



**whitchurch town council**

# Annual Report 2022/2023

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# #whitchurchstrongertogether

# Whitchurch Town Council Annual Report

Civic Year 2022/2023

## Contents



**Introduction – Mayor & Chairman, Councillor Andy Hall**



**Committee Update – Culture & Civic – Committee Chairman, Councillor Matt Phipps**



**Committee Update – Parks & Public Realm – Committee Chairman, Councillor Pete Lea**



**Committee Update – Personnel – Committee Chairman, Councillor Rose Hall  
Finance Advisory Group Update – Chairman, Councillor Rose Hall**

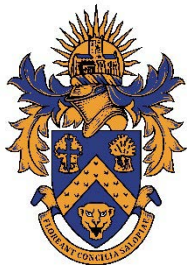


**Supporting the Voluntary Sector**



**Museum & Heritage Centre Report – Museum Curator, Dr Judith Hoyle**





# Introduction

## Councillor Andy Hall

### Town Mayor & Chairman

**Welcome to our Annual Report, covering the 2022/23 Civic Year.**

**I write the Annual Report this year as the elected Mayor of Whitchurch. I couldn't be prouder to represent the town in which I was born, raised and adore. I have found the years of gained knowledge, business experience, friendships and working with local partnerships an asset in this role.**

**This has been a very busy year for both myself and Whitchurch Town council (WTC) in an ever changing world. This year we witnessed the loss of our beloved Queen Elizabeth II as our longest serving monarch and, for many, the only one we've known. I was privileged and honoured to represent the people of Whitchurch at events to mark her passing and celebrate her extraordinary life.**

In last year's Annual Report, I outlined the historic challenges faced by our council and the unrelenting resolve of our NEW Town Council to work and deliver brighter and more prosperous times for our wonderful town. My aim was to reach out to the local people demonstrating an open and transparent town council, promoting and embracing equality and diversity for all. I said:

***"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"***

Well, our new council have done just that!

As many are aware, retaining the Driving Test Centre in Whitchurch was a major priority of mine. I met with representatives from the DVSA and formulated a proposal to broker a deal for this service to be accommodated at the Whitchurch Civic Centre, this was unanimously agreed by full council. After a long journey of negotiation and planning applications, I am pleased to report this will be operational soon. I would like to thank our Proper Officer, Mike McDonald, the resolve of our local driving instructors, and the added support from our Shropshire Councillors and our local MP.



This year WTC agreed to create three new positions in our all-new Grounds Maintenance team. These much-needed local jobs were made possible by restructuring our Parks and Public Realm contracts and services. The contracted services are now being delivered by local companies providing better value for money. Improvements to areas such as Deermoss Park have been completed, revamping old and incorporating new all-inclusive play equipment.

As with many charitable organisations who struggled post-covid, the Beechtree Centre sadly closed this year. However, WTC stepped in and has been successful in accommodating many of their groups and services to continue serving the people of Whitchurch.

### Inward Investment and Growth

On a more positive note - like many of you, I'm delighted that the building work for the new Medical Centre at Pauls Moss & Swimming Pool at White Meadow are now underway with a total investment of £32.2 Million in our amazing town. It's been great to welcome many new shops and businesses who have opened in the town centre, too, including the old Woolworths store as an arcade.



In March 2023, we were delighted to host a visit from the then High Sheriff of Shropshire Selina Graham. I had the pleasure of providing a tour of our awesome town. Selina kindly made time to meet with a variety of local charities and community groups providing some excellent information, advice and guidance which has already proved invaluable to some. She commented:

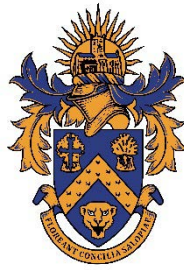
***“Whitchurch might come at the bottom of the alphabet, but it is certainly not at the bottom of the class when it comes to Community spirit! Although it is the oldest continuously inhabited town in Shropshire, it has some fabulous 21st century facilities ... It also has an extraordinary number of dedicated voluntary groups and organisations.”***

This Spring brought the opportunity to celebrate the Coronation of Charles III and the dawn of a ‘new age’ ... in similar fashion, I believe that we are experiencing a new era in the history of Whitchurch - our beautiful town and the community working, in tandem, towards a common goal, and our focus for the coming year, **#whitchurchstrongertogether**

