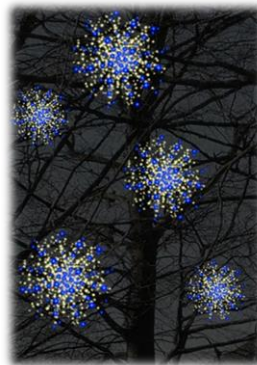




Didcot Town Council Annual Report 2016/2017



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Mayor's Report



The Mayor, Councillor Steve Connel, laying a wreath on Remembrance Sunday

This time last year, when my friend Councillor Healy was sat where I am now, he started his report by speaking about the horrible tragedy which had just struck at Didcot 'A' Power station and I feel I need to do the same.

Except I want to focus not on the event itself, but on one particular effect it has caused.

As someone who grew up in Didcot I quickly got used to hearing the jokes that were made towards us, but it never really bothered me as I knew they simply hadn't experienced the real community spirit we offer.

The reason for saying that is because the way our residents, our workers and our emergency services repeatedly showed how much they care has forever changed how people locally, regionally and nationally view us.

I think the MP for Rotherham, Sarah Champion, summed this up best when she said despite all the heartache, she has been impressed by the 'astonishing' support from Didcot residents.

"Because their men died in a strange town, far from home, it means the world to the families to know that their husbands and brothers and fathers were surrounded by love."

So whether you baked cakes, helped in the recovery operation or took part in the minute's silence (which was also followed across the world in places such as Athens, Copenhagen, Dumfries, Edinburgh and Liverpool) I just want to say thank you and it made a real difference.

I also know it's customary for each Mayor to look back on their time during this report so I thought I would cover a few of the more unique aspects of my year so far.

When I decided to study politics at Didcot Sixth Forms, the idea of being Didcot's Mayor seemed more than a little unrealistic and in fact even now a regular comment I get is 'you don't seem like a typical Mayor.'

My response often surprises them, "Didcot has never had a 'typical Mayor' as every single Mayor we have had used their unique qualities to bring the role to life. Unfortunately for me my unique skill is carrying out activities that other Mayors were far too smart to get caught doing such as:

- Become the first Mayor to complete Didcot's Park Run,
 - Very slowly.
- Take selfie's with the teenagers at TRAIN,
 - Some actually use these as profile pictures and now have a different perspective on local politics.
- Walk 18 miles on my own from Reading train station to Didcot Parkway Station for charity,
 - Be Free Young Carers (Formerly South and Vale Carers) and The Tuberos Sclerosis Association.
- Support both mental health and our military by being one of only a handful of councillors across the UK to complete and film myself doing 22 pushups every single day for 22 days.
 - This was put on social media alongside links to various support groups.
- Bring my son when my wife and I attended events.
 - Including seeing Santa at Didcot's various Christmas events and Thomas the Tank engine at Didcot's world famous Railway Centre.
- Open Boundary Park.
 - I first played rugby for Didcot over 25 years ago so opening it was an incredibly proud moment for me.

Finally, I didn't realise it when I agreed to take on the role but trying to balance family, work and Mayoral commitments really is one of the hardest yet most rewarding things I have ever had to do. It is also something that I simply could not have achieved without the support and understanding of my wife Sarah.

Councillor Steve Connel
Mayor of Didcot
March 2017

Leader's Report

After a tragic start to last year when four men went out to work and did not return home, the townsfolk of Didcot came together, to grieve together and to support the families of those men.

I salute you the Community of Didcot.

As you will read in the reports enclosed, the town continues to grow at an astonishing rate but at a controlled speed with our Planning and Development Committee making sound challenges to planning applications both large and small with good outcomes for our residents. Although this Committee has further challenges ahead which will need addressing to see that our town expands in the right way for the good of our town - the war is not won yet.



Leader, Councillor Bill Service

Our outside staff continue to do an excellent job looking after our public open spaces, our cemetery, our parks and play areas and I take this opportunity to thank them in public for their support.

Our inside staff have also had a great year in seeing that our Council and its assets are run efficiently and effectively given that we had staff changes with a new Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk taking post early in this financial year.

The town will lose several members of staff this spring. Our Outdoor Services Manager, Brenda Andrews, leaves after 24½ years of loyal service to the town. We also see the retirement of our Gardening Supervisor, Paul Copley, after 18 years' service and last but not least the retirement of our front of house Information Centre Manager, Sue Atkins, after almost 16 ½ years' service who has been exemplar in her role as the first point of contact for our Council.

I wish all three a very long and happy retirement.

On a financial note this year the Council has raised the precept for the first time in two years to look after the small increases in the cost of living rises. Yet we continue to support our local charities and volunteers with our Grants Scheme.

We have also segregated funds within our balances to look after the improvements to our sports changing rooms and our Council Depot which are all in need of upgrading. Whilst this money is not sufficient this year to carry out all of the works required it will go a long way to secure matched funding from other bodies where funding can be secured.

I have been urged to take out loans to complete the works today but with town already having a substantial balance to settle on the loan taken out to refurbish the Civic Hall several years ago, we must be careful and prudent with what we commit your tax money to.

