

43rd AMERSHAM TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

-March 2018

On behalf of the Town Councillors, officers of Amersham Town Council and myself, Councillor Clive Morgan the Town Mayor, I would like to welcome residents, community groups and visitors to this special evening where we take a look back at the highlights of the past year.

A Summer of Colour and Fun (fair)...

From the first band concert in late spring to Vanessa Bowers effortlessly performing songs from the musicals to the atmospheric nostalgia of Heritage Day ... from the school's planters to the artistic talent of the Arts Festival ... from the wonder of the planted funfair to the riot of colour in the Memorial Gardens 2017 was a busy year for Amersham and the Town Council!

The summer season is always a busy one in Amersham but that is just the way we like it!

With more & more residents and visitors enjoying our band concert programme we had to purchase additional chairs to accommodate the growing audience that come along to enjoy tea and cake while listening to the wonderful music in the splendour of the Memorial Gardens.

The Memorial Gardens was at bursting point for our *big* concert mid-July... Soprano Vanessa Bowers and Pianist Jon Rangers were invited to perform songs from the musicals while I had the pleasure of officially opening the 2017 summer display. It was one of those concerts that you just had to attend. One resident, sitting in her living room in the Broadway commented that she had a tear in her eye listening to Vanessa faultlessly belting out *Don't Cry for me Argentina*.

The concert provided the perfect platform to thank Andy Honour and his 1st Chesham Bois Scout leaders as well as the bloom volunteers for all their efforts in helping the Town Council to create such a wonderful display in the Gardens.

Fast forward to September and to the *Jewel in the Crown*...Heritage Day – With more visitors than ever Old Amersham once again came to a standstill. Heritage trains from Harrow and vintage buses transported the crowds to the old town, who were treated to steam engines, Irish Dancing; Chesham All Girls Marching Band; a Big Band, farmers market stalls; birds of prey displays, medieval re-enactments, historic open buildings, archery and so much more. It really is a fantastic family friendly day that puts a smile on the face whatever your age.

Amersham Festival of Art

After three years of holding the Council's annual Festival of Art at Flint Barn Court, the event returned to its former home at Market Hall in Old Amersham. It was also decided to hold the event in the autumn, in order to avoid clashes with other summer events in the town. This meant that with the support of other volunteers, we were able to re-launch and expand

the festival to include pop-up exhibitions and community performances of music and poetry at a variety of venues around the town. The submission of art work from the local school children was stunning and it was wonderful that we were able to show-case the children's talent at the pop-up exhibitions for all to see. Thirty six artworks were sold from the main exhibition at the Market Hall, with the artists generously donating 20% of their earnings to the Council's Jubilee Fund for distribution to local charitable organisations. A total of £1,632.20 was raised for the fund. This year the event will once again be held at the Market Hall, provisionally for 19 to 28 October. We hope you will continue to support this wonderful fund-raising event and we look forward to seeing you there.

Christmas in Amersham- The Memorial Gardens once again took centre stage over the festive period with a magical display of lights and reindeer.

We were once again proud to support the organisers of the two community Christmas events in Amersham. Our thanks to the Old Amersham Business Association for the *Magical Evening* in Old Amersham and to the Amersham Action Group for the wonderful *Christmas Festival* in AOTH.

The ATC Community Carol Concert – This year's Community Carol Service was another fantastic community event which seems to be getting bigger every year! We were delighted to be joined at the wonderful Kings Church by Woodside Junior School, Chesham Bois CofE Combined School, St. Mary's C of E Primary School, Elangeni School, Beacon Voices Choir from The Beacon School and Amersham Community Choir! Amersham Community Brass Band were also on fine form providing the musical accompaniment and Reverend Tim Harper from St. Mary's Parish Church led the service flawlessly!

The Community Carol Service is the perfect opportunity to bring the whole community together to celebrate the festive season! The retiring collection from the service was divided between my two chosen charities- Buckinghamshire Mind & Bucks Vision this year, with each charity receiving £300 to go towards their vital work in the local area. A huge thank you to all who took part and attended this special event!

