



# HIGHWORTH TOWN COUNCIL

# Annual Report

2022 - 2023



## ***Mayor/Chairman's Report***

Dear Colleagues

This Council year has been particularly busy, not only with the usual administration of council, but due to some challenging situations and exciting opportunities. Firstly, probably the most challenging being the protection of the Old Golf Course (OGC). Although we are not in a position to report it has been secured, we have been working jointly with a few members of the Action Group to deliver a comprehensive, evidenced based expression of wish to Swindon Borough Council (SBC) to secure a very long lease on the site to maintain it as open space. As a Council we have run workshops and surveys which clearly demonstrates that residents want it kept as open recreational space for everyone's use, an accessible space for all.



Following the last public consultation run by Highworth Town Council (HTC), where a draft plan was presented showing the proposed site layout, we can confirm it has been wholly supported by the public and we are now pulling together all the evidence to present it to SBC, everyone will be kept up to date as we know more.

As everyone will know we have had to put measures in place at the Lower Rec to make the site more secure, we do hope this will protect the site in the future.

This year has been special as we were able to come together as a community to celebrate the late Queen's Jubilee. The Town Clerk and her team worked tirelessly to deliver 3 days of events. Well done to them, all the councillors and volunteers who made this happen, and most importantly we hope all the residents enjoyed it as much as we did.

Following the sad news of our late Queen passing, we delivered a Proclamation Service. Unfortunately, as we had little time to prepare, we were unable to publicise the event as much as we would have liked, however, we hope those that did attend had the opportunity to be part of such an historic event.

This year we hosted the May Day celebrations for the first time after the previous committee headed up by Sandra Rendell decided to step down. Thank you again to all the volunteers who have delivered this wonderful tradition for many years, we hope that everyone that attended enjoyed it and we look forward to next year's event.

Just to mention some positive news, this year has seen the progress of a 3G artificial pitch, and we hope to be in a position to go out to the public sometime this year. Also, the Council has achieved Quality status as part of the Local Council Award Scheme. Well done to the Town Clerk and her team.

In respect of my role as Mayor, as mentioned previously it has been a time of both celebration with the Jubilee and Coronation, and sadness on the passing of our late Queen. I have had a once in a lifetime opportunity to light the beacon, which I will remember forever and to read the Proclamation, which I felt was a huge sense of responsibility, but an honour to deliver.

I have enjoyed attending over 50 functions as Mayor, both within the town and at civic functions, like Fairford United States Airforce (USAF) and at the Malmesbury Mayor Making. To name a few duties I have attended, I had the honour of opening the Skate Park, which so many people

had worked hard for many years to make happen. I was honoured to lay a wreath at the Remembrance service, represent Highworth at Lydiard Park field of Remembrance, re-opened the Lions charity shop, presented trophies at the senior Football Club, represented Highworth at the Royal International Air Tattoo, presented trophies at the Produce Show, attended the Links 50th Anniversary and helped to sort the magazines for distribution. Opened the Cabin and Cowshed in the High Street, new sensory space and family unit at Eastrop nursery and attended many groups like the Forget me Not Cafe, Scouts, Lions, Artists Society, Twinning and Choral Society. Attended businesses like Aldi, Budgens and Costa Coffee, presented a prize at Warneford School for the Jubilee painting competition, visited Grove Hill and Newburgh nursing homes, and kicked off the Deputy Lieutenant Shirley Ludfords charity swim at the rec to raise money to support youth at Swindon Capital Radio. To see a full list of events, go to the Mayor's page of the HTC website.

I have met some amazing people this year, particularly all the volunteers who do so much for others.

Event wise, I enjoyed hosting the Jubilee celebrations, Christmas Light switch on and May Day. We are very lucky to have so many talented individuals in the community willing to donate their time to entertain us.

I really enjoyed holding the Civic Service with the help of Alison who stood in to take the service as we have no permanent vicar. I was delighted it was really well attended, not only by residents but local groups, two Deputy Lieutenants and Mayor's from surrounding towns, including some as far afield as Salisbury and Malmesbury. We enjoyed lovely refreshments after in the Community Room and again I want to thank Gerry, Maggie, and Eva for making the fantastic cakes.

My Mayor's Charity Event at Wrag Barn was a great success raising lots of money and there were lots of laughs throughout the night. I think they deliberately set off the fire alarm at the end of the night in fear of us never going home!

