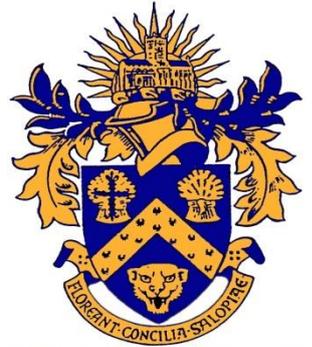




Whitchurch Town Council

# ANNUAL REPORT 2014 - 2015



Whitchurch Town Council



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## INTRODUCTION

**Cllr Rob Hewson**

**Mayor/Chairman**

**Whitchurch Town Council 2013 to 2015**

It is now coming up to the end of my two years in office and I would like to thank all councillors and staff for the support during my term of office. I would also like to thank Tesco for supporting my duties as Mayor and the charities that are in the town. It has been another good year with a number of new shops opening in the town.

The updated CCTV cameras in the town are now completed and I am very proud to be part of that project from start to finish. The grant from West Mercia Police paid for the majority of the cameras and the new digital system. I would like to thank the shopkeepers and residents in the town for their support in the upgrading of the cameras.

In the last year we have changed banks, this has saved the ratepayers a substantial sum as the previous bank started to charge for their services. We have had Stoke Heath assist the Town Council in the park and the market hall with jobs that take time. They have smartened up areas that would be a long term project for our own staff. I was the first Mayor to be invited to dine at the Nantwich Show, which to me was a great honour having grown up in Nantwich.

This year I have raised **£3000** for my charities which will be Whitchurch Young Mini Rugby Club, Air Ambulance, Whitchurch Youth Cricket Club and Cystic Fibrosis.

We had an excellent Christmas Lights Switch on event in November last year with a Frozen theme as well as a busy day in town with the outdoor Christmas Market, performances from local dance groups and partnership working with the Masonic Rooms, who joined in with the festivities. To finish the day we had artificial snow sprinkling down from the Civic Centre's new balcony; this is going to be difficult to top this year. I was proud to work in partnership with Whitchurch and District Lions Club, the Fauls Singers and pianist Maurice Posniak for the Mayor's Christmas Charity Concert 2014, where guests enjoyed an evening of musical entertainment and we raised £386.35 for the Mayor's Charities. A number of local businesses supported this event and to them I offer my most humble thanks for their support for this event and many others.

This year the Town Council has introduced a new website [www.whitchurchcouncil.uk](http://www.whitchurchcouncil.uk) and we would like to thank Ian Garner from the Whitchurch Museum and Archive Volunteers for all the work he has done to see this project through and his continued support to the staff in making the website accessible and interesting.

Other achievements throughout the past year include:

- Replacement of two street lights and the removal of one that was causing an obstruction.
- The Town Council has kept its street lights on after 12 midnight.
- A new parks contract, with considerable savings from the cost from the previous contract
- Successfully applied for lottery funding for WW1 project which started with McDonalds Hill Valley planting Newport Road, a cabinet in the Civic with memorabilia. Projects to follow include the cleaning of the cenotaph with new names to be added and a re-enactment.
- The land at Edward German Drive has been put up for sale
- We have taken down the old shed in Jubilee Park in preparation of a feasibility study being run by Shropshire Council Leisure Services.
- The Town Council has had presentations from Scottish Power who have explained the electricity situation in Whitchurch.

**I have enjoyed my term of office and wish the same good fortune for the incoming Mayor's term.**



## Heritage Report



When the Civic Centre reopened in May 2014, Whitchurch Town Council staff and Shropshire Council staff moved across to the new Hub inside the Civic Centre. At this point the volunteers, now Whitchurch Museum and Archive Volunteers (WMAV), were asked to take over the opening of the Heritage Centre as the Whitchurch Museum and Archives. Initially the WMAV opened the museum twice weekly which increased to three days a week as demand increased and more stewards were recruited. In total there are currently around 18 archivists and stewards. Volunteers of all ages from students to senior citizens have been recruited this year and are WMAV are always interested in any new volunteers. The number of visitors has increased coming from across the country and abroad as well as locally. The museum has answered queries from the UK and as far afield as Australia.

