



Didcot Town Council Annual Report 2015/2016



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Mayor's Report

In the formulation of this Annual Report, for the second occasion in my Mayoral year tragedy has visited our town.

The tragedy at Didcot 'A' Power Station has touched the hearts of the people of Didcot greatly.

On your behalf I have passed on to all of the families of the workers affected our heartfelt sympathies and sincerest condolences.

Once again, when tragedy strikes, we rely on our Emergency Services to respond.

Words cannot express our gratitude to all of the Emergency Services in Oxfordshire and further beyond. When we need them, they are always there – Thank You.

When I arrived in Didcot from Glasgow in 1972 to start employment at Didcot Power Station....little did I know that my journey would lead me to be given the honour of being elected the Mayor of Didcot for 2015/2016.

I was first elected to the Town Council in May 1976. This May will not only be 40 years since I was first elected to Didcot Town Council, but also this signifies my fourth term of office.

Over the last year in my travels all over Oxfordshire I have been genuinely touched by the goodwill I have been shown.

Many residents have also approached me during this time to express their concerns about Didcot's current rate of expansion.

My response to these concerns has been a simple one....Yes it is exciting living in a growing town, but it's vitally important that the right infrastructure is in place to ensure Didcot continues to move forward and thrive.

Mayors always look back and reflect on their year and I am no different. I will always look back with great affection of the kindness and goodwill shown to myself and Margaret.

From the various charities, voluntary organisations, local schools and ***their talented pupils***, churches, the vibrant business community, the Rotary and all the individuals



The Mayor, Councillor Des Healy

that are too numerous to mention.

Thank you all.

Although it's been important to raise much needed funds for my two nominated charities, the Didcot branch of the Royal British Legion and South and Vale Carers I felt it was equally important to highlight their profile and needs.

The Didcot branch of the Royal British Legion does fantastic work to encourage and support those younger people who were ex-service personnel. I'm sure they'll continue to do this sterling work and I wish them every success with their future activities.

As for South and Vale Carers, they have had to move from Lydalls Road here in Didcot to Harwell Innovation Centre.

They have asked me to reassure residents that the excellent service they have provided residents with over the past 21 years will continue from their new location.

Finally I have stated in numerous media interviews that Didcot is a small town with a big heart.

It has been my privilege to serve you as your Mayor this past year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my wife Margaret for her steadfast support all year as Mayoress and my family for their patience and understanding.

I would also like to pass my heartfelt thanks to all the Council Office and Civic Hall staff for their hard work and support during the past year....and of course Sue Atkins and Sally Robinson who each deserve two medals for keeping me in the right place at the right time.

Councillor Des Healy
Mayor of Didcot
March 2016

Leader's Report

Following the appointment of the new Town Council, one of the first questions that was asked was whether the Council would be working towards the previous objectives or creating new ones. It is with great pleasure that Didcot Town Council Vision – 2015 and beyond has now been adopted, providing clear direction for the staff and accountability for the

Council as a whole.



Leader, Councillor Charlie Robertson

Another key success that we have enjoyed as a Council is the manner in which we work with both South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

This improved relationship is a testament to the hard work that the District and County Councillors representing Didcot have put in to ensure that decision making reflects the desire and will of town residents.

As a result of this, we are seeing unprecedented improvement to infrastructure in the area with encouraging signs of what is to come in the future – it is especially noteworthy to mention that the Northern Perimeter Road and the Thames crossing will improve the links between Didcot and Culham Science Centre. Should these projects align with the crossing starting from the Northern Perimeter Road, we can expect to see traffic congestion easing which will make life a bit easier for residents in their daily commutes.

If the Garden Town is to come to fruition, we can expect to see 20,000 new jobs created alongside the 15,050 new homes being built over the next 15 years. Didcot Town Council will continue to challenge our District and County Councils in order to create sustainable solutions to keep the pressure off existing highway and public transport networks.

Thanks to a £50,000 grant from WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd), Councillor Alan Thompson, Chairman of the Environment Committee, has worked tirelessly to successfully deliver a project to introduce a new children's play area with safety surfacing at Loyd Recreation Park on Brasenose Road.

Fellow member of the Environment Committee, Councillor Dr Anthony Nash, has also successfully rejuvenated the 'Welcome to Didcot' signs throughout the town which not only enforces Didcot's legacy as a 'Historic Railway Town' but also identifies our proud twinning with Meylan in France and Planegg in Germany.

The Planning and Development Committee under Chairman Councillor Steve Connel has seen the gradual introduction of technology which has raised efficiencies and led to a more streamlined process when considering planning applications.

Over the course of the past year, the committee has commented on a number of major developments including rallying to support residents who opposed plans to introduce traffic to Station Road as part of the Orchard Centre phase 2 development.

