



RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

2007/08

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INTRODUCTION BY TOWN MAYOR

It is my great honour to present my first annual report as Mayor of Ringwood. It is however tinged very much with sadness.

Firstly we lost Cllr Malcolm Daly earlier this year when he passed away following a 12-month battle against illness. Malcolm was a very well respected member of the community, a great follower of all sports and in particular cricket and formula one racing and also a regular player of cricket in the town for over 45 years. Although he was only on the Council for a relatively short number of years, he made a significant contribution towards the debates on moving recreation provision forward within the town.

And then sadly following a five-year war against cancer Cllr Danny Cracknell – or Mr Ringwood to many – finally succumbed on the 18th April 2008.

Danny was originally known as “the washing machine man”; the chap who went to houses in the town repairing their domestic appliances. But he also had an involvement in the community, the community which he held very dear following his evacuation from London in 1941. He was a founder of Ringwood Cheetahs in 1974 which provided an outlet for young peoples energy and in particular those who were not interested in conventional sports. The Cheetahs provided banger racing and many young people will I am sure be eternally grateful for the support, advice and direction Danny gave to them at that time. His achievements following his involvement with the Cheetahs, his election to the Town Council in 1987 and to the District Council in 1991 are well documented. He was a founder member of Ringwood Festival and carried out innumerable charitable activities not least the annual Christmas run to Southampton, Portsmouth, Plymouth and London to distribute goods and food to the homeless. Latterly Danny has reminded all of us of our responsibility to Ringwood and to safeguard the future for our young people. His favourite phrase and one that I hope we will all remember is that “we must listen to the young; they are 25% of our present and 100% of our future”.

We have also sadly said farewell to Lyn Wickens who has been the Personal Assistant to the Mayor and Town Clerk for the past 20 years. In many ways she was Danny’s right hand man in ensuring the success of the Ringwood Festival. Lyn’s successor Sue Godwin who is local person takes over Lyn’s role on 1st May. But Lyn, may I take this opportunity to thank you for the wonderful assistance you have given to Councillors and the people of Ringwood over the past 20 years.

It would be easy for me now to talk about the achievements of the Council. But these are covered in the reports of Committee Chairmen that follow. I am only going to comment on one initiative that we have started in the last year.

People talk about Councillors not being in touch with their community. We try very hard to be in touch and we speak to lots of people within the town and lots of people come and speak to us. However, there was one section of the community with whom we had little or no contact and that is the young people. The simple reason we had little contact is because all of our children have grown up and therefore we have, despite their best efforts, lost touch to some extent with the young people. I

am very proud therefore to be able to tell you that we believe that we are the first Council in the country to have invited young people to become Student Advisors and attend all of our meetings and give us their views on matters coming before the Council. The appointment of the students is dealt with entirely by Ringwood School and we have not sought to have any influence over who should or should not be appointed. We believe the initiative has been a great success. These young people are our future and they are the very people that Danny Cracknell kept telling us to listen to.

Cllr Brian Terry
Town Mayor

23rd April 2008

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR JEREMY HERON

As Chairman of the Policy & Finance Committee I always find writing the Annual Report extremely difficult in that I would wish to avoid presenting a long list of figures but equally do not want to repeat the same points that are raised by other committee chairmen. We are the enabling committee, the one that deals with setting of frameworks and managing the finance which ensures that others can do the actual work that is of benefit to the people of Ringwood.

That said the figures are important, the precept for 2007/8 was £320,790 and you need to know where your money was spent and that it was spent wisely. Total expenditure for the year amounted to £455,026 off set by income of £128,101 making a net expenditure of £326,925. The net expenditure was funded by the precept and a transfer from reserves of £6,135. The variance on the revised budget was 1.56%.

Net expenditure broken down to committees was:

Policy & Finance	£ 131,858
Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces	£ 182,971
Planning, Town & Environment	£ 12,096

One significant change from the original budget was that we have revised the way it which we deal with the funding for the capital project at the Ringwood Junior School in that the payments made from developers contributions will be made directly by the District Council. It is the same amount of money and we will still be in control of the expenditure but there seemed little point in additional and unnecessary administration.

