



Ringwood Town Council

Annual Report 2023

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ANNUAL REPORTS FOR TOWN ASSEMBLY 31st May 2023

Introduction by the Town Mayor Cllr Gareth DeBoos

If I may paraphrase Tolkien, there was One Ring that ruled the others and so it was with Tony Ring, our previous mayor. Massive shoes for me to step into. I know we are all sad to see him retire from civic duty and wish him all the best for the future.

This past year has been a mix of joyous and sad events. Covid-19 has not gone away as the passing of Queen Elizabeth demonstrated. Three town councillors have suffered, and continue to suffer, the effects of Long Covid. In particular, I want to mention Cllr O'Reilly, who has been a joy to work with and will be missed as a Town Councillor. I sincerely hope that she will recover fully soon and be able and willing to continue assisting the Events Team in the future.

On events, there was the brilliant Pedal Car Grand Prix, organised by the Round Table and enthusiastically compared by Candice, the daughter of Michael Lingam-Willgoss, the voice of Ringwood. There was Carnival, that might not have happened due to the Royal funeral, itself a very solemn and moving occasion, but ended up being a truly memorable event for those that attended. Our thanks go to Ben Salsbury and his wonderful team of volunteers. There was Fireworks and the Christmas events, that are now firmly in the annual calendar, as well as the Coronation event on the Bickerley. We are lucky to have council officer Charmaine Bennett organising these with the Events Team, but again I must give a shout out to the numerous voluntary organisations that freely give their time and also financial support from local businesses. Thank you all.

On events of a different nature, the completion of the A31 roadworks scheme was met with a sigh of relief from Ringwood shop keepers and other businesses. I am told that footfall is recovering. What may help this further are ideas for improving the Market Place that came out of the Neighbourhood Plan work. I hope that funding may be secured to progress the vision. The Neighbourhood Plan itself has progressed remarkably quickly and I hope that the referendum will happen in the Autumn. I believe the Plan will make a positive impact on new development in Ringwood, including the strategic sites at Moortown Lane and Lynes Farm. Last, but not least, on projects is the redevelopment of the Long Lane football facilities. This is progressing well and will be an amazing sports venue when complete. The efforts of Cllrs Loose and Briers, as well as our Town Clerk, are deeply appreciated.

Lastly, I want to give a 'shout out' to all the Council Officers, from the front desk to the groundsmen. We are blessed with a great team.

Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee

Report by the Chairman Cllr Andy Briers

May 2022 – May 2023

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee 2023.

Whilst there are many open spaces and facilities within the town provided by the Town Council, I would like to comment on the following;

Carvers & Carvers Clubhouse

I am pleased to say that once again, with the manager's hard work and enthusiasm, this facility continues to improve. Activities continue and are well attended by the families of Ringwood despite the current cost of living crisis we find ourselves in. We will continue to source grant funding to further enhance the facilities and services, both at the clubhouse and Carvers in general.

In addition, and under the leadership of Cllr Fredrick, we are continuing to develop an overall strategy for the enhancement of this open space. This is currently ongoing and we hope to provide further information to our residents in the coming months.

Long Lane

We, Ringwood Town Football Club and partners are progressing the redevelopment of the facilities at Long Lane and I am pleased to report that the artificial pitch is now complete and is being used by teams of all ages. I would like to thank all those involved in the project, particularly Cllr Loose and the Town Clerk. This is now being taken to the next stage and we look forward to the construction of the new clubhouse in the coming months.

Events

Events in Ringwood have continued such as the Party in the Park to celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee, the annual firework display, the Christmas market and light switch on and most recently the gathering on the green to celebrate the Kings coronation. All of these events were very well attended and these events will continue this year. It is thanks to the Events Manager, Events sub-committee, officers, the voluntary support of local residents and associations such as the Carnival, Rotary Club, Round Table, Men's Shed and last but not least, the generous local sponsors that these events continue.

General Items

The committee as always gives its thanks to Mr Atack and members of Ringwood Garden Club for judging the annual allotment competition. The winning allotment holders were awarded prizes at a presentation last September.

