



HARWICH TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

2015/2016

FORWARD

Harwich Town Council consists of 16 members elected to serve the interests of local residents and address the communal needs of the town. The following members have been elected by you:-

| Councillor | Ward | Party |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Simon Ashley | East Central | UKIP |
| Barry Brown | East Central | Con |
| John Brown | West | UKIP |
| Garry Calver | East Central | Lab |
| Dennis Carr | West Central | UKIP |
| Andy Erskine | West Central | Independent |
| Sean Fay | West | Con |
| Maria Fowler | West Central | Lab |
| Ivan Henderson | East | Lab |
| Jo Henderson | West Central | Lab |
| Dave McLeod (Mayor) | East Central | Lab |
| Pam Morrison (Deputy Mayor) | West | Lab |
| Charlie Powell | East | Lab |
| Fiona Powell | West | Lab |
| Geoff Smith | East | Lab |
| Alan Todd | East | Lab |

Representation on outside bodies (subject to change in 2016/17)

| Organisation | Councillor |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Age UK | Cllr B Brown |
| Henry Smith's Charity (Ancient Parish of Dovercourt) | Cllr A Erskine |
| Harwich & District Community Association | Cllr M Fowler |
| Harwich & District Crime Prevention Panel | The Mayor |
| Harwich & District Pensioners Association | Cllr D Carr |
| Harwich Community Consortium | Cllr I Henderson |
| Harwich Conservation Panel | Cllr M Fowler |
| Harwich Festival Committee | Cllr C Powell |
| Harwich Mayflower Project | The Mayor |
| Merchant Navy Welfare Board | Cllr A Todd |
| Neighbourhood Network Meetings | The Mayor and the Clerk |
| Petrochem Carless Environmental Liaison Committee | Cllr Brown and Cllr S Ashley |
| Royal British Legion Services Committee | Cllr M Fowler |
| Teen Talk (Harwich) | Cllr J Henderson |
| Tendring District Association of Local Council | Cllr A Erskine |
| Tendring Older People's Forum | Cllr D McLeod |
| Parish Transport Meeting | Cllr S Fay |
| Port Liaison Committee | Cllr B Brown Cllr M Fowler Cllr C Powell Cllr A Todd |

Chairman's Report

I am pleased to introduce the third Annual Report of Harwich Town Council.

Since being elected to my 5th term of Town Mayor in May 2015 along with my Mayoress Mrs Dee King we have attended many mayoral functions, both within Harwich and Dovercourt and further afield. It has been a real privilege to be able to represent the town and promote its many different attractions.

I am honoured to have attended well over 80 Mayoral functions to date which have included, to name a few, The biggest Harwich festival of Arts so far with so many events, Official launch of the Mayflower 400 project in Gainsborough, Harwich Sea Festival, Motorcycle Rally, Guy Carnival and late-night shopping and Xmas Lights switch on. This is a mere snapshot of the many events, civic services, openings and ceremonies I have been fortunate to attend and I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all those organisations who have chosen to include us in their special day and for their warm hospitality. It is a true honour to represent Harwich Town Council in this way.

Many organisations and individuals pull together in times of need and this is why our town is a great community. The members of Harwich Town Council have enjoyed working alongside such organisations on many projects.

Sitting on a narrow peninsula, with its Blue Flag beach, Harwich relies on tourism as a major factor in our economy and this council is extremely proud of its commitment and efforts in encouraging visitors, not only from all over the country but with another cruise season commencing in just a few weeks, from all over the world. Members of Dovercourt Theatre Group, dressed in old time apparel, are there to welcome cruise passengers along with a local piper and Town Crier; this creating many photo opportunities for our tourists and visitors.

In an effort to bring visitors to the town and boost the local economy Harwich Town Council has, once again, published its Tourist leaflet with up-to-date local information. This is currently being distributed throughout the town. I would like to encourage everyone and every business to make sure our town looks good and welcoming to our visitors.

I would like to extend a big thank you to the many local charitable and community organisations, many of which have been supported by Harwich Town Council, for their sterling work in looking after the interests of local people; The Harwich Society, The Rotary Club of Harwich and Dovercourt and Teen Talk (Harwich) to name a few.

I am proud that Harwich is working together for the opportunity to show globally what our town has to offer and how friendly and welcoming we are.

The council has achieved so much over the last year which has been a progressive one. This is as a result of our councillors being united in one aim – to work towards a better future for our town in difficult times.

The Clerk and Assistant Clerk along with our Estates Supervisor all deserve our gratitude and I would like to thank each of them for their enthusiasm and commitment, working together for the benefit of the town and for us all.

