

Crediton Town Council Annual Report 2021-2022

Your Town Councillors

Liz Brookes-Hocking

Joyce Harris

Jim Cairney

Guy Cochran

Sandy Chenore

John Downes

Steve Huxtable

Frank Letch

Natalia Letch

Denise Ross

Mike Szabo

New Committee Structure

Full Council

Town Strategy & Planning Committee

- Planning applications, strategic documents & policies
- Neighbourhood Plan
- Highways & Traffic
- Heritage & Arts
- Town Promotion

Christmas in Crediton Sub-Committee

Council Affairs & Finance Committee

- Propose budget requirements
- Forward plan & make earmarked reserve recommendations
- Internal control
- Risk assessments
- Personnel
- Insurance
- Policy overview

Grants Sub-Committee

Community & Environment Committee

- Allotments
- Floral Displays & Floral Crediton
- Open spaces
- Maintenance of council assets

- Development of maintenance programme
- Manage earmarked reserves projects
- Strategies for council assets

Parish Paths Sub-Committee
Newcombes Meadow Task & Finish Group

Climate Emergency Committee

- Low carbon policies
- Town Council practices
- Sustainable contracting
- Supporting community to reduce carbon footprint

Effective from May 2022. A full copy of the Terms of Reference are available on our website.

Finances 1st April 2021 - 31st March 2022

Income and Expenditure Account included. Available in different format on request.

Did you know...? The town council's website contains details of all the town council's finances, including payments, receipts, bank reconciliations, budget and precept information as well as copies of the annual return. Please go to <https://www.crediton.gov.uk/Finances>.

Chairman's Report

Cllr Liz Brookes-Hocking, Mayor & Chair

Since May last year, the town has emerged gradually from the constraints of the pandemic. It has been good to see all kinds of social groups starting up again - youth activities, uniformed groups and sports clubs, many events and performances, indoors and out, and face-to-face services for elderly people. It has been a pleasure to see so much going on in the last year.

There are many who remain vulnerable to Covid and their needs must also be respected. There are also those who lost family members, children who missed school time, babies and toddlers who missed out on socialisation and people who lost jobs and prospects. Although we are essentially out of it, the consequences remain and we have all been touched by it, even if we think we 'coped ok'.

In May 2021, all town and parish councils were required to return to face-to-face meetings instead of continuing the online meetings of the previous year. This was a big disappointment to us and to councils throughout Devon and the rest of the country. Our meetings had been attended by more members of the public than ever before and many people watched the recordings. They were more time and cost efficient, as well as helping to keep everyone safe.

Some councillors could not resume meetings in person due to health conditions and we were sorry to lose Councillor John Ross during his continuing isolation. John made a great contribution to the town council during his four years. We said goodbye to Cllrs Louise Martin and Hanna Zorlu, who both resigned due to other commitments and we thank them for their input during their terms of service. We welcomed Mrs Natalia Letch and Sandy Chenore, who stood for election in November, and we were very pleased to co-opt Mrs Dee Ross in

February. All three of them have taken up the challenge of the councillor role with alacrity and are helping the council to make progress with projects and activities.

A highlight of the year for me has been the constant use of the town square for organised events, impromptu boules games, music of all kinds, vehicle displays, fairs and performances but above all, for its role as the town's public meeting place – the village pump on a grand scale. (Indeed, we are hoping to get a drinking fountain installed somewhere on the square later this year!)

In my second year as Chair of the Council and Mayor, I look forward to the challenge of the council delivering services to the town that will benefit everyone in some respect.

We are all aware of the financial and social difficulties for some residents so projects and activities that will support them are among those in which we invest time and money. Working in partnership with others always achieves more. Voluntary groups, social enterprises, businesses and the public sector all have a contribution to make to the liveliness and well-being of the town and we will continue to collaborate with all sections of the community.

Committee Reports 2021-2022

The following reports give an overview of the activities of each Crediton Town Council Committee & Sub-Committee for the past year. Each report has been written by the Committee Chair.