I must again congratulate Ringwood Actions for Climate Emergency (RACE) and their supporters for their ongoing commitment. I thank you for all of your efforts.

Last, but by no means least, I must mention and thank our office staff and grounds team. It is thanks to their hard work and ongoing commitment that our town and facilities are something to be very proud of.

I hope the residents of Ringwood have recognised our efforts through 2022-23 and will support us in the year ahead. I would also like to thank the residents and voluntary groups of Ringwood who help with community projects, litter picking, reporting defects etc. Your help is much appreciated.

Finally, I would also like to thank members of the committee for their help and contributions throughout the last year.

That concludes the annual report from the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee.

Policy and Finance Committee

Report by previous Chairman Cllr Jeremy Heron

Mr Mayor, Councillors, Ladies and Gentleman

What a strange event tonight's Annual Assembly is for me. I stand here to present my final annual report after close on a quarter of a century.

When I joined the Council I was oft asked if I was considering a career in politics and would I be standing to try and become an MP; strangely that question is not so common now.

Now this being my final report is not the strange part of tonight because far stranger than that is that I am here to report a slight overspend on the 2022/23 year. Our budget, set back in early 2022, gave us a predicted expenditure of £809 thousand pounds whereas the revised outturn was slightly higher at just over £3.2 million, a mere 300% overspend.

Quite an achievement when you consider that the Council Tax, for the year, was set at £553,949.

So, what have we done with the money? Tonight is our opportunity to tell the people of Ringwood what we have undertaken, on their behalf, over the past year. Whilst I thank those who have taken the time to come out this evening, I must also express my regret that the attendance is not what it used to be.

I will start with the Grants, which I would like to just mention have changed in their nature over the years; we used to make a far greater number of awards, each of a lower value, than we do now and I know that this Council is looking at possible changes to the process. However, I digress, last year we set a grant budget of £9,900 for the year and supported the following organisations:

Poulner Junior School
Ringwood Netball Centre
Crowe Hill Woman's Institute
Citizens Advice New Forest
Avon Valley Concerts
Ringwood Twinning Association
Bickerley Green Care Home

I trust that everyone agrees that these are all worthy organisations that help to enrich our community.

Being the Policy and Finance Committee, we do not undertake the big exciting projects but are more in the background enabling the smooth running of the Council, ensuring that the books balance and that the Council maintains a healthy reserve. Although the term healthy reserve can give rise to debate amongst Councillors.

The year has seen the purchase of the land at Forestside Gardens, a significant expenditure by this Council but one that has delivered a level of certainty to residents in the area and put an end to the anxiety that they have suffered every time someone thinks that they have the possibility of overriding the planning condition in the hope of making a personal profit.

We provided additional funding of £3,650 for further works on the Neighbourhood Plan, this money being in order to engage the youth of the town through an unlikely named organisation called SPUD.

And then we come to the reason why we exceeded our original budget, the development of Long Lane and enhancement of the football facilities within the town. This project not only represents a significant capital investment £3,140,665 but, in order to see it delivered, also required the Council to make a 50 year financial commitment in that we have enjoyed a rental income in the past but that has had to be forgone whilst the club look to service the loan. In addition, we have invested a further £353,788 in the form of developers' contributions and the Football Foundation Grant has committed £3,140, 665 making the whole scheme possible.

There also remains the projects for which we have agreed funding but which we have not yet delivered on, such as a further £6,000 from CIL to provide a Columbarium, the need to resolve the waste licence at Poulner Lakes and securing the new lease on Ten Acre Field.

The Council remains in a relatively strong financial position but is constrained in its ability to increase income whilst, like everyone in the community, struggling with the pressures of inflation. It will need to review its reserves to ensure that there is sufficient funding to cover replacement of capital items and to fund future projects.

I would like to thank everyone for the enjoyable time that I have spent being a member of Ringwood Town Council and wish it well for the future.

