

ROYAL WOOTTON BASSETT TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



Town Clerk Report

Society grows great – when people plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in!

And that's what has been happening in Vale View Gardens, but along with planting trees, we have vegetable beds, a pond, an outside classroom, bike rack, sensory path, grass area, and a wonderful sign by Marilyn Trew. Following approval by Council to take on this land, along with the Grounds Team, this area was created with massive support from residents, businesses, the Infants School and Horizons College, RWB Environment Trust, Gardening Club, and so many more.



The organisations and community groups who received Community Grants from the Town Council, were the focus of our Annual Town Meeting in April, a celebration of our town, and especially all the groups run by volunteers. Thank you all – you all make such a difference!

The Town Hall Trust received grants this year through Community First, and thanks to the generosity of Crapper and Sons, and Hills Waste Solutions, we have been able to restore the town's two historic Maces. Ged Collins who spent over 100hrs restoring the Maces, confirmed they are from the 15th century and with a sovereign coin dated as 1603.

And still some of our younger people choose to get involved in criminal damage, graffitiing our play parks and vandalising our public toilets. The last incident of damage to the toilets has put them out of action for a few months and will cost us over £6,000 to repair.

Before Christmas, our Councillors spent a Saturday together in a workshop, looking at how we work together, behaviours, getting to know each other, how we deal with conflict and disagreement, discussing the potential move to a non-political Council, and we started to work on a Strategic Town Plan – something that we want to engage with local residents on, setting out what we hope to achieve in the next 5 to 10 years for our town.

The Grounds Team continue to ensure our town looks great including our parks, Jubilee Lake, the cemetery, flower beds and hanging baskets; we receive a lot of positive comments about the work they do.

We are starting to do things differently as a team of Council Officers, implementing our Digital Office including changes to how meeting papers are created, removing waste, reducing costs, and improving efficiency.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with businesses in our town and hope to set up a business forum, and with community groups, schools, churches, sports clubs, and partner organisations including Wiltshire Police, the Fire Service, GreenSquare Accord, and Wiltshire Council – and with Richard and the team at REME Museum and Colonel Tim Gillies, the new Commandant at MoD Lyneham.

Thanks to Owen for all his help, support and knowledge.

I would like to thank Sue Hughes who has recently finished her time with us as a Town Councillor. Many of you will know the amount of time and dedication Sue has given to our town, not only as a Town Councillor, but as Chair of the Local Youth Network, involved in community groups, and previously involved with trying to save the Learning Centre at Longleaze School, and instrumental in ensuring the reopening of the Lime Kiln Leisure Centre after the fire many years ago.

Finally, I have a list on the door of my office, which includes;

- Do something nice, and don't get caught
- Don't make excuses
- Let someone cut ahead of you in a queue
- Be kind to people
- Be kind to unkind people
- Give your time to others
- Realise and accept, life isn't fair
- And don't sweat the small stuff – it's all the small stuff!



Mark Hopkins - Chief Officer

Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council

Councillor Eve Silvester
The Mayor of Royal Wootton Bassett 2023 -2024



I can't believe how quickly the year is going. When I became Mayor in May 2023 the months of office seemed to stretch out endlessly and now it is 2024! It's true that as you get older time flows quicker! Fortunately, though I have still not been caught in the rain when fully robed.

I went to a performance of 'sleighed to death' given by the Clarendon Players, our local theatre group. Held at the Memorial Hall, it was a very enjoyable evening. Well done the Clarendon Players.

At the beginning of November, I was invited to the opening of the Field of Remembrance at Lydiard House together with the Mayor of Swindon. I left a message from our town on the small wooden cross that I was given.

On Saturday 11 November 2023 we marked Armistice Day at the War Memorial, and the following day Remembrance Sunday was marked with an open air service around the War Memorial on the High Street. Over 200 people marched in the parade along the High

Street. I was very proud to be on the podium to take the salute, proud to represent RWB, a town which honours those who serve. Remembrance Day never fails to move me.

As Mayor I was fortunate this year to be asked to act as President of our local Arts Festival. This is an annual event and takes place over three weekends, covering music, speech, drama, and musical theatre and is a competitive event. And what an event it is! Wide reaching in size and scale and deeply impressive.

Thinking of music, I went to a performance given by the Royal Wootton Bassett orchestra in early December. Held at St Bartholomew's & All Saints Church it was an enjoyable mix of music including of course some Christmas music. A very good evening.

One of the most important events of the year is our Christmas lights evening, which I always enjoy as it marks the start of Christmas and the turn of the year. This lights night I was with the winner of our Christmas card competition as she switched the lights on, and she did a great job. Thanks to everyone who put the evening together and to Owen our Town Crier who oversaw the switch on.

