March

Coming up to year end Councillors recommended the new Reserves Policy be put to Full Council. As there is no real system for making grants, Councillors agreed to research a viable system for future requests. There were discussions about the maintenance of St Michael's Churchyard, once it is definitively established that it is a closed churchyard, it was agreed to investigate how this should be funded in the future, as currently there is no entry in the Precept to cover this.

I commend my report.



Keith Smith
Councillor/Chairman of Purpose & Finance

Chairman's Annual Report

*Chairman of Neighbourhood Plan Committee:
Councillor (Miss) Julie Murphy*



This year the pace of updating the Neighbourhood Plan has really ramped up with the lifting of COVID restrictions. This key document, one of three is part of the Swindon Borough Council(SBC) Development Plan. SBC have to apply weight to its content in their decision making. It benefits the Town in many ways, some examples are: -

- Provides a clear vision of the Highworth Area now and in the future
- The Vision then enables a strategic focus for HTC
- Identifies how residents would like to see development look
- Identifies necessary infrastructure to support the growth of the town if it comes forward in the Local Plan
- Identifies areas of the town that residents consider an asset and assists in preserving them
- Enables HTC to secure funding from development to deliver projects that residents want to see

Timeline

This project has deliberately run alongside the consultation of the Emerging Local Plan, which enables us to understand the outcome of the Inspectors report regarding housing allocation so that we can incorporate this into our Neighbourhood Plan to be compliant. It was originally planned for this main modification to our Neighbourhood Plan to go to referendum in May of next year when the elections take place, but due to the Emerging Local Plan being delayed it is likely our project timetable will need to be tweaked, however we still aim to get our Plan as up to date as soon as possible so that it carries the maximum weight in planning decisions.

Tasks achieved

Since I last reported to you the Neighbourhood Plan Committee have run 4 workshops for residents to gain feedback on the following:-

Workshop 1- Living in Highworth Area

Types of housing needed

What do we expect new homes to include to support climate change

Of the sites in the Emerging Local Plan for housing how would you rank them

Workshop 2- Getting Around Highworth

Modes of transport used and where improvements can be made

Asking for feedback on a proposed dedicated walking/cycling ring road around Highworth

How to improve the town to promote shopping

Workshop 3- Community of Highworth

Feedback on the value of facilities and where improvements could benefit
How the loss of a facility has affected residents
Views on extending the cctv and, if so, where?

Workshop 4- Town Centre

To gain views on a proposed vision for the High Street and Swindon Street
To run a competition of how Gilberts Lane could be improved
To understand the value of the Market and if residents want to see it expanded

We also held a Focus Group for the Ramblers and Photographers who were invited to come and plot points on a map to identify views in and out of the Town that they felt were valued landscapes. We will be holding a residents Workshop too for their feedback. This will be valuable evidence to endeavour to safeguard the Town from urban sprawl. Valued landscapes are acknowledged within the National Planning Policy Framework so this will help to safeguard our open spaces and identity of Highworth.

Recently we invited town centre businesses to a drop-in session to receive some of the feedback from residents regarding the Town Centre Workshop and enable them to comment too.

There has been a vast amount of work completed in the last 12 months and the results will be shared with you once all our forms of engagement have closed.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone that attended the workshops and focus groups, we are very grateful for your important feedback. Also, to Councillors for supporting this project. A very big thank you to our Neighbourhood Plan Committee who have worked really hard all year and our Town Clerk and her team who have been fantastic. Also, thanks to the residents that have contributed to tasks, particularly in setting up our workshops and helping to facilitate them, thank you all.

Please continue to look out for further news in the Link, on posters and on social media for future events and we look forward to seeing you all in the near future.

Good news

I would like to share some good news, that we have just had a grant approved for us to continue this very important work. This means we are able to fund a consultant to write the policies for our Plan and the engagement of professional services where necessary without impacting on the Precept.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to finish by saying how much I have enjoyed working with you all on this project, particularly engaging with the public and working closely with the Neighbourhood Plan Committee and look forward to another productive year which will ultimately, produce a robust, easy to use document that will be fit for purpose and make the Vision that residents want to see become a reality.

Thank you.



