

Ringwood Town Council - Annual Meeting - 27th May 2009
– a Report from District Councillor Chris Treleaven

In her opening address as our newly-elected Town Mayor, Councillor Christine Ford told us that she had a number of priorities for the Town on which she intends all locally accountable authorities should make progress.

From a District Council point of view, I - and no doubt all Ringwood District Councillors - support her intentions, and to that end, the following comments are offered on a number of the priorities she has highlighted.:-

1) Old Town Hall/Cinema site

The owners of the site have planning permission for a comprehensive redevelopment scheme which includes linking the Market Place to the Furlong Shopping Centre. The implementation of this generally welcomed scheme may depend on the present economic climate and indeed on whether the owners are able to purchase every single but necessary part of the whole development site. As all this area is privately owned, direct intervention by the District Council is severely limited.

Meanwhile, efforts are being made by your Mayor and others to encourage the owners to erect temporary but visually attractive cladding to the front of the old Town Hall building.

2) SW Corner of the Furlong Car Park – Public Facilities

A carefully conducted feasibility study of providing a comprehensive 'one-stop' facility incorporating all the public service functions in a new building at this site has shown a funding shortfall for the original ambitions. In summary, the general fall in property values has meant that the existing Christchurch Rd. Public offices have decreased the potential funds available, even though there would be a considerable saving in taxpayers revenue by selling or leasing them. At the present time, a less ambitious scheme is under active consideration, but still incorporating new conveniences, visitor information facilities (open all office hours) as well as the community and partnership services currently offered in Christchurch Rd. The timescale unfortunately but necessarily depends on the economic climate. .

3) Affordable Housing.

The recently adopted S.E.England Plan envisages significant growth points in the Southampton area and in S.E Dorset, whilst the whole New Forest area has projections for more modest growth for all Towns, and related to local needs. The District Council - as the legally constituted Planning Authority – has agreed policies now in front of the Government Inspector, which include urban extensions to existing settlements specifically to include a high % of affordable housing for local people (both for social rent and shared equity ownership). During the coming year, Towns and Parishes will have the opportunity (once again!) to put forward suitable sites compatible with infrastructure availability, in addition to those already agreed or proposed in the Core Strategy .

(crt 27thMay)