



HARPENDEN TOWN COUNCIL

CLOSER TO THE COMMUNITY

ANNUAL REPORT 2016/2017

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Statement of Responsibilities

Harpenden Town Council is responsible for the preparation of an Annual Report and for the information set out within it.

The Town Council is satisfied that the information included in the Report is in all material respects accurate and complete.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE ANNUAL REPORT

1.1 The Annual Report for Harpenden Town Council is a statement of the performance and achievements during the preceding financial year 2016/17

1.2 EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENT

The Town Council is committed to identifying opportunities to improve services to drive efficiency gains, financial savings or attract additional income. It will focus on continuous improvement through ongoing consultation, regular review and effective change implementation. Opportunities will be sought to enhance a service or consider new, imaginative and innovative schemes to improve performance or provision for the benefit of the community.

2. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TOWN MAYOR, COUNCILLOR MRS NICOLA LINACRE

The Town Council has a vision to make Harpenden a vibrant and successful Town where people want to live, to work, to invest and to visit.

During 2016/17 the Council has done more than ever to deliver this vision and has placed collaboration at the heart of everything it does as it recognises that it can only deliver the best outcomes for local people if it works in partnership with key colleagues from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

A new Town Clerk joined the Council in July 2016 and soon thereafter carried out a review of current staff resources and structure to ensure that they were fit for purpose and enabled the Council to deliver its priorities. Out of this review came a number of proposals which included the creation of some new posts. These included a Projects Officer and a Communications & Marketing Officer. This post was created to ensure that all the brilliant work that goes on across the Town is promoted and widely known in the community. including the work of the voluntary and business communities which the role will help to promote.

The third, and perhaps the most exciting new role, is the Commons & Greens Education officer. This post will deliver a 3-year programme of education and engagement events across our commons and green spaces. The role will be fundamental in encouraging a wide range of local people to enjoy the beautiful assets in the Town. The Council is working closely with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust on this programme.

Neighbourhood Plan

There is no bigger key priority for the Council than the development of the Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan, which the Town Council is driving forward.

The Council launched its approach to delivering a Neighbourhood Plan in December and since then has built some strong momentum and community support.

The Neighbourhood Plan could be considered as one of the most significant things to happen and will have a major impact on Harpenden over the next 15 years. The Neighbourhood Plan will be a community led planning document that will guide the future growth, development and conservation of the Town.

Specifically, the Neighbourhood Plan will focus on the following themes:

- Housing
- Social Infrastructure and Community Facilities
- Transport and Movement
- Environment, Sustainability and Design
- Employment and Retail

Other Key Priority Projects

The Council has also been delivering other key priority projects during 2016/17 which have either been finished or are nearing completion.

These include:

- Refurbishment of the play area at Westfield Recreation Ground
- Introduction of new Christmas Lights across the Town Centre, Southdown and Batford
- The redevelopment of the Batford Springs Volunteers HQ on the Lower Luton Road
- Establishing a storage depot for the Council's maintenance team
- The redevelopment of the former allotment sites at Westfield Recreation Ground into affordable housing.

Westfield Recreation – The Council worked closely with local residents to understand their aspirations for the play area at Westfield Recreation Ground and established a Working Party, involving members of the community, to consider designs and leisure mix. This exciting project was completed at the end of 2016 and has been well received and used since.

Christmas Lights - The introduction of new Christmas Lights across the Town has received an incredible amount of positive feedback. The lights were carefully designed to reflect the uniqueness of each of the three areas and once installed provided a fantastic 'wow' factor.

Batford HQ - Batford Springs Volunteers HQ became derelict when a large tree fell on it. The intention of the Town Council has been to demolish and rebuild the HQ so that the volunteers have the facilities to continue to help to manage the Batford Springs Local Nature Reserve and offer a base for educational activities for local people.

The Council had previously secured planning permission for the site but has since reviewed its plans to make sure it is as cost effective as possible. The change to the plans has seen the Council move away from a traditional build to a prefabricated unit that has been successful elsewhere in the District. The Council is currently going back through planning permission and hopes to have the project completed in September.

Storage Depot – The Council will be developing the former allotment site at Heath Close as a depot for its maintenance team. At present the Council has to rent storage space but in future this money can be invested in plant and machinery. The Council is currently working up designs for this facility and will be procuring contractors and making a planning application in the next few months.

