



RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

2009/10

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INTRODUCTION BY TOWN MAYOR

I have been honoured and delighted to carry out my civic duties this year, being privileged to represent the Town Council and citizens of Ringwood in the course of over 80 engagements. It has been a happy year and one in which I have learned a great deal about Ringwood people and our neighbouring communities. My husband Michael was able to accompany me on many of them and the Mayor's Cadet Flt Sgt Kieran Bull on others. Thank you to the Deputy Mayor Cllr Brian Terry and Jacquie for deputising for me on the occasions when I had a clash of duties.

It has been a joy to visit groups and charities, large and small, to learn more about their work there are so many people giving their time and energy working for the benefit of others. I admire and thank every one of them, and urge you to visit their stalls on Festival Saturday 10th July. These wonderful people help to make our town the way it is – a very large village with a very large heart and community spirit.

The Town has strengthened its relationship with Ringwood School, especially through the fairtrade links and Student Adviser roles. This scheme, adopted a couple of years ago, has become a true beacon of civic administration – a national first indeed – the Town Clerk, Terry Simpson, will be attending conference later in the year to give a presentation to other authorities on how Ringwood devised the protocol and how it works. The scheme has been of real benefit to both Councillors and students, as it is of major importance that the young people of Ringwood have input on planning for the Town's future. Your Council hopes to adopt ideas put to them by the advisers helping to provide 'something to do' for our younger citizens.

There has been some exciting progress this year on enhancing the Town, some ideas which had emerged from the Town Plan. Regarding the green environment, the popular desire for better access to the river (Millstream) is coming to fruition at the Danny Cracknell Pocket Park. Some residents' alarm over the methods the landscapers have used to clear some of the undergrowth and self set trees will, I am confident, prove unfounded, when the area has regenerated by next year. At the other end of the Bickerley a new tranquil nature reserve, dedicated to the late Raymond Brown, a much missed benefactor of Ringwood, is under preparation.

We have had many compliments about the Cemetery and how well looked after it is. At this point I would like to thank Clive Wentworth (Head of Ground staff) and his team for all their care and dedication in maintaining our open spaces, parks and playing fields.

Now to the built part of Ringwood, and very important news. A joint press release has been issued by Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, and ourselves, regarding the project to combine our offices in a new purpose built building in the south west corner of the Furlong Car Park. This is very different from the plan put before us a couple of years ago. It will be cost efficient, provide all Council services under one roof, incorporate visitor information and, at last, new toilets. Subject to planning permission work should start in the spring of next year.

The enhancement of Southampton Road from Friday's Cross to Mansfield Road and its approach from the Town car park, is progressing well. Work is expected to start in the autumn and be finished by Christmas. This was another desire arising from the Town plan in order to brighten up and make more appealing this part of the Town.

A project to restore the Jubilee Lamp and its surroundings is ably led by Cllr Jeremy Heron. Cllr Nigel Clarke is heading a Committee comprising people who are in the process of reviving the former twinning links with Pont Audemer. We are again in contact with their mayor who indicates that they are willing for this to happen.

There have been several very special firsts for Ringwood:-

- Continuing our innovative Student Advisers policy;
- Appointment of a Mayor's Cadet;
- Dare I say it – the appointment of a female mayor!; and
- I am delighted to announce that Ringwood now has the authority to appoint an honorary freeman. On the 16th June it will be confirmed that in recognition of his long service as Councillor, and the special contribution he has made to our sporting activities, particularly at Bisterne, Cllr Neville Chard will be asked to accept the honour of becoming Ringwood's first ever honorary freeman.

Finally thanks are due to Terry Simpson, Town Clerk, who keeps us on the straight and narrow and offers much sensible advice, Jo Stannard, his deputy, Sue Harford, my PA, and all the other marvellous people in the Town Council 'family'. And of course, the team, my fellow Councillors, who pull together against many obstacles, to make decisions which we believe in our hearts will be best for our lovely Ringwood.

Cllr Christine Ford
Town Mayor

26th May 2010

POLICY and FINANCE COMMITTEE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR JEREMY HERON

Ladies and gentlemen, Madam Mayor and fellow Councillors I have pleasure in presenting the report of the policy and Finance Committee for the municipal year 2009/10; as ever I have tried to keep the format similar to previous years for ease of comparison.

The precept for 2009/10 was £376,930 against expenditure of £514,586. Additional income amounting to £120,624 gave a net expenditure of £393,962. Net expenditure was funded through the precept and a transfer from reserves of £17,032.