Just before Christmas I was invited to read one of the lessons at the service of nine lessons and carols at St Bartholomew's Church which I was pleased to do. It is a beautiful service, with our parish church lit by each member of the congregation holding a candle. It is timeless.

Finally, you may remember that my charities are Alzheimer's Support, and our RWB Environmental Trust, and Owen delivered a series of Ghost Walks during October and November. The proceeds from the donations going to these charities. The walks are fascinating, and Owen's knowledge is amazing. Thanks to Owen and to the volunteers who opened our Town Hall at the end of the walk. Thanks also to those who put a donation into Owen's top hat for my charities too.

Thanks also to everyone who donated to my charities at the market on 20th December 2023 in exchange for a mince pie and a hot fruit punch. Thanks also to the team at the office and other colleagues, couldn't have done it without you!

All best wishes
Mayor Councillor Eve Silvester

Mayor's Charity Music Festival

On 22nd March 2024 the Mayor's Charity Music Festival took place, a first for a mayoral event in Bassett, in aid of Alzheimer's Support and RWB Environment Trust! An evening of live music at the Memorial Hall, including Lisa Williams and the Cantanti Choir, with an amazing solo from Dillon, then a stunning performance by Sammy Till-Vatier, local band End of the Road with Stuart Bell and headline act Barrelhouse with Stuart Whant!



Town Crier



The year started with attending the Mayor Making event in May 2023 it was lovely to see visitors from our twin town of Blain who have never attended a Mayor Making Ceremony before.

Next was Armed Forces Day in June 2023, followed by an invite to officially open Tockenham Village Fair. This reminded me of the fetes attended as a child of the Blunsdon Village fetes many years ago that no longer take place and brought back some happy memories.

It was a pleasure in July 2023 to be at Old Court Park with local children; Lydia & Eve, cutting the ribbon on a pathway named after them. I then attended the 70th Anniversary of the Korean War and met some retired soldiers.

In August 2023, a visit by The Commonwealth Graves to Downsview Cemetery to place a headstone for local soldier Private Walter Harris, a proud day for his family in remembering his sacrifice for King & Country.

September 2023, I had the pleasure of officially greeting Chris & Leonie Anderson from Adelaide, in Australia. It was also one of my heritage walks 'Un Locking the Past' raising funds for the Mayor's Charity. Merchant Navy Day followed with the red duster flying from the town flagpole. A visit to the local Brownies at the Guide hut to explain the role of the Town Crier past and present was to round up the month.

October 2023, I attended the Mayor's Civic Service held in St Bartholomew's Church. Sadly, I also attended the funeral of Bill 'the Bell' fellow town crier of Ledbury, a good friend who was a regular visitor here in Royal Wootton Bassett on many occasions.

November 2023 Armistice Day and Remembrance was to follow in remembering the town's fallen in two World Wars. And the first of many of my 'Ghost Walks' for the Mayor's Charity, some of the wettest that I can ever remember. These walks raised donations for the Mayor's Charity £500.00, Town Museum £350.00 and Town Carnival £100.00.

December 2023 was the Town's Christmas Lights switch on, then a Ghost Walk for the Explorer Cubs. Special thanks to the Museum and Heritage Group for opening the museum on all occasions of the ghost walks, that the visitors really enjoyed.

These are just a few of the events attended throughout the year in the role of the Town Crier & Sword-Bearer.

Owen Collier

Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council

CORPORATE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Council's aim is to promote Royal Wootton Bassett as an independent and vibrant community.

Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council's commitment to residents is to be a forward-thinking organisation and provide effective leadership for the town.

The Town Council seek to offer:

- Quality services, founded on community involvement and responsive to the town's needs.
- Support its staff and value them in delivery of services to residents.
- Through effective leadership and quality of service provision, the Town Council will promote a sustainable and balanced future for the town.

Buildings and services that the Town Council are responsible for:

- 117 High Street
- Manor House
- Merchants House
- Trustees of Memorial Hall and Town Hall
- Public toilets in Borough Fields and Jubilee Lake
- Play areas x 7 + Jacqui Woolford Memorial Park
- Jubilee Lake
- Church Street Allotments
- Downs View Cemetery
- Flowerbeds and hanging baskets
- CCTV
- Bulletin
- Salt bins
- Tourist Information Point
- Town Clock
- Wednesday Market
- Bus Shelters

Your Town Councillors

The Town Councillors are elected to represent one of three wards in the town. Councillors are elected to serve a period of four years. The last election was held on 6th May 2021. The next elections will be held in 2025.

