



# **RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2006/07**

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## **INTRODUCTION BY TOWN MAYOR**

This is the time of the meeting for the Town Mayor to give his annual address.

It has once again my great honour to hold the office of Town Mayor for our most wonderful town of Ringwood. As ever I have thoroughly enjoyed the job and am grateful that I was given the chance to carry out mayoral duties on your behalf.

Next year you will have a new Town Mayor – not because I am standing down – but because at the Town Council we have decided that no Councillor should be allowed to hold the office of Town Mayor for more than two consecutive years. I entirely agree with that decision and having been Town Mayor for the last two years I look forward to handing over the chain of office to another Councillor after the Elections who will I am sure serve the Town and its residents very well.

I am not going to say too much because each of the Committee Chairmen have their own reports detailing the work they have carried out. I would however like to make one or two very personal comments.

Last year we had some stimulating times at meetings. Sometimes the debates were constructive and healthy and sometimes they were less constructive. But despite our disagreements and some of the press headlines let me put on record that I believe that although we had our differences in meetings all Councillors, and I exclude no Councillors from this comment, actually want to deliver the same thing and that is good services for the people of Ringwood.

I don't know of any issue where we actually disagree on what is best for the town, our disagreements have been about how we get to our goal. The arguments show that your Councillors are thinking about the town and what is best for the residents. We have the Elections on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. I would encourage all of you to vote and to vote for those candidates who you believe will put the people of Ringwood first irrespective of whether they carry a political tag or an independent tag.

Finally I would want to finish by thanking all of my fellow Councillors and our most loyal staff for the support they have shown to me during the past years. I would want to give a special thanks to Norman Light, who is not here tonight and who is the current Chairman of our Recreation Committee. Regrettably he has decided not to stand for re-election and his departure will be a great loss to the Council. Councillors Belinda Charlton and Terry Scriven have also decided not to offer themselves for re-election to the Town Council and I wish both of them well in their retirement from the Town Council.

Cllr Danny Cracknell  
11<sup>th</sup> April 2007

## **POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE**

### **REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR PETER CHAMBERS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Policy and Finance Committee is the body that produces technical paperwork for the Full Council - all of the councillors sitting together - and recommendations for major decisions with implications that cost money.

#### **TOWARDS A QUALITY COUNCIL - THE SEARCH FOR BEST VALUE**

Your council is responding to the challenge set by central government to become what is called a "Quality Council", a body that meets the highest standards of local government provision and the expectations of people used to high standards of quality and service in their lives.

Although the term officially called "Best Value" does not apply to Town Councils we aim to apply the same level of professionalism that a larger council would to obtain the most from your money.

#### **SCRUTINY OF THE SPENDING PROGRAMME**

During recent years the Town Council has deliberately set out to provide services and expand the amount of green open space and sporting facilities available in Ringwood, as well as produce a Town Plan.

This expansion naturally has cost money - which must be seen to be well spent - and so Policy and Finance is where the spending committee recommendations and bids for funding are examined, priorities resolved and budgets set within what the regulations allow. This can be quite an interesting process as not everyone gets what they want during the free and frank discussion round the table. At the end decisions are made by majority vote and large decisions - such as the budget - sent to Full Council for decision.

#### **SUPERVISION OF IMPROVEMENTS TO CASH MANAGEMENT**

As recently as the millennium the Town Council was run as a rather traditional small business that did accounts using some basic ledger software and could work out a statement of its position at the end of a year. Such a system could not serve as a basis for progressive improvements in services such as the Council wanted.

In the last few years our Officers have completely revised the financial procedures to give both increased visibility of the state of the business and also earn increased interest on money temporarily awaiting spending. This is still a work in progress, but we are now in a position to see an end of year prediction at every monthly meeting.

**SUMMARY**

Policy and Finance Committee has evolved in recent years from a short 'boilerplate' meeting that used to involve signing a few grant cheques with a fountain pen to one where subjects are discussed as diverse as the costs of emergency building work or support for the arts. However the longer meetings are accepted by all concerned as necessary to support the services of a Quality Council.

## **RECREATION, LEISURE & OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE**

### **REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR NORMAN LIGHT**

#### **ALLOTMENTS**

There has been a general improvement by allotment holders and most are now achieving a high standard. We are grateful to Ringwood Garden Club for judging our annual Allotment Competition.

