

## **Mayor's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting – Wednesday 14 March 2024**

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 9 May 2023, where I was re-elected as Chairman and Mayor for the 2023/24 municipal year. Cllr Phil Purvis was elected as Vice Chairman and Deputy Mayor. I would like to thank Cllr Purvis for undertaking the role of Vice Chairman and Deputy Mayor for the last year.

As many of you will know, the Town Council elections are coming up in May 2024, therefore, this may be my last meeting I attend as Mayor of Corfe Mullen and Chairman of the Town Council, and indeed as a Town Councillor.

Following the resignation of Tim Howard in April 2023, no election was called as less than 10 electors of the town had made a request to Dorset Council. Therefore, the vacancy was filled by co-option. The Council welcomed Cllr Scott Florek in June 2023.

Our Head Groundsman, John retired in April 2023 after 25 years+ service to the Council. Councillors thanked him for his service and wished him well in his retirement.

As a result, with a reduced Grounds Team, the Town Council entered into an agreement with an external contractor to carry out grounds maintenance across some of its sites, particularly grass cutting and sports pitch maintenance. This has been a cost saving to the Council which has helped to keep increases to the precept to a minimum. We hope that users of our sports pitches are seeing some improvement, due to the groundwork undertaken to improve the drainage and surfaces.

Tree surveys are carried out 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. This was completed in April 2023, where the report highlighted several trees that required immediate work, mainly at Springdale Road Open Space and on Broadmoor Road adjacent to the Allotments site. This work has now been completed; however, further work is required and will be carried out later this year. The Council recognises the importance of our green spaces and trees within the village and will only carry out tree work where there is a risk to members of the public and/or properties.

Corfe Mullen commemorated the coronation of King Charles III by installing two commemorative benches at the Recreation Ground play area. I also attended the Dorset Civic Service at Sherborne Abbey in my role as Mayor to mark the occasion.

In July 2023, the Town Council resolved to nominate locations within Corfe Mullen as Assets of Community Value. Under the Localism Act 2011, this allows the Council to identify and nominate land and buildings that are important to be included on Dorset Council's list of Assets of Community Value. If sold, local community groups would then in many cases have a fairer chance to make a bid to buy the property on the open market. The inclusion of an asset on the list does not place any restriction on what an owner can do with their property, once listed, so long as it remains in their ownership.

BH Live Active leisure centre was registered by the Council in September 2019. Lockyers Middle School and the Royal British Legion, on Blandford Road were also registered in November 2023. All listings of Assets of Community Value remain in place for 5 years.

Applications for the Lambs Green Pub, on Lambs Green Inn Lane and the Dorset Soldier Pub, on Wareham Road are also being progressed by Dorset Council. Applications for the 'Pound' at the top

of Pardy's Hill/Blandford Road, the County Field, at the Corfe Mullen Recreation Ground and Corfe Mullen Library will be progressed in due course.

During the year, the make-up of the Grounds Team evolved with two members of the team, Phil and Mike taking their well-earned retirement and two other team members moving on to other jobs. The Council welcomes Phil, Paul and Darren to the team, who work hard to ensure all Town Council sites are kept clean and tidy for the enjoyment of residents. They are certainly kept busy and are all valued members of the team.

It has been another busy year for our officers, Catherine Horsley, the Clerk and RFO, Rachel Virrill, the Deputy Clerk, along with Becky Calendar, the Administration Assistant, continue to work hard to deliver the day-to-day services of the Council, particularly whilst the Clerk was on long term sick leave in the latter part of 2023. Thankfully she is now on the mend, and I would like to thank all staff for their ongoing commitment and dedication during some challenging times for the Council.

When thinking about Council officers and staff, it is recognised that some work on their own and with this in mind, the Council agreed to purchase lone working devices for all staff. This will mean should they injure themselves, or find themselves in a threatening situation, they can activate the device for emergency help. It is important for all staff to feel safe and supported whilst in the workplace, whether that's in the office or in one of our green spaces.

In September 2023, Paul Harrison resigned as Town Councillor, leaving a vacancy on the Town Council. Dorset Council Electoral Services confirmed in October 2023 that they had received the necessary 10 requests for an election to be called to fill the vacancy. A by-election took place in November 2023, when Cllr Lee Hardy was elected to the Town Council. The Mayor welcomed Cllr Hardy to the meeting.

