



Ringwood Town Council

Annual Report 2024

(Presented to the Annual Town Assembly on 15th May 2024)

CONTENTS

- Page 2 Introduction by the Town Mayor Cllr Gareth DeBoos
- Page 3 - 4 Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee –
Annual Report by the Chairperson Cllr Andy Briers
- Page 5 - 6 Planning, Town & Environment Committee –
Annual Report by the Chairperson Cllr Philip Day
- Page 7 - 9 Policy & Finance Committee –
Annual Report by the Chairperson Cllr Mary DeBoos
- Page 10 Staffing Committee –
Annual Report by the Chairperson Cllr John Haywood

TOWN ASSEMBLY 15th May 2024

Introduction by the Town Mayor Cllr Gareth DeBoos

In the last year, Ringwood Town Council has provided a great service managing town affairs. Most of what is carried out is invisible to the residents. They may notice that the Bickerley has been mown and they may hear that a grant has been awarded to some good cause. They may go to one of the events put on by the Town Council, like Fireworks or Winter Wonderland. But they only see a small fraction of what is carried out by councillors, officers and staff, assisted in no small way by volunteers.

A case in point is the work carried out by the Neighbourhood Plan team to generate a Plan for Ringwood. The initial drafting and evidence gathering was carried out by a gang of mostly volunteers split into four sub-groups. Housing was led by the wonderful Chris Treleaven and that team was particularly keen to see more smaller, genuinely affordable housing built rather than the high-priced housing built by national developers. The Design team was headed by an award-winning architect and chair of Ringwood Society, Joe Moorhouse, and that team were keen that the character of our town is protected and enhanced by any new development or face lifts of existing buildings. Concerns about the viability of the town centre was the drive for Cllr. Janet Georgiou and her team, looking to create a thriving marketplace, for example. The fourth stream looked at environmental concerns such as energy efficient housing and wildlife corridors. Yes, the work was supported by consultants with expertise in generating Neighbourhood Plans and paid for with a Government grant, but it was still a Herculean task that has taken a couple of years to date and had to pass the scrutiny of an expert external inspector, which it did with flying colours. Assuming the Plan is ratified by the Local Planning Authorities, it will then go to a referendum in order for it to become legally enforceable. You will hear more detail about the plan later from the other Cllr. DeBoos.

Looking forward, I hope to see the work progressing on redevelopment of the football club complete in the next few months. I also hope that the project to upgrade Carvers will start to provide tangible assets on the ground for the public to enjoy.

I also hope to see more activity from the newly formed Ringwood Business Community and Stronger Together Across Ringwood and Fordingbridge (STARF).

There are so many wonderful volunteer and community groups in Ringwood: Rotary, Round Table, Lions, Greyfriars, Ringwood Society and Ringwood Carnival to name only a few.

Overall, anyone that knows me knows that I believe Ringwood, although not perfect, is a wonderful place to live and, with the continued help of the community, I am looking forward to seeing Ringwood improve and thrive.

Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee Annual Report by the Chairperson Cllr Andy Briers

May 2023 – May 2024

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

As mentioned last year, I am pleased to say that yet again, with the manager's hard work and enthusiasm, this facility continues to deliver to the residents of Ringwood. Activities continue and are well attended by the families of Ringwood despite the ongoing 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. The strategy is in its final stages, and we hope to provide further information to our residents in the coming months.

Long Lane

We, Ringwood Town Football Club and partners are continuing to progress the redevelopment of the facilities at Long Lane and I am pleased to report that the new pavilion is nearing completion. I would like to thank all those involved in the project, particularly the Town Clerk.

Events

Events in Ringwood have continued such as the annual firework display, the Christmas market and light switch on. 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 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

I'm pleased to advise the new allotments at Crow will be officially opened this month, providing more opportunities for budding gardeners.

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 2023-24 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.

Planning, Town and Environment Committee

Report by the Chairperson Cllr Philip Day

May 2023 to May 2024

It was an honour to be re-elected as Chair of the Committee – my fifth year in the role and my 9th on the Committee.

All but two of my fellow Councillors are members of this Committee. It was a pleasure to welcome several new Councillors and to have Cllr Glenys Turner as my Vice-Chair. The Committee is probably the busiest of all the Town Council's committees as we meet on the first Friday morning of every month, including August when other committees take a welcome break from business. Our meetings are rarely over in less than an hour and regularly approach 3 hours.

