

Droitwich Spa Town Council

TOWN MEETING 9 MAY 2022

Report of the Resources Committee

The principle role of the Resources Committee is to consider all matters that affect the assets, finances and resources of the Town Council. As Chairman working alongside Vice Chairman Councillor DM Craigie I confirm that Droitwich Spa Town Council has and will continue to follow a prudent approach to economies & finance and maintain high standards of governance.

The Town Council owns and maintains St Richard's House comprising the Heritage Centre and Museum, the Community Hall, two parks (Spring Meadow/Door Step Green and Copcut Park), 4 Allotment Sites comprising over 100 individual plots, together with various bus shelters, infrastructure and street furniture in the town. Contractors are engaged to provide and maintain year round Municipal Planting and the Annual Festive Lighting at Christmas. It also contributes to the upkeep of St Mary de Witton Churchyard and makes additional grants through the Resources Committee (to the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Council for Voluntary Services). Community grants and sponsorship are invited and considered in association with the Community & Amenities Committee throughout the year. The first Grants Appraisal Committee meeting of the next Municipal Year takes place on 6 June 2022.

The Town Council has very limited resources to carry out its functions and services as well as maintenance of the land holdings, buildings and public equipment within its ownership. Town and Parish Councils, which are not principal Councils (Local Government Act 1972), do not receive any grant from the Government. The Town Council relies solely for its income upon the Precept and the Precept Support Grant from Wychavon District Council, together with a small element coming from office tenancies, room hire income, retail sales, fees and charges. For 2020/2021 the precept was set at £420,869 (£384,750 precept requirement + £36,119 precept support grant). The budget requirement for the next year 2021/2022, including the grant element was £436,259 (£400,140 precept requirement + £36,119 grant element), an increase of 3.9%. This gave a Band D property increase for an annual council tax, of £1.74 per annum for 2021/2022. Since the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic in March 2020 there has been a significant impact on business continuity and finances. The Town Council has maintained a thorough, balanced and frugal approach during this difficult period of over two years. Despite the circumstances there has been no requirement to draw on reserve finances in order to maintain the normal business operations and a positive bank balance position. For 2022/2023 the precept has been frozen to ensure that no additional demand is placed on the Electorate and to help mitigate towards some of the other sector financial pressures in the wider economy. To this effect the budget requirement remains the same as 2021/2022 and set at £436,259 (represented as £400,140 precept requirement + £36,119 precept support grant). The resultant impact for a Band D property on Council Tax is a reduction of £0.76 pence on prior year. The approach accords with similar measures taken for 2022/2023 by Worcestershire County Council and Wychavon District Council.

The Town Council continues to review the way in which it sponsors the many major events and festivals taking place within the Town and ways in which it can deal with the increasing pressure to support both existing and new events even more so as a result of the pandemic. Last year the Council gave financial assistance in the amount of £5,000 the vast majority of which was used to support the community during the pandemic provided by our community service organisations and a multitude of volunteers. For the forthcoming year a total of £5,000 (with additional consideration of a further £2500 if there is sufficient demand) is being made available for financial support to the community via the Community Grants Appraisal Panel. Details are available on the Town Council's website and we look forward to many more varied and interesting applications from within our town.

June 2022 marks the special occasion of the Queens Platinum Jubilee. The Town Council & Wychavon District Council are jointly organising a Community Celebration Event on Saturday 4th June. At the start of the Special Bank Holiday on Thursday 2nd June there will be Pageantry and an illuminated beacon at Dodderhill Church and Vines Park in the evening from 9.00pm. Full Press and Media releases for both aspects will feature during May.

The Town Council was still able to organize Christmas illuminations this year although not in the manner of previous years. I would like to take the opportunity of thanking Sharon Abbott, one of our Assistant Town Clerks, for all her hard work and diligence in managing this in such difficult circumstances. The 2021 Event was affected by one of the worst storms of the winter period which necessitated the program to be scaled back for public safety reasons due to the high winds.