Planning, Town and Environment Committee

Report by the Chairman Cllr Philip Day

The “routine” work of the Committee has continued unabated over the last year, considering every single planning application made within the parish, along with applications made under the Licensing Act and for works to trees that are protected or within the conservation area.

We have continued the practice first adopted during “lockdown” and remote hearings whereby members of the Committee let me know about any concerns they might have about any particular application(s) in advance of the meeting. This ensures that any issues that any member has is properly considered and discussed. I am pleased to report that we as a Committee usually reach an unanimous decision about the recommendation that we make to NFDC Planning Officers but there are of course occasions when a vote has to be taken!

I also thank all those members of the public who have taken time out on a Friday morning to either speak in support or against a particular application. The opportunity to ask them questions helps no end in terms of coming to a proper decision.

We have seen a continuing trend towards replacing conservatories (for which planning consent might not have been necessary when erected) with permanent extensions, enlarging extensions into roof spaces and “infill” developments. The latter have usually been the greatest cause of concern.

I am pleased to report that by and large, NFDC officers have taken on board RTC’s concerns (but not always – see below) and as I write, there are two applications that have been deferred as a result of our representations to allow for further discussions.

We also have oversight of a number of projects including for example the Human Sundial and the now completed A31 widening project to name but two.

The Neighbourhood Plan

The Plan comes within the remit of the Committee and I am pleased to report that it has reached a stage when it is almost ready for submission to the Local Planning Authorities and examination by a Planning Inspector. I hope that the process will culminate in a referendum within the next year and if approved, will give the Town Council and local people a far greater say over future planning applications and a greater share of Community Infrastructure Levy (“CIL”) which the Town Council will be free to spend on capital projects that would otherwise be unaffordable.

My thanks to all of those (too numerous to mention individually) who have voluntarily given up a great deal of their time to undertake the huge amount of work that has been needed to get us to this stage.

Strategic sites

In the public eye, the large, proposed housing developments in or near to the Town have rather dominated the work of the Committee.

The Beaumont Park (Linden Homes) site has now been built out and occupied but we continue to scrutinise compliance with conditions, including in particular the open spaces and the provision of long-awaited allotments.

Although outside the Parish, we have also been concerned with the proposed Snails Lane development. The outline application was refused (despite officers' recommendations to grant). There has been no appeal but a further application may be forthcoming.

The Moortown Lane site was the subject of a "hybrid" planning application – in part for outline permission for the entire site but also detailed planning for the southern part. Our objections to these plans were supported by Planning Officers but at the time of writing, further applications are expected which the Committee will no doubt carefully scrutinise.

The other strategic site is that known variously as the Elm Tree, Nouale Lane or Taylor Wimpey site. RTC objected to the outline planning application for up to 400 dwellings (the Local Plan envisaged "at least 270") on the basis of over-development, concerns over flooding and drainage, non-compliance with NFDC policies and lack of appropriate conditions, not least relating to the building of the roundabout/link road from the A31.

NFDC granted the outline application by a 7-6 vote, prompting former mayor, town and district councillor Tony Ring to resign from NFDC planning committee.

There is a long way to go before any houses are built on this site and I am confident that this Committee will continue to do all that it can to ensure that any development is appropriate.

The Regal. Not a strategic site but one of huge interest to residents and integral to the re-generation of the Market Place, we await a planning application.

Thanks and acknowledgements

Four members of the Committee will be leaving us - Councillors Tony Ring, Gloria O'Reilly, Hilary Edge and Derek Scott.

I would like to thank them all for their valuable contributions to the work of the Committee and the Council and wish them well.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank our Deputy Town Clerk (and clerk to this Committee), Jo Hurd and our Office Manager Nicola Vodden who between them provide us with all the information we need to properly consider applications, give us invaluable advice to "keep us on the straight and narrow" and properly minute our discussions and decisions.

Finally

There are some major challenges ahead but I am sure that under the guidance of our officers, the Committee will continue to put the interests of our residents and the Town's heritage to the fore.

Cllr Philip Day

16th May 2023