Similarly, committee members have highlighted potential safety and traffic flow improvements as well as much needed flood prevention measures when discussing the plans to build a leisure centre and three schools as part of a planned 1,800-home estate north of Ladygrove. It is this kind of forward thinking that will make Didcot a safe environment for future generations to prosper.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee has faced some key challenges throughout the past year, most notably the removal of the £49,000 Council Tax reduction grant from South Oxfordshire District Council. However, Chairman Councillor Dr Simon Clarke has dedicated this time and focus to ensure that the best possible services are offered for the least possible amount of expenditure. This was demonstrated in the recent budget where the precept for the Town Council remained frozen while additional funding of £24,000 was made available for IT maintenance, plants for the proposed 'Didcot in Bloom' campaign, as well as an increase in provision for grass cutting.

It is the combination of the continuous review of major assets while factoring in long-term considerations to decision making that will lead to identified savings while ensuring that Grant Aid will continue to be offered to many community and voluntary organisations supporting the residents of Didcot.

In a time of exponential growth, the Mayor has been extremely busy and performed his duties to a very high standard. While I've known Councillor Des Healy for a relatively short period of time, in the recent Civic Hall Ball I commended him for his enthusiasm and professionalism over the past year. As the town continues to change, it will be a real challenge for the next Mayor of Didcot to follow the high standards that have been set historically – one that I'm sure the new Mayor will earnestly embrace.

It would be remiss of me to not highlight the excellent work from both the staff of Didcot Town Council as well as those employed by the Civic Hall. All efforts are greatly appreciated and I trust that the high levels of support we have come to expect will continue moving forward.

As we look to the future, we recognise that there will be a requirement for further reviews and all Town Councillors without exception must be accountable for even

the smallest changes to take place. We should look to a future of local politics where we surpass political indifferences and focus on the duties we were elected to perform – providing residents with valuable services from Didcot Town Council.

Councillor Charlie Robertson
Leader of Didcot Town Council
1st March 2016

Report from the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee



Chairman, Councillor
Dr Simon Clarke

The next financial year will see a further squeeze on Didcot Town Council's finances. The removal of the £49,000 South Oxfordshire District Council tax reduction grant was known about in advance but not prepared for in previous spending plans, leaving the job to the new council. However, a budget has been passed that will see the precept demanded by the Town Council frozen. In order to achieve this, difficult decisions about expenditure had to be made, but important services will be maintained.

The Town Council's objectives are also addressed by the budget; it provides for the Britain in Bloom campaign and to improve Didcot's recreational areas. It will fund erosion works at Ladygrove lakes and contribute towards the improvement of the Marsh rec play area.

The next financial year will also see Didcot continue to provide sizable community grant aid support. While it's true that the funds for these will decrease, the town's budget remains much more generous than other large town councils in Oxfordshire.

It is worth noting that the Town Council draws its income from relatively few sources and the Council Tax precept is by far the biggest source of revenue. Over the next financial year we will be carefully examining spending in all areas to see whether further savings can be made in order to keep the precept as low as possible and to realise value for the residents of Didcot.

Councillor Simon Clarke

Chairman of Finance and General Purposes Committee

29th February 2016

Report from the Chairman of the Environment Committee

The Environment Committee is delegated by Didcot Town Council to supervise and maintain parks and recreational open green spaces owned or leased by the Council, including:

- Stubbings Land
- Millennium Woods
- Ladygrove Lakes
- Didcot Cemetery



Chairman, Councillor
Alan Thompson

Parks:

- Edmonds Park
- Ladygrove Park
- Smallbone Recreation Park
- Marsh Recreation Ground
- Great Western Drive Park
- Loyd Recreation Park

Allotment sites:

- New Road
- Broadway
- Wantage Road
- Cockcroft Road
- Mereland Road

At present (March 2016) the number waiting for allotment plots are as follows:

- New Road - 5
- Broadway - 0
- Wantage Road - 3
- Cockcroft Road – 4 vacant, with one person waiting for a particular plot
- Mereland Road – 2

The committee also carries out Didcot Town Council's policies on sports, leisure and recreational activities within the town as well as all general environmental issues.

Budget

The budget covers the funding of contracts to empty dog and litter bins, grass verge cutting, vehicle maintenance and Christmas lights. The budget also covers the

funding of town notice boards and hanging baskets.

In the financial year 2015-2016:

Expenditure	£295,548
Income	£ 51,150
Net expenditure	£242,958

These figures are accurate to 18th January 2016, with expenditure expected to remain on track in line with the budget.