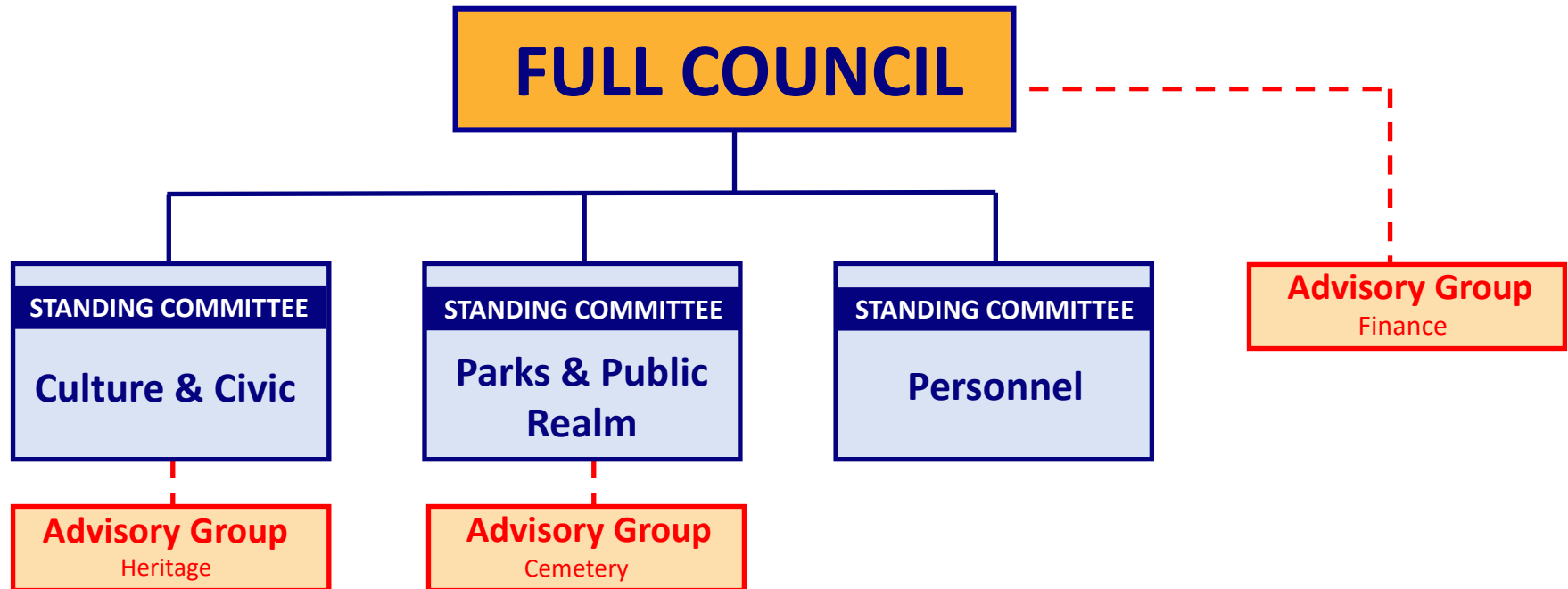
Very recently, I have had the opportunity to re-engage with our twin town, Neufchatel-en-Bray, rebuilding old relationships and forming new ones. As we head into the new Civic Year, I am still confident that Whitchurch Town Council and its new staffing structure will maintain the high standards demonstrated this year which the town's people have found to be so refreshing and rightly now come to expect.

*Andy*





# Committee Structure & Reports



**Committee Structure 2022/23:** 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, Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation. In 2022/23 we introduced 'Advisory Groups' to create additional opportunities to engage with the community as part of our decision making processes.



# culture & civic

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## **Key Areas of Responsibility:**

Whitchurch Civic Centre, Heritage and the Heritage Centre, Markets, Marketing and Public Relations, Economic Wellbeing, Events (including the Christmas Lights Switch-on), Tourism and our Youth Service – and Heritage Advisory Group

## **Committee Membership at May 2023:**

Gregory Ebbs

Rose Hall

Adele Jackson

Matt Phipps

Cathy Purt

Paul Sample

Pete Tew



## Committee Update

# Culture & Civic

## Councillor Matt Phipps

### Committee Chairman

This year we have continued to make positive progress to address historic issues with the Civic Centre's lease, including infrastructure issues, and the possible freehold transfer to safeguard its longevity as a facility Whitchurch can be proud of. Nonetheless, in spite of our position as 'tenant' of the Civic Centre, we have repaired, maintained and improved facilities within the Civic Centre throughout the year. We have avoided major Capital Expenditure, but continue to formulate future plans for when we are in a position to make investment into our infrastructure.

We've been delighted to welcome back many, shows to the Civic Main Hall, which have also seen an increase in variety.

The Friday Market continues to be a focus in order to increase custom and traders, which has proved a particular challenge in light of current economic challenges.

We've also supported the more vulnerable in our community through our "Warm Hub" initiative and hosted the NHS Vaccination Service to increase opportunities to protect those who need it most, with newly installed presentation equipment in our Edward German Room.

Major events included the Mayor's Disco Ball in May, June's BIG Jubilee Weekend and, of course, the Christmas Lights Switch-on.



*"We have a Youth Club at last! This year saw the opening of our Youth Club at the Watergate Centre in Whitchurch. This has been achieved by partnership working between WTC (Funding), Beacon Church (accommodation) and Shropshire Youth Association (Provider) to restore this much needed service for our Young People. WTC have doubled funding for this vital service for the forthcoming Civic Year on the recommendation of this Committee."*

**Cllr Andy Hall**

**The Committee would like to acknowledge the efforts of Morris Clive, our Facilities Manager, and the wider Facilities Team who continue to make The Civic a facility the whole town can benefit from!**



# parks & public realm



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## Key Areas of Responsibility:

Open Spaces, Public Facilities, Clocks, Allotments, Community Safety, Street Lighting, CCTV, Burial Facilities – and Cemetery Advisory Group

## Committee Membership at May 2023:

Jayne De-Wyrall   Chez Doyle   Angie Hotchkiss   Pete Lea   John Morris   Mike Ridgway   Giles Sullivan





## Committee Update

# Parks & Public Realm

## Councillor Pete Lea

### Committee Chairman

This year has seen significant improvement in the management of our open spaces with the Council taking the bold decision to replace an existing contractor with a small Council-employed “Public Realm Team” and new, local contractors for the provision of large space mowing and also the maintenance of Whitchurch Cemetery. We recognise that it will take some time to return some areas to their ‘former glory’, but we have made significant steps already to ensure that this happens. At the same time, we also returned our Public Conveniences to in-house management. Wherever possible we ensure that your money is spent on the employment of local people or with local contractors – it is cornerstone of our decision-making process.

This year we also completed the installation of a completely new inclusive play area within Deermoss Meadow, dedicated to the memory of Ben Evison, and upgraded facilities at Edgeley Gardens. Facilities include play equipment, seating and rubbish bins.

We improved public safety with the installation of Solar Lighting within Jubilee Park, and continue to repair and replace CCTV Cameras ahead of a full system assessment in the near future.

Sadly, we had continually battled vandalism across our estate, which unfortunately diverts money from other, planned improvements, and we have continued to urge Shropshire Council to complete works within our Public Realm for areas falling under their control.

In conjunction with recommendations from our Cemetery Advisory Group, we have improved facilities within Whitchurch Cemetery – including new signage and a portalo, with many more improvements planned.

We are progressing an on-going project, with members of our community, to improve signage within other areas of our Public Realm.



### Collaborative Approaches - #whitchurchstrongertogether

We continue to be delighted to work collaboratively with voluntary group **We Are Whitchurch** who are currently creating a Sensory Garden and Community Allotment within Jubilee Park's Harry Richards Memorial Garden.

**The Committee would like to acknowledge the efforts of our new Public Realm Facilities Officers who have made such an impact on our open spaces in such a short period of time.**

# personnel & finance advisory group

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## Key Areas of Responsibility:

The **Personnel Committee** provides strategic management and operational oversight to the management of our staff team and volunteers. The **Finance Advisory Group** is a Councillor-only Working Group providing scrutiny and oversight in financial matters and reporting directly to Full Council.

## Membership at May 2023:

Personnel:	Andy Hall	Rose Hall	Adele Jackson	Matt Phipps	Cathy Purt
Finance:	Andy Hall	Rose Hall	Adele Jackson	Matt Phipps	Vacancy (1)





## Committee Update

# Personnel Councillor Rose Hall Committee Chairman

It is gratifying to report a very positive year, which has provided both consolidation and expansion within our staff team – administratively, which has enable us to be able to expand our “Reception Hub” opening hours to include Saturday Mornings and with our newly formed Parks & Public Realm Facilities Team. It’s also extremely pleasing to note that Councillors and Staff work collaboratively as one – with a common goal to make [#whitchurchstrongertogether](#).