I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of local businesses, groups, individuals, and councillors who have helped me raise money for the Prospect Hospice this year. There are so many people I would like to thank again for making it possible, whether it was helping with events, donating prizes, providing equipment, making cakes, businesses making donations, people attending functions or popping money in the Prospect tub, the list is endless. You know who you are, thanks from the bottom of my heart.

I do also want to mention the administration and practical support I have received from Deanne, Claire, Carol, Tracy, Liam and his team; it has been second to none. I have been honoured to stand as Mayor and will treasure it for the rest of my life. I am pleased to confirm as of today in the last year I have raised £10,096.30.

As this is the last meeting of the old Council, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to those councillors who will no longer be working with us going forward, I sincerely wish you all the best in the future and thank you for all your hard work over the years. Also thank you to the councillors that have also supported me as Mayor.

It has been a pleasure to represent our lovely town.



**Julie Murphy**  
Cllr Mayor of Highworth

## ***Chairman's Annual Report***

*Chairman of Planning: Councillor (Ms) Julie Murphy*



Dear colleagues

Firstly, I would like to thank the Planning Committee for your contribution this year. It has been busy, and I appreciate the preparation for meetings is time consuming. I am pleased that there has been good debate to determine our comments to SBC as a statutory consultee.

This year has been unusual in that I have had to attend two hearings to present our views as a Council. The Wrag Barn application for 33 houses on Shrivenham Road where, the Inspector refused planning permission, aligning with our comments and the Barns conjoined appeal that has currently been adjourned due to the applicant having COVID. I can confirm I did have the opportunity to present a document to the Inspector for his deliberations. The hearing is due to reconvene in August.

As well as the usual homeowner applications for extensions and quite a few one-off dwelling applications in small pockets of land, as a committee we commented on the Honda redevelopment, consisting of a large warehousing distribution site. Although we did not object to the site enabling the creation of thousands of jobs, we did pass on our comments about the site being more environmentally sustainable and noted our concerns of large vehicles cutting through Highworth. We also requested developer contributions towards a cycle path protected for Highworth. I can now report the site was approved at the Swindon Planning Committee recently and I am pleased to advise that they have included some sustainable elements like solar panels and heat source pumps. It is extremely disappointing that SBC did not secure any S106 legal financial contributions to a cycling network to link the site to Highworth though.

In January of this year the Planning Committee was asked to comment on the reserved matters for the 250 houses known as the Gladman site on Shrivenham Road. The Planning Committee had real concerns about the design of the site which was more appropriate for a housing estate in Swindon. The comments of the urban design consultee of SBC have issues of design as we do, and we are awaiting the planning officer's decision. Consultees of this application seem to have many issues with the plans so the applicant will no doubt be working through these before coming back with a revised scheme.

In planning terms, the main decision at SBC that has an impact on our area is the decision for SBC to take their draft emerging Plan back to a regulation 18 stage, this means in layman terms the stage where they gain evidence of every housing site put forward for development, which they then use to support including it in the revised draft plan which then goes out to public consultation as a regulation 19. I understand the decision to go back to this stage was given by a legal planning consultant acting on behalf of the SBC as they had identified the old emerging draft Plan lacked evidence and was out of date. It is refreshing to know that this was the view of HTC and supports our comprehensive response to the draft emerging Local Plan. I would expect us to hear later this year at the earliest with a new draft Plan and we eagerly await which sites will be included. It is important to note that as a Council we will have to submit another response when it comes out and residents are also urged to submit their comments even if they replicate their response to the last one. This document is a key development document along with the Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework and will shape our town going forward.

As a Planning Committee I look forward to working with Councillors going forward to ensure we have a consistent, policy led approach to our comments and ensuring we secure as much S106 developer contributions to benefit Highworth going forward.

I have enjoyed my role as Chair of Planning and thank everyone, including the public for all your input.



**Julie Murphy**  
**Councillor/Chairman of Planning**

# ***Chairman's Annual Report***

*Chairman of Environment & Leisure: Councillor Ken Saunders*



Dear colleagues

Firstly, I would like to thank the Town Clerk and her assistants, together with the Grounds Manager and his team for all the effort and hard work they have put in. During the course of the year, they continue to deliver a high level of quality service and their efforts are appreciated.

This committee, along with the other committees is not only about the big things, it is also about the mundane everyday things, and behind the scenes activities, that deliver the services we need to function as a town.

Be that pigeon poo, litter bins, grass mowing, event planning and a thousand other issues the staff deal with on a day-to-day basis.