Our "routine work" continues unabated – we look at every single planning application submitted within the parish as well as applications for tree works in the conservation area and in respect of protected trees. We also consider applications made under the Licensing Act 2003 (although these have been relatively few and far between) and applications for advertising consent.

The majority of applications are uncontentious – in the main local residents looking to extend their properties although occasionally issues do arise concerning (for example) the impact on neighbouring properties or the effect on the street scene, particularly within the conservation area.

We have seen an increase in the number of applications for new dwellings as "in-fill" developments in people's gardens and the like. These can be controversial because on the one hand, we recognise the need for smaller, affordable (in the sense of relatively cheap) dwellings but on the other hand, we do sometimes have concerns about over-development and lack of amenity space or parking provision.

Both applicants and objectors (and their agents) are always welcome to attend our meetings and we are grateful when they do so as the opportunity to ask questions of them can be of considerable assistance in resolving queries.

The Neighbourhood Plan

I will not steal Cllr Mary DeBoos' thunder other than to formally report that we are expecting the plan to go to a referendum in July and to heartily thank all those volunteers who have been involved in bringing the plan to this point and within budget!

Strategic sites

Although now built out and fully occupied, the developers of Beaumont Park have yet to complete all works necessary to comply with conditions although I am pleased to report that the allotment site on Crow Arch Lane has now been handed over and all plots have been allocated.

A year after the Nouale Lane (Elm Tree or Taylor Wimpey) site was granted outline consent, little has happened and there is no real indication as to when any detailed consent will be sought, let alone when building works might commence.

Similarly, there has been little progress regarding the Moortown Lane site although amended plans have been submitted, various reports have been received from statutory consultees and we expect the hybrid application (part outline and part detailed) to come before NFDC's planning committee in the near future. The Town Council has made numerous representations highlighting our concerns about several aspects of the proposals, not least highways issues, the overall design, flooding and the impact on neighbouring properties.

Although outside the Parish, the proposed development Snails Lane has been the subject of a "scoping exercise" but at the time of writing, no formal application has been submitted.

The Old Town Hall (also referred to as the Regal and/or the Corn Exchange) has been empty for about 20 years and has become something of a blot on the landscape of our Town Centre and Market Place. We were pleased that a local company has acquired the site and proposes to re-develop the same with both commercial/retail use and additional housing. We were also grateful that the developers have engaged with the Town Council in explaining their proposals, arranging a site visit and listening to our concerns.

Flooding

There is a perception that flooding around the Town has worsened in recent years and we were pleased to receive a very informative presentation from Hampshire County Council's Flood and Water Management Technical Manager. The clear message was that flooding incidents were not always being reported properly and as a consequence, the County Council was unaware of some of the issues arising. Councillors and members of the public are urged to report all such incidents to <https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/environment/flooding/reportingflooding>

Thanks and acknowledgments

To all those involved in the Neighbourhood Plan, all members of the public who have attended our meetings, Ringwood Society for their invaluable contributions in respect of the conservation area and last but certainly not least, our Deputy Clerk Jo Hurd and Office Manager Nicola Vodden without whose assistance and guidance, our work would be immeasurably more difficult.

Cllr Philip Day
25th April 2024

Policy and Finance Committee

Report by Chairperson Cllr Mary DeBoos

It is a pleasure to present my first report at a Town Assembly. As a new Councillor I am indebted to our Finance Team and our Town Clerk, Chris Wilkins, for guiding me through the production of this report.

Firstly, I would like to thank Rory Fitzgerald our Finance Manager. The external audit report last year was very positive, and this is testament to his excellent work.

Although the ultimate responsibility for production of our accounts sits with Rory, the management of each budget sits with our other Council Officers, all of whom are diligent in this duty.

Before I talk about the finances, a little about the Policy and Finance Committee (P&F).

