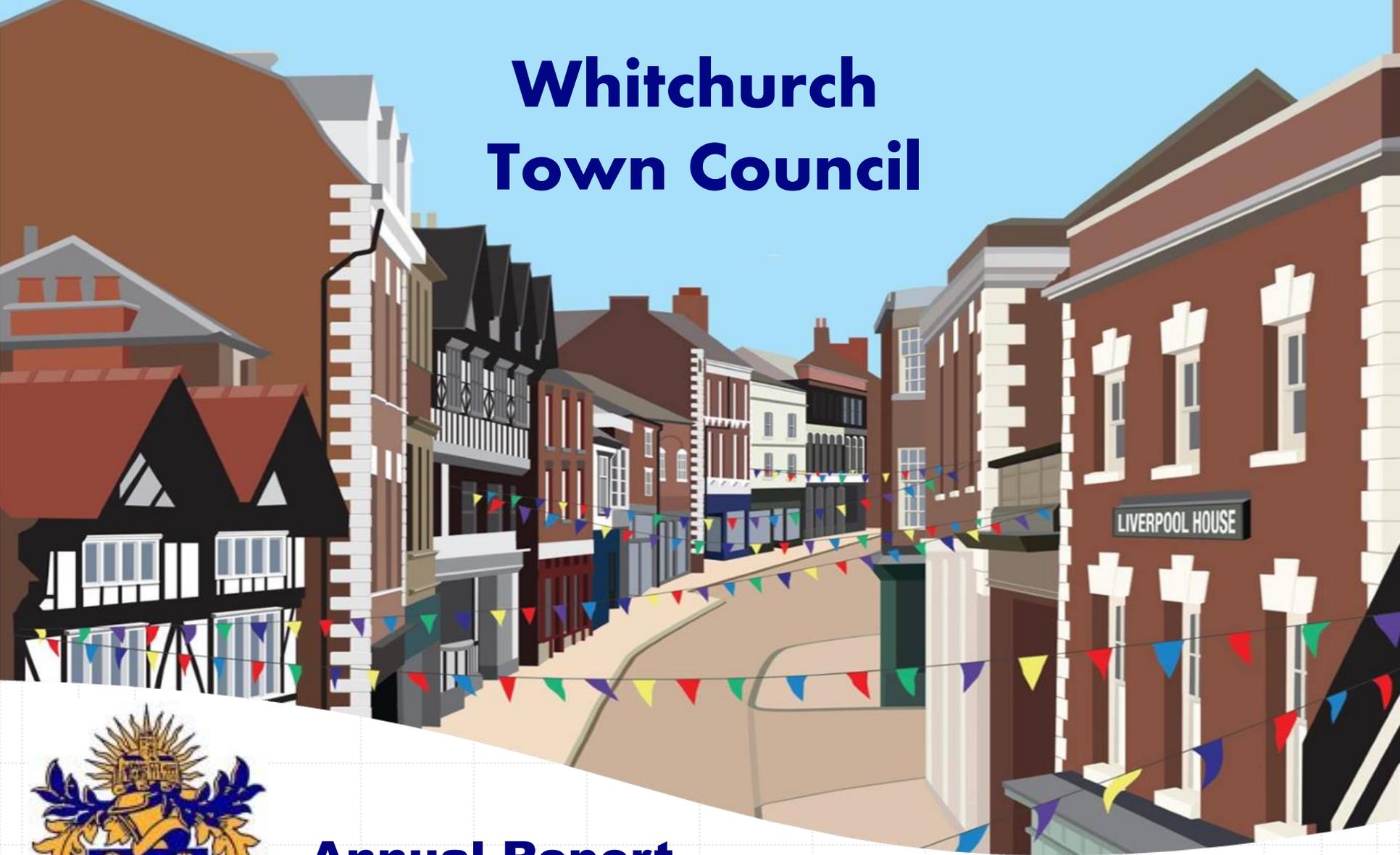


Whitchurch Town Council



Annual Report 2021-2022

Published 5th May 2022

Whitchurch Town Council

Annual Report

Civic Year 2021/2022

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Introduction

Councillor Andy Hall

Acting Town Mayor & Chairman

Welcome to our Annual Report, covering the 2021/22 Civic Year.

