

A review of Town Council activities during the year and a look ahead to future plans by Councillor Sue Clarke, Mayor of Buckfastleigh

The Covid pandemic has had an impact on us all and in 2020 and 2021 changed the way the Town Council conducted their business. Last April, the Council meetings were being conducted as 'zooms' but then transferred to 'fun in the park' as all councils were charged to meet in person again, but with distancing rules in place. Although chilly at times, meeting outside meant the council became part of the local landscape alongside the skate park and its accompanying music. We even managed to get some input from some skaters which was great!

We have had some changes in membership on the Council this year, with the loss of Andy Stokes, (one time Mayor and Deputy Chair), Kate Kayley, Gwena Harman and Bryony Tilsley. Along with the other remaining members, I extend thanks and appreciation for the contributions and support these councillors gave.

We have welcomed Kathy Taylor as a new councillor and are keen to recruit other town residents to join us. Thanks, are also due to our current District and County Councillors, Huw Cox, John Nutley and Sarah Parker-Khan, whose support and input is valued. As restrictions were lifted, Clair Stevens, the Town Hall Administrator, has diligently kept protocols up to date and along with our Caretaker, Kiki Sykes's invaluable support, has kept all the Town Hall users safe. Thankyou.

Overseeing and guiding our activities and dealing with all the complex legal business, Judith Hart the Town Clerk has steered the Council through another uncertain year with clarity and skill. In the office Inga Page. has been able to continue her much needed clerical and PR support, which fortunately increased again as Covid restrictions eased and last, but certainly not least, Gary Quest the Town Ranger has really made a difference this year and has also made a lot of friends.

With the emergence from lockdown restrictions and the resumption of outdoor activities, the Council has been able to support many local projects through its grant award capability. The projects involved are quite wide-ranging and include, wildlife enhancement, sporting activities, children's holiday projects, alongside the swimming pool, youth club activity support, and the practical ventures of The Share Shed and Citizen's Advice Bureau sessions.

The grant capacity helps the Council to fulfil a primary aim of building community partnerships and supporting new ideas. The total amount provided in grants for the past year was £51,377. Although reduced due to restrictions, some social events have taken place, notably the opening of the Wildlife Garden behind the Town Hall which had undergone extensive re-modelling and design (thank you so much Charlie Scullion and the Farm Able Charity). In December, the cinema recommenced in the Town Hall showing a children's film which was a great success. We had another cinema evening in February and are looking to make this a regular happening. The Christmas meal and gift initiative was enjoyed by over fifty residents in the town, and we had a great time as councillors and volunteers delivering meals and treats on Christmas Eve.

We have put in place a lovely new Jubilee bench at Round Cross on the hill, and our new town clock which will soon be installed outside Searles, so watch out for notifications of that event. Thanks go to Cllr John Bailey for his work on getting a new clock for the town.

We have recently completed a number of energy advice workshops after applying for a grant to do this from Western Power. Several residents were able to access some cost-saving ideas and we plan to run more of these events at the end of summer before the winter sets in.

The annual consultation with the town (the survey delivered through your door) garnered a fair response last autumn. The following areas were significantly highlighted: climate change/environment, parking, wellbeing and cultural/entertainment events. This information enables the Council to pursue and initiate activities to reflect the needs and concerns of residents.

In the coming year, the Council hopes to reinstate the rural skip service and provide a new Tetra Pak recycling facility. Along with the cinema events, other cultural and interest activities are also planned. At the time of writing, we are concentrating upon the celebration for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, linking with other groups in Buckfastleigh to ensure a happy few days for all. Information about this will be coming out soon, so watch this space.

Despite the constraints of the past year, we have endeavoured to continue to provide a hub of support and connection for all residents and will continue to prioritise supporting local initiatives through grants and being innovative in finding ways to deliver services to our residents.

Councillor Sue Clarke, Mayor of Buckfastleigh
20 April 2022