



# Ringwood Town Council

Annual Report 2022

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# ANNUAL REPORTS FOR TOWN ASSEMBLY 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022

## Introduction by the Town Mayor Cllr Tony Ring (read by Cllr Philip Day – in his absence)

As the Covid imposed hiatus in so many aspects of life ebbs away it is pleasing to be able to construct a positive annual report on actions and activities in our town.

Throughout the whole period of lockdowns and restrictions Ringwood Town Council has continued to provide administrative and operational services in managing town affairs, Councillors, officers, staff and our wonderful legion of volunteers have continued to provide assistance, care and environmental support to the community. We were able to reinstate the annual town fireworks display and Christmas Fayre – both immensely successful and will again be able to enjoy events such as the Pedal Car Grand Prix and of course Carnival with, this year the joyous addition of Her Majesty the Queens Jubilee celebration. Established voluntary organisations have continued to flourish and are now enhanced by organised efforts to offer assistance and temporary accommodation to displaced Ukraine persons. A ‘Greening’ campaign has commenced to address energy use and emissions issues, plans to update the Ringwood Trail to encourage walking tours of the town are in process a possible entry for Ringwood in Bloom to the national RHS scheme is in early progress – all supported by Ringwood Town Council and voluntary input from individuals and councillors. The Town Council has awarded the first of newly constituted Annual Merit Awards to reward personal contributions to community wellbeing and we look forward to future awards to recognise the effort and input of individuals. Thanks and congratulations are due to all involved.

I regret that some previously reported actions remain necessarily a work in progress but can confirm that matters such as town centre development, Neighbourhood Plan issues, managing effects resulting from the A31 road works and extensive work on plans for development at Moortown Lane and Lynes Farm are all in process and being conducted to ensure the best possible outcomes for our town. Additionally, work is progressing on the very exciting plan to redevelop the football club and a project to upgrade Carvers to provide improved long-term facilities has been initiated for eventual public consultation to ensure that we meet expectations and make sure that Ringwood remains a wonderful place to live.

# Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee

## Report by the Chairman Cllr Andy Briers

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee 2022.

As other chairman will no doubt mention, and as everyone is acutely aware, these last few years have been extremely difficult for all of our residents. That said, I have to give thanks to all at Ringwood Town Council for all they have done during this time for our local residents.

Whilst there are many open spaces and facilities within the town provided by the Town Council, I would like to comment on the following;

### **Carvers & Carvers Clubhouse**

I am pleased to say that with the manager's hard work and enthusiasm this facility continues to improve. This was recently evidenced by the Carvers Activity Open Day which was well attended by the families of Ringwood. We have seen its reputation grow with many clubs and organisations using the building. We will continue to source grant funding to further enhance the facilities and services, both at the clubhouse and Carvers in general.

In addition, and under the leadership of Cllr Fredrick, we have been looking at an overall strategy for the enhancement of this open space. This is currently on going and we hope to provide further information to our residents in the coming months.

### **Long Lane**

We, Ringwood Town Football Club and partners are progressing the redevelopment of the facilities at Long Lane and I am pleased to report that Planning Permission has been granted. I would like to thank all those involved in the project, particularly Cllr Loose and the Town Clerk. This is now being taken to the next stage. The improvements to the football facilities at Long Lane will include a new artificial grass pitch (that will allow all-weather training) and a new clubhouse with much better facilities. As we are all no doubt aware, projects like this take a long time in the making but we look forward to the re-development of the site.

### **Events**

Events in Ringwood have re-started and will continue with the hard work and dedication of the Events Manager, Events sub-committee, and Town Council Officers. The first event last year was the annual firework display followed by the Christmas market and light switch on. Both of these events were very well attended. These events will continue this year with the next being the Party in the Park to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It is again thanks to the Events Manager, Events sub-committee, officers, the voluntary support of local residents and associations such as the Carnival, Rotary Club, Round Table and Men's Shed and last but not least, the generous local sponsors that these events continue.

### **General Items**

The committee as always gives its thanks to Mr Atack and members of Ringwood Garden Club for judging the annual allotment competition. The winning allotment holders were awarded prizes at a presentation last September.