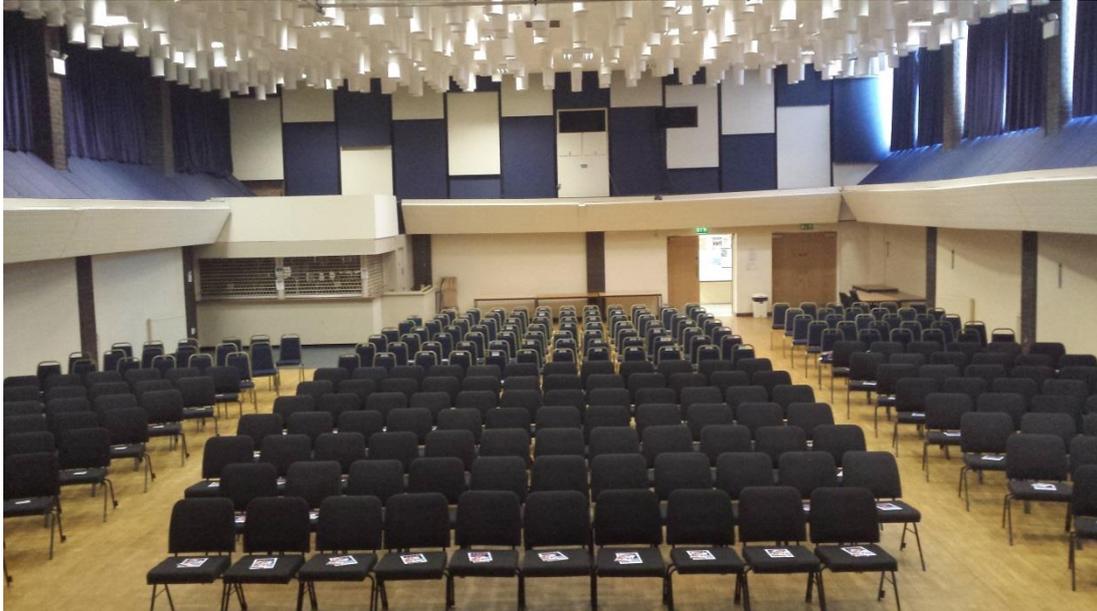
There have been several successful events during the year. For International Museums 'On The Air' weekend an amateur radio station able to contact other museums worldwide was set up and tried out by visitors. There was a special opening for 'Archive Remembered' where the public could come and research WW1 relatives, local events etc. For the third year running, the WMAV organised Heritage Open Days in the town, which enabled people to look around St Alkmund's Church Tower, Sainsbury's Ice House, The Masonic Hall and Whitchurch Museum and Archive, along with an organised walk around chapels in the town. Several hundred people visited. The WMAV received a Heritage Lottery grant of £6,400 to create a Communication Display in the museum to commemorate WW1; the work towards this is ongoing.

A 16th Century silver dress fastener from the British Museum was purchased and Art Fund has approved an £800 grant to purchase a very rare hooked dress fastener found near Prees. Over 120 further donations have been received. The return of The Rector's Scrapbook to Whitchurch was secured after it was to have been kept by Shropshire Archives, following its digitisation, and this is now kept for public access in the Whitchurch Archive in the museum along with copies of the Whitchurch Herald dating back to the mid 1800s. WMAV are constantly seeking funds to add items to the museum.

Whitchurch Museum has undergone a reaccreditation process, which is completed every five years, and both the honorary curator Dr Judith Hoyle and Ian Garner have put in a huge amount of time and hard work on the submission that was sent in February 2015. The Town Council has continued to maintain the building and also awarded a grant to WMAV towards the running costs of the museum.

The Heritage Centre building does have a problem with its heating system and as it is a listed building, along with a necessity to maintain the museum and storage areas at the temperature and humidity required for safekeeping of the museum artefacts, there are limited options available to alter the system currently in place. There is asbestos residue associated with parts of the heating system that needs to be removed before any upgrading of the heating system can commence. The building would benefit from a programme of works to install more insulation, which would also significantly reduce heating costs.

## Civic Centre and Markets Report



### Events the Council has run and been involved with during the year

- **EVERY FRIDAY a market in the Market Hall**
- **Gardeners' Market**
- **Food and Drink Festival**
- **Blackberry Fair**
- **Christmas Lights Switch on**
- **Indoor Christmas Fair**
- **Spring Fair**

The Civic Centre re-opened after the extensive refurbishment in May 2014. The building now houses the Community Hub where Shropshire Council and Whitchurch Town Council work in conjunction with one another. The Hub is providing a vast number of Council services to residents and visitors to the town, as well as tourist information. Bookings for rooms in the Civic can be made at the Hub and the centre is once again very busy. The front of the building was refurbished and the area from the Theatre back to the Market Hall was left due to financial constraints. The Theatre has been completely redecorated, the changing rooms have had new flooring and been fully repainted, and the Main Hall has had new stage curtains and new chairs to match, all financed by the Town Council.

The inaugural Whitchurch Food and Drink Festival attracted well over 4,000 visitors to Whitchurch in May last year and we look forward to the next one. The festival organising committee now has its own separate bank account, affiliated with the Town Council, to improve the organisational process.

The Civic and Markets Committee discuss all the issues related to the Civic Centre and events being held in the town. The Main Hall has recently been renamed the 'Whitchurch Civic Theatre', to encourage increased use of the theatre space. The named artists have been invited to use the facilities of the **WHITCHURCH CIVIC THEATRE** and we are confident that once used they will return and pass comments onto others in their profession. It is the aim of the committee to bring back life into the theatre and encourage residents and fans from far and wide to be entertained. The Whitchurch Civic Theatre has been used for weddings, theatre plays, dance classes and concerts over the past year. The Licensee has put together a Party Pack for those who wish to hand over the organisation of their celebrations with a number of menus and drinks packages available at very competitive prices. The Theatre had the pleasure of hosting a Michael English concert, with visitors travelling from as far as Abergavenny in South Wales. The theatre will be presenting Dominic Kirwan and Mary Duff in June, tickets are already selling well. The Civic Centre gratefully received a defibrillator from the Whitchurch Rotary Club in memory of Dr Paul Wilson and provided training for staff, councillors and Rotarians.