Planning & Town Strategy Committee – Cllr Liz Brookes Hocking

There's a lot of development coming to Crediton and the committee has the opportunity to comment on applications, although the town council is not the Local Planning Authority (Mid Devon District Council is) and we do not make the decisions. We saw a lot of applications last year, large and small, uncontroversial and the very controversial. There are always arguments on both sides.

Increasingly, our comments on new housing are based on sustainability and well-being: Is there enough room for people to live in? Is there enough space to play in? Is it energy efficient and will the running costs be affordable? Is there enough public open space for people to walk, sit and meet in? Of course, there are regulations on minimum sizes for dwellings but the pandemic has taught everyone a lot about the need for space as well as the need for sociability.

Then there's the question of all developments contributing to bio-diversity net gain – increasing the opportunities for wildlife. It's sometimes difficult to remember that requirement, especially with industrial buildings. Land is expensive so owners want to make use of every square metre for the business. No one is used to including trees or hedges in commercial developments but the argument has to be made if we are to keep the wildlife we have and encourage more.

The committee is responsible for traffic issues and for parking problems, which occur all around the town and especially near the schools at drop off and pick up times. It also oversees Town Square events like Christmas in Crediton and Share in the Square, which is programmed by the Arts Centre.

Strategic planning is also a remit of the committee which has been responsible for finalising the Neighbourhood Plan and commenting at the first stage of consultation on the district council's new local plan: Plan Mid Devon, which will cover up to the mid 2040s. We have received a presentation from Mid Devon District Council on the Crediton Masterplan and we hope to be closely involved with its development in the coming year.

Committee members: Liz, Jim, Joyce, Steve, John, Natalia & Dee

Council Affairs & Finance Committee - Cllr Joyce Harris

The Council Affairs & Finance Committee is responsible for proposing budget requirements as well as forward planning & making earmarked reserves recommendations. The Committee also ensures internal control checks and risk assessments are in place. In addition, the committee oversees the training requirements of Councillors and staff, the policies and procedures of the Council, its publicity and public relations, any legal proceedings, electoral matters, insurance arrangements and civic events. Finally, it also scrutinises, when required, Council activities and decisions.

In November 2021, Crediton Town Council was the first Council in Devon to receive the prestigious Gold Award. This recognises that the Council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement.

The Council has also taken on youth work in Crediton as there is a need for this in the town. Regular updates are reported to the Council Affairs & Finance Committee.

Committee members: Joyce, Frank, Jim, Liz, Steve, Natalia & Guy

Amenities & the Built Environment Committee – Cllr Joyce Harris

The Amenities & the Built Environment Committee is responsible for overseeing and promoting all Council owned and leased open spaces, parks, gardens and play areas. This includes the inspection and maintenance of trees. A tree risk assessment was carried out at Peoples Park and recommendations contained in this report are being actioned to ensure the park is suitability maintained.

The Council has over 120 allotments spread over three sites. The Chair of the Boniface Allotment Association along with a member of staff regularly inspect the allotments providing updates at each Committee meeting. This provides an opportunity to discuss any issues arising and amend allotment rules when required.

The Committee coordinates the provision of floral displays. This includes the hanging baskets you see through the summer, flower beds at Newcombes Meadow as well as flower towers on the Town Square and outside Hillbrow Care Home. This year many of the displays will be in the colours, red, white and blue in honour of the Queen's Jubilee celebrations.

The Floral Crediton Competition is being held again this year, with a new twist. If you don't want to enter your whole garden this year, residents are being encouraged to send in a photo of something from their garden instead. The categories are: the most beautiful thing, the most interesting thing or the thing I'm most proud of. Further details and closing dates can be found on our website or Facebook page.

The work of this committee could not be achieved without the support of local volunteers and community groups who work incredibly hard planting floral displays, picking up litter and weed killing to keep our open spaces looking their best.

