

Committee	ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
Date	9th May 2022
Agenda Item	3

Mayor and Chairman's Report – Civic Year 2021/22

The past year has once again been affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. Despite this, council meetings returned to being held in Queens Hall which enabled the public to attend, albeit with some restrictions.

The council were consulted on 79 planning applications during the year which was an increase of 10 compared to the previous year. Speculative developments continue to come forward for approval and the council lodged objections in many cases due to the unsustainable impact it's having upon the infrastructure and services in the town.

The council put forward the case for refusal to a proposed 200 dwelling development on land off Bournebridge Hill. This was supported by the Braintree District Council Planning Committee who refused the application. However, more recently two further developments of 80 dwellings on land North of Oak Road and 20 dwellings at Halstead Hall were given approval by Braintree District Council despite strong representations by both Halstead Town Council and Greenstead Green and Halstead Rural parish council.

House building gathered pace during the past year on most of the major approved developments. This growth is putting pressure on local services such as Doctors' Surgery, Schools and Highways. The council will continue to take every opportunity to push for improved services to support this development.

In May 2021 we were finally able to reopen the Riverside Bridge after most of the repair work and repainting was completed. Our thanks go to the working group and the support of local businesses and organisations for their commitment to this project.

I was really pleased that the council were able to reintroduce many of the popular events that were not possible the previous year. Bands in the Park returned in July and August, over 60's coach outings were run in August and September and also the Christmas parties were held in December. Thanks to the organisers of the Christmas Fayre, we were able to enjoy this annual event and the council Christmas lights switch on that followed. It was also great to see so many people out and enjoying themselves at the torchlight procession and carol service in the Public Gardens. Our thanks go to all of those who organised these events and were part of the teams that ran and managed them.

In the autumn of 2021, the council reviewed its facilities for car park management and replaced the previous pay and display machines with new machines that provided facilities for contactless payment by debit/credit card as well as coins. This was in response to the growing trend for the use of contactless payment as we come out of the pandemic. In April 2022 this was complimented by the introduction of the option to pay by the mobile MiPermit App which is in line with many other car parks in the area.

Through the prudent management of its finances the council was able to limit its council tax increase to 2% in 2022/23, which is lower than in most neighbouring authorities. The reserves remain at a good level and capable of supporting the future requirements.

Covid restrictions have once again limited the number of civic events this year to just a few. My charity this year was the Halstead Day Centre who do a fantastic job in giving much needed support to our senior citizens. I'm pleased to report that through the generosity and support at events during this year I was able to present them with a cheque for £1,600 earlier today.

On 3rd April the council held its annual Civic Service at St Andrews church. I was very disappointed to have missed this service at the last minute after catching Covid 19. This is an important milestone in the calendar because it gives us all the opportunity to celebrate our community and give thanks to the many people and organisations that provide so much interest and friendship. I'm very grateful to our Vice Chairman, Cllr. Dave Gronland, who stood in for me at the last moment and enabled the service to continue as arranged. Many thanks also to Sheenagh Evans who did a great job as always with the arrangements for the event.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Halstead Town Council staff for their hard work and dedication during the past year. In the ever-changing circumstances they have risen to the challenge and supported the council and the town with a high level of flexibility and commitment.

Looking ahead, arrangements are already in hand for a full programme of events in 2022. In particular, the Queen's Jubilee celebrations weekend provides additional interest this year with many activities and events being planned.

As we pull out of the restrictions of winter and into the spring/summer, life in our town has begun to re-emerge with many local organisations getting back to doing things they love to do. They all need our support and encouragement to help them get back flourishing once again.

We now look forward to an exciting year ahead and a new normal as we learn to live with the virus.

Cllr. Mick Radley
Mayor and Chairman of Halstead Town Council
9th May 2022