I must again congratulate Ringwood Actions for Climate Emergency (RACE) and their supporters for the tree planting and the ongoing care of these areas. I thank you for all of your efforts.

As mentioned previously, I must also mention and thank our office staff and grounds team. This again, has been a very difficult year, but it is thanks to their hard work and ongoing commitment that our town and facilities are something to be proud of.

I hope the residents of Ringwood have recognised our efforts through 2021-22 and will support us in the year ahead. I would also like to thank the residents and voluntary groups of Ringwood who help with community projects, litter picking, reporting defects etc. Your help is much appreciated.

Finally, I would also like to thank members of the committee for their help and contributions throughout the last year.

That concludes the annual report from the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee.

## Policy and Finance Committee

### Report by the Chairman Cllr Jeremy Heron

The figures for the years 2020/21 and 2021/22 are set out below. Our full accounts are open for public scrutiny to anyone who wishes to view them.

The one thing that I will comment on is that through prudent financial management Ringwood Town Council remains in a good financial position ensuring that we continue to deliver services and projects for the benefit community.

	2021/22	2020/21
	£	£
Precept	531,856	519,907
Income excluding investments income & CIL	289,105	216,193
Investment Income	427	882
Community Infrastructure Levy	5,814	31,544
Total Income	827,202	768,526
Revenue Expenditure	721,387	643,522
Capital Expenditure	36,234	9,345
Loan Repayments	31,546	31,546
Total Expenditure	789,167	684,413
Net Movement in Funds	38,035	84,113

Revenue Expenditure broken down by Committee is:

Policy & Finance	446,978	398,058
Recreation Leisure & Open Space	309,225	260,755
Planning	32,964	25,600
<b>Total Balances held at bank</b>	<b>639,322</b>	<b>597,321</b>

Town Council Loans:

Public Loans Board (Fixed rate 3.4% over 25 years)	175,049	189,523
Loan for land purchase (Fixed rate 3.03% over 25 years)	154,421	160,357

As I looked back over the past two years, and what extraordinary years they have been, I reflected that, through wise investment in IT this Council continued to support its residents through the Pandemic with staff working remotely from home and meetings taking place over the internet. What a learning curve that was for both staff and Members.

Whilst that was a tangible outcome for the Policy and Finance Committee we are, in essence, mostly an enabler for the Planning Town & Environment and Recreation Leisure & Open Spaces Committees.

As I look back this Committee has ensured that when Planning wished to support REAL in their environmental projects the resources were available, and equally when this Council decided that we should deliver a Neighbourhood Plan we were in a position to engage consultants and start that journey.

Recreation is again a committee that delivers on the ground for the people of Ringwood but again their hard work can not come to fruition without the finances to enable delivery. Our big cost item in this area is obviously the incredible improvements to the football facilities at Long Lane but this does not detract from the smaller projects that enhance the community such as the work at Kingfisher Way or the play area at Ash Grove, not to mention the planning that will hopefully deliver a greatly improved access road to Poulner Lakes.

I know that I have strayed into the area of other committees but I hope that this Council and the residents of Ringwood see us all as a single team working to improve the lives of those that live and work within our most amazing community.

I conclude, as always, with my thanks to our staff without whom none of this could be achieved.

# Planning, Town and Environment Committee

## Report by the Chairman Cllr Philip Day

### **Introduction**

I became a member of this Committee 7 years ago when first elected to the Town Council. Previously, the Committee was chaired by Cllr Chris Treleaven who did not stand for re-election in 2019 – Chris had vast experience of planning matters both at Town and District level and has been a “hard act to follow”. It is appropriate that I pay tribute to his hard work and dedication and thank him for the example by which he led the Committee.

Previous reports have included statistics about the number of applications considered, and the outcomes. I have chosen to depart from that approach, not least because in terms of planning matters, the last three years have seen some very major changes in policy and the bringing forward of proposed developments that have presented “challenges” to this committee, quite apart from the “routine work” of considering applications for planning consents (including tree work) in our Parish.

In addition, the Town Council resolved to proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan – a major task in itself.

I propose to look at each in turn and then make some general observations about how the Coronavirus pandemic, lockdown and other matters have impacted on our work.