Westfield Former Allotments – This project will see the development of much needed affordable housing in Harpenden. The Council have previously held public exhibitions for this project which clarified some of the misconceptions that the community had about the plans. In particular, the Council confirmed that it would completely be for affordable housing. The Council is currently preparing to submit an outline planning application to St Albans City & District Council.

Events

As always the Council has delivered successful events throughout the year and has supported partners to deliver their own. These include both Summer & Christmas Carnivals, The Highland Gathering, Armed Forces Day and Classics on the Common.

To help focus the Council's work the Council will be introducing a new Business Plan. This will be a blueprint for what it will deliver over the next 3 years. It will give a clear picture to residents, stakeholders and partners as to what the Council is trying to achieve and how it intends to go about it.

This Plan will set out the Council's vision, objectives and key priorities that it will deliver either directly or by trying to increase its influence on the relevant third party, such as St Albans City & District Council or Hertfordshire County Council.

The Plan will help drive and determine the direction and content of all other internal strategies and resources of the Council and will be used to plan activities and set the budget for each year.

The Mayor was also pleased to present Oliver Randell, Margaret Melville and Christopher Marsden OBE with Awards of Merit for their voluntary work for the Committee of the Batford Springs Volunteers, the Harpenden Gang Show and for their contribution to projects and initiatives across Harpenden respectively. The Mayor was also pleased to present her two charities, the Tyler Reader Brighter Future Fund and Youth Talk with cheques totalling £6,500 raised for the charities over the year.

3. THE TOWN COUNCIL'S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES AT THE START OF 2016/17 – A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Mission Statement:

To promote the area as a place
to live, to work, to invest
and to visit.



Corporate Objectives:

To serve those who live in the Town, work in the Town or visit the Town.

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To strive to improve the quality of life for all residents of the Town.

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To promote and represent the community's views and aspirations at local, county, regional and national level.

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To promote the devolution of services where they can be delivered more effectively and efficiently.

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To work in partnership at local, county, regional and national level to promote and provide for the wellbeing of the Town's community.

To achieve these Aims, the Town Council's Objectives were:

- To consult with the community to establish its aspirations for the future.
- To promote the vitality and viability of the Town Centre, Southdown and Batford.
- To encourage and participate in partnership and agency working with the public, private and voluntary sectors for the betterment of Harpenden.
- To promote sustainable policies that strive to improve the environment to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
- To help to create a socially inclusive and caring community which embraces all its residents irrespective of age, culture, wealth, race or religion and which seeks to develop their wellbeing, knowledge, understanding and mutual co-operation.
- To strive for a safer environment for the community.
- To deliver the best possible services for the lowest possible cost. Our aim is seamless local government delivering better, more cost effective services to residents.
- To ensure improved access to all Council services by working in close partnership with District and County Councils through on-line access at home, in Libraries and at Council Offices.
- To promote greater Police presence in the Town.
- To continue to lobby Hertfordshire County Council for improved roads and pavement maintenance.
- To continue to defend the character of the Town, oppose inappropriate development and preserve the green belt.
- To work for a cleaner, greener Harpenden.
- To work with St Albans District Council to seek the modernisation and improvement to the Public Halls to meet the needs and demands of Harpenden residents.
- To work with the History Society to find a permanent home for them in Harpenden.
- To work with local sports groups, clubs and residents groups to seek the mix and quality of facilities wanted by local residents.
- To actively support good ideas and encourage local initiatives.
- To oppose over-expansion and re-alignment of the runway at London Luton Airport where this would significantly impact on Harpenden.
- To lobby the Government to ensure the infrastructure needed to support London Luton Airport is provided.
- To improve services delivered to the elderly, disabled and less mobile members of the local and wider community.
- To facilitate the provision of affordable/key worker accommodation.

4. TOWN COUNCIL SERVICES

4.1 ENVIRONMENT

4.1.1 HARPENDEN COMMON AND GREENS

The Town Council owns and manages Harpenden Common and Greens. This includes Hatching Green, Kinsbourne Green, Leyton Green, Bowers Parade Sensory Garden, Southdown Green and Southdown Ponds.

The Common supports two cricket pitches, two football pitches, a golf club, a horse ride, nature trail, picnic area and 5 designated car parks which includes the picnic area. Income is generated from the use of parts of the Common by fairs and circuses, as well as licences and leases with sporting organisations.

