



ANNUAL REPORT 2013 - 2014



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INTRODUCTION

Mayor/Chairman of Whitchurch Town Council May 2013 – May 2014

Cllr Rob Hewson



This has been a busy year for me and I feel privileged to have been the Town Mayor, a role I have enjoyed immensely. I have had the pleasure of opening a number of shops throughout the Town Centre, which shows that people are investing in the future of our town, and I am very proud to support the new business owners.

It has been a trying time for all of our residents and visitors during the past seven months when the Civic Centre was undergoing extensive renovations. We have been faced with numerous disasters and setbacks but I am immensely grateful to Whitchurch Town Council's staff for guiding the Town Council's ship through very rough waters! I look forward to the range of services the new Civic Centre will encompass through its Community Hub.

Some of the highlights of my year in office include: the Mayor's Civic Service which was held at St John's Church in June 2013, the Whitchurch Lions Annual Dinner and my visit to Neufchâtel-en-Bray in France with the Town Twinning Association last September.

The Town enjoyed an extremely successful Edward German Festival 2014, which was painstakingly organised over the past 2 years by the Friends of Whitchurch (Shropshire) Heritage. I was privileged to attend all five evening concerts and the school concert. My personal highlight was the Pirates of Penzance Concert with the Fauls Singers in St Alkmund's Church, which brought the festival to a close.

During my time as Mayor I been raising money across various functions for the following organisations: Diabetes UK, Whitchurch Young Cricketers, Whitchurch Young Footballers, Centre Stage and Whitchurch Air Cadets. Thus far I have raised £1,921.46.

CIVIC CENTRE & MARKETS COMMITTEE



The refurbishment of the Civic Centre has been a drain on resources and it has produced both interesting and challenging elements for the Town Council. We had a gas leak at the very start of the project that could not be located, which meant that all of the gas had to be switched off in October 2013 for the duration of the regeneration work. This badly affected Whitchurch Friday Market and the hirers who had elected to stay with us during the renovations; many of whom had to find alternative accommodation. There was a threat of not being able to use the boilers in the Market Hall, thankfully this was averted, but with the boilers being over 40 years old the cost of replacing these will soon be upon us; which has no cheap option.

The main problems have been due to the original building design that prevented detailed investigations prior to the construction phase, for example; the ceiling could not be removed without destroying them. Once the ceiling had been taken down as part of the refurbishment, numerous problems were exposed resulting in complete re-wiring and fire protection being necessary. In addition investigations had to be carried out on materials used in the 1970's to ensure that they complied with current fire regulations.

Whitchurch Friday Market successfully operated in the Market Hall and on the Civic Centre's rear car park with a new outdoor layout throughout the renovation work. The Town Council would like to thank its loyal traders for their continued support and longevity. The Town Council is exploring the possibility of erecting metal signs at all of the entrances into the town to increase awareness about the weekly Friday Market.

We have had an extremely positive response so far from room hirers and we look forward to welcoming back the vast majority of our original and regulars hirers to Whitchurch Civic Centre.

In February 2014 the Town Council welcomed a new Facilities and Public Realm Officer (Handyman) into the team. The Town Council's new handyman has worked tirelessly with the other members of our Facilities staff to update the rooms which had to be omitted from the renovation plan during project shortfall. Both the Market Hall, the Main Hall and the changing rooms have been fully painted, with completely new flooring in the changing rooms. New stage curtains have been fitted into the Main Hall and the entire acoustic ceiling has been painted! The Town Council had to bear the extra cost in electricity while the contractors have been in the building as the contract stated that the Town Council should provide the electric.

WHITCHURCH HERITAGE CENTRE



The Town Council have been in negotiations with the Friends of Whitchurch Heritage and the museum volunteers to take on a lease for the building. The Town Council are keen for the volunteers to run the museum and attract more exhibits. The running costs will be difficult for the Friends of Whitchurch Heritage and the museum volunteers to manage and therefore the Town Council proposed a Grant of £15,000 to assist and grants will be offered every year to support them.

The building still belongs to Whitchurch Town Council and it will ensure that any usual repairs to the building will be covered by the handyman; after the Civic Centre is completed.