This year I find it strange to be writing this report after the departure of former Mayor John Sinnott following the very sad and sudden loss of his beloved wife. His resignation didn't come as a surprise to the Council, under the circumstances. John informs us he is planning to move back to the Wirral, and of course we wish him well.

Post pandemic 'recovery' has been a major theme for Whitchurch Town Council (WTC) this year, as it has for many organisations. It is great to see the Town Centre slowly returning to pre-Covid activity levels too, already attracting new businesses. I was recently asked to open the new premises of 'Harmony Beauty' in Watergate – Sarah Hand is a perfect example of the resilience of our local business owners, bouncing back and even expanding after such challenging times.

Sadly, we inherited a legacy of both staffing and contractual issues from the previous Council, resulting in us having to deal with the far-reaching consequences. As such, this has taken up a great deal of the Council's time and resources over the last 12 months – and even now some matters remain. However, the commitment of the new influx of forward-thinking Councillors, voted in by the people of Whitchurch in 2021, together with new professional staff members, will tackle these as we work tirelessly for a positive future for both the Council and Whitchurch. Many of the new Councillors have stepped up and taken on extra duties way above and beyond their remit – united and working together to keep the Council moving forward with confidence.

I am delighted to welcome Mike McDonald as our new Proper Officer and RFO. Mike, a former Mayor of Whitchurch and Town Councillor, joins us with a unique set of skills to steer this council forward and oversee the changes required to develop a modern organisation, focussed on us all working as a team.



Also joining the team is our new Accounts Officer, Charlie Burdock ... and we also plan the continued review of our team over the coming months to ensure we are fit for the future. We have even helped a young person enter the world of work through the Government's "Kickstart" scheme. I must also give special thanks for many years commitment to John Rodenhurst from our Facilities Team who retired in March. John will be missed by everyone in the Civic Centre and beyond – enjoy your well-deserved retirement!

Whitchurch is very fortunate to have many beautiful green areas and this year the Parks & Public Realm Committee, supported by the wider council, has invested in revamping some of those previously neglected to give our residents the facilities they truly deserve. Plans are well under way and some projects are in the construction stage, for example the Deermoss Play Area. Plans are also progressing to celebrate The Queen's Platinum Jubilee with a Market on Saturday 4th June and, on Sunday 5th June, a parade through the Town Centre – together with a Funday organised by "We Are Whitchurch" at Deermoss Meadow, which will also feature the official opening the new Play Area.

One of my personal missions this year, alongside Shropshire Councillors Peggy Mullock and Tom Biggins, with representatives of our local Driving Instructors, has been to campaign for the retention of Driving Test provision in the town. Whilst we were unsuccessful in overturning the decision to close the Driving Test Centre, the Council has offered accommodation to hopefully secure the future of the service. This is currently being considered by the DVSA and we hope for a positive outcome soon.

Like many Charities this year, Beechtree Community Centre found itself in financial difficulties following a significant fall in fundraising income caused by the pandemic, which put its future at risk. The Council resolved to support them with a £10,000 Grant, specifically for the development of youth work. In addition, we have also re-opened our Small Community Grants Scheme to give other local groups the opportunity to apply for funding in the 2022/23 financial year.

It is particularly pleasing to report that Whitchurch Town Council is in a good fiscal position, largely due the careful stewardship of former Councillor and Mayor Alan Chesters, who stepped down from the Council this year after many years loyal service. I, for one, would like to thank Alan for his tireless dedication to our town.

