

Annual Report of Minehead Town Council 2011 - 2012

The beginning of the financial year 2011 -2012 started quietly with the announcement that 11 of the 16 serving Councillors would be standing down at the local elections to be held in May 2011.

Projects that had been started would need to be finalised so that when the new Council were elected there would be a seamless transition from the departing Council to the new one. The outgoing Council left the finances in excellent shape so that work could continue to finalise any outstanding projects.

In May 2011 all candidates for Minehead Town Council were elected unopposed as no election was held for Town Council seats in all four wards. In fact, there was a vacancy in the Minehead South ward which was filled at the Annual Council Meeting by Cllr Tony Berry.

The new Council elected Cllr Terry Venner as Mayor for the municipal year of 2011 – 2012 and Cllr Marcus Kravis as Deputy Mayor. The Chairs of the Committees were:

Cllr Molly Studley – Amenities and General Purposes, Cllr Stephen Grice – Finance and Staffing Committee, Cllr Stan Taylor – Planning Committee, and Cllr Paul Grierson – Allotments Committee.

During the year there were changes to Committees with the Finance and Staffing Committee splitting into two separate committees. A Complaints Committee and a Devolution Working Group was also set up.

The Mayor added items to the Council agenda to improve communications.

These included a representative to give regular updates from the Avon & Somerset Police, Somerset County Council and West Somerset Council.

In February 2012 Cllr Kravis, resigned as Deputy Mayor and Cllr Berry was proposed for the final three months of this Council year.

During the next few months Committee Meetings were held and various topics discussed. One decision was to purchase 20 grit/salt bins to be placed in the areas most needed in Minehead and Alcombe. This was carried out in the autumn in a joint operation by the Clerk and Somerset County Council Highways department.

It is an operation that will continue with grit bins being placed in areas of Minehead which may experience difficulties in winter weather.

During the year S106 funding was identified for an area close to the Periton Way allotment site. An application for the funding was submitted to West Somerset Council so that a small car parking area could be made available for able and less able allotment plot holders to access the site. The Town Council was successful in their application and funding of £1,000 was granted. The car park was laid out by a local contractor and is now open to plot holders.

There are 132 plots on the Town Council's allotment sites. All plots are being worked well with waiting lists for all sites and remain one of the most popular of all the Council's services.

In the autumn a large scale programme of asbestos removal was carried out at the Minehead Football Club base in the Irnham Road buildings. Previously a detailed survey had been carried out by professional services which showed the degree of asbestos in the building so it was decided to remove the asbestos in the bar area of the club buildings so that Minehead FC could have a safe base to entertain visiting sides. The work took around three weeks to complete and will be the start of an ongoing programme to remove all the asbestos eventually. For the present time the function room area of the buildings has been bricked up and mothballed.

Ongoing negotiations have been taking place with Minehead FC during the year for a 25 year lease which will enable Minehead FC to draw down money from

various funding streams. The Council has now agreed to the lease and it will now be brought to a successful conclusion over the coming months.

All the Council's recreation sites with play equipment are checked weekly for defects by the Grounds staff but unfortunately some of the play equipment is now of such an age that it needs replacing and should remain a priority of the Council.

Alcombe Common continues to move into improvement as more scrub clearance work is carried out across the area by a land management company from North Devon. A programme of works is being followed for the next two years to ensure that the Common will be brought back into a condition that is satisfactory to Natural England so that the Council's Stewardship Scheme may continue after 2013.

The Minehead Cemetery on Porlock Road continues to be run to a high standard with dedicated staff who deals with the day to day running of the Cemetery and any concerns that members of the public may have. An increase in fees was introduced this year and it is yet to be seen if that has caused any effect on use of the Cemetery by members of the public.

A Devolution Working Group has been set up to try to steer a path through this emotive and sensitive subject with the Councillors on the Group having to deal with very difficult negotiations. All aspects of work in the area have been looked at with decisions on street sweeping, litter bin emptying and weed spraying being made. This is a start to a programme that will continue too run during the year 2012 – 2013 as the situation regarding funding for services at West Somerset Council and Somerset County Council continues to remain fluid.

The Christmas lights switch on and late night shopping event went ahead at the end of November. The Mayor and Sarah Williams, the winner of the BBC Countryfile programme, 'Photographic Calendar Competition' shared the honours of turning on the Christmas lights in Wellington Square. As usual this was a great success with crowds enjoying the festive atmosphere. Over the past few years the lights have been changed so that they are now LED sustainable types. Risk assessment is now a major part of the work of the Grounds staff when they put up the lights and trees around the town and stringent tests have to be carried out to ensure the safety over the festive season.

In February there was a visit to Minehead by the Somerset Towns Market Forum. This was a prestigious visit that was open to members of the Forum from all over Somerset with a number choosing to come to see what Minehead had to offer. The visit included a coach tour of the town finishing with a question and answer session with refreshments at the Minehead Eye.

In the last quarter of the year the Council dealt with various matters. This included a planning application from The Regal Theatre that would change the frontage of the theatre completely. Also, the purchase of 90 Commonwealth flags was agreed to be flown around the town during the Olympic Torch run and the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

One of the final purchases of the year was two new vehicles for the Grounds staff. Both previous vehicles were facing large maintenance costs so it was decided to source better vehicles. Finally, two vehicles were found the one being a 'tipper' which is useful in the type of grounds works carried out in Minehead.