Committee members: Joyce, Jim, Mike, Steve, Guy & Dee

Property & Assets Committee – Cllr Frank Letch

The committee has met five times during the year and mostly discussed the same regular topics. The first is Old Landscore School, which has been bought by the council for community use. The electrics have been checked and volunteers have painted the inside of the building, which now looks bright and a suitable location for our youth team to work in.

The Newcombes toilets have also been under consideration. With the introduction of a CCTV and a remote locking system the toilet at the front will be open and it is hoped to open one more at the back for the weekend of the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. We now have CCTV in several locations throughout the town.

In order to facilitate the staff's working conditions we now lease the bungalow behind the office. At the moment we are awaiting a door to be put in so that the back room can be used as a meeting room. The plan is to use the bungalow as workspace for the staff and a possible location for some council meetings.

The last area of interest is Stoney Park. This has arisen because the lease terminates at the end of July and the committee have considered a way forward. After valuation it was decided to carry on leasing the field and to put in a £100 deposit as well as the yearly rent. There is still some work to be done by the present tenant which the committee will keep an eye on.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank Lisa Blake, our committee clerk for her industrious searching for quotations, carrying out inspections and keeping us in order.

Committee members: Frank, Joyce, Liz, Mike, Steve, Jim & Guy

Climate Change and Sustainability Committee – Cllr Liz Brookes-Hocking

The Committee agreed that the town council should look at its own practices to address the climate and ecological emergency. A first step was to look at the use of weedkillers throughout the town and to agree to amend the contract for weeding around town council assets when it becomes due for renewal in 2023. The committee also agreed to ask MDCC not to use products harmful to wildlife when treating weeds in other areas of the town.

Another of the committee's proposals is to encourage the involvement of residents in the care of public open spaces and to create opportunities for them to do so. To promote alternatives to harmful weedkillers, the committee agreed to a Community Action Day around the Beech Park/Jockey Hill area to clear weeds and litter this spring.

A drinking fountain in the town square was agreed last May as being a viable project that could reduce purchase of single use plastic bottles of water by providing clean, free water to anyone passing through. Getting information on the water supply and an estimate of the costs of installation have both proved lengthy processes. We are still hoping to get this project

completed shortly.

On 6th November we collaborated with XR to hold Crediton COP 26. Speakers gave presentations on Transport; Agriculture and biodiversity; and Food security, Land use and Economy. A core group has continued to address these issues with a talk on the farming economy from the NFU; investigating and promoting car sharing and EV charging points; understanding the community carbon calculator; responding to planning applications and their potential carbon footprint. The COP 26 group is open to anyone to join.

Most recently, the town council's committee has agreed to develop a climate action plan and undertake an energy use audit of our leased premises. We are supporting the development of the Boniface Trail cycle route to Exeter and will be keenly promoting rail travel to and from Crediton now that we are lucky enough to have a half hourly service to Exeter with the national rail network a 10-15 minute journey away. Along with our buses, we have good alternatives to car use for commuters and anyone wanting to get to Exeter for business or leisure.

Committee members: Liz, Guy, John, Steve, Sandy & Natalia

Grants Sub-Committee – Cllr Joyce Harris

The Grants Sub-Committee met in November 2021 to decide on the allocation of grants to local organisations. A budget was approved to cover applications for the 2022/23 allocations. The majority of the applications totalling £20,884 were approved, with four held back for further information. The second meeting was in February 2022 when two of the outstanding applications were approved amounting to £4,000.

The Committee looks very carefully at the feedback received from the organisations who received a grant to make sure it has benefited the local community. For a full list of community grants issued, please visit our website. Crediton Town Council has a commitment to encourage, support and promote local community groups and organisations whose activities will contribute to or be of benefit to the town. Grant application forms are available to download from our website www.crediton.gov.uk.