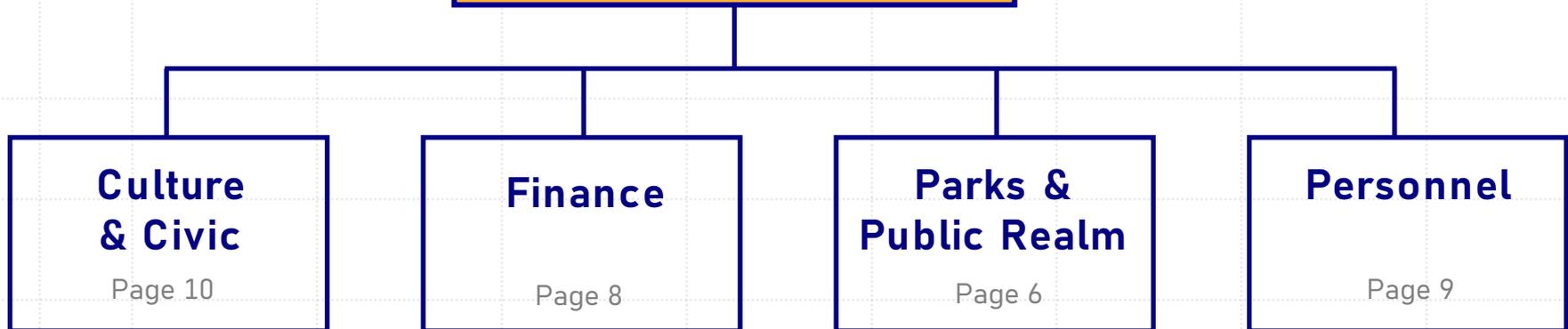
As we head into a new Civic year, I'm confident that the resolve of our NEW Town Council will work deliver brighter and more prosperous times for our wonderful town – which, more importantly, could not be achieved without your continued support.

Andy



Committee Reports

FULL COUNCIL



Committee Structure 2021/22: The Council appoints Standing Committees and their membership at the Annual Council Meeting, held each May. Committee membership is based on the specific needs of each Committee and membership takes into consideration the skillsets of individual Councillors. The Council delegates appropriate matters for scrutiny and debate to these Committees and define these in the current version of its “Standing Orders”.



Committee Update

Parks & Public Realm

Councillor Jack Thornton

Committee Chairman

This Committee reports to the Full Council on all matters in relation to the green spaces around Whitchurch, including this year, the Cemetery.

One of the main emphases that the Committee placed on its deliberations during the year was the benefit of those green spaces to the community in general with particular regard to the effects of both Covid 19 and the ongoing economic impact peoples income. To this end, the Committee decided that the Parks and green spaces under their control should receive sufficient funding to upgrade the facilities in order to allow residents free at source amenities.

Projects

The major investment has been on Deermoss Meadow, as that side of town is seeing the major housing developments, with a much needed extension and upgrade of the children's play area which is now complete, with the addition of inclusive play equipment, and will be officially opened on Jubilee Sunday 5th June 2022 by the Mayor in memory of Ben Evison.



Collaborative Approaches

Much work has been completed on Jubilee Park in conjunction with the **We Are Whitchurch** voluntary group who maintain, amongst other things, the Wild Area at the Park Avenue end of the Park. It is envisaged during 2022-2023 that this partnership may be placed on an official basis under the existing Town Council Volunteers Policy.

Future Plans

Future plans include the Jubilee Park children's play area which will see the notorious play bark removed and replaced with a soft play surface and additional all inclusive equipment. We also hope to fence in the play area as has been done on Deermoss Meadow as well as restricting the walking of dogs in the Lower Park.

Gambrell Avenue play area has had a much needed and long awaited junior swing and will undergo a maintenance tidy up soon whilst Edgeley Gardens residents have been consulted regarding which equipment they think is needed.

Solar lighting will be installed from the Jubilee Park main footpath up to Caldecott Crescent in time for the clocks going back later this year and there are plans for more litter bins and benches in a number of areas.



Whitchurch Cemetery

The Cemetery has seen the installation of 6 bases for future benches as well as a base for an all inclusive portaloos which is due to be sited very soon. There are also plans to extend the road to the top of the Cemetery to the new burial area.

Summary

All in all, we are pleased with the progress that the Committee has made during what has been a very difficult Civic year and members are looking forward to carrying on these works under the leadership of a new Mayor and Deputy.

Committee Membership at April 2022:

Adele Jackson Pete Lea (Vice Chair) Matt Phipps Mike Ridgway Giles Sullivan Jack Thornton (Chair)



Committee Update

Finance

Councillor Rose Hall

Committee Chairman

I would like to start off by again thanking former Councillor Alan Chesters, who was our Committee Chairman for many years and ran this committee both diligently and methodically. I took over the Chairmanship in November 2021.

Following the resignation of the then Accounts Officer, we have been very fortunate to have recruited Charlie Burdock, who joined the team in February 2022. Charlie is helping to bring fresh perspectives to our financial reporting, ensuring that our systems are up to date and helping to keep us informed and effective.

Despite financial challenges as a result of the pandemic, we were particularly pleased to be in the position to deliver a 0% increase in the Council Tax precept for the 2022/23 financial year, recognising the pressure many households are currently enduring. Yet, I'm pleased to say, we are still in a position to maintain all necessary services alongside a commitment to deliver an ambitious programme of ongoing and planned improvement projects.



Committee Membership at April 2022:

Andy Hall (Vice Chair) Rose Hall (Chair) Adele Jackson Jack Thornton



Committee Update

Personnel

Councillor Rose Hall

Committee Chairman

In a year of significant change, I must start by thanking the Council's Staff Team for helping us to maintain services and navigate through the challenges presented by the pandemic and elsewhere. It is fair to say that they have maintained a profession approach throughout.

I'm delighted to acknowledge that our staff team exemplify a renewed energy to maintain the future of the Civic Centre as the valuable hub of the community that we all recognise and also provided invaluable support to our new Councillors, as many transition into the role for the first time. We also have exciting plans to expand the team in the near future.

2022 has also brought the chance to welcome other members of the team, including Mike McDonald who joins us as our new Proper Officer. Mike and his team are certain to move forward with spirit that has already been demonstrated and the pride that they take in delivering the best service possible to the people of Whitchurch.



Committee Membership at April 2022:

Paul Busby Rose Hall (Chair) Adele Jackson Matt Phipps (Vice Chair)



Committee Update

Culture & Civic Councillor Andy Hall Committee Chairman

I am pleased to report that this year, this Committee had been formed from primarily new Councillors who had joined our team as a result of the 2021 election. They have been able to bring fresh perspective to ongoing challenges.

Together, we are making positive progress to address historic issues with the Civic Centre's lease and the possible freehold transfer to safeguard its longevity as a facility Whitchurch can be proud of. As the Council approached a renewed phase of negotiations with Shropshire Council, the Committee recently commissioned a survey of the building, which identified some significant shortfalls, both internally and externally. This will now inform further investigation and possible public consultation on the way forward for the building. As with most businesses, Covid didn't spare Civic Centre income, which has dropped significantly over the past two years, however this was mitigated by a rate reduction.

The Committee has also been supporting staff to regenerate old and welcome new bookings as we emerged from lockdowns, alongside supporting our hirers and the weekly Friday Market.

Bookings and building hires are now up - with returning events like the Easter 'pantomime', The Mersey Beatles, Northern Soul, Wrestling and, more recently, "Me and My Girl" from WOADS, which was an outstanding production. This recovery is largely down to Morris Clive, our Facilities Manager, and the wider Facilities Team who have also manned the Community Hub to ensure it continues to help the public and generate income. My deepest thanks go to everyone involved in making The Civic the success it is!



Committee Membership at April 2022:

Paul Busby Gregory Ebbs Andy Hall (Chair) Rose Hall (Vice Chair) Mike Ridgway



Museum & Heritage Centre

Annual Report

Judith Hoyle, Curator

Whitchurch Museum & Archives is a charitable trust with a specific aim to advance the education of the public in the history and heritage of Whitchurch, Shropshire and its surrounding area by the establishment and maintenance of a museum.

In order to fulfil this role the trust lease Whitchurch Heritage Centre from the Town Council and receive an allowance from them for the day-to-day running of the museum.

To accomplish this aim volunteers run an Arts Council accredited museum displaying the history and heritage of Whitchurch, Shropshire and its surrounding area. They also conduct research projects relevant to the history and heritage of Whitchurch, producing booklets, leaflets and internet material. In addition they maintain a historical archive of artefacts relevant to the history of Whitchurch.