### **The Local Plan**

My first major task as Chair of this Committee was to represent the Town Council (assisted by the Town’s Deputy Clerk and Clerk to this Committee – Jo Hurd) at the Public Inquiry into what has now become Part 1 of New Forest District Council’s Local Plan. Part 2 – identification of smaller development sites was expected by now and although some work has been undertaken in regards to the identification of smaller sites (i.e. for between 10 and 100 dwellings) it appears that as a consequence of a Planning Appeal in which it was held that NFDC could not demonstrate an adequate supply of housing sites over the next 5 years, the Local Plan Part 1 may itself be re-visited. We await further information but either way, there will be more work for this Committee.....

In summary (and one could write a book on this subject alone) back in 2019 we were principally concerned with what are now commonly known as the Elm Tree (Nouale Lane, Taylor Wimpey or site 14) and the Moortown (site 13) sites.

We were reconciled to the fact that the Elm Tree site would almost certainly be included within the plan but opposed the removal of the Moortown site from the Green Belt. We argued that existing infrastructure (roads, drainage, schools, doctors, dentists etc.) simply could not cope with these developments and that it was imperative that upper limits be imposed on the number of dwellings to be built on each site.

As we know, the Plan was indeed adopted but the issues raised at the Inquiry remain of concern and highly relevant (see further below).

## **The A31 widening scheme and associated works**

As Chair of the Committee, I have represented the Town Council at countless meetings over the last three years with Highways England (now National Highways), Hampshire County Council, NFDC and the contractors regarding the scheme and associated works.

I am pleased to report that our engagement has been productive, albeit to a limited extent in that (for example) we were able to persuade all concerned to undertake the footpath and other improvements to West Street at the same time as the laying of a new electricity cable, rather than have the street dug up twice.

Members were divided about the proposal to reverse Meeting House Lane but that occurred and was then promptly reversed back again when it became clear that the original reversal was causing congestion for those attempting to leave both the main town car park and that of Waitrose. Discussion continue regarding this and it remains to be seen what the final outcome will be.

We were successful in obtaining better signage on the A31 and within the town itself warning of the changes to the West Street junction although at the time and even now, more needs to be done in that regard to prevent “rat-running”.

The works to replace the Water Main with a new route through the water meadows, the Bickerley and then past Greyfriars, along Mansfield Road and back to the A31 have been and gone. Reinstatement work has been carried out at the Bickerley and officers are monitoring this but it will take some time for the ground to fully recover.

The main works on the A31 itself are now well advanced and scheduled to end in November 2022. The Town Council has been actively monitoring the consequences of these works and made numerous representations to both National Highways and Hampshire County Council as a direct result of which various amendments to the original traffic management scheme have been implemented (e.g. the extent of the 50 mph limit on the A31 itself and signage on the A31). It remains to be seen what will happen once the holiday season starts in earnest but whilst it is clear that the local road network has been significantly and adversely affected by the works, it is gratifying that after what might perhaps have been regarded as a “wobbly start”, monthly meetings do now take place and our concerns are at least heard. The other attendees are our County Councillor Michael Thierry and District Councillors (who are also Town Councillors) Tony Ring, Jeremy Heron and Steve Rippon-Swaine and our Deputy Clerk, Jo Hurd.

## **Snails Lane**

Although this proposed development was outside the Parish boundary, it would have had an obvious impact on the Town such that the Committee made forceful representations regarding the proposals. In the event, the planning application was refused by NFDC, there was no appeal and, to date no revised application has been forthcoming.

## **Beaumont Park/Linden Homes**

Although now effectively complete and the new houses occupied, the Committee continues to monitor issues such as drainage, the play and other open areas and to bring concerns to the attention of NFDC officers.

## **Moortown Site**

A year or so ago, an application to “excuse” those promoting the site from undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment had been rejected by NFDC. Those promoting the site (which does not include two significant parcels of land owned by the County Council) had engaged in a form of public consultation and a formal application for outline planning consent was expected in early summer 2021.