Committee members: Joyce, Liz, Steve, Guy & Dee

Parish Paths Sub-Committee – Cllr Guy Cochran

The Parish Paths committee meets usually up to three times a year to discuss work and concerns related to the paths within the town boundary.

Some of the paths in the town take you through the urban areas but many paths take you out to the south of the town, across the fields by what is known locally as Redvers Ramble. The paths are walked annually by councillors to check on any issues and these issues are reported back to Devon County Council.

This year has seen some new signage and work to paths that take you across the Crediton golf club course. New signs and bollards have also been installed at the top of Penton Lane at Penton Lynch. This is in order to stop motor vehicles trying to use this narrow path as a cut-through and unfortunately some vehicles have got stuck by attempting the path.

Other paths have seen some drastic cutting back by local landowners, one example was just off Four Mills Lane. These works were unauthorized, however, we are aware that replanting is due to take place. The committee looks forward to whatever the next year brings along.

Committee members: Guy, Jim, Steve & John

Christmas in Crediton Sub-Committee – Cllr Liz Brookes-Hocking

The Landtrain, the parade, the entertainment, the fancy dress competition, Father Christmas appearing, and the weather! The pleasure that an afternoon and evening filled full of fun and activity that is Christmas based is a pretty sure fire way of having a great time – this year was no exception. Loads of familiar activities and faces as you've become accustomed to, and the ongoing presence of COVID lurking around threatening all of the fantastic efforts. COVID was tamed but there was, as you'll recall, a little bit of a struggle with the weather forcing some last minute changes to venues and the planned programme – but nonetheless Christmas in Crediton 2021 was another stunning success.

Of course there is more to Christmas than just the events and celebrations on 27th November – the lights in the High Street as well as those adorning the rest of the town, including St Lawrence Green and the Town Square, continue to be a shining light in the calendar, and of course the stunning Christmas tree too. All on display for residents and visitors to enjoy all over the festive period.

The whole community engaged in an event that continues to evolve and get bigger and better, did you find all of the superheroes? There are many people and organisations to thank, without whom it would not be the success it is, and I have to say the efforts and dedication of the sub-committee members was phenomenal in making sure Christmas in Crediton continues to thrive.

I've written the above but feel that I need to mention that unfortunately I did not attend many of the Christmas in Crediton meetings, nor indeed did I manage to attend the event on the day either, due to ill health, so I have taken thoughts of individuals heavily involved and created the report!

Committee members: Steve, Liz, Jim & Dee

Britain in Bloom Update – Cllr Mike Szabo

Ten years ago, the town entered into the South West in Bloom (SWIB) It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) Award scheme. These are volunteer-led groups who work to "green up" and "clean up" their local environment. This year we have 20 entries into the IYN scheme. In addition, the town has entered into the prestigious Pennant Award competition with the judges visiting Crediton on Tuesday, 19 July to assess the town.

The BIB competition was started in 1963 and for the last 20 years has been sponsored by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) with its current President, Keith Weed CBE. It's a continuous improvement programme which encourages towns to make small incremental improvements every year because "green streets" encourage people to linger longer (helping local business to thrive), bond communities together (restoring pride and reducing anti-social behaviour), and creating a prosperous and unified community.

This is the aim of our group, which has become very challenging due to the district council eliminating non-statutory services like planting, weeding, watering and maintaining flower beds! Fortunately, more volunteer-led groups and individuals are helping the "bloomers" "green up" and "clean up" the town while more High Street proprietors are helping by "blooming up" the frontages of their shops.

A recent BIB judge who visited Crediton said "The pride taken in the town is evidenced by a lack of litter, dog fouling, and generally well-maintained street furniture". This year's SWIB Awards' Presentation will take place on Thursday, 13 October near Crewkerne. Then, Crediton will host its own Awards' recognition event on Monday, 17 October.

Anybody wanting to join us on this enjoyable and rewarding journey of step-by-step continuous improvement in Crediton can contact me at mikeszabo60@gmail.com or 01363 775255.

Contact details can be found below.

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