

STONEHOUSE TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Introduction from the Town Mayor – Cllr Gary Powell

This year, my introduction has to start with thoughts for the Ukrainian people, who over the last few months have suffered intolerable atrocities. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those who have suffered and have had to leave their country to ensure their survival, leaving their homes and loved ones behind. I understand that Stonehouse will become home to a number of Ukrainian families; I am sure they will be welcomed with open arms by the community.

After a couple of really difficult years, it feels like we were starting to turn a corner with Covid. The commitment from local residents, community groups as well as local authorities at all levels seems to have pulled the community through. Businesses too, having struggled financially, have stuck by the community and have re-opened, creating a busy feel to the High Street once again – they need to be congratulated for their perseverance and commitment to the town.

In May 21, local elections saw six new town councillors elected; they have bedded in well and have played a part in the council's decision-making this past year. Unfortunately, two councillors have resigned in recent months; both for personal reasons. The Town Council's thanks go to both, for their contributions. Both posts have since been filled, one through a by-election and the other, co-option. I am sure both Theresa Watt and Keith Creighton will prove to be productive contributors to the Town Council.

A recent work review has resulted in an increased budget for additional office staff; this is to help manage the growing workload associated with the Town Council two Committees, one Sub-Committee and fourteen Working Groups (listed below). Unfortunately, we have lost three really good members of staff; one through illness and the others due to personal reasons. We can, however, welcome two new members of staff who are both Stonehouse residents: Paul Crosby, our new grounds person and Jacqui Sanders who will be filling the vacancy left by the Deputy Clerk. We will be recruiting for other vacant posts in the coming months.

Last year, we told you about the opening of the new Library next to the Town Hall. It is a fantastic facility that has received high levels of use as well as high praise. Staffed mainly by volunteers, the Library has a particularly good children's section and was judged in a recent audit to have good access arrangements for people with disabilities. When closed, the library is used by various community groups. Please take time to visit this fabulous facility.

Each year, the Town Council is thankful for the continued efforts of Stonehouse in Bloom volunteers and their ongoing work to enhance the town. For the last two years, there has been some disruption to the national and regional In Bloom competitions, but SIB has remained as busy as ever, preparing for the eventual return to normality. Last year, they welcomed RHS Heart of England in Bloom judge Mark Wiltshire to the Old Chapel Garden, who judged this tranquil meeting place Outstanding in the It's Your Neighbourhood competition. Stonehouse also won Gold in the Heart of England in Bloom's digitally judged competition in 2021; and this year, Stonehouse is one of only two communities to be put forward by Heart of England in Bloom to take part in the national Britain in Bloom finals this summer – and the only one from Gloucestershire. I know that the work of Stonehouse in Bloom is very highly thought of by residents and quite rightly so.

The Town Council has been forging ahead in developing a number of initiatives linked with its commitment to tackling climate change, protecting access to the local countryside, supporting town centre improvements, supporting the town's youth and trying to encourage sustainable travel, particularly through its efforts to reinstate the Stroudwater Station. The Town Council tries to influence external organisations by responding to consultations. We undertook a major consultation ourselves and as you will remember, we asked residents earlier this year what they would like to see at the old Ship Inn site. The response to this consultation was incredible. We had 598 responses and such were the efforts of residents in putting their views forward that a significant number of people made efforts to send in drawings to illustrate their vision for the site. This outcome had been fed

through to the Strategic Canals Consultation work currently being undertaken by Stroud District Council.

This is the year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The Town Council had set aside £5,000 to support local residents and community organisations to run Jubilee events. In addition, the Town Council has been invited to support the opening of The Ocean Jubilee Bridge with Network Rail. It has been exciting to watch the project develop and to see it finally completed.

Having been elected as Mayor last May, I have been proud to lead the Town Council in delivering services to the town and bringing about positive change.

Stonehouse Town Council Income and Expenditure 2021-2022:

Income	2020/21	2021/22
Precept	339,573	336,995
Investment interest	1,574	929
CIL/s106	0	*
Grants	49,029	9,014
Leases	11,688	11,002
Facilities Hire	29,185	2,504
Stonehouse in Bloom	1,678	1,833
Events	236	3,044
Other	6,382	6,749
	439,345	372,070

*CIL Funding included in Grants total

Expenditure	2020/21	2022/23
Staff	133,080	125,308
General Expenditure	36,785	52,495
Streetscene	47,268	46,521
Building Overheads	35,979	32,092
Youthwork	36,782	37,360
Events	6,513	12,652
Stonehouse in Bloom	2,042	19,869
Equipment and		
Vehicles	1,818	6,999
Grants	23,519	9,258
Petty Cash	299.05	0
	324,086	342,554

Business Committee activities/achievements

The Committee has more recently been chaired by Cllr Mike Davis with Cllr John Callinan serving as Vice Chair. The Committee has a 'Terms of Reference' that can be viewed online; it covers the review of council policies, scrutinises the council's finances, oversees the council's staffing including their training, and generally supports the council in its efforts to deliver quality services to the community. The Committee also checks the draft budget before it is presented to full council. Owing to the fact that the Town Council did not increase its precept last year, the increase costs of contracted services across the board and a much-needed increase in staffing levels, the precept has had to be increased

by 5.98% in 2023, representing an increase of £8.36 per property per year. Of the total increase in the council's budget, £10,000 is being met from reserves.

Human Resources Sub Committee and the Internal Audit Panel report to this Committee in addition to the following working groups: Business Networking, Climate Change Action Forum, Communications, Policy and Youth, Oldends Lane Development, Support Stonehouse and Events.