Not a bad year when you consider the global financial situation and indeed such issues do impact on us as a Town Council. To give just one example, all be it significant, in 2008/9 this Council received interest on investments amounting to £17,341, money that was used to provide services without raising the precept; in 2009/10 this dropped by £14,395 to just £2,946. We can at least be thankful that we did not suffer the misfortune of some public authorities and charitable organisations that had funds invested in the Icelandic banks.

Given these troubled times variance on the revised budget against expenditure was not quite as good as last year with an overspend of £1,652. (0.42%) and was certainly within acceptable parameters; as always my thanks go to the Council staff for their excellent work.

Net expenditure broken down into committees was:

Policy & Finance	£171,191.
Recreation, Leisure & Open Space	£204,249.
Planning, Town & Environment	£18,522.

The Town Councils bank balance remained healthy

Total Balance @ 31/03/09	£347,626.
Total Balance @ 31/03/10	£356,592.

As can be expected requests from other organisations for grant funding increased in the year and as always the Council have looked to support those organisations that show they provide services that are directly beneficial to the people of Ringwood. For 2009/10 Section 137 grants amounted to £4,076, non Section 137 grants: £3,200, making a total of £7,276.

Grants were made to a diverse selection of organisations providing services to the elderly, the young, the disadvantaged and the disabled within our community. Often these grants were as little as £50 enabling an organisation to continue to provide a service that far exceeded the monetary value and for this my thanks go to the volunteers that give their time for free for the benefit of others.

Madam Mayor, I could go on to outline numerous project that this Council has funded and supported over the past year however I will finish by saying that it is possible to reduce the expenditure of this Council but that it would be to the cost of the services provide to the people of Ringwood however I hope the residence are pleased with the way in which we manage their money and agree that the Town Council plays its part in making this Town the place that we are all so very proud of.

RECREATION, LEISURE and OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR BRIAN TERRY

I am delighted to be able to present my first report as Chairman of the Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee, to the Annual Assembly.

Firstly, if our technology works, we are trying something different this year and you will see to the side a slideshow of your recreation facilities and projects we have been working on.

I hope you will join with me in congratulating my fellow Councillors and all of our staff on the work they have done for residents in the Town.

Where do I start? Again, this year we have moved steadily forward on a number of fronts to achieve good management of existing facilities and enhancements to those that are under our control.

You will probably have seen in the local press that we have brought back some of the allotments in Hightown Road into use again. As part of that, we have also introduced mini-allotments. They are not quite as small as some people think and measure about 6 metres by 4 metres. They were designed for those people who don't have a great deal of time or any garden, but still want to produce their own vegetables. Also, there are older people who simply cannot manage a large allotment and, indeed, have no need for the amount of food you could grow on an ordinary allotment. I am pleased to say they have been an outstanding success and the experiment has been copied elsewhere and received national publicity.

Our allotments continue to be well maintained by allotment holders, but where any do not respond to encouragement to improve the level of good husbandry, tenancies have been terminated to allow those on our waiting list and desperate for an allotment to get the opportunity to grow their own. A new pest control service to keep rat infestation down at Long Lane has also been introduced.

Last year I reported that we were awaiting the 'green light' to start on the construction of the new road to allow us to extend the cemetery. The road has now been constructed, and the bare soil re-seeded. That extension will take a while to settle down, but the Council's forward thinking will mean that we are unlikely to run out of burial plots for some long time.

Our ground staff continue to maintain the cemetery, and indeed the closed church yard in the Town centre, to a remarkably high standard. I congratulate them on their achievements. Unfortunately, due to vandalism, we have had a number of occasions when we have had to close the toilets at the cemetery. They are now closed overnight and at weekends. This is simply because when they are left unlocked, they are vandalised and it can easily take two of our ground staff all Monday morning to clear up the mess and carry out any repairs that are necessary. I am very sorry, but it is a fact of life that some people do not treat other people's property, even at cemeteries, in an appropriate manner.

The ten acre field at Long Lane continues to be well used and provides some of the best playing surfaces for football for many miles. Regrettably, we have still not been able to buy additional land, as the farmer is unwilling to sell, even though we have offered substantially more than agricultural value for that land.

It has been a year of ups and downs at Carvers. The drop-in continues to be very successful and the full internal refurbishment at the Cricket Pavilion has been completed. In addition, as a result of the grant from County Councillor Steve Rippon-Swaine, we have also been able to install a new access from the main gate at Carvers through as far as the skate park. This also gives much better access for the disabled.

Our proposals for a new slide, because the current one is coming to the end of its useful life, and additional equipment in the skate park, are being frustrated as a result of suppliers having too much work! But rest assured, both are very much on line and we are hoping that the skate park equipment will be installed in the next few weeks and the new slide not long thereafter.