Cllr Dave McLeod

Town Mayor and Chairman of Harwich Town Council

Allotments Committee Report

Harwich Town Council manages 7 allotment sites, and plots are rented out to residents within the parish of Harwich and Dovercourt who wish to grow their own fruit and vegetables. Harwich Town Council ensures the rent is affordable and offers a 50% discount to state pensioners. The Council is aware that large plots can become unmanageable for some plot holders and the opportunity to halve the size of such plots is available to those tenants who request it. At present the Council has more than 220 plots and this year, in particular, the Council has seen an increase in the number of new tenants. Many plot holders are long-standing tenants and help newcomers when they arrive, as working a plot is hard work and needs commitment. Should you be interested in obtaining an allotment plot, please contact the office on 01255 507211 where we will be happy to give you details of available plots or record your details on the waiting list. To view the sites please go to www.harwichtowncouncil.co.uk and click on 'Allotments'.

The committee is always open to suggestions and ideas to help with the smooth running of the sites which has resulted in numerous repairs and general upkeep such as fence repairs, boundary hedge reductions, external path clearance and tree management. The meetings of the committee are public and questions and queries can be voiced.

New signage for all the sites is now in place and a health and safety review at the Redoubt site has resulted in new safety signage.

Every day there is something that needs attention and is administered from the office in the Guildhall by our Assistant Clerk working with our Estates Supervisor who deals with the 'hands on' side of things.

On behalf of the committee and myself, may I thank the staff for overseeing the wide-ranging issues and administrative matters that are necessary to ensure the smooth running of Harwich Town Council's allotments? I wish to also place on record our gratitude to our volunteer Site Representatives for all that they do on a day-to-day basis. As Chairman of the Allotments Committee, I would like to thank all of the committee members for their commitment to the decision-making process that enables Harwich Town Council's allotment stock to be successfully managed and for our tenants to continue to have the quiet enjoyment of their allotment.

Cllr Alan Todd

Chair of the Allotments Committee

Environment & Community Committee Report

The proactive members of Harwich Town Council's Environment & Community Committee have worked hard to achieve positive results for the Town.

The committee has continued to over see Harwich Town Council's Emergency Plan to ensure it is kept up to date and fit for purpose. The Council's Emergency Plan would only be implemented on receipt of instructions from the relevant authorities.

The committee has been aware of the opportunities to bring to fruition, projects through the Local Highways Panel and as a result a number of projects were successfully approved:

- Ingestre Street - junction protection
- Historic Harwich – 20mph advisory signage
- Lower Marine Parade – installation of new zebra crossing
- George Street – junction improvements
- Parkeston Road – Enhancement of existing signage to highlight school crossing patrol
- Low Road – Traffic calming measures

At the time of writing it is hoped that proposals from Harwich Town Council will lead to the establishment of further cycle racks located in the town centre, a national tourist sign along the A120 to promote attractions in the area and welcome gateway signs in Historic Harwich.

One controversial initiative considered during 2015/2016 was the proposal to lift the parking restrictions in The Drive. The Council was aware that this divided opinion so undertook local consultation to ensure that the views of all of the residents were known before a final decision was taken. As a result, the proposal to lift the parking restrictions was not taken forward.

The Council has been pleased to seek local partnership arrangements and a good example of this was the arrangement with Harwich Library to act as a collection centre making it easier for residents to collect recycling containers.

Jointly funded, in partnership with Harwich Residents Association and Harwich Secret Gardens, the committee oversaw the planting of 9 new trees in Dovercourt's Cliff Park.

Harwich Town Council's joint project, with Tendring District Council, to upgrade the existing facilities on the Putting Green, and to install a new picnic area, has taken longer than was hoped or envisaged. However, this project is ongoing and the committee hopes it will be completed in the near future. Once the picnic area is installed, the next phase will be to look at upgrading the crazy golf.

I would like to thank committee members, Michelle, Lucy and Peter for their support and hard work throughout a very busy year.

Cllr Maria Fowler

Chair of the Environment & Community Committee

Finance & General Purposes Committee Report

Harwich Town Council's Finance and General Purposes committee oversees the council's finances and internal processes including the running of the Hill School site and the upkeep of the Guildhall.

For the year 2015-16 its members have been Cllrs S Ashley, B Brown, G Calver (vice chair), A Erskine, I Henderson, J Henderson, D McLeod (ex officio), P Morrison (chair) and C Powell.

The year 2015-16 has seen major improvements to the Guildhall with the installation of a stair lift to the 2nd floor and the installation of a disabled toilet. The installation of a hearing loop in the council chamber will also be completed in the very near future. These much needed improvements have allowed Harwich Town Council to once again hold its meetings in the council chamber after an absence of 8 years. Carrying out work on a Grade I listed building is never straightforward and the improvements have involved a lot of time, effort and resources. However, it has certainly been worthwhile and we have been very grateful for the positive public feedback.

Another important improvement during this year has been the acquisition and installation of a new telephone system which offers easier and more effective communication to and from the council. A new web site is being developed which will greatly improve the council's ability to provide information and, whilst the council is experiencing on-going issues with its I.T. provision, solutions to the problems are being actively sought.

