

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

In last year's report I mentioned how our late Mayor and District Councillor Huw Cox would have loved to have helped with the installation of new Christmas Lights for Buckfastleigh as at that time we were frantically trying to commission an affordable option after our old lights were condemned. Thanks largely to the detailed work of our Town Clerk and the band of steadfast volunteers and with gratitude to the business and individuals who supported this...oh boy did we deliver!

Our Christmas lights were a resounding success with so many positive comments from locals and visitors from as far away as Canada. Although the outlay for this is significant, we hope that the impact on footfall and business in the town will bring positive benefits. Not to mention the impact on people's sense of wellbeing and pride in Buckfastleigh. We will continue to need the support of donations from our businesses and residents to help offset the costs involved

This year we said a sad goodbye in July to Cllr Walker-Howarth and welcome to new Cllr Ben Leany a teacher and locally retained Fire Fighter. 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.

We also said goodbye to Inga Page after she decided to retire from her role as Admin Assistant and we appointed Clair Stevens to the new role of Deputy Clerk.

In November we celebrated the 20 years of service of our dedicated and valued Town Clerk Judith Hart. We are grateful for Judith's commitment to our town and particularly her ability to provide such rigorous accounting and her attention to detail. Not everyone could have coped with the frustrations of managing the UK Shared Prosperity Fund project, but I personally think this town has done an amazing job with that money given the constraints of the funding criteria.

Thanks to this Government funding we were able to provide some much needed new street furniture and signage, refurbish the Valiant Soldier Visitor Centre so that it is now a modern, bright and interactive space and take on the lease from Teignbridge District Council (TDC) of the main green entrance to the town to create an attractive area with a nod to our industrial wool heritage through our cheeky but handsome Ram.

I never thought that being Mayor of Buckfastleigh would lead to so many conversations about the anatomy of farm animals, but our Ram is already well loved by townsfolk and visitors. The next job is to find him a name and I am in contact with the local school about just that.

In the past year, this Council awarded over £53,800 in grants, 35% of our budget spent directly on services, provided by other organisations and community groups in the parish which are of benefit to a broad spectrum of residents.

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. Our Councillors understand that our job is to ensure that our funds do not sit idly in accounts and that we use the money we have to help our town grow and thrive.

In December 2024 we delivered a record number of 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 is now the highlight of my civic year. Thanks to all who help with this service.

We held our second Green Fair in September which gave local wildlife and environment groups the opportunity to showcase their work. Preserving our natural environment is very important to Buckfastleigh Town Council and we look for green initiative wherever possible.

Looking forward in these uncertain times, we are currently working with TDC and Cllr Stuart Rogers alongside the Buckfastleigh Scout Group to secure a new scout hut on the land by the Tennis Courts. Hopefully, more about that exciting project to come.....

Devolution is planned in the next couple of years, and we are all asking questions and finding to get answers about what that might mean for us. The upcoming County Elections on May 1st will also potentially impact the way in which Devon works with the Towns and Parishes. Whatever the results, we remain dedicated to making progress and serving our residents, remaining open and transparent and would encourage all residents to come along to any of our meetings and help us in our decision making and planning. We want very much to hear your voice and for you to contribute.

I feel honoured to continue to represent Buckfastleigh and Buckfast and serve its people. I would like to thank my fellow councillors, our Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, 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 2025