In fact, ownership of the site passed from St Congar to Crest Nicholson who very helpfully sought to engage with us and the public in a series of consultations and presentations. A hybrid planning application was eventually submitted in December 2021 seeking outline consent for some 480 houses on the site within their ownership and a detailed consent for what is in effect the southern half of the site.

On this occasion, the Committee formed a “Task and Finish Group” to put together a draft response. I am grateful to local architect Joe Moorhouse, Dr Geoff Ridgway OBE, my predecessor as chair of this Committee – Chris Treleaven and Cllr Gareth DeBoos for their invaluable input, along with all of those members of the public whose comments on social media and on the NFDC and other websites helped us to formulate a view. Following a change in the schemes of delegations for Committees, the final response required the approval of Full Council rather than simply this Committee.

I believe that the formal response (recommending that the application be refused) that was approved by in April is the longest and most detailed response ever submitted by the Town Council to any application, comprising an 8 page summary and supporting documents running to well over a hundred further pages.

I suspect that given what has happened with the “Elm Tree Site”, it will be many months before a final decision is reached regarding this site.

## **Elm Tree site**

A year ago, I drafted a report for what should have been the 2021 Assembly which never took place. However, regarding this site I wrote this:

*“An outline application is now being processed. NFDC officers have been consulting with the Committee throughout the process and we have been making our views known. Most recently, the Committee made its formal views known following a “Zoom” meeting attended by 63 people – the vast majority being local residents (see further below). We recommended that the current application be refused for a host of reasons – details are available on the Town Council’s website.*

*Regarding this particular application, my thanks to Cllr Gareth DeBoos for his work in analysing the comments made by the public on the NFDC website and pulling together an excellent presentation that was of huge assistance in identifying issues of concern.*

*Engagement with NFDC officers will continue into the foreseeable future and as matters progress, the Town Council will do its utmost to represent the interest of those living in Ringwood.”*

12 months later, there have recently been a host of amended plans and documents and the Planning Committee will no doubt again be exercised to consider whether our original concerns have been addressed and will respond appropriately.

It may well be that we will again look to form a “Task and Finish Group” to consider and draft a further response but I am sure that we will do all that we can to listen to and take on board the views of local residents before submitting further comments.

### **The Old Town Hall – Regal Cinema Site**

After years of inactivity by the owners of the building, a public consultation took place last year regarding a proposed redevelopment of the wider site, including the current car wash and the two semi-detached buildings fronting Meeting House Lane. We applauded the fact that those looking to develop the site had sought to engage in consultations with both the Town Council and the public at large.

As so often seems to happen, the anticipated planning application has to date not been forthcoming and might or indeed may not include a space suitable for a cinema (albeit a small one). Nevertheless, there remains a prospect that this important building might be restored to something of its former glory given its very prominent position in the Town centre.

### **Neighbourhood Plan (NP)**

After much debate over an extended period, in mid-2020, the Town Council decided to proceed towards adopting such a plan.

Consultants were appointed, grants were obtained to cover the vast majority of the cost, a steering committee has been formed (under the chairmanship of Cllr John Haywood) and various working parties are hard at work undertaking research, consultations and formulating policies that will eventually find their way to a referendum before becoming something that has some real legal “bite” (which is not the case with the earlier “Town Plan”). Again, I express my thanks to the leaders of the Working Parties – Chris Treleaven, Joe Moorhouse, Janet Georgiou and Cllr Gareth DeBoos and also to Mary Deboos who has in recent times taken on the somewhat onerous mantle of Project Manager.

It is hoped that the NP can be finalised before detailed planning applications are submitted for the large development sites and can have a real influence on how the new houses will be built, their design and how any development can contribute positively to our ancient Market Town, especially in the historic town centre around the High Street and Market Place.

More work is needed to involve the community as a whole (especially the younger residents) but those currently involved are extremely enthusiastic and things are progressing well.

### **“Routine work”**

The number of planning applications considered by the Committee continues unabated. Without undertaking a forensic or statistical analysis of the same, the majority are from people looking to extend their homes (rather than to “upsized”) by building extensions, extending into roof spaces or looking to “convert” a conservatory into a brick extension. A consequence of such applications is of course to reduce the available stock of smaller, cheaper houses in the town – a matter of some concern to the Committee but not a valid reason to refuse planning consent.

