

# Whitchurch Town Council

# Annual Report

# 2020 - 2021

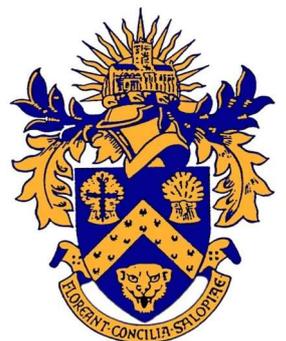


Published 14th May 2021



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# Introduction & Review



It has been a great honour and privilege to represent and serve you, the townspeople, as Mayor and Chairman of the Town Council. I have really enjoyed meeting and getting to know so many more of you.

When attending functions with other Mayors from Shropshire I aim spread the word about our vibrant town have received many compliments about there always being so much going on here and the 'buzz' in the town. It was a pleasure to welcome to Whitchurch, the High Sheriff of Shropshire, when she visited last year; she thought the town was wonderful with a very attractive town centre.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank my fellow volunteer Councillors for all the time and effort they have put in throughout the last two years, remembering Terry O'Neill who sadly passed away last year. It has been a pleasure to get to know and work with those councillors who are positive and forward thinking and who work together to improve the services and community facilities for all the townspeople. My particular thanks go to Deputy Mayor Simon Hamlyn for all his work and support this year, which has been really appreciated.

We have a fantastic team of Officers, facilities and hub staff and I thank them for all their continued hard work and cheerfulness; they are always ready to help and have been absolute stars over this last year when the pandemic launched us all into working so differently. Special thanks go to Acting Town Clerk, Zoe, whose hard work and calm dedication, has kept the Council's business on track through this very difficult year and to Accounts Officer Alison for keeping our accounts in excellent order.

We are very pleased to be welcoming our new Chief Officer, Shirley Reynolds, who will be joining the Council team early in June and I know the staff are really looking forward to working with her.

Work started on many projects including improvements to playground equipment; investment in youth provision; investment in upgraded community facilities at the Civic Centre and in the town; new entertainment: sell-out big-name comedy nights; music nights; sell-out Christmas and Easter pantomimes; the start of cinema provision; energy saving projects and much more.

But what a year this last year has been since the Covid pandemic began.

Whole town events such as Party in the Park, the Food and Drink Festival, the Christmas Market and Christmas lights Switch-On all had to be cancelled, thankfully the Christmas lights, with new additions, were put up and spread a bit of cheer and magic into the town.

After a pause and once Government legislation was in place, Whitchurch Town Council (WTC) could resume meetings via Zoom and the Council's work has carried on, although continuing the Council's work during this difficult period has been very problematic at times because of Covid restrictions, which has unfortunately led to some projects being significantly held up.

Rest assured, Councillors and Staff have kept on working for the people of the town as close to normal as possible and much has been achieved. Using CIL money (Community Infrastructure Levy paid by developers, not taxpayers) and some contributions by the Council, many projects have been completed or are ready and waiting to go once the Covid lockdown eases.

The job of WTC is to provide services for the townspeople and the Council has continued to invest in improvements in both services and community facilities for the benefit of all. Below are listed some of the main achievements:

#### Projects completed

- New Grounds Maintenance Contract, saving approx. £200,000 over next 5 years compared to the previous contract.
- Investment in new CCTV for Jubilee Park
- £20,000 investment in installation of new LED stage lighting in main hall to upgrade the performance area, as stated in the Place Plan for Whitchurch
- £15,000 investment for youth work funding 2020-2021, deferred to 2021-2022 because of Covid and Shropshire Council (SC) continuing funding.
- £9,164 investment in the Youth pod in Jubilee park with a generator bike.
- Investment in LED street lighting
- Investment in LED lights in the market hall.
- £6,000 Emergency Community Covid Support Fund set up for local organisations
- A replacement cupola and all sash windows refurbished and the building repainted on the listed Heritage Building which is owned by WTC.
- All Heritage Courtyard Studios let, providing income for WTC
- The Friday Market moved to a more attractive and welcoming room, agreed by traders and shoppers to be a great improvement.