As you might expect the Committee advises on and monitors income and expenditure and hence the budget. It also:

- Oversees the Council's formal policies, Standing Orders, strategies and governance documents, including periodic reviews when deemed necessary;
- Oversees all Council business of a legal nature including: the acquisition or disposal of any freehold or leasehold interests in land. During this year this has included:
 - Successful defence of an ownership claim for part of the public land on the Bickerley, our Village Green;
 - Renewal of the lease of the bowling green and premises to Ringwood Bowling Club; and;
 - Transfer to us of the freehold allotments site off Crow Arch Lane;
 - I would like to express public thanks to Chris Wilkins for his management of all of these and in particular his expert handling of the ownership claim in relation to the Bickerley.
- Manages the Council's Grant Aid scheme. This year we have awarded grants to:
 - Ringwood Junior School PTA;
 - Friends of Ringwood Infant School;
 - Bickerley Green Care Home;
 - The Girl Guides;
 - Greyfriars;
 - Avon Valley Concerts;
 - New Forest Disability Information Service;
 - Ringwood Rotary Club.
 - All of which I feel, and I hope you agree are worthy causes within the town.

So that takes me to the financials. To put this into context Ringwood Town Council has a budget roughly equivalent to that of a primary school.

	Original Budget	Revised Budget
Revenue Expenditure	868,217	928,962
Capital Expenditure	781,000	2,111,959
Plus transfers to earmarked reserves	33,600	47,933
Less Revenue Income	-288,311	-340,618

Less Capital Income (grants)	-641,170	-1,560,000
Less transfers from earmarked reserves	-142,810	-573,723
Net budget requirement	610,524	614,513

Funded by:

Council Tax	610,429	610,429
Covid Relief Grant	96	96
Plus transfer from the General Reserve	0	3,989
	610,524	614,513

Before becoming a Councillor, I have managed large projects and budgets and never in all that time have I had to report an overspend on expenditure of over £1.3m!

Those of you who attended last year will know why, but for those who were not here, this arises from the Long Lane Football Development Project. As with many construction projects the phasing of the expenditure has changed meaning that we have an overspend this year. This project is predominantly funded by monies from Football Foundation, AFC Bournemouth Community Sports Trust, New Forest District Council and Ringwood Town Football Club.

Our income streams are very limited. We have rental income, cemetery receipts, events income and allotment income, but you will see that we had more revenue income than anticipated, this is mainly from increased interest payments on the money reserved for the Long Lane project.

As a local authority the majority of our costs are funded by Council Tax. For every additional £5,500 that we spend we need to increase the Council Tax on a Band D property by approx. £1. The precept is calculated based on our Council Tax Base (effectively the number Band D equivalent of properties we have). Since 2018/2019 this number (as shown below) has increased by between roughly 0.5 and 1.5% which is not sufficient to cover inflation.

Financial Year	Band D equivalent	%age increase
2024-25	5,501.6	0.49
2023-24	5,474.9	0.18
2022-23	5,465.0	1.12
2021-22	5,404.3	0.79
2020-21	5,362.0	1.45
2019-20	5,285.2	0.53
2018-19	5,257.3	

This is why the cost per household has increased each year, with a cost of £111.50 for a Band D house in the 2023/2024 year.

The Council is 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. We have reviewed our reserves and identified areas that need adjustment. Of particular note is that we have created a plan to gradually increase reserves for replacement of tools and machinery for our grounds team over the next 10 years.

Finally, a few words on the budget process. On the basis that all of our budgets are managed very tightly by the responsible Council Officer, we have historically set the budget on an incremental basis, taking the previous year and adjusting for inflation and any anticipated changes. Before we start the process of setting the 2025/2026 budget we are undertaking a review of our assets, expenditure and income to ascertain whether there are further opportunities to reduce spend, increase money in or to utilise our assets more effectively. I hope that next year's Town Assembly will include positive outcomes from this work.

Staffing Committee

Report by the Chairperson Cllr John Haywood

The Staffing Committee meets twice-yearly and when required to handle business of a Human Resources nature relating to the town council's staff. Business can be of a quite technical nature – something that can be dry but is essential for the smooth running of the council and for the welfare of our staff.

Of note this year was the recommendation that the council become accredited as a Real Living Wage employer. This is a commitment that has been made by 14,000 UK employers big and small. It commits the council to pay a minimum hourly rate that is based on the actual cost of a basket of goods and services to provide an acceptable living standard. This is determined by an independent foundation, is different to the government's minimum wage and is a higher amount. Currently it is set at £12 per hour and will be reviewed in October.

Adopting this policy was recommended to Full Council which I am pleased to say agreed unanimously.