

Mayor's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting – Wednesday 15 March 2023

Presented by Cllr Sowry-House

I am pleased to present this report from the Town Council to the Corfe Mullen Annual Parish Meeting as the Mayor of Corfe Mullen and Chairman of the Town Council.

It has been another busy year for the Council, and I would like to share with you all, some of the achievements over the last year.

The Annual Town Council meeting was held on 10 May 2022, where Cllr David Mattocks and I were re-elected as Chairman/Mayor and Vice Chairman/Deputy Mayor for the 2022/23 municipal year. I would like to thank Cllr Mattocks for undertaking the role of Vice Chairman and Deputy Mayor for the past 3 years.

A response was issued to Dorset Council earlier in 2022, in respect of the initial consultation of the Dorset Local Plan, this included lots of input from residents. Dorset Council confirmed the publication of the draft local plan for comment was not anticipated until December 2024.

Work was completed on the repairs and preservation to the exterior of the chapel in the old cemetery. It is hoped the work will preserve the chapel for many years to come.

In June, the Council resolved to name the new road for the development of 9 affordable homes being built on the land off Sleight Lane as 'Spring Close', due to the vicinity of a natural spring.

An independent Health & Safety Inspection was carried out of the Sports Pavilion at the Recreation Ground and as a result of the number of concerns raised, the Sports Pavilion was closed to all users with effect from 20 June 2022. The early years provider, Mini Munchkins, relocated to the small hall of the Village Hall to enable them to continue to provide childcare for families in Corfe Mullen.

Corfe Mullen celebrated the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II over the June bank holiday weekend with the Council resolving to install a commemorative bench at Towers Way green space to honour the occasion as well as signposting residents wishing to take part in the Jubilee Big Lunch. I was pleased to attend the Dorset Civic Service of Celebration on behalf of Corfe Mullen at Sherborne Abbey on 3 June 2022.

The play area at the Recreation Ground received a new piece of play equipment to replace the witches hat. Picnic benches were also replaced using environmentally friendly, recycled, heavy-duty plastic. These require little or no maintenance and should last for many years to come. These were all funded using Community Infrastructure Levy, known as CIL monies. Children are enjoying using the new equipment already and Council remains focused on provision across its recreation areas.

The first meeting of the Climate Change Working Party was held, made up of volunteers from across the community to develop a Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Local Action Plan for Corfe Mullen.

If you remember, the Council resolved to put in place a Neighbourhood Plan for Corfe Mullen, to ensure greater control is retained by residents when it comes to development within the Parish Boundary. Members of the community put themselves forward to be part of the Steering Group which held its first meeting and is working hard to draft the Plan with help from professional consultants. It is anticipated the draft plan will be produced later this year, to go to Referendum in May 2024.

The Clerk, Nicola Gray resigned having been offered another opportunity at Wareham Town Council. The Council were saddened by her decision but understood why and wished her well in her new role. As a result, the Deputy Clerk, Catherine Horsley was promoted to the role of Clerk and RFO from 1 August 2022.

Council is grateful to Catherine for stepping up to this role and the commitment she has given to council and Corfe Mullen. This then left a vacancy for a Deputy Clerk, to which Rachel Virrill, Administration Assistant was promoted to the role of Deputy Clerk, also from 1 August 2022.

We are fortunate to have had such talent and capacity amongst our team to be able to fill these key roles with such capable people. We wish Catherine and Rachel every success in the forthcoming Council year.

As a result of the staffing changes, the Council reviewed the salaries for all Council staff and by advertisement went out recruit a replacement Administration Assistant.

Corfe Mullen Carnival Committee held another successful carnival and fun run at the Recreation Ground, with our grounds team ensuring the Recreation Ground was looking its best to welcome everyone to those events.

In July, the Council awarded a grant of £6,000 to the Village Hall to ensure the Charity remained solvent and had enough funds to pay its bills, commitments, and salaries, whilst building up the bookings and income following the closure during the Covid pandemic.

Corfe Mullen welcomed back the first Macmillan Dorset bike ride to the Recreation Ground since the Covid pandemic. This raised valuable funds for those in Dorset who may be suffering from cancer.

Following discussions with the Corfe Mullen Sports Association, known as the CMSA, the Council resolved to take back possession of the Sports Pavilion and sports provision at the Recreation Ground with effect from 1 August 2023 and to make available the £75,000 reserves allocated for future development of the Sports Pavilion to carry out maintenance and works to the pavilion, making it safe for users and meet the requirements of a subsequent Health & Safety inspection.