I have had mixed comments about the Bickerley and the surrounding area.

On the one hand, I received compliments about the standard of maintenance of the main part of the Bickerley. Over the past five years, we have steadily enhanced the grass cutting and removed much of the undergrowth that marred its usage and appearance. On the other hand, despite the fact that the vast majority of people told us when we consulted on the Town Plan that they wanted better access to the river and the countryside to the south of the Millstream, we are getting cries of vandalism when we actually implement schemes. The current scheme for the Danny Cracknell Pocket Park will achieve everything that the vast majority of the public told us they wanted to see achieved in that part of the Town. We are creating a quiet, peaceful area for public and wildlife. We are providing good views across the water meadows and, for the first time, an access for the disabled right down to the Millstream. Yes, in a construction period it does not look like the final product. But please give it time. If, when the work is done, and the new growth from the existing shrubs and new planting doesn't appear, we will return and carry out more planting. For the record, all of the works in that area have been submitted to and agreed by Natural England, who are in fact contributing £10,000 towards the overall costs.

Thanks to County Councillor Steve Rippon-Swaine who has allocated some additional funds, we are also improving the appearance of the bridge across the Millstream to the Avon Valley Path. The current scaffold pole appearance of the bridge will be replaced with a much softer wooden appearance, but we are not touching the footpath surface of the bridge whatsoever.

Whilst on the Bickerley, you may have seen reference to the 'Raymond Brown Nature Reserve.' Our original discussions with Natural England indicated that we could have very good access to that area of land for most of the year. Subsequent communications have suggested that the period that the public can use that land will be much reduced. We are continuing our negotiations with Natural England, but we sincerely hope that we will be able to open up the area later this year.

In both the Danny Cracknell Pocket Park and the Raymond Brown Nature Reserve, there will be Interpretation Boards which will explain what we can all see in and around those parts and how we can help to protect and enhance the environment generally.

And, finally, can I again thank my fellow Councillors and all of the staff for their wonderful support throughout my term of office and for the way in which they have gone about the Council's business to manage and deliver recreational facilities for all of the people in Ringwood.

PLANNING, TOWN and ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR NIGEL CLARKE

An overview of the Committee's activities shows that the flow of planning applications has been more robust than this time last year and that a lot of thought and time has been put into various consultations. Our policy is that it is our duty to reply on the Town's behalf if it is likely to have a material impact on the Town – no comment, no right to complain.

Firstly, I would like to thank the members of the Committee for their positive part they have played in the effective operation of the Committee, and in particular Jo Stannard and Claire Perrens for their support, advice and the effective use of the electronic delivery of planning documents. It works most of the time, subject to poor quality (presentation and completeness) of some of the applications.

To put our role into context we have considered:

- New Forest District Council – 193 No applications;
- New Forest National Park – 47 No applications;
- Overall they included: 34 No Tree Preservation Order works, 6 No Conservatories and surprisingly 74 No accommodation units, including 24 No at Eastfield Lane.

A major area of our activity has been either replying to consultations or being part of various working parties:

- Southampton Road Environmental Improvements – slow progress, but a start this autumn;
- Town Access Plan – slow but sure progress;
- Ringwood Signage Project – a very long standing project slowly coming to fruition;
- Informal Traffic Management Liaison Meeting – another long standing group trying to find least harmful ways of managing traffic and parking in our Town;
- Ringwood School Student Parking – a resolution looks in sight;
- NFDC – Sites and Development Management Plan Document – future housing sites;
- A31 Improvements – Highways Agency – a saga that is still running that will have a material impact on the Town;

We also commented, in particular, on two NFNPA documents:

- Western Escarpment (west of the A31) Conservation Area Management – off and now possibly on now that staffing issues have been resolved;
- Local Development Framework – Cores Strategy and Development Management Policies – we expressed concern about new housing and employment opportunities.

The committee had two training events presented by NFDC officers:

- The Licensing Act 2003 – operation and valid objections, the latter is important, as the grounds are very specific;
- Local Development Framework and core documents – the framework for future planning considerations.

Concluding, I attended in June 2009 the Examination in Public of NFDC's Local Development Framework at Lymington for the first two days – an exemplar of a planning enquiry, exacting, focused and well managed, even if some of the assumptions I would question. And earlier on this year I attended again at Lymington the Public Enquiry into the application to build 24 units off Eastfield Lane, which was

dismissed. Once again I was impressed by the quality of the enquiry if not the outcome.

Lastly, your Committee will continue to serve individual applicants and the larger community to the best of our collective ability – it is a balancing act between individual benefits and that which benefits the community as a whole.