The Town Council is totally committed to see that our town will get the best deals we can so that our daily lives are the best we can make them.

Councillor Bill Service
Leader of Didcot Town Council
March 2017

Report from the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee



Chairman, Councillor Dr
Simon Clarke

Didcot needs to improve the sports changing facilities on Edmonds Park and Loyd Recreation area. They're currently in a terrible state, give a really bad impression of the town and will soon be completely unfit for purpose. It would be unacceptable not to do anything, as that would deprive local sports teams of the opportunity to compete in their respective leagues.

With this in mind, the Town Council Finance and General Purposes Committee has recommended to the Council that it establish a fund of £400,000 to remedy the situation. These funds come from money that was underspent over previous years. Our auditors have advised us that the Council is sitting on too much Council Tax payers' money, so it's been proposed that we'll use some of this money to fund the new buildings, rather than increase the precept even more.

However, the Finance and General Purposes Committee has recommended a budget that will see the council tax demanded by Didcot Town Council increase by less than 1.5% for the next financial year. This is the first rise in two years and according to Bank of England predictions for the next financial year, represents a below inflation rise.

The Town Council's objectives are, as you would expect, addressed by this budget; as well as continued support for the Civic Centre, it provides for a Town Fayre, which we hope will be run by a committee of the Town's residents, and to improve Didcot's recreational areas. It will fund maintenance work at Ladygrove lakes and Ladygrove play area. Replacement fencing at New Road allotments will also be provided for and Mendip Heights will see the play kit removed and that area grassed over. The budget also provides for further professional fees for the works necessary to update Didcot Town Council's facilities on Edmonds Park.

The proposed budget also continues to provide sizable community grant aid support. As I outlined last year, Didcot's budget remains relatively generous when compared to other large town councils in Oxfordshire and over the coming year; personally, I hope to see more applications where part funding has been secured before an application has been made to Didcot Town Council.

Councillor Dr Simon Clarke
Chairman of Finance and General Purposes Committee
March 2017

Report from the Chairman of the Environment Committee

Didcot Town Council delegates the Environment Committee to liaise with Council staff who supervise and maintain parks and recreational open green spaces owned or leased by the council, including: Edmonds Park; Ladygrove Park and Lakes; Smallbone Recreation Park; Marsh Recreation Ground; Great Western Drive Park; Loyd Recreation Park; Stubbings Land; Millennium Woods; Didcot cemetery; and five allotment sites (New Road, Broadway, Wantage Road, Cockcroft Road and Mereland Road).



Chairman, Councillor
Johanna Nash

The Committee also liaises with the Council staff to discuss policies on sports, leisure and recreational activities within the town, as well as all general environmental issues.

Budget

The budget for this previous year (2016-2017) shows that the income generated by cemetery burial fees was down by 8.3%. The grass cutting contract also showed a significant underspend, and this budget was vired towards a weed-killing tender.

In the past year, accurate to 31st January 2017, the expenditure against an overall budget of £448,588 is as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Expenditure | £302,693 (of which £24,283 relates to projects) |
| Income | £40,688 |
| Net expenditure | £262,005 |

Ground staff support

The Council is extremely proud of the excellent team of grounds staff led by the Outdoor Service Manager, Brenda Andrews. The team manages Council-owned land, undertaking a vast amount of work, including, but not limited to: tree care and annual planting; allotment maintenance; litter clearance; cutting of grass and hedges; maintaining flower beads and hanging baskets; play area equipment repairs and inspection; providing sports pitches; and vehicle and machinery maintenance.

This year will also mark the departure of Outdoor Services Manager, Brenda, as she embarks on her retirement. The Council will undoubtedly miss her experience and leadership, which will be difficult to replace, and we wish her the best of luck for the future.

Highlights of 2016-2017

In the previous year the Environment Committee, in addition to the usual maintenance, has completed a number of projects.

Designating Smallbones Recreation Ground as a Centenary Field

The Council was approached by the Royal British Legion earlier in 2016 to consider designating the garden of remembrance at Smallbones Recreation ground as a Centenary Field. This is a partnership between the Royal British Legion and Fields in Trust to commemorate the centenary of the First World War and the sacrifice made by those who gave their lives in the conflict, launched by HRH The Duke of Cambridge. Given the installation of a memorial seat at the edge of the Garden of Remembrance, the Committee decided to designate Smallbones Recreation Ground as a Centenary Field, which will be operational by the end of 2018.

Updating Didcot Christmas lights

It was decided to update the Christmas lights in Didcot in the June 2016 meeting. Despite an update to LED lights undertaken by the Outdoor Services Manager, it was decided to replace them as they were over a decade old. The contract was also up for renewal. The new lights were installed in time for the Didcot Christmas Street Fair and received feedback both constructive and positive. It is hoped that the Council will improve on the current display in the coming years.

Tikspac free dog bag stations

Tikspac is an environmentally friendly concept that provides free dog waste bags in parks, recreational grounds and public areas. The Environment Committee agreed to a contract with Tikspac in the June 2016 meeting, and should be distributed in the coming months.