This year we improved reporting structures and training through the provision of online ‘portals’ to allow for ease of administration, convenience and efficiency for our people, accountability and reporting, alongside the delivery of mandatory and other training.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank each of our employees, individually and collectively, for their efforts in going above and beyond, both for the Council and for the town we serve.

### STAFF TEAM AT MAY 2023:

**Mike McDonald** – Proper Officer / Responsible Financial Officer

**Morris Clive** – Facilities Manager

**Charlie Burdock** – Accounts Officer

**Jane Down** – Hub Assistant

**Linda Field** – Administrative & Hub Assistant

**Pauline Jones** – Hub Assistant

**Lawrence Bebbington** – Facilities Officer (Parks)

**Michael Bloore** - Facilities Officer (Parks)

**Dave Shepherd** – Facilities Officer (Civic)

**Duncan Taylor** – Facilities Officer (Parks)

**Dave Whitehead** – Facilities Officer (Civic)

### FINANCE ADVISORY GROUP UPDATE – Cllr Rose Hall, Chair

Strong and stable financial management has been an ongoing theme throughout the year. However, we have, notwithstanding challenging economic circumstances, been able to tackle a backlog of ‘unfinished business’ from previous administrations and a hiatus in staffing, as well as delivering on a number of new strategic aims and projects for the benefit of the people of Whitchurch – improvements in facilities or the provision of Warm Hub support being just 2 of those. We’ve also managed to do this within existing budgets and ensured minimal increases in our precept. We are also proud to have be able to create funding opportunities for many voluntary groups within the town, who we know are facing very tough times financially.



# **supporting** the voluntary sector

**Whitchurch is extremely fortunate to benefit from vibrant groups and active volunteers, who work innovatively and collectively to add to the richness of local life and to help people who need additional help or support.**

**The Town Council aims to work effectively with the voluntary and community sector to deliver a diverse range of quality projects and services to our communities, focussed on empowerment and resilience through funding opportunities or practical initiatives.**

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## ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTED 2022/23 – SMALL COMMUNITY GRANTS

Brownlow Community Centre	Community Resource
Hope House Children's Hospice	Little Bears Day Care
Men in Sheds	North Salop Wheelers
Queensway Playing Fields	Rotary Club of Whitchurch
Whitchurch Canal Festival	Whitchurch Fairtrade
Whitchurch Indoor Bowling Club	Whitchurch Junior School
Whitchurch Whippets	Wingate Centre

## SUPPORTING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR THROUGH SMALL COMMUNITY GRANT FUNDING

"We were so grateful to Whitchurch Town Council for helping to sponsor the Chirk Dark Run 2022. The family friendly event raised just under £8,000 to help keep providing vital respite and end-of-life care both in the hospice and within the community." **Hope House Children's Hospice**

"May I thank the Town Council for their grant to Whitchurch Rotary and for the men who benefitted from the grant. This year we had 586 attend [prostate screening sessions] and out of this number 45 were advised to seek further tests." **Rotary Club of Whitchurch**

# #whitchurchstrongertogether

"The support of Whitchurch Town Council assists North Salop Wheelers Community Bus to bring rural residents regularly into town on Market Day. Twenty or so passengers who have no other access to transport come to do their weekly shop. Many regard it as a lifeline." **NS Wheelers**

"The grant has helped fund the Community Resource monthly 'Hearing Loss Hub' held at Whitchurch Library, local home visits and regular maintenance support to hearing aid wearers living at Greenfields Care Home ... Our service provides information, advice and practical support to people in Whitchurch so that they do not only adjust to life with a hearing impairment, but improve their quality of life as well." **Community Resource**

"The funding from Whitchurch Town Council has been used to reduce the cost of walks to all participants – including use of minibuses, venue and canal boat hire. By covering these costs we have been able to benefit all participants to our festival, thereby encouraging more to come along to join us, benefitting local businesses (particularly hospitality and accommodation)" **Whitchurch Walkers**

"The Wingate Centre would like to thank Whitchurch Town Council for their funding support. The money will go towards running the Centre and being able to provide disability fitness sessions to children and young adults from the local area." **The Wingate Centre**

"We used the money to help develop our outdoor learning area. It went towards fencing to create a space for our children to safely learn about the outdoor environment. We will soon be able to get the children out to look for bugs, look after plants, grow fruit and vegetables and be with nature. Having a designated area gives them experiences they may not have at home." **Little Bears Day Care**



# 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.**

**To accomplish this aim dedicated volunteers run an Arts Council accredited museum which displays the history and heritage of Whitchurch 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.**

In order to fulfil this role the Trust leases the Town Council owned Whitchurch Heritage Centre at minimal cost, and receives a grant to cover the day-to-day running costs of the museum. The "Heritage Advisory Group" liaises with the trustees and volunteers managing the Museum and Archives and reports recommendations to both the Culture & Civic Committee and Full Council. Since its inception the Heritage Advisory Group has met twice, the second meeting was held in the Heritage Centre and included a guided tour of the museum for members of the Group. Three 'lay' members of the Group were appointed which provides a link to members of the public in the town as well as one representative from the Museum volunteers. The advisory group recognised a variety of maintenance needs including remedying penetrating damp in the gallery and approval has been received to proceed with this work.

### 2022-23 Highlights

- Volunteers worked over 5,200 hours during the last financial year, the equivalent of nearly 3 members of full-time staff.
- Just under 1,500 guests visited the Heritage Centre. This was approaching a 50% increase on the previous year
- The museum is open to the public between 11am and 4pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Since January 2023 volunteers have opened the building on the first Saturday of each month from 10am until 1pm.

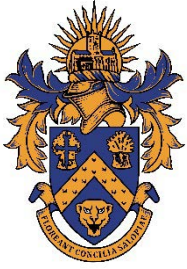




- Other openings to support national and local events included The Queen's Jubilee, 7 sites in the town for Heritage Open Days and extended hours for Whitchurch Christmas Lights switch on.
- Volunteers continue to network with local groups, providing placements in July for two work experience volunteers from SJT. A group of local Caldecott enthusiasts from Ellesmere also visited.
- In November a video-making team visited the Heritage Centre and commenced work on creating a video of items in the Collection as well as behind the scenes. On completion this will be available in a number of digital formats including YouTube and Facebook
- Also in November the museum opened specially for 38 members of the Antiquarian Horological Society (Turret Clock Group)
- 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 including Canada (wanting information on Vancouver Heritage Hall clock).
- More than 220 new items have been accessioned into the Museum's Collection, some donated, others purchased using grants and donations. These include:
  - Bronze Age spearhead found between Whitchurch & Prees
  - Whitchurch silver football medal for 1912/1913 season
  - Pair of leather children's clogs
  - Mezzotint by Jessie Furber
  - Silver urn presented to the Vicar of Ash during the 1930s
- Other activities by the volunteers:
  - A two page article on an Autograph book in our Collection, that belonged to Miss Violet Webb, featured in the September issue of 'Who do you think you are' magazine (result of interview with curator)
  - Creation of free leaflets on Whitchurch Fire Service and Violet Webb's autograph book
  - New displays created include Church House, Salopia Coaches, Butterflies and Prees Heath Past & Present
  - On view in the Community Display Case have been items found by a local metal detectorist



**A new website [www.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk](http://www.whitchurch-heritage.co.uk) continues to be updated allowing members of the public to view the Collection electronically. There are now 7 websites containing information on the history of Whitchurch and its surrounding villages**



# whitchurch town council

**Mayor and Chairman 2022/2023**

**Councillor Andy Hall**

**Members as at May 2023**

## **NORTH WARD**

Chez Doyle  
Adele Jackson  
Matt Phipps  
Giles Sullivan  
Pete Tew

## **SOUTH WARD**

Gregory Ebbs  
Andy Hall  
Angie Hotchkiss  
Cathy Purt  
Mike Ridgway

## **WEST WARD**

Jayne De-Wyrall  
Rose Hall  
Pete Lea  
John Morris  
Paul Sample

**Proper Officer & Responsible Financial Officer**

**Mike McDonald, MA, FSLCC, CILCA, FCMI, FRSA, MInstF, CIPFA**

**Civic Centre, High Street, Whitchurch, SY13 1AX**

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[whitchurchtowncouncil.gov.uk](http://whitchurchtowncouncil.gov.uk)



**socials - @wtcwhitchurch**