

Earley Town Council

Town Mayor's Report 2020 – 2021

1. This has been a very different year, and having a written report, rather than one to present to an Annual Town Electors' Meeting, is different again. Despite the problems presented by the pandemic, and initial conflicting instructions from Government, it has been very encouraging how Officers and Councillors have adapted to the changing circumstances with care, commitment and understanding.
2. The Full Council receives Committee minutes (Amenities & Leisure, Planning, Policy & Resources) that are commented on in other parts of this written report.
 - 2.1. It has been very pleasing to have co-opted Mike Smith to the Town Council, he has already been an invigorating, questioning and valuable presence.
3. Finance
 - a) Councillors received the financial audit and were especially impressed that the number of debtors had halved: as a Council we had set a target of prompt payment.
 - b) The Internal Audit results were excellent, and the Councillors again wanted to thank the Finance Officers and Town Clerk for their hard and focused work with this.
 - 3.1. During the pandemic the Council adopted a system of delegated powers so that, if necessary, the Town Clerk, in conjunction with the Mayor or Leader of the Council could pass necessary orders, reporting any decisions back to Members at the next meeting. This has been reviewed at all Full Council meetings but not used. As the Government have now stopped Town Councils' ability to use Remote meetings for decision making, it means that these powers may have to come into use. Town Councillors will continue to meet up remotely to discuss issues and make recommendations, agendas for these meetings will be published and the public are welcome to attend. The Council will continue to review the situation regarding face to face meetings, the intention is to resume such meetings as soon as we are able to satisfy all the Covid-secure requirements of such a meeting.
 - 3.2. The new Council Officer team have found several areas of work regarding Council activities and process that could be improved, sometimes substantially.
 - 3.2.1. It has been great that the Risk Assessments for all operations have been rewritten and received by the Council. These are live documents and are vital to moving forward in doing anything.
 - 3.3. In February, after much work, especially by the Town Clerk with assistance from several Councillors, the budget was agreed. Due to the problematic year we have all had and the financial constraints of many residents the Council agreed that the precept should only increase by 1%.
 - 3.4. Earley Town Council were asked by Wokingham Borough to submit a list of open green spaces so that they could decide whether they should be designated areas. It was great that ETC had already asked for Swallows Meadow to be upgraded from countryside to a designated area with added protection before adverse work could occur. This is still working through WBC's production of the Local Plan.

- 3.5.** There was an application for a 5G telecommunications mast at Sol Joel park that was moved on from Planning to Full Council, as it was felt all Councillors needed the opportunity to input on the Council's comments. Although these orders cannot legally be stopped, the Council said strongly that this was an inappropriate placement. Due to the Fields in Trust protection of Sol Joel park and the intervention of the Council the proposal to place such a mast within Sol Joel park was dropped.
- 3.6.** The Council was aware of the flooding in Egremont Drive and was very supportive of the hard work of Councillors Mickleburgh and Jones in ensuring that WBC fixed the culvert and stopped this occurring. Thanks also to the Town Council's Park Rangers who ensured that there were no contributions to the problem downstream.
- 3.7.** The Council adopted a Climate Emergency motion and is now looking at work to cut emissions and become a more responsible energy user. It was agreed that the Climate Emergency is of prime concern to all of us, and the Town Council is keen to support this important work.
- 3.8.** The Council rewrote the Town Plan and had this adopted. This is a live document and will be regularly updated so that it remains relevant to the Town's structure and development.
- 4.** As Mayor I was sad not to be able to serve the community as much as I would have liked, the pandemic prevented me from physically meeting people, attending schools, and visiting care homes, but I hope my successor can do more of this, as circumstances improve.

 - 4.1.** I was delighted to be at the opening of the footpath beside the Harley-Davidson Garage at Loddon Bridge, and the fact it now provides disabled access through there is a great improvement.
 - 4.2.** It was appreciated by the Full Council that even in these restricted times, as Mayor I had several positive interactions with staff and residents at Austen House Care Home.

Councillor David Hare
Town Mayor 2019 -2021