The Common is a County Wildlife Site managed through a Five Year Management Plan. This large and important part of the Town Council's portfolio of assets forms much of the heart and character of Harpenden.

In 2012, the Town Council entered into a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement with Natural England, which provides funding towards hayfield management, hedgerow restoration and heath land restoration.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust act as an advisory body for the Town Council and helped in the production of the Five Year Management Plan which included a consultation process involving the local community and tenants on the Common.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- *Green Flag Award* *Achieved the Green Flag Award for Harpenden Common for the tenth consecutive year.*
- *Common Management Plan* *Delivered against the recommendations contained within the Management Plan.*
- *Volunteer Project Days* *Provided monthly opportunities for members of the public to get involved in looking after their local Common.*
- *Horse ride surfacing* *Explored the options for re-surfacing some sections of the permissive horse ride to improve access.*
- *Concourse improvements* *Improved the aesthetics and design of the area.*
- *Community Events* *Delivered safe and well attended large scale events such as Harpenden Carnival and Christmas Carnival*
- *Health and Safety Tree Works* *Monitored the tree stock via Health and Safety reports and site visits and to carry out any recommended works.*

4.1.2 BATFORD SPRINGS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Batford Springs Local Nature Reserve is owned and managed by Harpenden Town Council. The majority of conservation and maintenance work on the site is undertaken by Batford Springs Volunteers with assistance from the Council and other contractors.

In 1995, the area was accredited as a Reserve by Natural England. Its principal features are the fresh springs that serve a small network of chalk lined streams and ponds. The River Lea with its riverside walks flows through the site and there is open grassland and a small wooded area to explore.

Achievements in the year 2016/17

- Developed a new all-encompassing management plan for the area
- Improved access onto Marquis Meadow.
- Developed a new specification for the Batford Volunteers HQ building and secured revised planning permission
- Worked closely with Batford Spring Volunteers

4.1.3 ALLOTMENTS

The Town Council owns 14 Allotments sites. The sites include two transferred to the Town Council from St Albans District Council in March 2016. The sites are administered on behalf of the Town Council by South Harpenden Allotments and Gardens Society (SHAGS), which manage eight sites and the East Harpenden Gardening Club (EHGC), which manage six sites. The Council supports both allotments societies with a grant. There are approximately 600 Allotment plots in Harpenden.

Key achievements in 2016/17

- Ensured that the allotment sites are maintained and managed to a high standard, ensuring site security and tidiness to attract new plot holders.
- Held an annual meeting with the trustees of the SHAGS and EHGC to review the grant aid for the following year and discuss any current issues.
- Conducted an annual inspection of all allotment sites
- Repairs, maintenance and tree work undertaken at several sites, as required
- Monitored the located sites of asbestos and removed asbestos from sites, as required.

4.1.4 LYDEKKER PARK AND CAR PARK

In May 2012 Lydekker Park and Car Park were permanently transferred to the Town Council from St Albans District Council.

The contract to manage the St Albans District car parks and on-street parking is undertaken by NSL Services Group. Lydekker Car Park is included in this agreement. The income from the fee paying car park at Lydekker covers the costs incurred in managing the Car Park.

Achievements in 2016/17

- Maintained car parking charges at 60% of those charged by St Albans District Council for other car parks in Harpenden, with free parking on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Held a Teddy Bears' Picnic in August 2016.
- Maintained and managed both areas to a high standard, including carrying out further tree inspections.

4.1.5 RECREATION AND PLAY AREAS – PORTERS HILL, MARQUIS LANE, WESTFIELD

The Town Council's first play area at Porters Hill opened in May 2010 and has proved to be extremely popular. The play area has transformed a formerly derelict piece of land owned by the Town Council. With effect from April 2012 Marquis Lane and Westfield play areas were transferred to the Town Council.

Achievements in 2016/17

- Maintained the play areas and associated play equipment to a high standard.
- Undertook regular checks and inspections of all play equipment, complying with recognised safety regulations.
- Refurbished the play area and trim trail at Westfield Recreation Ground
- Supported 'Larks in the Park' that was held on Marquis Lane.

4.2 COMMUNITY SERVICES

4.2.1 TOWN HALL INFORMATION POINT

A one-stop shop information service is delivered at the Town Hall. This offers access to St Albans District Council and Hertfordshire County Council services, as well as tourist and local community information. An electronic link to St Albans District Council systems enables access to District Council information and resident accounts.