The museum status is being renewed in May 2014 for which the volunteers will ensure the status is maintained.

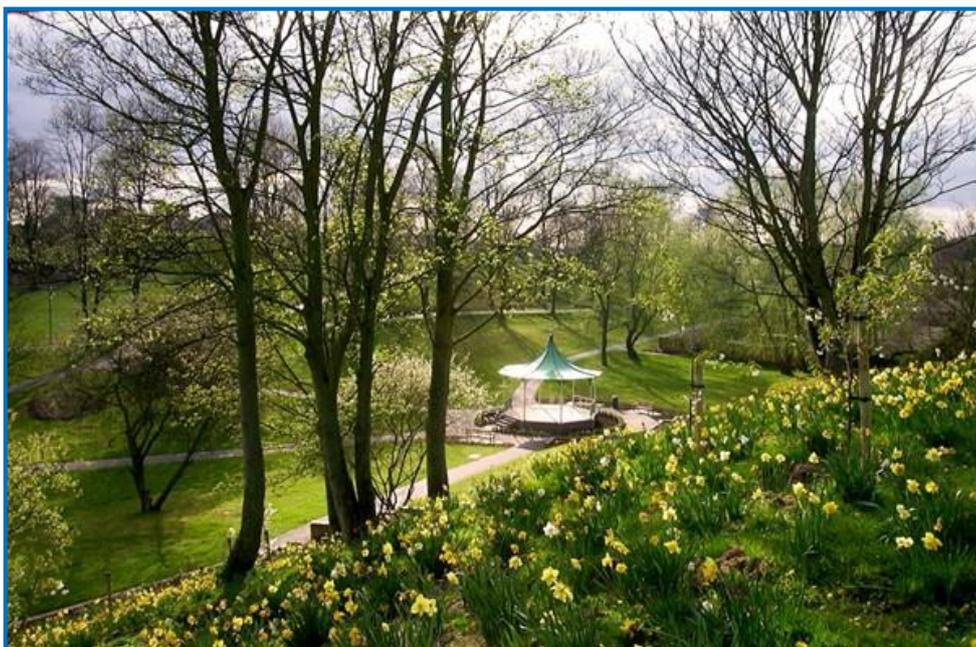
An Energy survey has been completed as the volunteers would like to apply for grants to improve the efficiency of the building. The information provided will give the volunteers the opportunity to apply as they would have documentary proof of the need. The volunteers will be constantly looking for grants to improve the building.

Two amateur radio events will be taking place this year and aerials will be erected on the building to facilitate these events. Children will be encouraged to speak to others across the world in these events.

The Heritage Centre has just been fitted with new alarms to accommodate the standards needed for the museum.

Once the Heritage Centre is leased, Whitchurch Town Council members will still be encouraged to be involved in all meetings to assist in the governance of the museum.

PARKS & OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE



We have enjoyed the beautiful flowers in Jubilee Park and the well maintained gardens throughout this last financial year. Nobridge has done us proud again. The contract is up for renewal in September but it is being extended until March 2015, in order to give the Town Council the opportunity to ensure that next year's precept includes the cost of providing the service.

On 19th August 2013 the public conveniences in Jubilee Park were re-opened after extensive refurbishment. This building comprises of a similar set up to the Town Council's other public conveniences on White Lion Meadow; they are coin operated, cleaned twice a day and locked every night.

Sadly in the wet weather and high winds we lost three of our trees in Jubilee Park. The Town Council is looking into the possibility of replacing the fallen trees and also increasing the number of trees in the park to assist with drainage.

We have suffered with some vandalism and graffiti in the park and a bench was lifted from the concrete. The CCTV cameras are to be enhanced to provide the police with information on those individuals that are causing the problems. Perhaps when these are fully operational we will see a change in behaviour of some individuals.

The Skate Park is still ongoing and the youth of the town are being canvassed as to their requirements and companies being asked to provide details of skate parks they can provide. Last year outdoor fitness equipment was considered but is currently on hold in order to allow the skate park to take precedence over the funding, as both projects are very costly.