Renewed play equipment in Marsh Recreation Ground

The tender for the replacement of play equipment at Marsh Recreation Ground was considered at the July meeting of the Environment Committee. The contract was awarded to HAGS-SMP, with a donation towards the funding from WREN, as this design received the most public votes and had enhanced elements, such as sensory equipment. The equipment has been ordered and construction is due late March so that the play area will be ready for the summer.

The Annual Didcot Town Summer Fayre

The fifth annual Didcot Town Fayre, called "A Right Royal Affayre" to mark the Queen's 90th birthday, was held on Saturday 2nd July 2016, and proved a resounding success. The Council received positive feedback about the overall structure of the day, entertainment provided, and food and drinks stalls. A great deal of praise was given to the staff and the efforts they went to ensuring the event ran smoothly. The Council also received constructive feedback, which will be taken into

account for future events.

I would like to thank the Environment Committee members and Council staff for a commendable job. We look forward to the coming year.

Councillor Johanna Nash
Chairman of the Environment Committee
March 2017

Report from the Chairman of the Planning and Development Committee



Chairman, Councillor
Anthony Dearlove

Didcot Town Council's Planning and Development Committee will have met 18 times over the 12 months from 11th May 2016, when I was nominated for the role of Chairman.

As a statutory consultee the Committee does not determine the final outcome of planning applications. We are however able recommend refusal or express concerns provided sound material planning reasons can be demonstrated.

The vast majority of application reviewed are householder applications, extensions for example.

We have also reviewed a growing number of applications for infill development. This is when an additional dwelling or more is added into a gap in an otherwise built up frontage.

Infill development is widely accepted in principle as it allows for the provision of additional badly needed homes within the existing limits of the town.

It is however fundamental that infill developments do provide a high quality home that sit well within the local area and offer the residents, both new and existing, plenty of amenity space and privacy.

There has been a number of instances over the last 12 months where the Planning and Development Committee has felt that the proposed development has not met these standards. In two cases the applications were heard by South Oxfordshire District Council's (SODC's) Planning Committee as the views of planning officers were contradictory to that of the Town Council.

In both cases Didcot Town Council's Planning and Development Committee attended to give its representation and in both cases the Committee agreed with the Town Council and planning was refused.

In terms of larger developments, we have received two major outline applications over my time as Chairman.

Didcot North, an application for around 2,200 homes on land north of Ladygrove, and an application for 175 homes between the A4130 and Great Western Park. Ladygrove North was recommended for refusal by the Town Council's Planning and Development Committee.

Although the principle of development on this site was accepted the Committee felt the current outline plans did not go far enough to elevate some of the concerns.

Outline planning permission was later granted at a SODC Planning Committee meeting. The focus will now move to ensuring the development delivers parks and open spaces, new leisure facilities, schools and required infrastructure improvements.

The application for 175 houses north of Great Western Park was also recommended for refusal. The Committee expressed concerns over the proposed junction onto the A4130 and highway safety. This application was undecided as of the time this was written.

January this year saw the long awaited appeal hearing for an application for 175 houses on land between Didcot and East Hagbourne. The application was unanimously refused at SODC's Planning Committee in May 2016. This application was strongly contested by the Town Council's Planning and Development Committee, East Hagbourne Parish Council, and many local residents who came together to form the mind the green gap campaign. As of the time this was written the planning inspector was still to release their decision.

Councillor Anthony Dearlove
Chairman of the Planning and Development Committee
March 2017

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Personnel and Administration Committee
Planning and Development Committee

Staff

- Kathy Fiander ~ Town Clerk
- Tom Hudson ~ Deputy Town Clerk
- Brenda Andrews ~ Outdoor Services Manager (Paul Watts will replace Brenda Andrews on her retirement)
- Sharon Hickman ~ Finance & Administration Officer
- Beth Gillham /Sally Robinson ~ Information Centre Manager (Sue Atkins retired in February 2017)
- Teresa Tye ~ Administration Assistant
- Paul Copley ~ Grounds Supervisor
- Steve Andrews ~ Grounds
- Justin Strong ~ Grounds
- Richard Dowling ~ Grounds
- Dan Furby ~ Grounds
- John Jones ~ Gatekeeper
- Neressa Copley ~ Pavilion Cleaner
- Sam Cobb ~ Apprentice Gardener

Contact details

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Balance Sheet

Unaudited accounts as at 2nd March 2017

| 2016 £ | | 2017 £ |
|-------------------|--|---------------------|
| | Current Assets | |
| 62,902.00 | Debtors | 13,622.00 |
| 966,609.00 | Cash at Bank and in-hand | 1,254,460.00 |
| 1,029,511.00 | | 1,268,082.00 |
| | Current Liabilities | |
| 60,708.00 | Creditor and accrued expenses (repayable within one year) | 117,576.00 |
| | Net Current Assets | |
| 968,803.00 | | 1,150,507.00 |
| | Capital and Reserves | |
| 292,947.00 | Current Year Fund | 286,371.00 |
| 675,856.00 | General Reserves | 864,135.00 |
| 968,803.00 | | 1,150,507.00 |

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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: