

STONEHOUSE TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Introduction from the Town Mayor – Cllr Carol Kambites

It is my privilege to introduce the Annual Report for the year 2023/24. In doing so, I would like to welcome the Councillors and staff who have joined us during the last year, all of whom have hit the ground running and are making valuable contributions to the Council and the town. We have gained two new members of staff during the year. Some of you will have seen Rod Helps, our new Senior Town Maintenance Officer, around the town. He and Paul are working hard to keep the town neat and tidy as well as looking after the fields and play areas. David Marsden has recently been appointed to provide cover for Carla, our Business Support Officer, who is on maternity leave. We look forward to working with David and welcoming Carla back in due course.

I would like to thank all the staff and Councillors for their hard work and dedication during the last year. I'm proud of the way that Council and staff have pulled together to tackle the various challenges that we have faced. But Stonehouse would not be Stonehouse without you, the residents. So, I would like to use this opportunity to thank all those members of the community whose work and enthusiasm make Stonehouse into such a friendly and welcoming town.

The next year will no doubt produce new issues and the election will produce new Councillors to deal with them, but I am confident that we have a strong basis from which to move forward with existing projects and face new challenges.

Stonehouse Town Council Income and Expenditure 2022-2023/2023-24

Income	2022/23	2023/24
Precept	357,130	373,973
Investment interest	3,059	32,337
CIL/s106	*	*
Grants	15,027	0
Leases	10,228	11,521
Facilities Hire	1,355	2,673
Stonehouse In Bloom	1,788	650
Events	934	1,400
Other	<u>6,027</u>	<u>5,693</u>
Total	395,548	428,247

- CIL Funding included in Grants total

Expenditure	2022/23	2023/24
Staff	151,297	182,897
General Expenditure	52,460	37,986
Streetscene inc SIB	47,424	68,924
Building Overheads	34,491	37,759
Youthwork	46,851	55,625
Equip/Vehicles	20,285	3,424
Grants	37,497	22,136
I.T.	10,882	8,884
Events	<u>5,372</u>	<u>6,437</u>
Total	406,559	424,072

Business Committee activities/achievements

The Committee has 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 increased costs of contracted services across the board and a much-needed increase in staffing levels, the precept has had to be increased by 6.83% in 2024, representing an increase of £10.64 per property per year. Of the total increase in the council's budget, £20,000.00 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 2023/24 £0

Grants Awarded 2023/24

Citizen's Advice	£2,451.00
Cotswold Canals Trust	£5,000.00
Sherbourne Community Group	£1,000.00
Child Led Tutors	£300.00
Stonehouse Gardening Club	£500.00
Stonehouse Community Association	£60.00
Tiny Toes Stay and Play	£195.00
Sportily	£630.00
Homestart	£10,000.00
Allsorts	£1,000.00
Stonehouse School of Trustees	<u>£1,000.00</u>
*Total:	£22,136.00

*This figure allows for adjustments to original codings.

Budget Headings	2023/24	2024/25
Staffing	180,000	205,000
Grants	15,000	17,400
Climate	5,000	5,000
Business	146,380	149,980
Environment	69,600	58,100
Contingency	0	0
Gross Expenditure Total	415,980	435,480
Income and Use of Reserves	-42,007	-51,610
Precept	373,973	383,870

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

This year, Business Committee has:

- Completed the programmed review of the Town Council's policies including its Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Scheme of Delegations, Data Protection, Role of Working Groups, Memorials, Health & Safety, Reserves, Council's Inventory, Transparency Code Information, FOI Publication Scheme.
- Reviewed the Town Council's internal controls with very positive outcomes, through its Internal Audit Panel for each quarter of the 2023/24 financial year and reported these to Full Council.
- Supported Stonehouse Town Football Club in continuing to improve its welfare facilities, primarily to allow the club to maintain its current status and also to support additional facilities for the wider community.
- Supporting the Workshop, Pavilion and STFC Hospitality Suite to join the main sewage unit.
- Provided grants for a number of organisations in need of financial support.
- Approved the cost of installation of CCTV in the Town Hall car park.
- Approved the purchase of an additional CCTV camera for the POD building.
- Secured a new 3-year IT support contract.
- Progressing discussions with Stroud District Council regarding improvements to public conveniences and the High Street car park.

Environment Committee

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

In 2023/24, the Committee has:

- Continued to support Stonehouse in Bloom in its efforts to prepare for the RHS Heart of England in Bloom National finals in 2023 with new planting containers and plant suppliers. They won Gold in the Heart of England in Bloom and Winner of Best Small-Town Category.
- Supported the Events Working Group in organising community events such as Goodwill and supporting with the Canal Spring Festival.

- Responded to consultations on Stroud District Council's Community Governance Review, Street Trading Policy, Public Spaces Protection Orders in respect of dog control, review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023.
- Undertook a tree survey of trees in Doverow Wood and various other trees in the town, including the Willow at the Globe. Following the tree surveyor's recommendations, employed qualified and certified specialists to carry out the necessary remedial works.
- Continued to support the public consultation regarding the future of Verney Fields. Over 120 questionnaires were completed by residents supporting the application for Town Green status to be applied to the fields which was presented to Gloucestershire County Council.
- Secured the services of a planning consultant to prepare a planning application to extend the allotments at Stagholt, a Flood Risk assessment of the area and an Ecological Report.
- Supported the canal rejuvenation by networking with stakeholders along the canal frontage in Stonehouse to pinpoint future opportunities for economic regeneration, health & wellbeing, and environmental conservation that will come with the restored canal. Produced an outline business case for a community facility on the former Ship Inn site as well as identifying potential opportunities at other locations between Bond's Mill and Ryeford.
- Supported the Town Council's work on ensuring the town's Public Rights of Way remained protected.
- 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.
- Secured a new 5-year Grounds Maintenance contract.
- Supported the purchase of materials to build small scale boat planters.
- Supported the purchase of replacement, inclusive swings at Laburnum Park.
- Supported and matched funding for an e-bike hire project.