## Successes

### The Jubilee Weekend:

The celebrations over Friday 3rd, Saturday 4th & Sunday 5th of June weekend was a first test for our staff in putting on a series of major events. 3 totally different events over 3 days, which were extremely well attended. As chair of this committee, I congratulate our Town Clerk, and the staff for making it a success.

### Travellers 6th June:

I won't dwell on this everyone knows of their arrival. A great deal of behind-the-scenes hard work and pressure was put in by councillors and staff to have them moved on.

### Remedial action:

SBC's list of preventative measures did not materialise, our Grounds Manager offered pragmatic solutions, and HTC's offer to implement a number of measures, has hopefully, secured the Lower Rec from future incursions.

### Tourism:

Councillors met with representatives from USAF Fairford Airbase on Saturday 27th August 2022, the representatives were shown round the Market, completed a Town Tour and were shown through the Visitors' Centre. A buffet lunch in the Council Chambers was provided by the Market Traders and was well received by the visitors, although the Lardy Cake was treated with some suspicion!

An official letter of thanks has been received from the USAF Fairford Airbase.

### Skate Park:

The official opening event of the Skate Park took place on Saturday 6th August 2022. The event, specifically for skaters was well attended by skaters and public alike. It was fantastic to see so much local talent and visiting skaters from throughout the South West.

### Fireworks:

The annual Firework Display despite being a ticket only event had increased ticket sales. My thanks to Councillor (Mrs) L Vardy and the staff it was yet again an amazing success.

### Switching on of the Christmas Lights:

For the second year the switching on of the Christmas Lights became a Saturday all day event. The change of format has proved extremely popular and was exceptionally well attended.

### Environment:

A further 10,000 trees have been planted in Pentylands Park.

HTC has been working with the OGC Action Group to find a way forward with the Old Golf Course.

Meetings have been held with our MP Justin Tomlinson and SBC representatives.

HTC have run public surveys, and overwhelmingly, residents want the site retained.

HTC and the Action Group are well on the way to completing a strategic plan with advice from Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the National Trust.

It is hoped that in the forthcoming year we will have a resolution to the future of the OGC.

### Play Area Improvements:

HTC is in the process of putting together a strategic plan to deliver updated play areas within the town.

The play area at Northview is a priority as many pieces have been removed due to health and safety issues.

Some funds are available however, HTC is still awaiting monies to be transferred from S106 funds.

### Allotments:

The office has carried out several inspections of all allotments over 3 sites. Holders of neglected and unworked plots have been contacted and where necessary appropriate letters issued. 35 tenants surrendered their allotments, and offers were made to those on the waiting list. Briefly there were spare allotments, but now, there is again a waiting list.

2 additional allotment plots have been created by the Grounds Team at the Park Avenue site from what used to be a grassed area. These are being used by the Forget Me-Not Dementia Group, free of charge.

Monitoring of all allotment plots and visits are scheduled for April and September each year.

### In Conclusion:

Our Town Clerk has only been in post for 2 years but in that time has brought about massive change and there is more to come. Many of these changes may not be immediately noticeable but they are making huge differences.

I know I have said this in the past, but it still stands true, 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.

Last Friday the results of Thursdays Parish elections were announced, it brings 6 new members with new ideas to HTC.

I look forward with interest to seeing what the next year will bring.



**Ken Saunders**  
**Councillor/Chairman of Environment & Leisure**

# ***Chairman's Annual Report***

*Chairman of General Purpose & Finance: Councillor Keith Smith*



Dear colleagues

The following actions were taken or recommended over the past Council year.

Thanks to the now total transfer of council finances to the online system, councillors were able to view a complete report each month and were able to agree actions instead of approving them in retrospect. Councillors also welcomed the time saved for staff to be able to carry out more purposeful activities plus it ensured greater accuracy.

In addition to the monthly overview of accounts the Committee also discussed and authorised or recommended the following:

In June, because of issues with parking on the Market Square on Saturdays and the increasing anti-social parking on double yellow lines it was agreed to set up a Working Party to look at possible solutions to recommend to Full Council.

It was recommended that budget for community grant funding is in a future precept.

It was agreed that a proper funding structure should be put in place for the Grounds Team to manage the St. Michael's Closed Churchyard.

In July the Committee received a full report of Visit Highworth Limited (VHL) activities. Councillors were surprised by the range undertaken to support the town and the fact that there had been over 3000 visitors to Visitor Centre. It was agreed to support VHL for a further 12 months and ask that a councillor be invited to attend their committee meetings.

