

The Mayor's Annual Report 2014

Introduction

The membership of Wells City Council has remained unchanged since the Annual Parish Meeting in 2013. Councillor Maureen Brandon completed her term as Mayor of Wells on 18th May, I was elected to replace her and Councillor Chris Briton was elected as Deputy Mayor. There has been know change to the senior staff: Felicity White remains as Town Clerk and Steve Luck as Responsible Financial Officer – they are ably assisted by staff based at both the Town Hall and the Cemetery.

Budget

The Council raised 327,257 in precept in 2013/14 from a band D charge of £88.63.

In 2014/15 the band D charge is £89.22 (an increase of 0.2%) which leads to an income of £334,634.

In addition to precept income, the Council receives rental income from various properties owned within the city.

Other income comes from the use of the Town Hall, cemetery and miscellaneous charges.

Grants

The Council budgets to give annual grants to a small number of local organisations, in 2013/14 these were:

Wells Museum £3,000

Wells Citizens Advice Bureau £2,000

Mendip Community Transport £500

The above figures remain the same in the 2014/15 budget.

The Council also budgets £4,000 per year for community grants. In the 2013/14 financial year these were distributed as follows:

Wells City Archers £500

Wells Food Bank £480

Wells Rotary Club (hire of reindeer) £500

Wells Scout Group £500

Wells City Band £250

Glastonbury FM £440

Heads Up £440

Mendip and Sedgemoor Community Support £440

The Somerset Motor Project £440

Total = £3,990

The Council has budgeted £4,000 again this year and so far agreed to the following grants:

SWEDA £500

Wells Football Club £250

Wells Bookworms £250

Grant applications should be directed, in the first instance, to the Responsible Financial Officer Steve Luck.

Town Hall

The Town Hall is well used, in addition to housing the City Council offices, the Registrar, Tax Office, Citizens Advice Bureau, Mendip District Council Advice Office have permanent bases in the Town Hall. The Coroner continues to use the Town Hall on a regular basis and, whilst Mendip District Council is re-developing its own offices, they are holding a number of meetings in the Town Hall. The Town Hall is also used for a large number of community groups, sales and weddings.

Earlier this year the re-development of the former court was completed, leading to the creation of a new upstairs bar and a downstairs multi-purpose room. This has increased the facilities the Town Hall is able to offer.

Public Lavatories

The public lavatories in Wells are run by a combination of Wells City Council and Mendip District Council.

- Wells City Council owns and directly manages the public lavatories next to the Town Hall.
- Mendip District Council owns the public lavatories in the Union Street Car Park and funds and manages them through their contract with Landscape Group.
- The public lavatories on the Recreation Ground (next to the Bishop's Barn) and at the bus station are owned by Mendip District Council, they are managed through Mendip District Council's contract with the Landscape Group and funded by both councils.

Wells City Council has agreed with Mendip District Council that we will continue to co-fund the Recreation Ground and bus station lavatories for 2014/15, with further discussion needed on the future of those lavatories beyond the end of this financial year.

Wells City Council has decided to open the lavatories next to the Town Hall on Sundays as of this year.

Christmas Lights

Wells City Council provides Christmas lights in the centre of the city. The budget for this is £10,000. In 2013/14 it was decided to spend £12,000 with the hope that the shortfall could be met by contributions from local traders. Sadly only £484 was forthcoming leading to a deficit of £1,516. The budget for 2014/15 remains at £10,000 so the City Centre Management Committee is looking at different ways of providing Christmas lights for 2014/15 and future years.

CCTV

Wells City Council is part of a CCTV partnership with Mendip District Council and contributed £7,753 in the 2013/14 financial year, this goes up annually with inflation so we have budgeted £8,000 for the financial year 2014/15. Wells City Council is committed to this arrangement until 31st March 2016.

Allotments

The City Council provides 52 allotments in three locations, The Bishop's Palace (27), Burcott Road (16) and Barnes Close (9). There is currently a waiting list for an allotment and anyone who wishes to apply for one should contact the City Council Office.

Cemetery

The Cemetery continues to be well-maintained. The facility for green burials, which was first used in 2013, has been used a second time and continues to be available. The extension to the cemetery has been made ready for use this year.

Skate Park

The skate park is well used, well maintained and inspected daily.

Agreements with County and District Councils

Wells City Council has entered into a five-year agreement with Somerset County Council to cut the grass verges along the relief road provide reactive minor works (e.g. cutting brambles and removing fallen branches). 2013/14 was the first year of this agreement, which will therefore continue for another four years.

Wells City Council also has an agreement with Somerset County Council that will see the City Council's staff helping to clear snow and ice from pavements in the centre of town.

Similarly Wells City Council has reached an agreement with Mendip District Council which will see the City Council's staff helping to clear snow and ice from the Market Place.

Wells in Bloom

Wells City Council continues to run Wells in Bloom, although a large amount of the work is done by volunteers (both councillors and non-councillors). Those involved do an excellent job helping make our city look attractive. As a result of the efforts of many volunteers, Wells won the "Best Town" category in the 2014 Mendip in Bloom competition. Whilst the majority of Wells in Bloom's expenditure is met from sponsorship, the Wells City Council also contributes to the running costs.

World War One commemoration

The City Council has reached agreement with Mendip District Council (as the trustee of the Wells Recreation Ground) to plant a flowerbed, planted with poppies, near the bandstand. This has been dug and planted and there will be a formal dedication on the evening of 4th August, the centenary of the outbreak of the war. The bed will remain until the centenary of the end of the war in 2018.

Archives

The Council's agreement with Wells Museum for the storage of the city archives continues. This enables the archives to be stored in a more suitable environment and makes the archives more accessible to the public.

Planning

Wells continues to change and develop. Since the Annual Parish Meeting in 2013, we have seen the opening of the new Waitrose supermarket on Whiting Way and the new Weatherspoons pub on Priory Road. Work is underway on the Cathedral Way housing development off East Somerset Way

and the Bishop's Brook housing development off Glastonbury Road. Mendip District Council has recently granted outline planning consent for up to 150 further units off Glastonbury Road. Outside the city boundary Mendip District Council has granted consent for 160 units on the former Thales site off Wookey Hole Road and land adjacent to Elm Close is also being promoted for development.

Mendip District Council's 2006-2028 Local Plan has yet to be adopted, however the Local Plan Part 1 (formerly the Core Strategy) underwent the Independent Examination part of the process this month.

Neighbourhood Planning

Following a request from a group of members of the community, under the "Wells21" umbrella, the City Council is now working with members of the Civic Society on proposals for a Neighbourhood Plan for Wells. Council has applied to Mendip District Council for the City of Wells to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area.

Recreation Ground

Though not under Wells City Council's control, the future of Wells Recreation Ground is an area of importance. Mendip District Council (as trustee) has set up a committee to consider the interests of the trust. That committee has received a report on the options for the future of the Bishops Barn and the Recreation Ground (Wells City Council contributed £1,000 to help fund this report) and is now undertaking further consultation.

Councillor Theo Butt Philip, Mayor of Wells

22nd April 2014