We were not able to hold our usual program of Band Concerts in 2021 due to interruptions presented by the Covid restrictions. A short program of four concerts was possible through September 2021 by which time many Bands had resumed their rehearsals. I am pleased to confirm that provision has been made for a Full Program of concerts for the 2022 season. I am grateful to the Community & Amenities Committee for organizing this from mid- May to September. As always the Resources Committee stands ready to support the Community & Amenities Committee in providing a suitable budget for these free Concerts which are well received and supported by the public and will now be even more important in our post-Covid recovery.

The Committee has reviewed all relevant policies such as Financial Risk Management, Financial Regulations & Standing Orders and Internal Controls and we now use the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) own regulations as our guidelines in doing this. The Internal Auditor has undertaken interim and financial year end reviews of controls and procedures and I am pleased to report that, at this time, standards remain high with robust controls in place. I am especially grateful to Mrs Jane Greenfield - Assistant Town Clerk - Civic, Finance & Administration for her hard work and diligence which are instrumental in maintaining these high standards year on year. Savings and efficiencies are continually monitored including energy options. An application has been registered and confirmed for the "Zero Carbon Ready Worcestershire Decarbonisation Review" through the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Programme (PEEP). This work covers both owned and maintained buildings – the Community Hall and St Richards House. The review findings and recommendations will be considered and presented later this year.

Following the disruption of the pandemic there are many emerging projects and strategic priorities. These were summarised in detail as part of the report on finances and budgets to support the precept setting at New Year. Three key initiatives are as follows,

- (a) Refurbishment and upgrade scope for the Heritage Centre and Museum.
- (b) Consideration towards a business hub facility and office space for the second floor of St Richards House. This is being taken forward as a collaborative venture working with Wychavon District Council and Worcestershire County Council.
- (c) Neighbourhood Plan project options in close alignment with the Wychavon District Council – Town Centre Prospectus and the SWDP Review.

Within staffing matters, Miss Emily Porter- Elliott moved from the Heritage Team to a full time position elsewhere in January 2022. Earlier in June 2021 Mrs Sarah Davies retired after a very commendable tenure of ten years working in the Heritage Centre. A vacancy has recently been advertised for a Full Time replacement person to work alongside our existing part time Heritage Manager – Mrs Catherine Finn. The successful candidate is Mrs Becky Butler who will start in role during May. In addition the Town Council has resolved to provide a new apprenticeship position in conjunction with the opportunity to support a course in study towards a business management qualification. This is a new and exciting initiative for the Town Council. Work is progressing with Wychavon District Council, Worcestershire County Council and the High School to complete arrangements and make the position available ready for starting in September.

Collaboration with Wychavon District Council has been strong during the past year and spanned many different initiatives. Examples include the Community Legacy Funding for the King Georges Sports Pavilion project which is nearing completion, the Heritage App and various special arrangements connected to this year's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations. Most recently the Town Council have arranged several small grant awards using WDC special funding to support Community and Resident Groups Street Party celebrations in the Town for the Jubilee Weekend. The Town Council continues to be an active key stakeholder on two significant WDC projects – “the West and Beyond” Underpass refurbishments and improvements and the new Town Centre Prospectus. The WDC Place and Projects Officer for Droitwich Spa – Miss Gemma Ranford has been very helpful in working with the Town Council taking many of these important work streams forward.

The Committee continues to review and identify ways in which short, medium and long term repairs and maintenance are to be financed and a schedule of maintenance and improvement works continues. This covers all Town Council assets including premises, land holdings, fixtures and fittings. The Town Council continues to maintain two lease hold arrangements with valued tenants for office space and facilities at St Richards House.

This has been a difficult year for everyone so I am proud to report that the Town Council's finances remain in a healthy state despite the many challenges we have faced as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore the External Auditor raised no negative findings last year. Local Government finances always face many challenges which become even more important considerations when faced with the pandemic, global conflict and an uncertain road to economic recovery.

I am confident that the Town Council is exercising and maintaining good standards of due diligence & governance and will rise to those challenges benefitting the Town, its residents and visitors.

My thanks go to Councillor DM Craigie - Vice Chairman and all members of the Resources Committee for supporting me in my role as Chairman. I would like to thank the Council's Officers –Sharon, Jane & Mark for their work in maintaining and monitoring the Council's resources and for their personal support provided to me in my role as Chairman.

Councillor Mrs Kate Fellows

Chairman of Resources Committee.