Ground staff support

An excellent team of full time grounds staff, led by Outdoor Services Manager Brenda Andrews, manages land maintained by Didcot Town Council. Work involved by the team includes:

- Tree care and annual planting
- Allotment maintenance
- Litter clearance
- Cutting of grass and hedges
- Maintaining flower beds and hanging baskets
- Play area equipment repairs and inspection
- Providing sports pitches
- Vehicle and machinery maintenance

Highlights of 2015-2016

In the previous year the Council Environment Committee, in addition to the usual maintenance, has:

Replaced all 'Welcome to Didcot' signs

Environment Committee member Councillor Dr Anthony Nash replaced the 'Welcome to Didcot' signs in February 2016 after their concept and design. These new signs reflect Didcot's railway heritage and also feature 'Historic Railway Town' on the signs. The new signs also include Didcot's twinning with Planegg in Germany which was absent on previous signs. The signs have been deployed on all routes into the town, including the entrance of Great Western Park

Renewed play equipment in Loyd Recreation Park

Play equipment at Loyd Recreation Park was replaced in 2015, with the official opening being made by Didcot Town Council Mayor Councillor Des Healy on 14th December 2015. We wish to thank WREN for their donation of £50,000, which helped supply and install new play equipment with safety surfacing. Of note, the

equipment chosen included sensory play equipment for disabled children.

The Annual Didcot Town Summer Fayre

The fourth annual Didcot Town Fayre was held on Saturday 11th July 2015, and proved to be exceptionally popular. The Fayre continued into the early evening with live music from local acts and throughout the day there were demonstrations by local groups.

I would like to thank the previous Committee, the fishing club, allotment holders, and also Brenda and her staff on doing such a good job, as always.

We look forward to the challenges of the coming years.

Councillor Alan Thompson

Chairman of the Environment Committee

1st March 2016

Report from the Chairman of the Planning and Development Committee



Chairman, Councillor
Steve Connel

The first thing I would like to do is express my profound thanks to the members of the Planning Committee. The time and effort you have all shown in your research has managed to increase both the efficiency and the effectiveness of these meetings.

In addition over the last year I took the action to gradually integrate modern technology into our meetings (at no cost to the taxpayer) and I am extremely proud to say that this has significantly reduced the administrative time spent by the officers each month on the Committee.

As well as freeing up officer time for other important aspects of their work this also had the effect of successfully reducing the Committees running cost and carbon footprint.

Over the past year we reviewed hundreds of applications for thousands of properties using a combination of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework), SODC (South Oxfordshire District Council) Local Plan and most importantly the needs of the residents as our guidelines.

We worked to ensure development in Didcot and the surrounding area was appropriate for the town in terms of building type, density levels, potential viability and had all the infrastructural support it deserved.

Although we were sadly unable to halt every single application we felt was flawed due to the NPPF's "presumption in favour of sustainable development" we have achieved significant improvements to the vast majority of them.

Whether those enhancements were ensuring rising bollards are to be included in the pedestrianised areas of the Orchard Centre (to protect children coming out of the cinema), pushing SODC to provide a dedicated officer for residents potentially affected by the Didcot Gateway development or the large number of applications that were altered based on our suggestions prior to final review we have worked to do the best for the town we all care about.

Councillor Steve Connel

Chairman of the Planning and Development Committee

22nd February 2016

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Personnel and Administration Committee (sub)

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Des Healy

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Finances and General Purposes Committee (sub)

Personnel and Administration Committee

Staff

Richard Chapman ~ Town Clerk
Kathy Fiander ~ Deputy Town Clerk
Brenda Andrews ~ Outdoor Services Manager
Sharon Hickman ~ Finance & Administration Officer
Sue Atkins /Sally Robinson~ Information Centre Manager
Paul Copley ~ Grounds Supervisor
Steve Andrews ~ Grounds
Justin Strong ~ Grounds
Richard Dowling ~ Grounds
Vacancy ~ Grounds
John Jones ~ Gatekeeper
Neressa Copley ~ Pavilion Cleaner
Sam Cobb ~ Apprentice Gardener

Contact details

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Balance Sheet

Unaudited accounts as at 3rd March 2016

2015 £		2016 £
	Current Assets	
60,587.00	Debtors	62,902.00
891,330.00	Cash at Bank and in-hand	966,609.00
951,917.00		1,029,511.00
	Current Liabilities	
127,355.00	Creditor and accrued expenses (repayable within one year)	60,708.00
	Net Current Assets	
824,562.00		968,803.00
	Capital and Reserves	
287,715.00	Current Year Fund	292,947.00
536,847.00	General Reserves	675,856.00
824,562.00		968,803.00

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Feedback

Please use this form to provide feedback or ask a question about any service provided by Didcot Town Council, South Oxfordshire District Council or Oxfordshire County Council. You can also include any comments you may have on the Annual Town Meeting.

Name:	Telephone:
Address:	
Email:	
Comment:	

Return to:

Didcot Town Council
Britwell Road
Didcot OX11 7HN
E-mail: council@didcot.gov.uk
Telephone: (01235) 812637

Or deposit in the box located near the exit.

For Office Use Only

Response Required: Y/N
Date Responded:
Forwarded to:
Actioned by: