

Hatherleigh Town Council Chair Report May 2017

Welcome everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting 2017. Having never expected being the Chairman of Hatherleigh Town Council, let alone being a Mayor, I am grateful for the opportunity and I hope I have served the position well in my first year.

Before I review the years events and achievements I'd like to start by giving thanks and appreciation to those that make this organisation what it is. Thank you to the clerk, Rosemary Lock, your guidance and support to myself and new Councillors is very much appreciated. Thank you to all Councillors for the help, support and commitment to getting jobs done with the many issues that arose over the year, and for their extra time taken standing as representatives on the various committees. Another quick thanks to those that accompany me as consort to Mayoral events and sacrifice even more of their time.

This is also an opportunity to thank the many groups in Hatherleigh for keeping our traditions alive and us all entertained – the Silver Band, Carnival Committee, Festival Committee, the Players, Rotary Club, Community Centre Trustees, Parish Pump, Walruses and many more. The Cricket, Football and Bowls clubs and Skatepark group for providing great sports facilities and the way they encourage youngsters to engage in sport - all these groups are made up of volunteers who make this the great town that it is. Special thanks I feel should go to the Moor Management Committee for the way they continually offer financial support to all manner of local projects, not only does this provide the obvious benefits in the items provided but saves the hidden cost of volunteer time from untold hours which would be taken up in fundraising, we are lucky to have them!

I would also like to thank District Councillor Patrick Kimber for his responsive manner in which he's offered his time to work closely with the Town Council on some key matters. And thank yous should be noted to Okehampton Mayor Jan Goffey and Cllr Michael Ireland for keeping a sustained pressure in campaigning on our behalf in their respective causes against hospital closures and promoting the reinstatement of a regular daily rail service.

A final thanks, but still important, go to our Town maintenance people Mr Moorcroft, Mr Cole and Mr Leahy – and to those conscientious residents for random acts of picking up litter and weeds, watering the hanging baskets and being the eyes/ears to report issues.

The Council year kicked off with a bang by the holding of a public meeting to discuss the parking problems in town. We had a large audience who all brought questions and grievances to put to the Town Council and to a panel of representatives from higher tier Councils and the emergency services.

With this and the results of the parking survey prior to the meeting we have been working towards the community call – to make the car park free and introduce parking restrictions at various hot spots. There has been slow progress over the year due to financial and manpower restructuring at Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Council but within the last month we seem to be finally moving forward in our negotiations. How the situation pans out is still a major challenge for our coming year.

Other tricky challenges to contend with are the housing increases proposed for the town. The consultation stages of the Plymouth and South West Joint Local Plan ensured an immense amount of reading and discussion over how we formed our responses. The process has left us concerned that Hatherleigh will see another large growth in development in a short space of time despite what the community have expressed through the Hatherleigh Community Plan with concerns on its impact to services.

The market area development that has held uncertainty since its outline planning approval now appears to be moving a step closer to being developed. We have had the opportunity to speak with an interested company and if development goes ahead we hope they will work with us as representatives of the community to ensure little disruption to the running of the Tuesday market.

There remains a worrying trend of closures to community facilities. This year the community has seen the loss of the Bank, and a pub. And although we've been lucky enough to retain the Post Office with it moving to its new location we are still unsure if we are to lose another business property where the Post Office once was. Also despite supporting the campaign to keep our current hospital services, we will be seeing bed closures and the loss of some services at Okehampton hospital. A positive to report is our small success in lobbying to keep the public phone box at Moor View.

There have been changes and upheavals from the higher tier Councils with reduced staff within West Devon Borough Council and cuts to services at Devon County Council. This Town Council has had to absorb and adapt to these shortcomings and we will continue to address any problems that arise. This is helped in part through maintaining our links with other communities through regular attendance of the Northern Parish Links meetings, and this year we hosted a meeting here in Hatherleigh.

It is clear that the challenges we've had to work through are beyond our control. However, moving on to more positive activities to report of which we are in control, we have a number of projects to be proud of.

The installation of 12 cycle racks around town, thanks to Devon County Council and Councillor James McInnes with his help with half the funding. The other half coming from the Town and Parish Fund.

The TAP fund enabled the creation of the Warhorse Way which got off to a great start with a successful opening walk organised jointly with Iddesleigh Parish Council. Other footpaths have been monitored well and repairs quickly dealt with.

We worked with the Co-op store to bring about the re-decoration of the bus shelter, the hard work being kindly done by the shop staff. We also maintained our pressure on West Devon Borough Council to see the toilet block re-furbished, and we have a new toilet cleaner appointed for the coming year.

Island Park continues to improve thanks to skatepark volunteers, Luppo Diepenbrook, Steve Brock, Alec Muir and Brad Horn helping with the installation of the litter bins. The next phase will shortly see the installation of some new granite and concrete (vandal proof!) seating and picnic benches.

Other general improvements have been the clearing of the Sportsfield path, works to the Jubilee path, new seats, the re-furbishment of the flower bed mosaic, thanks to Alan Beaman and his art group, and the re-burial of the time capsule with additional items. A larger Community noticeboard has been created and an updated information board for the bus shelter has been commissioned. The repair of the Millennium mosaic, a tricky job, is a step closer.

We have also had a resident offering to take up the voluntary post of Community Road Warden, this will bring a much valued extra pair of hands, with Chapter 8 training, to help with Devon County Council related issues.

Discussions have begun over the air ambulance night landing site and we are grateful to the Cricket Club for help with this.

One of the things I was keen to improve as Chair was the way in which the Council presents itself to the public, to make contact with us more approachable and clearer. This I hope has been improved through us now having a full page in the Parish Pump community magazine thereby giving more space to detailing who we are, what we do and promoting the use of the website for finding further information. The website has also undergone a full revamp not only improving its security and compatibility with mobile phones, it has also had a more modern, updated design.

The Community Centre have also kindly offered the use of the wall in this meeting room to display a more permanent record of the Town Council, for instance the Town shield and photographs of past Mayors.

As Mayor I've been surprised at the number of invitations to engagements across the region, many of which I couldn't attend due to work commitments. One of the first events was attending the exciting National cycle trials; the most regal was meeting Princess Anne at Farms for City Children's 40th Anniversary; but the most fun was picking litter around the town with the Primary School children.

And finally, this year saw a change to membership with the resignations from some long standing Councillors. We have though welcomed new Councillors Peter, Keith and Ben to our merry band, and we look forward to filling our remaining two seats and taking on new challenges for the year ahead.

Clare Tyson
Chairman
9th May 2017