Whitchurch Party in the Park was well received in 2013 and will be continuing this year on Saturday 7th June 2014. Funding for the graffiti artist is being provided by Shropshire Community Alcohol Partnership. There will be numerous activities on the day for all ages to visit and enjoy and a number of bands performing throughout the afternoon.

FINANCE



The Town Council's accounts are subject to an independent Internal and External Audit, **Audit and Audit regulations 2003 (amended 2006)**.

Copies of the accounts can be accessed upon request.

The final audited accounts for 2013/2014 will be available for inspection in June 2014.

For seven months of the 2013/2014 financial year, the Town Council employed Local Community Solutions, to ensure that all of the Town Council's Policies and Procedures were up to date and to implement important operational functions. The consultants also assisted the Town Council with the May 2013 elections, after which the Town Council welcomed a number of new town councillors. LCS Ltd also assisted with the appointment of the new Town Clerk, Michelle Wilson, who joined Whitchurch Town Council in October 2013.

In December 2013 the accountant informed us that the next financial year 2014/2015 Whitchurch Town Council would have to increase the precept in order to stand still. This has been done with a heavy heart from all the volunteer councillors. The most expensive items on the budget include the day-to-day running of the Civic Centre, staff salaries (eight members of staff), and the Parks contract.

In line with the Town Council's Grants Policy, the grants awarding process has now changed, which was supported by a Town Council advertising campaign at the beginning of this year. There will now only be one award each year, which will be decided upon during the April Full Town Council meeting. Applications must be received at the Town Council Office by 1st April, any other requests after that date will be held until the following year.

For this financial year 2014/2015 the following grants have now been awarded:

Name of Body	Amount Awarded
KSLI Memorial Appeal	£240
St John's Methodist Church	£300
Town Twinning Association	£400
(79 Whitchurch) Air Cadets	£450
Friends of Whitchurch (Shropshire) Heritage	£1,000 <i>Harry Richards Fund</i>
Age UK, Whitchurch	£170
Party in the Park	£630
Home Start North Shropshire	£2,500
Cricket Club	£250
Queensway Playing Fields Association	£500
Blackberry Fair	£1,500
Inner Wheel	£350
Total:	£8,290

HEALTH & SAFETY, CCTV, CHRISTMAS LIGHTS & PUBLIC CONVENIENCES



With a Doctor Who themed switch on Whitchurch Christmas Lights 2013 was an event not to be missed! On Saturday 30th November the Town's Christmas Lights were switched on by ballroom dancers AJ and Chloe from Britain's Got Talent. The switch on was preceded by a Frost Forest Lantern Parade, where local children, accompanied by the Mayor and Mayoress of Whitchurch, paraded down the High Street to the stage with handmade lanterns to signal the switching on of the lights.

Events ran throughout the day, starting with a special Christmas Market which stretched from the Post Office in Green End all the way up the High Street, past the Civic Centre. The Market enjoyed much success with over 40 stalls in attendance, including hot food, gifts and crafts. The Christmas Market was beautifully lit with festive lighting to encourage later shopping in the town up until 6pm, with many High Street shops electing to join in.

Due to the fact that the Civic Centre was out of action, the main stage was erected next to the clock in the Bullring, which was funded by the LJC. However, this new found location worked perfectly, allowing all areas of central town to feel included in the switch on activities. The stage could be seen from both the top of the High Street and Green End. A number of acts performed throughout the day and local band Just Lookin' closed the event, performing to a delighted crowd who had gathered for the switch on. The Bullring was saturated with rides and attractions for children including a giant inflatable football goal, Ferris wheel and other fairground rides. With a full road closure in place all day families could enjoy their time in Whitchurch with a relaxed view towards road safety. Father Christmas also managed to drop in! St Alkmund's Church celebrated its 300th birthday and festivities at the church ran alongside the switch on day.

All Civic Centre and Heritage Staff received First Aid Training with Shropshire Council during summer 2013. The Town Council has commissioned Securasond to complete a full overhaul of the CCTV cameras in the town; this should be completed after the Civic Centre is opened. The Parks cameras will be taken on by the Town Council and this should eliminate any vandalism in the park.