Amersham in Bloom enjoys further Success

Following national success in 2016 the community of Amersham came together once more to capture Gold in the Britain in Bloom Regional Competition!

As well as brushing aside Henley on Thames, for the accolade as the best town, we also picked up the regional award for Conservation and Wildlife along with another Gold for the 'seen to be believed', as noted by an RHS Judge, Memorial Gardens and Fairground Display. The town's success in the bloom competition is a testament to the collaboration between the Town Council, bloom volunteers, community groups, schools and businesses, each of whom play an important part in the bloom campaign.

It is with great pleasure to announce that Amersham has been invited into the National Britain in Bloom National Final once again this year. A wonderful achievement for all involved!

To put this into perspective we are the only town in Buckinghamshire to be invited and one of only 67 from the whole of the UK. Needless to say we are very proud and look forward to representing the region in the competition which is judged in August.

I would personally like to thank the efforts of all of our Amersham in Bloom supporters, most notably the Town Council Depot staff, 1st Chesham Bois Scout Group Leaders, Barnett

Waddingham, The Rotary Club of Amersham, The Entertainer, Old Amersham Hotels Group, Fremantle Media, Amersham Society, Amersham & District Residents Association, Van Hage Garden Centre, our local schools and of course the Amersham in Bloom volunteers. Bloom is very much at the heart of Amersham in providing improvements throughout the town whilst engaging with our community.

Amersham Town Council Core Role

In addition to all the community events throughout the year, Amersham Town Council continues to provide our core services and facilities for all residents. These include:

- Cemeteries—as well as ongoing maintenance of our three cemeteries, we organised and attended 46 burials. (27 ashes interments and 19 full burials)
- Allotments—ongoing maintenance of these sites with waiting lists of 7 at Woodside Road; 13 at The Pyghtle and 14 for White Lion Road.
- Street lights—we own and maintain 915 street lights, with a planned programme, throughout the next five years, to replace all lanterns with more efficient LED and energy saving fittings.
- Planning Applications—Councillors discussed and voted on over 215 planning applications, as well as responding on a variety of public consultations.
- Sports and hall bookings—we continue to support the local sports clubs by preparing pitches for cricket and football matches.
- Strong links to our Twin Town of Bensheim - we continue to support the Twinning Society with Bensheim. Our German friends visited us in July, attending one of our popular band concerts in the Memorial Gardens. We also hosted a reception for Bensheim exchange students on their yearly visit, arranged by Dr Challoner's Grammar School.

Town Council Financial Report

2017/18 has again been a challenging year financially for Amersham Town Council. After a gradual reduction over previous years in the Mitigating Grant awarded from Government, the grant ceased altogether for the 2017/18 financial year, meaning that the Council was forced to raise the precept by £6.51 per annum per Band D property to meet the costs of delivering the best possible service for the residents of Amersham, as well as finding ways to reduce costs and increase income.

Staff costs were reduced by employing fixed term grounds staff at the depot during the busy growing season rather than permanent staff throughout the year, and additional contract work was undertaken for other parishes to boost income. Efforts to promote our halls for community use has resulted in a significant upsurge in the hire of the Barn Meadow Community Hall which is proving a popular venue for a variety of activities such as classes in ballet, pilates and drama.

We have also undertaken considerable refurbishment work at two of our properties (with the work mostly being carried out by our depot team to save on costs). Even after this heavy investment, Council has approved a programme of capital investment over the next 5 years, in order that the burden on the council tax payers is reasonably stable. Otherwise there would be wild fluctuations as major expenditure occurred.

Market Hall

Market Hall- never far from our thoughts!

On behalf of the Town Council I am pleased to inform you that we are in confidential negotiations with a third party which will improve usability and functionality of the Market Hall, a treasured asset within Old Amersham. With the Town Council wholeheartedly appreciating the need for better accessibility to the Hall I can assure you that as well as protecting the historic value of the building, access, is at the forefront our discussions. While these negotiations are ongoing we envisage that a proposal will be made public within the next 60 days.