The council's finances are on a sound footing which has allowed investment on projects such as our new Christmas lights, the provision of hanging baskets throughout the summer in the town centre and the provision of a shuttle bus service to bring cruise ship crews into our town, an initiative that has boosted the local economy. The council continues to fund the upgrading of our public CCTV coverage to a 'fully monitored' status to assist the police and in 2015-16 had a Grants budget to assist good causes in Harwich and Dovercourt that was larger than TDC had in place for the entire Tendring District.

This resulted in grants being awarded to:

The Harwich International Shanty Festival, the Harwich Children's Carnival, the Harwich Generation Corps of Drums, Harwich in Bloom, the St Nicholas Welcome Committee, the Dovercourt Choral Society, the Tendring Brass Band, Harwich Quay Fireworks, We Are Music, Harwich and District Social Stroke Club, the 4th Dovercourt Sea Scouts, CAB Tendring, the Harwich and District United Services Club and the Harwich Festival of the Arts.

In January 2016 we were pleased to be able to put forward a balanced budget for 2016-17 that did not require any increase to council tax.

In closing may I thank the members of the committee for their hard work and support, in particular Cllr Calver who has worked alongside me as vice chair of the committee. It is also a fact that the committee's efforts would have come to nothing without Lucy, Michelle

and Peter whose hard work, expertise and enthusiasm has been the engine room of the council. Last but not least, a big 'thank you' to all of the individuals and organisations who have worked alongside the committee in a variety of ways throughout the year. It has been a very successful year and that success has only been possible because of the support and partnerships that have made such a positive difference.

Cllr Pam Morrison

Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee

Planning Committee

Harwich Town Council is the statutory consultee on planning applications for the parish.

The committee consists of all 16 members of the council and it is a convention of Harwich Town Council that the Planning Committee is chaired by the Deputy Mayor.

The committee has considered almost 90 applications since June 2015 and has raised no objection to the majority of them. Some applications considered were for multiple unit new builds however a large number of applications were for improvements to residential properties.

There have been a number of applications which have led to significant debate including the various applications for development on the land at Valley Road by Sato UK Ltd for 38 residential units and a replacement factory, the new commercial outlets at the Gateway Development and also the application from J.D. Wetherspoon PLC to develop the old Co-op building in Kingsway, Dovercourt.

I wish to thank the committee for its diligent consideration of the applications over the last year and to Lucy who has endeavoured to ensure that all relevant information has been available to the committee members to allow them to reach an informed decision.

Cllr Pam Morrison

Chair of the Planning Committee

Clerk's Report

As there were Local elections in May 2015, the 2015-16 year began with Michelle, Peter and I getting to know seven newly elected councillors and the new intake getting to know us and how the Council operates. Unfortunately, within a few months a by-election was required in West Ward which created additional work in what is always a busy period and also resulted in a bill to Harwich Town Council in excess of £5,500.

In order to deal with the administrative workload the Council took the decision to reduce the number of days that the office is open to the public from four to three. There is a lot of work that has to be done behind the scenes as policies constantly need to be updated to meet changes in legislation and Michelle and I seek to ensure that the Council remains compliant and acts in line with best practise.

The major refurbishment to the Guildhall has made it an interesting year as Michelle and I have had to work to the accompaniment of hammers and saws and the smelt of fresh paint, as well as move from office to office as the work carried on around us. The results have certainly greatly improved our working environment and, remarkably, most of the work has been carried out by the Council's Estates Supervisor, Peter Barrenger. Since much of the refurbishment has been carried out 'in house' Peter's efforts have saved the Council a considerable amount of money that would otherwise have been expended appointing contractors, and has also ensured that the work has been completed to the highest of standards.

A particular highlight of the year was Michelle's success in achieving her CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration). Having obtained this qualification myself a few years ago I am aware of how much study, dedication and all round effort is required to gain this industry-recognised qualification and everyone at Harwich Town Council is both delighted by and very proud of Michelle's achievement.

Harwich Town Council is very supportive in seeking to facilitate training opportunities for its officers, which often lead to additional qualifications. This year, I have been successful in attaining 'the Principles of People Management' and 'the Principles of Leadership and Management' elements of the Level III Diploma in Management. By the time this report is published Peter will have attended a one-day training course and become qualified to install induction loop systems, with the intention of installing the system in the Council's Chamber this year.

In order to improve both the efficiency and working environment for its officers, Harwich Town Council has undertaken an external review of working practises and has now commissioned external HR support to bring about change. This is an ongoing process involving both councillors and staff and is already showing positive benefits. Another significant improvement is the investment in a new telephone system which has greatly improved communication with and from the Council.

It is a time of significant change within Harwich Town Council and the team is working positively and enthusiastically to improve the service that Harwich Town Council provides to its residents and partners. I would like to close by saying that I am very proud of our team and that Michelle, Peter and I look forward to continuing to serve the local community in the coming year.

Ms Lucy Ballard

Clerk to the Council and Responsible Financial Officer