Councillors learned from the Market Manager that there was capacity to expand the Saturday Charter Market. He has been invited to bring his recommendations to a future meeting.

At an extraordinary meeting in August, following an unwelcome visit by the Traveller fraternity to the Lower Rec it was agreed to approve expenditure of CIL money to provide preventative moulding.

In October the main discussion centred around the 2023/24 Precept. These included costs for social media and website hosting, Local Council Award Scheme, whether to finance a regular parking attendant, whether to develop a Loneliness Strategy, how to encourage more volunteers within the town and whether to introduce live streaming of meetings.

The Committee is also to look at ways to encourage local businesses not to park all day in the Town Centre.

In November the Committee considered grant applications from local organisations but were unable to approve them either through lack of detail or omissions on the grant form.

In January a number of financial policies were reviewed and approved, and councillors agreed to recommend a new Community Engagement policy to Full Council. The Committee was also able to make a grant of £1500.00 to Wrde Up to provide children's activities at the annual music festival.



The February meeting approved a grant of £100.00 to St. Michael's Church Thursday Kitchen Initiative which provides free meals to those in need.

At the final meeting in March issues discussed were Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 funds, to approve to seek legal advice on cemetery management procedures and with Environment and Leisure committee to approve a quotation to lease three fleet vehicles for the Grounds Team.

Finally, I am delighted to offer congratulations to the Town Clerk and her team for the high standards they are maintaining in both financial matters and governance as demonstrated through the excellent external audit reports received.

I would also like to thank the Finance and General Purpose Committee for their hard work over the past four years. I thoroughly enjoyed my time as Chair thanks to the insightful and professional manner in which they conducted themselves at every meeting.



**Keith Smith**  
**Councillor/Chairman of Purpose & Finance**

## ***Chairman's Annual Report***

*Chairman of Neighbourhood Plan Committee:*

*Councillor (Miss) Julie Murphy*



I would firstly like to thank the Neighbourhood Plan Committee for all their hard work this year. In order to update the plan requires a lot of work outside of meetings, particularly with evidence gathering which is crucial to a sound plan.

In July of last year, we held a Public Consultation at the Saturday Market, particularly looking at valued landscapes and open spaces. A summary of all the workshops we conducted are on the HTC website should anyone be interested in reading the results. This information is crucial to support our plan and I want to thank the councillors that assisted in holding the public consultation and to the residents that contributed.

We were pleased to secure grant funding through Localities to instruct a professional to assist us in creating design codes for future development, and also to instruct a housing need survey as further evidence to shape what types of housing are needed in the town.

We have been in touch with the doctor's surgery to understand their plans to cope with the continued growth of the town. They are keeping us updated through the link magazine with their future plans as the town grows.

The future of the OGC is an important factor for the revised Neighbourhood Plan, and therefore the Committee have been gathering evidence, not only for the plan, but to assist in securing the site with a very long lease. Part of this work was to gather evidence in terms of the ecological value of the site. An ecological appraisal was carried out, and the report is now being used to secure the site. In simplistic terms it identified there was a great opportunity to provide biodiversity net gain, particularly in the wetlands. This result could mean a win win situation, in that by leaving it natural it can generate an income and assist in delivering development around Swindon Borough, which has to provide an increase in biodiversity of at least 10% which if it cannot be delivered on site the developer has to look elsewhere.

Following receipt of the ecological survey and results from the consultation about open spaces and valued landscapes a public consultation was held to gather views on a proposed use and layout of the OGC prior to submitting an expression of wish to take over the site on a 99-year lease. It included ideas from residents that not only could generate an income but for infrastructure requirements for the town and the Borough as a whole. For example, a natural burial ground that leaves the area natural but responds to a shortage of burial space in the Borough and Highworth in the longer term. But also provides a choice to residents of whether they want the conventional funeral or a more natural approach. This consultation was extremely well attended, and residents were wholly supportive of the plans. The Town Clerk along with members of the Working Party are in the process of pulling it all together to present to SBC in the very near future.

Due to the delay of the emerging Local Plan the strategy of the revised Neighbourhood Plan has slightly changed. We are currently preparing a draft Plan that will not include any additional housing sites, but will include things like design codes, housing needs, new policies and updated current policies to protect the town in the shorter term, and give us more of a say on up-and-coming housing proposals, from the principal of development as the Plan will be up to date, and also how we want it to fit in. In the near future we should be ready to publish this draft Plan with a view to it being made (adopted) after that.

I have enjoyed my role as Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Committee and look forward to continuing this important work going forward. Before I finish, I want to thank all the residents who have contributed to this process to date.