Julie Murphy
Councillor/Chairman of Planning

Chairman's Annual Report

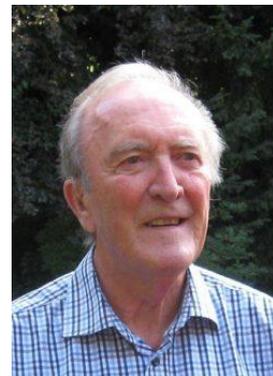
*Chairman of Sustainable Highworth Working Group:
Councillor Nick Gardiner*

No report due to illness



Swindon Borough Councillor's Reports

Councillor Alan Bishop



Although I am old, I am very glad to be here, better than 6ft under or in a box on the mantelpiece.

As a Swindon Borough Councillor it has been a very busy and challenging year. COVID has definitely increased residents' difficulties. Locally, I have dealt with many social housing issues. Flooding, blocked drains, electrical faults, doors falling off and locks not working, overhanging trees, dangerous dog issue and as is usual, streetlights not working, mainly due to changing to LED bulbs. Response from SBC is sometimes slow. I was particularly pleased that by persistence, we managed to get the extension on the cottage at Hampton granted. It is sometimes very difficult to resolve a problem, so to receive a phone call and thank you cards as we did is very satisfying.

It is sometimes very difficult to resolve a problem so to receive a phone call and thank you cards as we did then is very satisfying.

Of course, the big issues are always present, planning matters loom large and I will always fight for Highworth to oppose very strongly further development. I think that if you look at new development in the surrounding area Blunsdon, Fairford, Faringdon and Shrivenham, we are doing quite well and long may it continue.

Traffic is an ongoing problem. From Speed Watch it is obvious the traffic through Highworth and surrounding villages is moving too fast. Swindon Street may solve its problem when the new design comes into play. Until then, I feel the only way we can slow the traffic is by illuminated signs and prosecutions. Large lorries along Shrivenham Road could be reported to their owners, narrow B class roads were not built to take them.

I enjoy my work as a Councillor and helping the people of Highworth gives me a lot of satisfaction.

Swindon Borough Councillor's Reports

Councillor Steve Weisinger



During the last municipal year I have worked hard as a Borough Councillor representing residents in all parts of the ward.

I am on the following committees at SBC

- Audit Committee (Chair)
- Scrutiny Committee (Vice Chair)
- Full Council
- Growing the Economy Committee
- Standards Committee

I have attended SBC Planning Meetings on behalf of HTC and residents in the ward, speaking in favour and against numerous planning applications.

At the SBC Meeting held on 20th January this year I proposed the amendment to the SBC Local Plan supported by Councillor Manro and Councillor Bishop to have LA34 withdrawn

which was the proposed development of 350 houses on Highworth Golf Course. This proposal was successful.

School Safety Environment Zones (SSEZ) outside Westrop & Eastrop schools are now in place.

Discussions with Highways officers on issues within numerous parts the ward. Spent time with Community Speed Watch team which I fully support. Dealt with several issues for local residents - some still ongoing. Re-started Councillors' surgery now COVID restrictions have been lifted.

Swindon Borough Councillor's Reports

Councillor V J Manro

(Not present report sent prior to the meeting)



Over the previous month:

I attended two meetings of Wiltshire Pension Board; The main issue was the investment policy. Carbon Neutral. I attended SBC Planning Meeting, no issues for Highworth.

Attended the Police and Crime Board meeting. Local presence of police officers.

Resolved the road closure in Hannington for Thames Water and the closure was reduced from four weeks to two weeks. Timing of works was always changed to suit residents and Hannington Parish Council.

Extra two disabled bays in Newburgh Car Park have been installed. The residents are still parking on double yellow lines / no stopping order, residents should be aware that the parking enforcement will issue parking penalty instantly. I met the PCSO and stressed that more visits should be made to Highworth.

Sevenhampton residents meeting, request to introduce more speed reduction features and change speed limit in the village.

Verge reinstalment on Cricklade Road by Open Reach which does not comply with specification. The contractor to contact the resident to resolve.

Number of potholes reported some have been repaired others have been marked to be repaired.

Attended the latest incident at Freke Arms junction and again requested SBC to consider speed limit. The issue is how do we deal with driver errors.

All I can state is we SBC Councillors worked hard sorting out residents' problems. The main issue was to remove Old Golf Course Development from the Local Plan. My view is still that the group should fund raise to buy the land from SBC.