The Council would like to thank the CMSA and its volunteers for the hard work and commitment they have given to sport and recreation in Corfe Mullen over the last 35+ years.

August was a busy month taking over the sports provision and working with all the sports clubs to ensure all sports continued with minimal disruption, although Council recognised this was a difficult and uncertain time for many of the clubs. The Council commenced engagement with local contractors to carry out essential maintenance and health & safety works.

In September, the nation mourned the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Council observed all appropriate protocols during the period of official mourning.

On 11 September the Clerk and I attended the Proclamation of King Charles III, in Dorchester

I was honored to be invited to speak about Her Majesty at St Nicholas Church on the morning of 18 September. In the afternoon I represented Corfe Mullen at the commemoration service for the late queen at Sherborne Abbey.

Many people will be looking forward to the Coronation and the new Bank Holiday. Council supports the Coronation Big Lunch and will gladly advise residents wishing to take part in this.

Several residents have questioned the ownership of the land known as 'the pound' at the top of Pardy's Hill. The Council are keen to understand who owns this land and are working with Dorset Council and the Land Registry to ensure the land remains an area of historic interest within the Parish.

In October, the Council resolved to open the Village Hall as a 'Warm Space' for the community as a safe space where members of the community, who may be struggling to heat their homes as a result of the cost-of-living crisis, could come and enjoy a free hot drink and companionship. The lounge area has been funded by a grant obtained from Wessex Water and will remain open until 31st March.

There has been an increase in anti-social behaviour at the skate park, particularly involving young people on the land adjacent to the new housing development on the old allotment site. This has involved working with the local Neighbourhood Policing Team and should anyone witness any anti-social behaviour within our community, the Council encourages members of the public to report the matter to the police via 101. I took the opportunity on Sunday 12 March to discuss concerns specifically related to anti-social behaviour with the new Chief Constable of Dorset Police, Amanda Pearson. Amanda and I spoke about the desire to continue the current vision for Dorset law-enforcement and the need to deliver on that vision for all residents. Dorset Police are the second least funded constabulary in the country, just ahead of Wiltshire.

This poses distinct challenges when policing a wide area such as Dorset and its largely rural geography. For Corfe Mullen to receive the level of policing it needs, a different funding formula is necessary, and I will be supporting the South West Regional Crime Unit in advocating for this.

Discussions re-commenced with Corfe Mullen Allotment Association regarding them taking over self-management of the allotment site. The Council are working closely with the Association to ensure a smooth transition of the site management, should it be agreed by a minimum of 60% of the allotment holders. The allotments continue to thrive with some new areas established to provide more plots for residents. There are now only 6 people on the waiting list, which is good news. There are still some issues with flooding on the site, but the allotment holders have been resilient and managed to enjoy the fruits (and vegetables!) of their hard work.

In November, the annual playground inspections took place with some recommendations relating to all our play areas, which are being progressed to ensure the play areas are safe to be enjoyed by young families in Corfe Mullen.

Council was pleased to organise the first Civic Remembrance Sunday Parade since 2019. Councillors, residents and groups within the community joined with the Royal British Legion to remember the Armed Forces, and their families from Britain and the Commonwealth. We remember the vital role played by the emergency services and those who have lost their lives as a result of conflict or terrorism. Council is grateful to St Nicholas Church for the service and facilitating the live streaming of commemoration for those unable to attend in person or who wished to watch it later.

The Council would like to thank the Carnival Committee members and members of the community for their support on the day. The parade could not have happened without them and Council was very proud of everyone who contributed to such a well organised, well attended and meaningful remembrance.

The Council continues to manage Corfe Mullen Youth Trust as the sole Trustee of the Charity. The youth club is an important part of the community which is enjoyed by many of the young people in Corfe Mullen and continues to thrive.

A new youth support worker, Rob Williams joined to work alongside the existing team to support young people in Corfe Mullen and Council welcomes Rob to the team and wishes him every success.

You may remember, whilst the Village Hall was closed due to the Covid pandemic, Council took the opportunity to obtain planning and building consent to extend the rear small hall into a more useable space with full disabled access and facilities, along with the addition of a porch at the front of the hall. The work to create the porch is due to commence later in 2023.

In December, the Council agreed the sports fees effective from 1 April 2023, which are published on the Council's website.

In the run up to Christmas, contractors installed a new play safe fence at the Henbury View play area. There are still some snagging issues with the flooring, which are currently being worked on and it is hoped the play area will be re-opened as soon as possible.