The last set of figures that I will give you are:

Total Bank Balances @ 31/03/07	£ 347,763
Total Bank Balances @ 31/03/08	£ 330,201

These figures show that although we are not a wealthy council we are in a sound financial position. Our accounts are open for inspection for those of you who would wish for more details and the monthly committee papers are published on the Town Council web site.

Moving on, one item of Town Council expenditure I would wish to mention is the Christmas Lights. In recent years the Council's role has changed. We used to provide a grant to the Chamber of Trade who were then responsible for the lights but in recent years the Town Council has taken on this responsibility and the Chamber have donated towards the costs. This change has seen an improvement in the display, particularly noticeable in the Market Place, but this has come at a cost and we are looking for feedback from the people of the town on how this should be taken forward in future years.

Finally I would like to look forward. With the retirement of Lyn Wickens we have taken the opportunity to introduce a new structure within the office - some of the people you will know and some will be new to you:

Terry Simpson	Town Clerk
Jo Stannard	Deputy Town Clerk
Martin Townsend	Finance Manager
Alyson Greenfield	Finance Officer
Christine Smith	Office Manager
Sue Godwin	PA to Mayor & Town Clerk
Claire Perrens	Meetings Administrator
Richard Eldred	Technical Officer

RECREATION, LEISURE & OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR NEVILLE CHARD

It is my great privilege and also sadness that I am presenting this report. As many of you will know the late Cllr Malcolm Daly was elected Chairman of the Committee last May and I was pleased to be appointed as his Deputy. Regrettably following a long illness Malcolm passed away earlier this year and I took over as Chairman of the Committee. Malcolm's work as Chairman has already been well documented elsewhere but I would like to pass on my sincere personal thanks for the work he did during his term of office as Chairman.

I will just make a few general points and draw out those issues which I think have the greatest bearing on the future of recreation, leisure and open space provision in the town.

ALLOTMENTS AND CEMETERIES

Our allotments and cemeteries continue to be very well maintained, the former by the allotment holders and the latter by our very dedicated ground staff. In order to carry out an extension to the road in the Hightown Road Cemetery, we have had to terminate the tenancies of allotment holders who had been using spare ground on that site. Once the new roadway is constructed we hope to be able to relet some of the area for use as allotments.

Some of you may have noticed that we have had to carry out significant tree works within the cemetery in the last three months. Like people, trees have a life span and unfortunately several have come to the end of their time and we have had to have them removed for safety reasons.

LONG LANE

Our development of sports pitches at Long Lane has by all accounts been a massive success. So much so that although we provided more car parking than the Planners required, there are insufficient spaces and the Committee has agreed that we should now look to provide additional off-road car parking to support these pitches.

DROP IN CENTRE

Regrettably we were forced to terminate the tenancy of the Tennis Club for the grass courts at Carvers Recreation Ground. I am very pleased to say that our decision on that has given us the opportunity to introduce a Drop-In Centre for teenagers at the former tennis pavilion. This is staffed entirely by volunteers and has taken the place of the Drop In that used to operate from Belinda's cake shop in the High Street. It is very well attended and is providing an informal supervised facility for those young people who would otherwise have nothing to do on a Friday evening. In addition the cessation of grass court tennis will enable us to incorporate the grass tennis court area into the adjoining children's' play area. This will give the very young children a safe and enclosed grassed area on which they can kick a ball in absolute safety.

CHILDREN'S ENTERTAINMENT

Finally I am pleased to say that when we prepared our budget at the end of last year we managed to include a provision which for the first time allows us to provide young children's entertainment on Carvers Recreation Ground twice a week during the summer holidays. The entertainment will be based on circus skills and has been designed to enable the young children to learn skills and perform if they wish to. We will be circulating details to all schools and play schools shortly before the school summer holidays.

PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR NIGEL CLARKE

Your Committee has, on your behalf, considered a wide range of topics and planning applications, some small, some of considerable significance in the medium and long term.

WHAT WE HAVE CONSIDERED:

In total the Committee made its recommendations to the New Forest District Council and National Park Authority Planning Committees on the following applications, broadly categorized as: -

National Park Authority:

Alterations/extensions/garages 18 No

Ringwood Town/New Forest District Council:

Fell or prune trees 28 No

Alterations and/or extensions (a reduction on last year) 107 No

New Houses (some of which are repeat applications) 34 No, including an application for 31 No units off Eastfield Lane

Flats/apartments 4 No, which could produce in excess of 17 units.