Achievements in the Year 2016/2017

- Provided an Information Point service, from the Town Hall, in conjunction with St Albans District Council.
- Provided a computer link from the Information Point to the St Albans District Planning pages to facilitate the viewing of planning applications via the Planning Portal.
- Provided assistance and support to residents to access Hertfordshire County Council services, including Transportation, Children, Schools and Families, Health & Community Services and Highways Services.

4.2.2 PARK HALL COMMUNITY BUILDING

Park Hall is a Grade II listed building and was leased to the Town Council on a 99-year lease by St Albans District Council in January 1994. The Freehold of the building was secured by the Town Council in 2014. The Hall is for hire and comprises a main hall, fully fitted commercial kitchen, disabled toilet, baby change facilities, separate toilet facilities for ladies and gents, cloakroom, store and car park. Park Hall is accessible for people with disabilities.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Promoted the Hall more actively resulting in an increase to usage
- Maximised income generation through the hire of Park Hall.
- Installed wi-fi in the building

- Painted the main areas of the hall to ensure it is presented to a high standard.

4.2.3 HARPENDEN IN BLOOM

Harpenden in Bloom is a community initiative designed to enhance the appearance of Harpenden, Southdown and Batford, to promote a sense of ownership of the Town by the local community and improve the quality of life for all.

Supported by the Town Council, the Harpenden in Bloom Working Party arrange a number of events throughout the year to encourage participation from members of the public.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Promoted a sense of ownership and pride in the Town by the community.
- Organised competitions to encourage continued interest, particularly with schools and young people.
- Promoted sustainable practices and environmental awareness through the planting of native pollinators alongside traditional bedding plants.

4.2.4 FARMERS' MARKET

The Harpenden Farmers' Market has been running successfully since 2005. The Market is held on the fourth Sunday of each month, in conjunction with the District Council's Market Charter, from 10.00am to 2.00pm in the Lower High Street and Bowers Parade. With a wide variety of locally produced goods being sold, the Farmers' Market is extremely popular attracting many visitors throughout the year.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Delivered a monthly Farmers' Market to a high standard.
- Ensured that a variety of locally produced products were available at each market and that the markets were full to capacity
- Organised "France in Harpenden" two day event offering residents the chance to purchase products from French traders.

4.2.5 COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Town Council supports community safety initiatives to minimise both actual crime and the fear of crime and to promote safety at public events. The Town Council works closely with the local Neighbourhood Police Team, Safety Advisory Group and Joint Agency Group, and has been involved in many initiatives including:

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Responded to community issues that may have occurred throughout the year.
- Maintained links with local schools, businesses and retailers, identifying any concerns early and acting promptly.
- Maintained a good relationship with the Neighbourhood Police Team.
- Participated in various St Albans District community meetings to create a safer environment for Harpenden.

4.2.6 COMMUNITY EVENTS

The Town Council runs and supports a number of events throughout the Town during the course of the year.

Christmas Carnival and Lights Up

Historically the Town Council provided support for the Christmas Carnival which was organised by a Christmas Carnival Committee comprising Councillors, businesses and representatives from local organisations. However, following the disbandment of the Christmas Carnival Committee, after the Christmas 2012 event, the Town Council has taken on the administration and organisation of the Harpenden Christmas event from 2013.

It is an extremely popular event with an estimated 10-12,000 people attending. In addition, the Town Council provides festive lighting throughout the Town Centre, Southdown and Batford. This includes the purchase of lights, erection and dismantling, compliance with Health and Safety Regulations and energy costs. The Town Council also holds Christmas community events and competitions, including the Christmas Window Display and the Town Mayor's Christmas Card Poster competitions.

Summer Carnival

In 2015 the Town Council joined with Harpenden Roundtable to combine elements of our Discovery Day and their Carnival into a joint free event on the Common for residents. This was an extremely successful event and a lot of positive feedback was received from residents.

Achievements in the Year 2016/2017

- Enabled the Royal Anglian Regiment to exercise their Freedom of Harpenden on 12 April 2016.
- Delivered a new Christmas Lights Display that received unprecedented public praise.
- Organised Carnival with Roundtable to enable residents to enjoy a free event on the Common in June 2016.
- Supported Love Parks Week and promoted the use of Lydekker Park with the Teddy Bear's Picnic.