#### Projects that have been agreed and ready to implement

- Investment of £25,000 CIL in an all-inclusive play area in Wheatsheaf Drive, but delayed by Covid and the belated decision to install the equipment elsewhere.
- Investment of £25,000 CIL in Deermoss play equipment, survey done.
- Investment in provision of a new website for WTC
- Investment of £40,000 including £30,000 CIL, for the desperately needed Bar Lounge refurbishment to enhance the interior of the Civic Centre, as stated in the Place Plan for Whitchurch, to provide an up-to-date, attractive and safe community room that the townspeople fully deserve to have.

#### Projects ongoing:

- Community Asset transfer of Civic Centre freehold from SC to WTC
- Community Asset Transfer of Country Park and Sherry Mill Hill car park from SC to WTC
- Community Asset Transfer of Centre North East, to provide a youth club, funded by an investment of £50,000 of CIL, negotiations currently paused by SC.
- Lobbying for direct access to Whitchurch southbound railway platform with partners.

As well as investment in low-energy lighting etc, WTC uses green energy suppliers for electricity and gas and has agreed to engage with Shropshire Climate Action Partnership and Whitchurch Against Pointless Plastic.

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the huge amount of voluntary and charitable work going on quietly in the background in the town and I am in awe of all that is accomplished.

I have no doubt this community spirit will flourish even more over coming years and wish to thank all the charities who work so hard for the benefit of others.

Over my two-year term I have donated a total of £3,147.15 to charitable organisations including the following donations to my nominated charities:

- £500 to Whitchurch Scouting and Guiding Group towards provision of new toilet and hand washing facilities in Church House
- £832.43 to Whitchurch Scouting and Guiding group to support activities for young people
- £832.44 to Headway Shropshire to continue their excellent work of rehabilitation of people with acquired head injuries

Finally, I wish the new incoming Council all the best and hope that they will look forwards and build on the good work already in place.

## Parks & Public Realms Committee – Annual Report 2020 - 2021

Cllr Andy Hall – Chairman.

Over the past 18 months or so public areas have become invaluable and have provided much needed exercise and social stability for residents during this global pandemic. Whitchurch can boast magnificent Parks and green areas which have greatly contributed to this and the public's mental health.

In September 2020 I was unexpectedly voted in as Chairman of Parks and Public Realm after the sad passing of Terry O'Neil who had held this position for many, many years.

Armed with a new committee of fellow councillors, we set about implementing outstanding resolutions including installing a new youth pod which included a bike which charges mobile devices, this has been welcomed by our younger digital native residents! I'm told "it's well sick!" (young people's speak).

The committee were approached by "We Are Wild Whitchurch" with a request to develop a neglected part of Jubilee park to create a "wild garden" where trees had been felled, this was unanimously agreed and the results can now be seen and it's well worth a visit. My thanks go out to all the organisers, volunteers who have worked tirelessly and of course for the generous donations of time, money and materials from local businesses and residents helping in creating an area that can be enjoyed by all for years to come.

Every year the town has enjoyed stunning floral displays and hanging baskets which local businesses contribute to. Annually provided by Nobridge, these have been enjoyed and commented on regularly by the residents and visitors to our awesome town. This year, by a majority, Whitchurch Town Council have now engaged the services of a new contractor – Newman's, as the new Grounds Maintenance Contractor for the next five years.

Residents may have also noticed that many areas of town are looking much tidier in terms of clean pathways, hedgerows, and being virtually litter free! Although this is nothing to do with WTC, it is worth mentioning it's solely down to the hard work of the "We Are Whitchurch" volunteers who come out in force every Sunday rain or shine to improve our fantastic town – you guys are amazing! I for one am proud to be associated.

For some years now there has been CIL money allocated to improve play areas of the town, introduce all inclusive play equipment and football facilities for junior teams which is greatly needed for our growing town. Sadly, to date this had not been achieved. This money (over 50K) remains untouched. The committee has started the process to get this underway and I am confident that the new forward-thinking incoming council will prioritise these crucial needs in our community as soon as practicably possible, with the new P&PR Chairman hitting the ground running.

As many of you know, I have always been heavily involved in past events such as Party in the Park (June), Christmas Fair (December), The Food festival (May) and various community events which sadly have not taken place recently including the Blackberry Fair! I look forward to these events returning strongly over the next few months with the full financial support of the Town Council behind them.

## **Culture and Civic Committee report**

### **Councillors who served during the Council year – April 2020 – March 2021:**

Harvey Vasey, Bev Duffy, Andrew Hall, Simon Hamlyn, Christian Gregory-Peake, Scott Radford, and Rose Snell.

Committee Chairmen	Cllr Vasey	April to December
	Cllr Hamlyn	January – April

**Overview:** The activities of this year were dominated by Covid 19. The committee met each month [excluding August] from April 2020 when local government laws were changed to permit virtual meeting.

No public events were permissible due to government restrictions and the committee resolved extra funding for events such as the Blackberry fair when public events can be resolved safely.

The Committee sought to use the Covid period to undertake work that would usually be difficult due to hirer disruption. Besides necessary work to ensure Covid safety at the Civic Centre work was undertaken to rectify vital historic problems with electrical safety and overhead lighting rigs in the main hall.

The Committee agreed to the essential upgrading work to the lighting in the market hall was undertaken, and in the main hall, [and aid accessibility with improvised facilities for the hard of hearing].

The Committee resolved to create an additional entrance to the main hall so audiences could queue inside, out of the rain, and as well to ensure a safe flow of people around the building when the upstairs bar and main hall were in simultaneous use for events.

After customer feedback, the Committee also took forward work to provide greater flexibility of usage of the upstairs bar area with plans agreed for a full refurbishment and modernisation with much of the anticipated £40k cost being provided by £30k of CIL monies. [CIL is a levy that local authorities can choose to charge on new developments in their area to help fund projects that the council wishes to progress as an alternative to burdening the local taxpayer]

The Committee continued negotiations with Shropshire Council on the leasehold of the civic centre.

The Committee worked with Shropshire Council to try and bring Centre North East back into use as a Town Council asset [setting up, after a public consultation last year, a charity ran by the town's people with an emphasis on culture and young people].

This has been delayed further by Shropshire council who must sign the transfer of the lease. Despite great difficulties during lock down, WTC staff have gathered the requisite three quotes for each of the major elements of expenditure. The next step will be for WTC to approve overall costings and allocate the work to companies - most of which are local.

Due to the sell-out success of national level comedy at the Civic Centre the Committee resolved to improve sight lines in the main hall and to use CIL funding for flexible, unobtrusive raked seating to bring the town's key facility in line with comparable venues of this size.

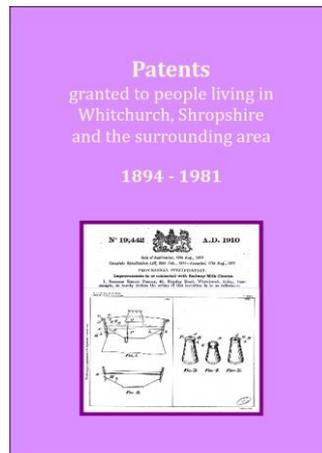
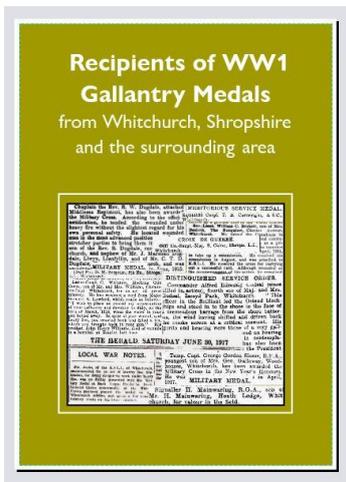
# WHITCHURCH MUSEUM & HERITAGE CENTRE

## ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

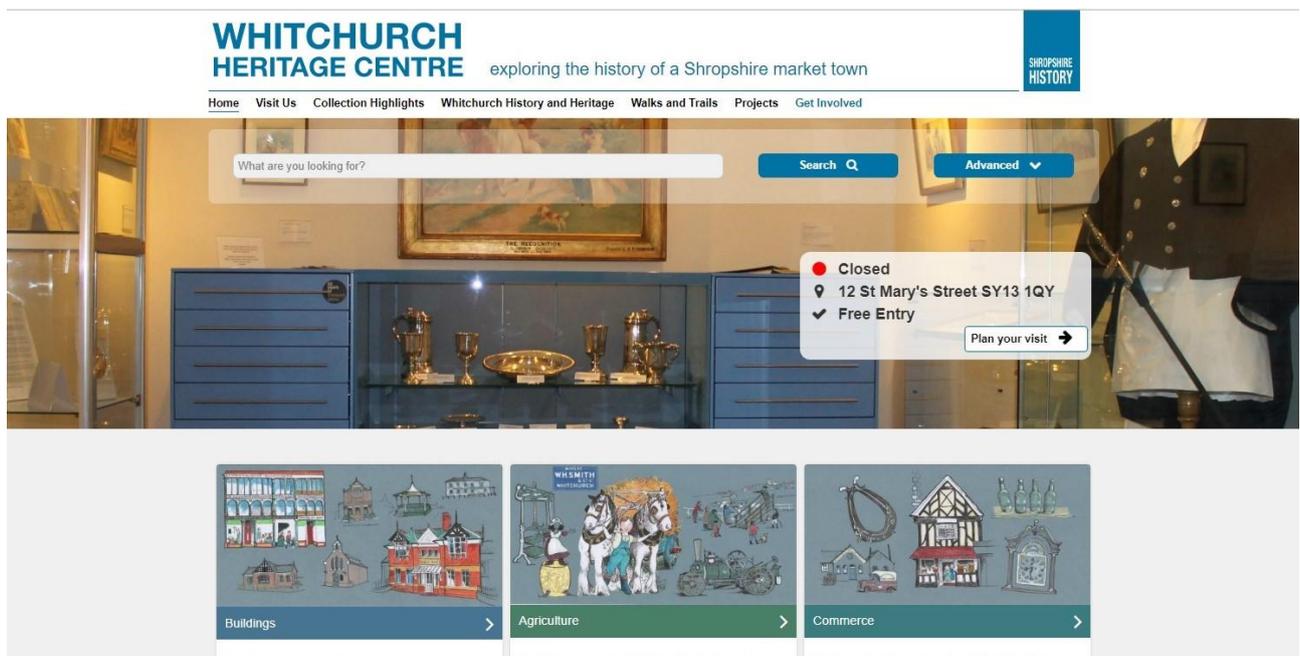
Whitchurch Town Council wish to thank the Curator and all the Museum & Archives volunteers for their continued and dedicated hard work, despite the Covid-19 pandemic causing the Museum to remain closed. Volunteers worked an average of 350 hours per month from home and in the Heritage Centre, on research and securing the collection, to create a noted museum in Shropshire.

That research has resulted in a number of website updates, booklets and leaflets:

Recipients of WW1 Gallantry Awards booklet, Men who served in the Boer War website, Trufood leaflet, Whitchurch men who joined the marines leaflet and Patents granted to residents of Whitchurch booklet.



while government grants enabled the Museum to be made Covid-19 safe for volunteers and visitors and create professional new website that provides a more complete access to information about items and the history of Whitchurch, especially helpful whilst we have remained closed.



The new website [www.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk](http://www.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk) with links to our other websites has generated an increase in followers and likes, making up for the loss of visitors to the museum.

<http://thegreatwar.whitchurch-shropshire.co.uk>  
<http://workhouse.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk>,  
<http://www.allourstories.whitchurchheritage.co.uk/>

A YouTube video was launched for Heritage Open Days in late September on “International activity in Whitchurch during WW2”, viewed hundreds of times so far, with many more expected in future.

The displays in the Museum have been refreshed and new displays have been prepared ready for when the Museum reopens:

- Deaves long case clock Pigeon racing in Whitchurch Trufood of Wrenbury

Notable acquisitions to the collection have been a post medieval silver coin hoard from Prees, awaiting collection from The British Museum, an 18th century print of a view of Whitchurch, a commemorative jug featuring Prees Heath camp and a Deaves of Whitchurch long case clock.



Lockdown used as an opportunity to carry out maintenance and improve the physical and digital infrastructure of the museum, enabling improved virtual/online visits. The archaeology cabinet was rearranged with small items transferred to illuminated drawers for closer inspection and the collection cataloguing system is being upgraded from Modes Compact to Modes Complete.

The Grade 2 listed Museum building, built as a Wesleyan Chapel in 1811, has seen a new cupola (originally part of an early ventilation system dating from the late 19th century) installed on the top of the roof.



The result of all this work very much impressed the High Sheriff of Shropshire with the quality of displays and facility for the town during her visit earlier this year.



2020-2021 has been a difficult year financially. The Pandemic dramatically changed the direction and purpose of the council who were to incur additional costs and loss of income. The strength of balance sheet allowed swift and decisive action by the staff to observe and implement all Government emergency measures.

The significant loss of income has been partly offset by the Rate Rebate scheme, which has been extended for the year 2021-2022

The restrictions in place for Covid have delayed some planned and budgeted schemes but adequate funds are still available for approved projects

Investment in the Civic Centre and its infrastructure has seen the upgrade of the main hall lighting. The installation of Solar Panels on the Market Hall roof are beginning to show savings and the forecast revenue. Future development of the Civic Centre will be determined by the ongoing negotiations with Shropshire Council to secure a long term lease, but the costs to upgrade the venue could be significant.

Staffing costs remain high but as yet it has not been possible to recruit a clerk or part time administration assistant. All existing staff were retained during the year working either from home or doing maintenance at the Civic. Despite the circumstances staff adapted to keep everything running relatively smoothly and for that we should be thankful

The outlook is positive, a healthy balance sheet ,zero rate increase, reduction of Covid restrictions, and a new Council.

# Council 2020-2021

## **Mayor & Chairman**

Cllr Bev Duffy

## **Councillors**

Cllr Lee Broders  
Cllr Alan Chesters  
Cllr Alan Cooper  
Cllr Christian Gregory-Peake  
Cllr Andy Hall  
Cllr Simon Hamlyn  
Cllr John Martin  
Cllr Mitch Haynes  
Cllr William McDonnell  
Cllr Scott Radford  
Cllr Ruth Shepherd  
Cllr John Sinnott  
Cllr Rose Snell

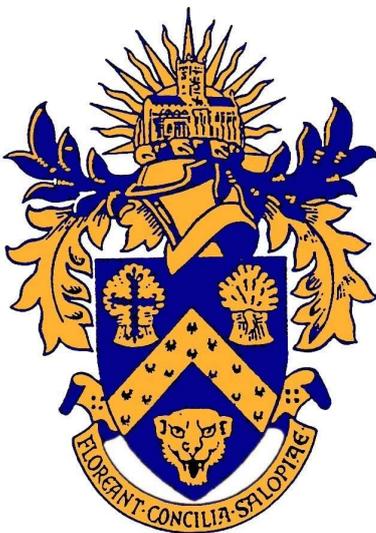
## **Acting Town Clerk**

Ms. Zoe Dean

Civic Centre, High Street, Whitchurch SY13 1AX

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**Whitchurch Town Council**



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