There have been a significant number of applications for “in-fill” developments in back gardens or by the division of existing plots and a few small developments of between 10 and 20 houses (e.g. the old police station site).

The Committee has, by and large had no issue with most applications but on occasions, has made a recommendation that there be an outright refusal or that the proposal be amended. I am pleased to note that there have only been a very small number of occasions when the Committee's recommendation has not been accepted by NFDC officers although there remain two matters of concern in particular:

Ringwood Local Distinctiveness, particularly in areas such as (but not limited to) Broadshard Lane and the visual impact on the street scene of developments such as replacing hedges with (high) fences; and

Concerns that Committee members have about the impact some developments have on localised traffic and parking issues.

In both cases, there is perception that not sufficient weight is given to the views of the Committee, given out local knowledge.

### **Working with NFDC officers**

Historically, by the time that this Committee considered a planning application, an officer's report would be available with recommendations as to whether to grant or refuse an application (or grant subject to conditions). This gave us a clear insight as to officers' thinking.

However and for some time now, reports have either not been available or have identified planning considerations without giving an indication of the view likely to be taken by officers. This has meant that members of the Committee have had to spend more time than hitherto in looking at details of the applications before we have been in a position to formulate a recommendation.

On the other hand, engagement with senior planning officers at NFDC (Clare Upton-Brown and Richard Natt in particular) has improved with one or both officers regularly updating members on an informal basis with regard to each of the larger developments and also attending formal meetings open to the public. There remains scope for improvement but we are grateful for their assistance.

### **The effect of the Pandemic**

Come March 2020 physical meetings of the Town Council meeting came to a very abrupt halt. This Committee was the first to hold remote hearings using the Zoom technology. It does of course have its disadvantages but it has made it easier for councillors, officers and members of the public to "attend" – I very much doubt that had the meeting to consider the Elm Tree application taken place in the Gateway, 63 people would have attended nor the 25 or so who attended a more recent virtual meeting regarding the Moortown application!

I anticipate that we will very shortly be reverting to physical meetings but it does seem to me that this exercise in "virtual democracy" has largely been a success.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank all those members of the public who have attended our meetings, whether to speak for or against a particular application or to raise other matters of concern.

I would also like to thank the various organisations that contribute to our work, including in particular Ringwood Society, RACE, REAL, Transition Ringwood and all those who are involved in formulating the Neighbourhood Plan.

Thanks too, to all members of the Committee, especially my Vice-Chair Rae Frederick who has on occasions had to take the Chair in my place.

As a committee, we have been much assisted by our Clerk Jo Hurd and Office Manager Nicola Vodden who trawl through the many applications to extract relevant documents that are provided to us in advance. When meetings are taking place, they are always on hand to call up relevant documents, policies, “Street View” etc.

We owe both Jo and Nicola a huge debt – thank you very much!

Thank you also to the majority of committee members who consider the papers before each meeting and let me as chair have your preliminary comments. I am therefore able to quickly identify those applications that are contentious and require further examination and debate when we “meet” and those that we can dispose of literally in a matter of moments. Members are however scrupulously careful to ensure that they retain open minds until applications are formally considered.

I would also like to put on record that our Mayor, Cllr Tony Ring has been a member of this Committee throughout but is the only Ringwood Councillor who is also a District Councillor member of the NFC Planning Committee. Tony takes great care not to partake in discussions about any potentially contentious application that comes before the Town Council so that he can in effect “keep his powder dry” should the matter come before the NFDC Committee for a “final” decision.

### **In conclusion**

Without wishing in any way to detract from the work of my predecessors as chairs of this Committee, I suspect that history will dictate that the last three years and quite probably the next few will turn out to have been the most challenging times in terms of Town and Country Planning in Ringwood in recent decades – indeed since Poulner was developed and the A31 cut Ringwood in two.

Be that as it may, I would like to emphasise that all members of the Committee are local people, living in the Town or very close by. We occasionally disagree but all care passionately about our community and although our powers are limited we will as a Committee continue to do all that we can to protect and enhance our wonderful Market Town.