4.2.7 PUBLIC TOILETS

The Town Council owns Leyton Road toilets, which is located in the town square.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Facilities were cleaned and maintained to a high standard.
- Full compliance with the Equalities Act and Health and Safety Regulations.

4.2.8 STREET FURNITURE

The Town Council provides and maintains a number of bus shelters, benches, community notice boards, litter bins, dog waste bins and bicycle stands throughout the Parish, including in the Town Centre, Southdown, Batford, Lydekker Park and on the Common and Greens.

Achievements in the Year 2016/2017

- Maintained bus shelters, notice boards, benches and dog bins owned by the Town Council.
- Worked with Hertfordshire County Council on the introduction of new bus shelters and replacement of old where necessary.
- Ensured regular litter picking is organised throughout the Town
- Ensured all the notices in the notice boards and bus shelters are up-to-date.

5. DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION

5.1 CIVIC REPRESENTATION

The Town Council preserves and continues the Civic and Ceremonial traditions of Harpenden. The Town Council appoints a Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor each year. The Town Mayor may also act as both Leader and Civic Representative of the Town Council. Each year the incoming Town Mayor selects charities for which funds are raised during their term of office.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Elected the Town Mayor, Councillor Mrs Nicola Linacre and Deputy Town Mayor, Councillor David Heritage at the Annual Meeting of the Council (Mayor Making Ceremony) in May 2016.
- Represented at 117 community events and meetings, with the Town Mayor personally attending 106 of these.
- The Town Mayor held three fundraising events during her year of office (a Quiz Night, Schools Music Night and Children's Film Matinee) and a total of £6,500 was raised for the charities from events, activities and direct donations during her fundraising year. The charities were The Tyler Reader Brighter Future Fund and Youth Talk.
- In partnership, the Royal British Legion held a successful Armed Forces Day in June 2016.
- Held a service at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday, which was well attended. The Town Council helped provide administration and support on the day.
- Awards of Merit were presented to Oliver Randell, Christopher Marsden OBE and Margaret Melville at the Annual Town Meeting in 2017.
- A Past Town Mayor's Badge was awarded to Councillor Brian Ellis at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2016.

5.2 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Harpenden Town Council Planning Committees A and B

The Town Council, as part of the consultation process, is consulted on all planning applications within the parish boundary. This includes proposed government legislation, licensing, appeals, circulars and planning policy statements.

The Town Council's Planning Committees A and B meet on an alternate fortnightly basis to consider all Harpenden applications within the parish and provides St Albans District Council, the Planning Authority, with the views of the Town on each application. As with all Town Council meetings, members of the public are welcome to attend, and applicants, their representatives and residents may speak for and against an application.

Harpenden Town Council – Neighbourhood Plan

Harpenden Town Council are working with Harpenden Rural Parish Council to develop the first joint neighbourhood plan in the District. The area of designation for the plan was approved by the District Council on 17 March 2016.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Ensured consultation responses reflect the concerns of the local electorate.
- Continued to defend the character of the Town, oppose inappropriate development, be responsive to local issues, support good ideas and preserve the green belt and conservation area.
- Protected the interests of the Town and its distinctiveness through vigorous engagement with the District Council's Strategic and Detailed Local Plan making initiative.
- Ensured the sustainability of Harpenden as a place to work, live and visit.
- Launched our approach to developing a Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan

5.3 TOWN TWINNING

Harpenden Town Council is twinned with Alzey, Germany and with Cosne Cours-sur-Loire, France. Alzey is a small, bustling and picturesque market town. Cosne Cours-sur-Loire is a small town with a population of around 14,000 and is situated in the busy centre of an attractive wine-growing district near Sancerre. Two community organisations, the Friends of Alzey and the Friends of Cosne, also enjoy friendship links with both Twin Towns, as do many of the schools and organisations in the Town.

Cosne recognised 30 years of Town Twinning with Harpenden in 2012 and the Friends of Cosne visited in 2013 to celebrate with them. Alzey hosted a special 50th Town Twinning Anniversary celebration with Harpenden in 2013.

Achievements in the Year 2016/17

- Maintained good links with Alzey and Cosne.
- The Town Council was represented at key events.
- Organised a reception for the Friends and greet the visitors from Alzey in July 2016