A display cabinet of WW1 memorabilia is in the foyer this was Cllr John Ebbs' project, who provided most of the items inside the cabinet. The Friday Market is currently being promoted online with an incentive for new stall holders who sign up to trade for an extent period of time. The Town Council is endeavouring to bring in new traders and has erected new signs around the entrances to the town showing we are a Market Town.

## Parks and Open Spaces Report



We started the tender process for the parks and open spaces in October 2014 and the new contract started in April 2015; the existing contractor won the bid. The contract is reduced by £5,000 and two of the areas maintained by the contractor are now not covered by the Town Council. The first one is Edward German Drive as this area is up for sale, and the second is Wayland Road which is now being maintained by Streetscape.

Jubilee Park has had some significant changes over the past year. Most recently being the band stand and the railings having been repainted. We have a partnership agreement with Stoke Heath Prison Service for work in the community and they have been assisting with the improvements.

The Town Council is seeking more information and consultation with residents on the feasibility of some exercise equipment in Jubilee Park.

The Town Council have been assisting Shropshire Council Leisure Services with the feasibility of a wheel park in Jubilee Park. The old shed has now been dismantled in preparation of the wheel park once all the consultation process has been completed.

We have sought advice from Meres and Mosses on making some of the areas in the park more habitable for wildlife and insects by introducing wild seed areas in the park. The park does suffer from some drainage issues and these areas have been targeted for mowing to be ceased and in order to allow the grass grow and to encourage more wildlife. The pond by Sherrymill Hill will be introduced with the help from Meres and Mosses and their expertise.

More trees have been planted to give an avenue effect as you walk down the footpath and a rose walk will be introduced later in 2015.

## Finance Report



The Town Council moved back into the Civic Centre in May 2014 and despite substantial investment the unexpected, yet inevitable, expenses were incurred by Whitchurch Town Council.

The awards for grants were changed to May this year as some calculations as to availability of funds had to be determined. A list of successful applicants will be circulated later.

Some major funds have been spent this year the most being on the CCTV cameras in the town. The town now have digital cameras an upgrade from the previous analogue cameras. These give a clear and in time motion picture of events.

2014/ 2015 saw the first without consultant accountants assisting the running of the Council's finances, the transfer to internet banking and wages done in house.

2015 / 2016 will be a challenging year for the Town Council. The loss of the £43k support grant from Shropshire Council and the Town Council determination to minimise the rise in precept to 0.5% has left little room for manoeuvre, but WTC are resolute to provide a service to the best of their ability within budget and financial constraints.

Our accounts are audited every year and once a year before external audit members of the public can ask to see the internal audited accounts.

## CCTV and Christmas Lights Report



The Town Council applied for and received funding through Shropshire Council from West Mercia Police a grant for upgrading the CCTV cameras in the town. This work is completed for the town and the Town Council would like to thank all the shops owners/proprietors for their patience and understanding through the change. Jubilee Park will be fitted with new cameras which will assist in any anti-social behaviour reported to the police.

The 2014 Christmas Lights celebration was organised by the Town Council, using the new Civic Centre as the focal point for the switch on. The theme for the year was 'Frozen' and the children's fancy dress competition was a very popular focus for the day. The Christmas Market attracted more than twenty stalls from the parking bays in Green End to the very top of the High Street, the stalls and many shops in the town were open late to support the switch on. Many other events in the town coincided with the switch on including St John's Christmas Fair, Mrs Claus at the Masonic Rooms, and lantern making workshops Christmas Craft with Beacon Church.

The town's beloved Lantern Parade, in association with Blackberry Fair, lit up the streets of Whitchurch, with the families and their handmade lanterns culminating on the balcony of the Civic Centre along with the Mayor and Whitchurch's own Diana Beard. Everyone looked on in awe as artificial snow fell from the balcony accompanied by themed music, which was the perfect end to an extremely busy day in Whitchurch. Winners of the Frozen competition were taken for a ride in the spectacular sleigh with Sven, Olaf and Elsa, a switch on highlight for many. Olaf was photographed many times with children in the town; he was definitely the favourite of the day.

The Christmas lights were returned in January, as the four year contact came to an end. It was not known at that stage that these lights were on rental. Most councillors were of the opinion that they would belong to the town council after the four years and the accounts showed that they were a capital item. Unfortunately there has been a misunderstanding along the way and the lights do not belong to the council and now alternative arrangements are being sought.



## Further Pictures from the year 2014 - 2015



The Main Hall, dressed for a wedding



The inaugural Whitchuch Food and Drink Festival and the Mayor pictured with the Rt Hon Owen Paterson.



Whitchurch's first Gardeners' Market in the Bullring and one of the displays in Jubilee Park (left)