**Julie Murphy**  
**Councillor/Chairman of Planning**



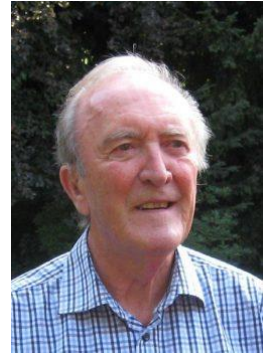
## ***Chairman's Annual Report***

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

No Report Provided

## ***Swindon Borough Councillor's Reports***

*Councillor Alan Bishop*



### **Councillor A Bishop – verbatim**

You may think that you have been lucky tonight because I had thought of giving a report on my 26 years as a Town Councillor or my 12 years as a Borough Councillor, don't worry this report only covers the last twelve months.

I have of course dealt with everyday problems such as burst pipes causing flooding, electric failure, fences blowing down etc. I helped Councillor K Saunders by taking cases he could not solve as they had to be dealt with by SBC.

After 4 years of negotiations, we now have an ALDI store, which brings people from surrounding villages to shop in the town.

On a recent Saturday morning Surgery, a young lady who had recently moved to Highworth and works for SBC has indicated that she would like to come to a HTC meeting and talk to the Council on Public health issues.

Blunsdon has more than its fair share of houses, but an application by the Plymouth Brethren Church for a building with 162 parking spaces on the A4019 on the way out towards Highworth was too much and so was refused. I was part of the Planning Committee that granted the firm of Panattoni to re develop the old Honda site giving work to 5,000 on site with a further 2,000 in the surrounding area. All of the groundwork must be completed in 5 years before the work starts on buildings. The exciting news is that a foot/cycle path will be built on the west side of the A361 crossing the road with a toucan crossing as it reaches Highworth.

The fence around the green opposite St Michaels Church has now gone I think a section so that the houseowner could drive his car in would have sufficed. You may think this has nothing to do with Highworth, but I proposed, and it was granted that the old railway swimming pool and Turkish baths have £7 million spent refurbishments. When my sons were at school, they swam in Highworth Swimming Clubs, and I have spent many a Saturday night cheering Highworth on.

Finally, I would like to thank on behalf of Councillor (Mrs) J Bishop and I the Town Clerk and her staff for being so helpful with all of our problems over the past year and the Ground staff for keeping the town looking so well-kept and tidy.

## **Swindon Borough Councillor's Reports**

*Councillor Steve Weisinger*



In my role as Swindon Borough Councillor for Blunsdon and Highworth Ward I have attended all Meetings of the Committees I am on. These are Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committee, Full Council, Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee. I also attended Cabinet Meetings in preparation for Scrutiny Committee. I have held regular Meetings with Officers throughout the year.

I had the privilege to continue as chair of Audit Committee. I also had the privilege to continue as vice chair of the Scrutiny Committee, which I chaired three times during the municipal year due to the chair being unavailable.

I have attended several Committee Meetings at SBC which have clashed with HTC Meetings.

I have continued to work for the residents I represent across all parts of the Blunsdon and Highworth Ward and have spoken at the SBC Planning Committee numerous times on behalf of applicants in different parts of the ward. I have also spoken on decisions made by HTC and other Parishes within the Ward.

I will continue to work as hard as I can in the next municipal year for the residents I represent, and I will attend as many meetings I can at HTC and other parishes in the ward as one of their three ward councillors.

Ward Councillors Surgery has gone well, and residents appreciate the availability to discuss or raise issues on a face-to-face basis.

Finally, I would like to thank the following people:

Councillor (Mrs) L Vardy for her commitment to HTC and the residents she has supported over the years as a Highworth Town Councillor and her commitment not just to the council but residents and several other organisations. I would like to wish her a very happy retirement.

Councillor A Bishop for all he has done for residents in both roles as a Highworth Town Councillor and Swindon Borough Councillor. I would like to wish him a very happy retirement.

Councillor (Mrs) J Bishop for her commitment to HTC and the residents she has supported over the years as a Highworth Town Councillor. I would like to wish her a very happy retirement.

The amount of experience you all have will be missed not just by residents but in this council chamber as well, please all enjoy your free time.

## **Swindon Borough Councillor's Reports**

*Councillor V J Manro*

*(Not present report sent prior to the meeting)*



Since my last report these are the issues, I am currently dealing with.

- 1 Bydemill Gardens tree issues.
- 2 Westhill again tree issues