#### **CEMETERY**

The grounds staff continue to maintain the Cemetery to an excellent standard. Considerable tree work has been carried out along the boundary to improve safety and to the internal trees to improve the overall appearance and accessibility along the pathways. Essential repairs have been carried out to the external fencing and front wall of the Cemetery.

The Cemetery will be full within the next few years. Temporary use of part of the site as allotments is now being terminated and engineers are being appointed to discuss a further new extension and further improvements to give a better area for scattering of ashes and possible installation of a commemoration wall.

#### **PLAYGROUNDS**

All the Council's playgrounds are well used. Toad Corner seems to be an outstanding success and we are now looking to upgrade the facilities at Carvers and also some limited improvements at Ash Grove. Next year the committee will need to look seriously at the future of Ash Grove.

#### **CARVERS**

Carvers continue to be exceedingly well maintained and well used by residents. The grounds staff now use the MCC's contract specification for maintenance of the cricket square.

There continues to be difficulties with maintenance of the grass tennis courts. Regrettably, maintenance of these courts is very expensive and, whilst the Tennis Club continues to have a very small membership, it is finding it exceedingly difficult to meet the maintenance costs. If the Club is able to extend its membership from the low 20s to, say, 50, then the costs would be well within their reach.

The hard courts, with floodlight facilities, are now available on a more permanent basis and bookings can be made through Ringwood Recreation Centre.

The Bowls Club had an exceedingly good playing season last year. The green has been in use for well over thirty years and we are providing additional funding to the Club to improve it.

The Skate Park again is a very popular attraction. We do get some vandalism, but not as much as in other towns, and we have a regular maintenance cycle which now includes a repaint twice a year.

I hope that the public will have been pleased to note that once the temporary medical centre buildings were removed, all of the promised reinstatement was carried out. The income received from the use of the site for this purpose is being used to upgrade the internal arrangements and facilities in the existing Pavilion.

### **THE BICKERLEY**

The Council continues to improve the general standard of maintenance. We have completed the purchase of another piece of land at the western end and are in the process of completing design works for the upgrading of Pocket Park and the adjoining area. Some trees have been removed but these will be replaced and new paths and seats installed to give better access to the Millstream. The Council's intention is to create this as a quiet tranquil area for members of the public to rest and look out over the water meadows to the south.

Our grounds staff continue to maintain all of our other open spaces to a very high standard. I am also very proud of the standard achieved at the Memorial Gardens, Jubilee Gardens and Dr Little Gardens. We now have Maintenance Contracts to carry out work for the local schools and have reduced the number of staff by two.

For the future, I am pleased that the 10 acre field at Long Lane has been upgraded and has been brought into use. We have managed to bring it into use without the need to construct new buildings on the open fields. This has been achieved by partnership working with the Ringwood Town Football & Social Club and we hope that the arrangements made for use of joint facilities will bring benefits to the town.

Ringwood is massively under provided with land for sports facilities. We are therefore still negotiating with other landowners to acquire a further thirty acres of land in the Long Lane area to improve the sports pitch provision in the town. We will shortly be entering a further round of consultations to make sure that the development of this site does provide the right mix of facilities to achieve a huge benefit that will serve the town well for many years to come.

Once again we hope that this summer the town will be blooming with the addition of a new planter and 30 extra railing troughs to add to last year's impressive floral display.

Finally, as I am standing down from the Council this year, I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors and the staff for the support that they have given to me as Chairman over the last four years and hope that the Council will

continue to make progress on the provision of sports facilities for the town's people.

## PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

### REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN – CLLR NIGEL CLARKE

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Your committee has had, on your behalf, to consider 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 the National Park Authority Planning Committees on the following number of applications, broadly categorised as: -

##### *National Park Authority:*

Alterations/extensions/new build unit) 27 No (1 new

##### *Ringwood Town/New Forest District Council:*

Fell or prune trees 22 No

Alterations and/or extensions 148 No

New buildings Houses 24 No (Note

some are outline, then detailed or modified applications, which could provide up to 32 No units if approved)

Flats/apartments 12 No (Similar comment, with a range from 1 to 11 units, which if all approved could provide up to a further 30 No units)

Change of use/alterations of planning conditions 10 No

Control of advertising 13 No

Conservatories 19 No

Commercial or industrial 11 No

(Note significant applications have been made by Dean and Dyball, and Churchill Retirement Homes)

In retrospect, the notable feature was the number of applications for new build proposals, either houses or flatted accommodation, built exclusively on 'brown field' sites as described in Planning Policy Statement 3. These are more commonly perceived as infill on existing larger plots that are either subdivided or the existing property demolished for higher density development. No development has been submitted for 'green field' development, all new development is within the older, existing urban townscape.