A visit from Faye Bailey (Head of Shropshire Museums and Archives) and Emma-Kate Lanyon (Head of Collections and Curatorial Services) on 19th November 2021 resulted in the following comment:

“It was such a pleasure to meet you and your amazing team yesterday. I’m completely in awe of the level of professionalism you all display and your passion for promoting the heritage of Whitchurch”.



Activities during the financial year 2021 to 2022

- Volunteers worked over 4700 hours during the last financial year, the equivalent of 2.5 members of full-time staff.
- Nearly 1000 guests visited the Heritage Centre. This was about 50% of the footfall prior to Covid but every month the numbers are steadily increasing.
- The museum reopened to the public (after closure due to Covid) at the end of June. Regular opening hours are 11-4 Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- Other openings to support national and local events included Heritage Open Days, Whitchurch Christmas Lights switch on, and The Randolph Caldecott Festival. The latter attracted more than 160 visitors.
- Volunteers continue to network with local groups. These activities included organising an evening visit by Prees scouts, cubs and beavers, giving a talk to Hadnall history group, liaising with Malpas Jubilee Committee and offering a placement to an SJT student as part of their D of E Award.
- A new digital scanner/printer was purchased and loaned to Whitchurch Library to enable members of the public to view the contents of the Whitchurch Herald 1869-1949
- Research was carried out in response to requests for information on local and family history from members of the public. These requests came from all over the world, one being to trace living relatives of a Whitchurch man KIA in WW2 for the town of Overloon in Holland, where he was buried along with 280 fellow soldiers, to help them create a permanent memorial to the soldiers who saved their town

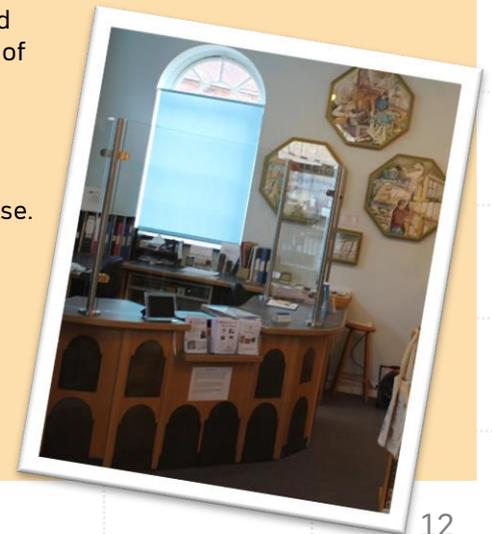
During the year than 200 new items have been accessioned into the Museum's Collection, some donated, others purchased using grants and donations. These include:

- Hoard of silver Civil War coins found in Prees
- Selection of moths caught in the 60s in the Prees Heath/Whixall area
- 1819 pound note issued by the Whitchurch, Shropshire Bank
- Cast iron gatepost manufactured by R T Smith (mid 19th century)
- Victorian silver medallion for Whitchurch Ladies Friendly Society

Other activities by the volunteers during the year include:

- Creation of free leaflets on Whitchurch Cinemas and Ancient Monuments in the Local Area. Also a catalogue for the Caldecott Exhibition was produced and a Children's Quiz created.
- New displays created include Stained glass windows from old Red Lion pub, Whitchurch Girls Grammar School and the Life and Diverting Art of Randolph Caldecott
- All items in the Collection have been photographed. New acquisitions were uploaded onto our database.

Our new website www.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk has been updated with this information to allow members of the public to view the Collection electronically.





Keeping up to date with Whitchurch Town Council ...

As we have been emerging from 'lockdown', so has our Web and Social Media platforms ... please visit them for updates throughout the year ...

Events

News

Updates



@whitchurchtowncouncil2



VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.WHITCHURCHTOWNCOUNCIL.GOV.UK



Acting Mayor and Chairman
Councillor Andy Hall

Councillors

NORTH WARD

Paul Busby
Adele Jackson
Matt Phipps
Giles Sullivan
Vacancy at April 2022

SOUTH WARD

Gregory Ebbs
Andy Hall
Angie Hotchkiss
Mike Ridgway
Vacancy at April 2022

WEST WARD

Rose Hall
Pete Lea
Paul Sample
Jack Thornton
Vacancy at April 2022

Proper Officer & Responsible Finance Officer
Mike McDonald

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