Grants Received 2021/22

Stroud District Council - Local Restriction Support Grant	1501.00
Stroud District Council - April CIL payment	2496.33
Gloucestershire County Council - Build Back Better Grant for Willow Tree birthday from county councillor	250.00
Stroud District Council - CIL contribution	3766.23
Gloucestershire County Council - Receipt of Build Back Better Grant for Shop Stonehouse bags	1000.00
Total	9013.56

Grants Awarded 2021/22

Co-Operative - supplies for APT via Support Stonehouse fund	111.00
Co-Operative - Cereals for APT from Support Stonehouse	40.00
Stonehouse Methodist Church - Grant for Little Acorns playgroup for soft play and trip TC2662	949.00
Stonehouse Town Football Club - Payment of SDC grant TC2657	1,501.00
Share & Repair - Grant to support the set up of the Hire Shop	500.00
The Fig Tree - Grant for a new keyboard, baking equipment and Scrapstore membership B/292	972.00
Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester - Grant to run a new volunteer training course	2,484.90
Stonehouse Gardening Club - Grant for increasing publicity for the club and subsidising meeting room hire (Business Committee B/323)	500.00
Transition Stroud - Grant awarded in support of Big Solar Project	2,000.00
Stonehouse Community Choir - Grant	200.00
Total	9,257.90

Budget Headings	2021/22	2022/23
Staffing	152,885	168,885
Grants	20,000	15,000
Climate	7,000	7,000
Business	152,680	139,880
Environment	24,300	61,800
Contingency	0	0
Gross Expenditure	356,865	392,565
Income and Use of Reserves	-19,870	-35,435
Precept	336,995	357,130

For a comparison of the precept with that of other parishes, please see your council tax bill.

This year, Business Committee has:

- Secured a new 3-year youth services contract with The Door. The Town Council has also increased its budget for youth services by 25%. The Door has successfully provided Stonehouse's youth service for the past three years, making a significant positive impact on the young people they come in contact with.
- Completed the programmed review of the Town Council's policies including its Standing Orders and Financial regulations
- Reviewed the Town Council's internal controls with very positive outcomes, through its Internal Audit Panel for each quarter of the 2021/22 financial year and reported these to full council
- Created three major contributions in the council's efforts to tackling climate change: Contracting Severn Wye Energy Agency to undertake a review of the Town Council's energy use within its Sports Pavilion; Initiating a carbon-reduction scheme within the community to provide householders tangible support to help improve the energy efficiency of their homes; Provided Transition Stroud with a grant towards encouraging businesses to adopt solar energy.
- Other climate change initiatives included the purchase of battery-operated general purpose and grounds maintenance equipment and securing green energy (both gas and electricity) for its buildings
- Undertook major sustainable reinstatement works to Stagholt Brook, which was needed due to the gradual degradation of the banks in certain areas
- Initiated an 'Access Audit' on the town including the Town Hall and Library to identify areas in need of improvement for people with disabilities – the Highways authority in particular are involved in the improvements
- Supported Stonehouse Town Football Club in improving its welfare facilities, primarily to allow the club to maintain its current status but also to provide additional facilities for the wider community
- Awarded a one-year grounds maintenance contract to a local contractor that assists the council in increasing biodiversity of the town's green open spaces
- Provided grants for a number of organisations in need of financial support
- Secured a three-year health & safety advisory service to ensure the council maintains a safe work environment and protects its staff and others
- Is pursuing an extension to Stonehouse Allotments at Stagholt (consultation on the recreational use of the remaining part of Stagholt field to following this coming year)

- Liaised with Gloucestershire County Council and other agencies to encourage flood-alleviation measures at Horsemaring lane/Stagholt
- Commenced negotiations with Taylor Wimpey to consider the potential adoption of green open spaces at Court View

Environment Committee

The Committee has been chaired by Cllr Carol Kambites, with Cllr Neil Gibbs serving as Vice Chair.

In 2021/22, the Committee has:

- Continued to support Stonehouse in Bloom in its efforts to prepare for the Heart of England in Bloom National finals in 2022 with its Jubilee colour scheme, new planting containers and plant suppliers
- Been instrumental in securing funding from the Department of Transport in support of the council's aim to reinstate the Stroudwater Station with further funding secured from Ecotricity to conduct a feasibility study
- Supported the Canal Rejuvenation Working Group in designing and implementing the consultation on the old Ship Inn Site and producing a final report, which provided a detailed analysis of the results following the high level of public participation, and ensured that Stroud District Council, the authority leading the strategic development of the canal is encouraged to consider the results
- Supported a contribution towards a shared Market Towns' Tourism Officer's post which will be key to revitalising the town
- Supported the Events Working Group in organising community events such as Goodwill and the launch of the SCAMP and, with the aid of the Rotary club, the Father Christmas float that toured local estates
- Supported the adoption of the Stonehouse Community Arboretum Management Plan (SCAMP)
- Supported the Town Council's work on ensuring the town's Public Rights of Way remained protected
- Supported the development and publishing of an Eco Directory for the town
- Secured external funding to purchase 25 trees for the town
- Provided support for a multi-use path through Standish to Gloucester alongside the B4008
- Responded to consultations on Stroud District Council's Economic Development Strategy, Draft Local Plan, and the review of the names of streets, buildings and monuments in the district
- Supporting highway improvements through its Transport and Highways working group
- Providing support for the community's most vulnerable through its Support Stonehouse working group, All Pulling Together (APT) and its contributors