#### **WHAT WE HAVE COMMENTED ON**

The scale and possible impact have been, this year, very wide ranging from the South East Plan Core Document to the National Park Authority – Planning Enforcement Policy and Practice. All together we have offered comment, based on what we perceive is the importance and possible impact on the Town, on over 14 No consultations. Two worthy of noting are:

Local Development Framework – Employment Land Consultation, where your committee carried out 2 days of public consultation with mixed results, only to

find that this issue is to be subsumed, on advice from Government Office South East (GOSE), within the Core Strategy and considered afresh later on this year; Hampshire Minerals and Waste Development Framework – 17 No sites north of the Town have been identified for further consideration. Mineral extraction can only happen where there are naturally occurring aggregates and the Avon Valley is a prime location, and the same goes for waste storage sites where the forecast supply is likely to be filled within 6 – 7 years.

### **THOUGHTS FOR 2007/8**

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.

Two interlinked, larger scale planning reviews which will set the scene for a number of years at District, County and Regional level – New Forest District Council's Local Development Framework and the South East Plan, the latter with its time frame of up to 2026 on such important matters as housing, minerals and waste, employment, should be well on their way with strong guidelines emerging.

Against such a backdrop 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**

The past year has seen a great deal of activity on Ringwood Town Plan public consultations and information gathering with over 50 volunteers from the community involved.

The process is divided into four sections:- Environment which includes both the natural and built environment; Economy with a Tourism sub-section; Transport and Accessibility; Community and Social with a Young People's sub-section. Each group is chaired by a Town Councillor but all other members are volunteers from the community.

An extensive survey called Love It, Hate It, I Wish, was circulated to every household in Ringwood as well being made available in selected locations, such as the doctor's surgery and being posted on the website. This simple but completely open survey asked participants to tell us three things they love about Ringwood, three things they hate and three things they wish it had. We have had a total of nearly 2,000 responses which represents about 14.6% of the population of Ringwood, an exceptionally high response for a town of this size. It is most encouraging to see the interest that citizens are showing in the future of their town.

As a result of this survey, we have learned that 75% of you would like a large facility which includes a cinema, theatre and hall for holding functions, conferences and dances. You want more facilities for young people. Across all age groups you value the location of the Town on the edge of the New Forest with easy access to the coast, the Dorset Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Southampton, Salisbury and Bournemouth. Many of you highlight the problems of congestion and parking in the Town, especially in the High Street, and have consequently requested that pedestrianisation be considered. You are delighted with the schools and doctors but you are worried by anti social behaviour. These are just a few of the points you have brought to our attention. We have analysed all these results and they will be incorporated into the Town Plan and project proposals.

One facility that some of you said you would like was a taxi shelter. I am pleased to report that Sainsbury's have agreed to fund a shelter and so, shortly, you should be able to enjoy one small result of this consultation.

We have consulted you on the use of Employment Land for New Forest District Council and we held a two day consultation in the Trinity Centre which was attended by over 400 people. Everyone had the opportunity to fully discuss the findings to date and to give their opinions and ideas which were noted and will also be incorporated. There is a further Open Evening at the Elm Tree on 17<sup>th</sup> April between 7.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m.

We held a Tourism Workshop in the Town with Incito Consulting and Tourism South East, as well as New Forest District Council and the National Park

Authority, and as a result Ringwood is developing some exciting car free tourism initiatives. The reinvigorated Tourism Group is looking forward to benefiting from free training being offered by Tourism South East. The SWOT analysis made us all realise that Ringwood has an exceptional product to offer and that there is possibly a wider range of activities available here than in any other New Forest town.

The next consultation will take place when the draft plan is written when you will be asked for your views and opinions. In the meantime, if anyone would like to join in with this most interesting project, please contact us.

I would like to finish by thanking all the volunteers who have taken part for their invaluable time, expertise and contribution and for making it such an enjoyable experience.