A number of residents raised concerns with the speed of traffic in the Waterloo Valley. Dorset Council carried out a traffic survey in December on behalf of the Town Council to gather data for considering a change to the current national speed limit in the area. A further survey will be conducted in the Spring 2023.

In January this year, the Council welcomed Becky Callender as the new Administration Assistant. Becky hosts the reception when members of the public come into the Council office and deals with the administration of the Village Hall and sports bookings amongst other things. She is certainly kept busy, and we welcome Becky to the team.

Council met at the beginning of the month to approve the budget for the 2023/24 financial year. A budget and precept of £502,456.00 was agreed, which is an increase of 8.55%, and sees a Band D property increasing from £116.39 to £126.34 per annum. Despite a greater rise in cost of living, a rise which Council faces itself, members were keen to keep any increase to a minimum whilst still maintaining services provided. This has been possible due to careful budgeting and the work of our Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer.

After a lot of time and effort the Sports Pavilion reopened to users following a successful Health & Safety follow up inspection on Saturday 28 January 2023. The Council hopes all users are now enjoying the renovated facilities.

Council agreed to hold various civic events in the coming year with the first one being a Civic Celebration of Service to be held on 16 April 2023 at St Nicholas Church. As Mayor I wanted to celebrate the service given by many individuals and organisations across the community. With no physical centre to our Parish, I strongly believe our residents are our shining asset and I will be proud to let our friends and neighbours from across Dorset learn a little bit more of the diversity of Corfe Mullen

In February, some of you may have noticed the new signage for the renaming of the Recreation Ground to 'The Platinum Jubilee Fields' as a legacy to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of the Queen Elizabeth II.

Corfe Mullen Junior Tennis Club is back, and the Council are pleased to be working with tennis coaches, Philip Loose, Simon Dunford and Richard Davies of R.D Sports Coaching, to provide tennis coaching, holiday and after school clubs which are accessible to everyone. The early years provider, Mini Munchkins also relocated back to the Sports Pavilion following half-term.

The Town Council continues to work with Dorset Council Highways on a number of concerns raised by residents with one being the road safety of children attending our local schools. The Town Council are liaising with the Road Safety Team to investigate further provision of pedestrian crossings in and around Windgreen Roundabout. Another concern is the supply of salt bins across Corfe Mullen. As you will know, we have a number of roads with steep inclines and during the colder weather, access can become more challenging.

The Town Council are liaising with Dorset Highways to review the provision of salt and grit bins in various locations. This is work in progress and hopefully this will be resolved ahead of next winter.

You may have spotted an Arboriculturist looking at all the trees on Town Council sites. The Council are required to carry out a tree survey every 3 years to make sure trees on our land are safe and not at risk of injuring members of the public and/or properties. We anticipate the report being issued

early in April and any tree work carried out will be carried out by a qualified tree surgeon. The Council recognises the importance of our green spaces and trees within the village and will only carry out works on trees if they are deemed unsafe. We need to protect our green spaces, trees and wildlife and Council remains committed to tree planting when sites become available.

Grants awarded to local organisations during 2022/23

Organisation	Grant Awarded £
Corfe Mullen Foodbank	600.60
Citizens Advice East Dorset and Purbeck	1000.00
Vision Wimborne Dial-a-ride	250.00
Corfe Mullen Carnival	1000.00
Corfe Mullen Carnival (Festive lights and Father Christmas evening parade appeal)	500.00
Legs and Company Leg Club	1500.00
Corfe Mullen 5K run and Children's one-mile fun run	500.00
Women's Institute	150.00

Corfe Mullen Homewatch were also awarded a matched funding grant of up to £500. However, they have chosen not to proceed with the grant at this time, due to not wanting to raise the subscription fee during the cost-of-living crisis.

There is still much to do across the Parish to ensure the Council provides the high standard of services it always has done. Council remains resolute that Corfe Mullen does not lose its precious green belt land and is not swamped with unsuitable, unsustainable housing.

We continue to work with residents to ensure that facilities at the Platinum Jubilee Fields reflect the needs of the community.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors who continue to thoroughly and robustly debate, discuss and enact all matters in Corfe Mullen with a passion and desire to keep Corfe Mullen as an independent, beautiful and highly desired place to live.

I especially thank the Chairs and Vice Chairs of our committees for their commitment to detail and diligence with which they carry out their duties.

Each Councillor brings a different perspective to what can sometimes be very difficult decisions, but as a team we ensure that whatever the outcome of those decisions, we move forward together and provide Corfe Mullen residents with a parish to be proud of.

Thank you.