Change of use/alterations of planning conditions 4 No

Control of advertising 6 No

Conservatories 9 No

Commercial/ industrial/educational 28 No, including the last site on Embankment Way.

The trend identified last year for more and larger development proposals on 'brown field' backland has continued, which incrementally will change the nature of parts of our town. In comparison with last year there has been a decline in the absolute number of applications. It will be interesting to see if changes in the wider economy have an impact on the local market with possibly an emphasis on alterations and/or extensions?

WHAT WE HAVE COMMENTED ON:

We have commented on a wide range of topics covering:

- Minerals and Waste Development Framework – waste sites may be a future issue;
- Planning for a Sustainable Future – very ambitious but hard to relate to our sphere of competence;
- Community Strategy Review – a similar comment;
- Changes to permitted development – allegedly a simplification;
- Survey of Taxi Ranks –the case for more;
- Transport in the Community – alternatives to the bus, community transport;
- Changes to the Planning Application requirements – another simplification, which does not seem to have achieved that goal, and premised on electronic exchange of information;

- National Park Authority – Proposed Conservation Area, Western Escarpment, which the committee did not support as a blanket designation.

Generally, the Committee sees its duty to review and comment on all consultations as in the past Town and Parish Councils have not done so and then felt aggrieved that their viewpoints had not been considered. Our comments are framed in the context of Ringwood to-day and tomorrow.

THOUGHTS FOR 2008/9:

The Committee will continue to be one of the busiest of the Council's committees, with a wide and challenging remit. There will be continuing incremental change of the Town's urban character either by alterations or extensions to existing properties and by infill development on existing sites at substantially higher densities; Ringwood meets all the requirements of a 'good' place to live.

Major planning guidance in the shape of the South East Plan, the complementary South West plan (what happens in East Dorset and the conurbation of Bournemouth and Poole will have a major change on employment and traffic levels) will become clearer over the year. Similar clarity will also appear over the year for the New Forest Local Development Framework and the County's Mineral and Waste Strategy

Against such guidance your committee will do its best to support individual planning applications mindful of the planning framework, and a desire to sustain the identity and vitality of Ringwood.

TOWN PLAN COORDINATING COMMITTEE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR BRIAN TERRY

You may remember that in June 2006, we circulated a leaflet to all households entitled 'Ringwood's Future' that explained how we were going to produce a Town Plan for the future of Ringwood.

Ringwood Town Council had identified a need for a Town Plan for Ringwood to help manage and cope with change in the future. We needed to identify actions to manage change as far as possible and to make life better, more inclusive and richer for the community as a whole. These actions had to come from the community itself and so we embarked on a lengthy period of public consultation.

The Town Council employed a Project Officer to facilitate the process which examined all aspects of life in the town to establish what is good and valued about Ringwood, what problems and challenges face the town, and what opportunities exist to overcome them. A Town Plan Partnership Steering Group was formed of six volunteers from the public and six Town Councillors. Working groups comprising over fifty volunteers gathered information and consulted across the town over a period of eighteen months. Following an extensive period of public consultation, the Town Plan is now ready to be published, along with a list of projects aimed at addressing many of the issues raised by the community.

We asked you for your opinions in a Love It, Hate It, questionnaires which went to all households and was posted on the website. You responded in large numbers. We held public consultations on four days and two evenings, gave talks at public meetings, held two public 'roadshows' and consulted widely with statutory, voluntary, private and public organisations in the town on the draft town plan before publication. We analysed all our findings and from those results the Town Plan was written

Whilst change and growth are often uncomfortable and may have their downsides, they are preferable to the prospect of decline. The way forward is to manage our future and to have real influence over what happens. The Town Plan provides a starting point from which to shape our future. In many ways, it represents a realistic wish list but it must be emphasised that the projects put forward are dependent on many factors, often outside the scope of the Town Council. They are also dynamic and time limited and so need reviewing regularly to ensure that they are still appropriate and viable.

You have told us what the issues are and how you would like to retain the character of the town even if development is necessary. These are the plans that we believe will deliver this vision. You will be able to access the Town Plan and full details of all the projects in the Strategic Implementation Programme at www.ringwood.gov.uk.

All I would ask is that you watch the local press for opportunities to be involved.