South & West Ward		
Cllr Michael Cotton 	Cllr Paul Heaphy 	Cllr Josephine Holloway 
Cllr Eve Silvester Mayor 	Cllr Carole Tan 	
North Ward		
Cllr Steve Walls 	Cllr Martin Denz 	Cllr Pat Farrow Deputy Mayor 
Cllr Nic Hughes 	Cllr Andrew Matthews 	Cllr Jenny Stratton 
Cllr Rob Anstee 		

East Ward

Cllr Katherine Wilson



Cllr Fiona Holness



Cllr Steve Bucknell



Council Staff

Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council employ **14** full time staff and **7** part time staff, alongside a team of CCTV staff. The structure includes:

Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Accountant

Administrative Services Manager

Administrative Services Officers

Grounds Maintenance Services Manager

Grounds Staff

Health, Safety & Facilities Officer

The Council has a number of committees, in 2023/2024 as follows:

Committee Group

Full Council

Revenue and Resources

Amenities

Planning

Town Trust

Memorial Hall

Annual Town

AMENITIES COMMITTEE



Chair: Councillor Katherine Wilson

The Amenities Committee looks after seven play areas, Jubilee Lake Nature Reserve, Jacqui Woolford Memorial Park, Vale View Garden, Downs View Cemetery, CCTV, open spaces under its ownership, Church Street Allotments and the Public Conveniences at Borough Fields Shopping Centre & Jubilee Lake.

PLANNING COMMITTEE



Chair: Councillor Steve Walls

Members of the public are welcome to attend planning meetings which are called as necessary and normally precede other council meetings. The Town council will continue to strive to ensure that any application submitted is in the best interests of the town.

2023/24	
Town Council Comment	Planning Applications
No objection	94
No objection (Concerns raised)	3
Objection	9
Withdrawn	9
Total applications received	106

REVENUE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Chair: Councillor Martin Denz

The committee is responsible for capital expenditure projects such as the redevelopment of Manor House which will see the Town Council move into modern office space fit for the 21st century and allow for the growth of the Town Council through devolution of services from Wiltshire Council and any future expansion of the town through Wiltshire Local Plan. Manor House will also provide much needed community space for groups to make use of, something that has been lacking since the sale of the Civic Centre in 2015.



Our Services

CEMETERY

Cemetery Improvement Work

In October 2023 the second stage of the new cremation area was created. Our grounds team did a great job, and the area is now complete. A selection of bushes will be planted to create a screen between the new area and car park.

The section is situated at the bottom end of the cemetery.



Burial and Interments	
2022/23	
Ashes interments	20
Burials	23
2023/24	
Ashes Interments	25
Burials	20

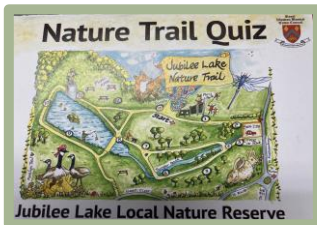
Private Walter Thomas Ewart Harris - War grave placed over 100 years after his death.

The Town Council were contacted by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) regarding the unmarked grave of Private Walter Harris. The Town Council Cemetery Team located his grave and the CWGC have now placed a headstone so that he is rightfully and properly remembered.



JUBILEE LAKE

Jubilee Lake Nature Trail Signs and Quiz



Please come along and participate in the trail, which leads you all around the nature reserve area and takes about an hour to complete. The nature trail quiz is available from the Jubilee Lake Cafe, the Town Council office at 117 High Street RWB or via the QR code which is situated on the new signs.



OPEN SPACES AND PLAY AREAS

The Grounds Team go about their routine tasks of maintaining the amenities and play areas, ensuring they are clean and fit for purpose.

Play Areas

Royal Wootton Bassett has 7 children's play parks which are owned and maintained by the Town Council.

Old Court Toddler Play Area

The newly refurbished play area was officially opened on 31st January 2024. The new equipment consists of a slide with mini tower, double swing, crazy hen rocker and spinner bowl.



Tree Planting

The tree planting programme in Royal Wootton Bassett continues with the Town Council and RWB Environment Trust (RWBET) working together. To protect the newly planted trees we have modified our grass cutting programme. You will notice the area around the trees has been cut twice a year, so the trees will be situated within scalloped areas of longer grass, which is aesthetically pleasing, as well as affording some physical protection for the trees. Our Grounds Team have been continuing their work with Dave Gardner of the RWBET to discuss suitable sites for additional trees.

