

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

I must start this review by talking about the sad and shocking loss of Cllr Huw Cox. Huw was very well known in Town and had served as a Town Councillor since 2018 and as our District representative since 2019. He was our Mayor from January 2023 until his untimely death in 2024.

Huw loved to get out and solve problems in a practical way and I remember, it seems not that long ago he sent his apologies for missing a meeting because he was out helping someone deal with a flooded property. At his funeral we heard about his love of being outdoors and learnt that he had once considered training to be a Buddhist monk. That would certainly explain the quiet and contemplative way in which Huw would approach problems and debates and the joy he took in connecting with people in his community.

As Council Leader Huw also became the Chair of the Town Hall Trust and led on a project to start refurbishment starting with Room 3 now named The Huw Cox Room. He was also very involved in making sure the town Christmas lights and trees were up and every year and was keen to get some new lights and decorations sorted for the future. This work is ongoing with a committed group of councillors and townsfolk and our town Clerk. Huw will be sadly missed by all who knew him, and we thank him for his service to our town and district, which he clearly loved.

The 2023 election was uncontested with only 8 of 12 seats filled. Emma Fitzpatrick became a Councillor but left 6 months later due to contesting commitments. Cllrs Erin Kohler Ockmore and Mark Jefferys did not stand for re-election. Erin had joined us in October 2020 and served as Deputy Chair and Mayor from May 2021 to April 2023. We thank all those who give their time to become Councillors. We welcome Cllrs Steven Burch and Joanna De Groot-Marzec who have recently come on board but we still have four seats vacant and I would urge all Councillors to promote recruitment among their friends and contacts in town. Democracy works best when more people have a seat at the table where decisions are made, and we can have wide representation from all parts of our community.

In the past year, this Council has awarded over £69,000 in grants, 46% of our budget spent directly on services, provided by other organisations, in the parish which are of benefit to residents such as the Citizens Advice Outreach service at St. Luke's Community Hub, new children's equipment for the library, funds towards refurbishment at the Valiant Soldier, the popular Christmas Fair Victorian carousel and funds to keep our swimming pool open.

We also continue to support the TRAYE youth provision and the wildly successful free activities and food for children through the Hello Summer/Winter/Easter Programme run by Better Places that take place throughout the year. Our ability to work in partnership with others and to ensure that our funds are distributed to do good in our community make us the envy of many other towns, most much larger than us. I have often been asked 'just how does Buckfastleigh do it?' My answer is that 'we value partnership' but I should perhaps add to that that our Councillors understand that our job is to ensure that our funds do not sit idly in accounts and that we continue to make our grant applications process smooth and accessible. We should celebrate this success and ensure we continue this goal of distributing the money we have so that good things can happen.

In December 2023 we delivered over a hundred free two course Christmas meals accompanied by treat bags sourced from local businesses. This service has become very

popular with recipients, some of whom may well be struggling to feed their families. Helping with deliveries has become one of my favourite things to do. This Easter we were also able to deliver 34 extra meals following a generous donation from which remaining funds will be used later in the year. My thanks to Judith and Inga at the Town Hall Office for all their work to help make this happen.

In May 2023 a Commemorative Coronation mug was presented to both primary schools and the home-schooled children who requested them so that they could have a lasting memory of a moment in British history.

2023 also saw the first meeting of the Buckfastleigh Youth Forum chaired by Cllr Cox and it is hoped we can re-visit and further develop this forum to ensure we keep abreast of the issues affecting our young people and can distribute our grant funding where it is most needed.

There have been some exciting developments in Town with the opening of a couple of lovely new shops, new management at The Globe now offering a tempting new menu and the continued growth of our industrial estate on Mardle Way. It was here that the amazing Winterfest took place, where I am told over 2,000 people visited in one day and many of the businesses sold out of their products. I really hope this could be the start of a commercial regeneration and look forward to building more links between businesses and the Town Council.

Lastly, but by no means least; Judith our Town Clerk has now reached her 20th year of service with us and I would like to take this opportunity to send her our admiration and thanks for all of her hard work on behalf of Buckfastleigh. It's not easy having the people you work with come and go every time there is an election or as people stand down. She remains steadfast in her commitment to ensuring things run smoothly which is why our Auditors are always so impressed by the way she manages our finances. Well done Judith, we value you!

I feel honoured to represent this town and serve its people. I would like to thank my fellow councillors, our Town Clerk, Admin Assistant, Town Ranger, Town Hall staff and all those in town that we work in partnership with for doing such amazing work.

Councillor Sue Clarke, Mayor of Buckfastleigh

April 2024