Church Street Allotments

The Town Council own and manage Church Street Allotments which is located off Church Street, behind St Bartholomew's Church and currently has 173 plots.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Town Council is working with volunteers on the working group to review and update the current plan.



COMMUNITY SAFETY CCTV



The aim of using CCTV is to ensure Royal Wootton Bassett is safe for the public and act as a deterrent to criminal and anti-social behaviour. The CCTV suite has now grown to 24 full colour cameras and is manned by a team of volunteers keen to give “something back” to their community.

CHARITY TRUSTEES

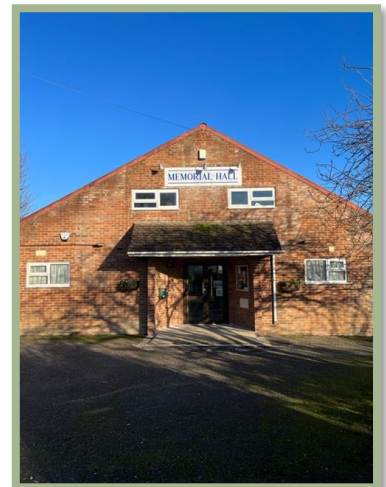
Memorial Hall

Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council are proud to be the sole Trustee of the Memorial Hall and continue to look forward to supporting local groups, clubs and sharing special occasions with the local community.



Town Hall

Royal Wootton Bassett's best-known landmark, the Town Hall was built at the end of the 17th Century. The Town Council are trustees for Wootton Bassett Town Hall which now houses a museum that is run by a group of volunteers.



EVENTS

Civic Awards

Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council was delighted to present the prestigious Civic Awards, Inspirational Legacy award and the Freeman Medal to members of our community on Tuesday 25th May 2023.



Alan Butler received his Civic Award for his outstanding service to the community through his Runvember Challenge.

Francis Watkins was awarded a Civic Award for her outstanding service to the community through the uniform initiative.



An Inspirational Legacy Award was given to the late Chris Wannell who left behind a legacy of over 40 years dedicated service.

Royal Wootton Bassett's first Freeman of the Town, Johnathan Bourne, was awarded his medal following his dedication ceremony in July 2021.



Armistice Day – Saturday 11th November 2023

Remembrance Sunday – Sunday 12th November 2023

The town came together to remember the service men and women of all Nations who give their lives for our freedom.



Christmas Lights and Shopping Evening – Friday 1st December 2023

Our annual Christmas Lights & Shopping Evening took place this year on Friday 1st December 2023. See a selection of photographs from the Town's most popular event, attended by approx. 5,000 people.



FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Grant Aid

The Town Council has supported local voluntary and community groups with £5000 of grants awarded in 2023 -2024. Those assisted were:

Name	Project	£ Received
Clarendon Players	Help towards hire of the Memorial Hall	£580
Lisa Williams Music	Help with the set up and running of a Dementia Choir and café in the Memorial Hall.	£900
RWB Shed	Help towards replacing 2 large pieces of equipment used by the group.	£250
St Bartholomew's Primary Academy	To cover the cost of setting up a mini police program and to provide a uniform (Tabard, Cap and notebook) for the children.	£300
Twinning Association	Attracting more members via setting up a website	£312.17
Wiltshire Sight	Funding part of our monthly community sight loss hub held in Royal Wootton Bassett	£500
Carer Support	Funding towards guest speakers, refreshments and project management of a monthly group of carers that meet at the Angel hotel	£750
Rotary Club	Organising an Easter egg hunt around the town during the easter holidays	£304
Community Magazine	Production of a quarterly magazine for all residents in Royal Wootton Bassett	£1000
Total		4,896.17
Total Remaining		£103.83



HOW THE TOWN COUNCIL IS FINANCED

Tax Base 2022/23	Precept 2022/23	Council Tax Band D 2022/23	Tax Base 2023/24	Precept 2023/24	Council Tax Band D 2023/24	Council Tax Increase (Decrease)
	£1,021,005	£216.62		£1,090,940	£216.62	0.00%

Income 2022/23	
Grants	£30,000
Services to the Public	£175,483
General Reserves	£257,128
Earmarked Reserves	£1,171,440
Precept	£1,090,940
CIL	£29,577
Total	£2,724,568

Expenditure 2022/23	
Civic, Democratic, Planning and Administration	£842,768
Buildings	£619,608
Memorial Hall	£26,622
Town Hall Trust	£9605
Parks & Open Spaces	£260,608
Events	£36,779
Community Safety / CCTV	£24,565
Other	£3,271
Total	£1,823,826