You may have seen in the national and local press or heard me on BBC Radio Solent regarding the felling of trees at 113 Wimborne Road in October 2023. The felling of trees was conducted without prior knowledge of the Council or neighbours of the site. One of the Council's priorities has always been to maintain a balance between preserving Corfe Mullen's natural beauty and ensuring the safety of its residents. The matter is no longer being investigated by Dorset Police.

The Council has engaged with many contractors over the last year to complete work on Council sites. Some of those include repairs to the old cemetery driveway, to ensure it remains stable and adequate drainage is in place to take away some of the flooding previously experienced. Working with Enerveo, who is part of SSE to carry out repairs and upgrade some of the street lighting in the village which is the responsibility of the Council to LED lighting, which is better for the environment and a cost saving to the Council.

Some of the major purchases during the year included a trailer for the Grounds Team to enable them to move larger equipment between sites and a utility gator to travel to sites, negating the need to use the larger truck.

You will have seen or maybe used the Beryl Bikes located across the village. The Town Council was keen for Corfe Mullen residents to have access to the scheme arranged by Dorset Council. However, felt there should have been better public consultation to understand the needs of its residents and where best to site the Beryl Bike bays.

A number of residents have asked the Council to consider installing additional bus shelters, mainly on Wareham Road, by the Windgreen roundabout and opposite the large Co-op at Towers Way. The Council has allocated monies within the 2024/25 financial year budget for purchasing the bus shelters and is currently engaging with suppliers and seeking approval from Dorset Council Highways before proceeding.

The safety and wellbeing of our residents and users of our facilities is very important. The Council has listened to users and is installing pedestrian safety railings on the public footpath near the exit

gate on Hillside Road from Henbury View Play Area. Work is also progressing to install an outdoor gym at the Recreation Ground to be accessible to all, with the added bonus of those working out being able to admire the lovely views across to Wimborne and Badbury Rings. The Town Council is seeking grant funding to purchase the equipment. However, if this is not successful, monies have been allocated in the 2024/25 financial year budget. The Council hopes the gym will be installed ahead of the warmer months.

You may remember, at last year's meeting, I stated that the Council was going to progress with public consultation relating to the proposed development of the sports pavilion at the Recreation Ground. Unfortunately, due to a number of issues and priorities, this has not happened this year. The Council hopes to be in a better position later this year, following the elections and a newly elected Town Council.

The annual playground inspections took place at the end of 2023, 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. The play equipment at the Recreation Ground play area has undergone some repairs and repainting to preserve the equipment for a few more years, where we hope, children will continue to enjoy the play area. The Council remains focused on the provision of play equipment for all age groups and abilities across its recreational areas.

Cllr Peter Neil continues to lead the Climate Change Working Party along with volunteers from across the community to develop a Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Local Action Plan for Corfe Mullen. The Mayor thanked Cllr Neil for his work thus far.

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. Unfortunately, due to the work involved in developing the plan against the number of volunteers needed to progress the work, the Council resolved to pause the development of the plan until after the forthcoming elections. The newly elected Council will look to relaunch the development of the plan later in the year when it is hoped more volunteers and Town Councillors will be able to join the Steering Group to continue the excellent work already started. The Mayor also thanked Cllr Neil for his work to develop the plan.

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.

Corfe Mullen welcomed back the Macmillan Dorset bike ride to the Recreation Ground in July 2023. This raised valuable funds for those in Dorset who may be suffering from cancer.

The Council has been working with Corfe Mullen Sports Association (CMSA) to transfer the trustees to the Council as the sole trustee of Corfe Mullen Sports Association Charity, which is being progressed with the Charity Commission.

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.

Several residents have questioned the ownership of the land known as 'the pound' at the top of Pardy's Hill. The Council has engaged with a local legal firm to ensure the land remains an area of historic interest within the Parish.

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.

The Council has also seen an increase in vandalism and damage to property across all its sites. It is really disappointing that the minority spoil it for the majority. The Council take this very seriously and consider these behaviours to be criminal damage which is reported to Dorset Police. The costs to the Council to either repair or replace total just over £3500, which does not include officers and staffs time to resolve, just in the current financial year, which is funded by those of you who pay Council Tax, through the precept.

The Council was pleased to organise its Remembrance Sunday Parade. Over 400 people lined the parade route and attended the church service including 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. The Town Council is grateful to St Nicholas Church for the service and for 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. We said goodbye to Nigel, our Senior Youth Support Worker who retired in October 2023 following many years of working with young people in Corfe Mullen. Jo has taken up the reins, continuing to work with the young people to develop their individual capabilities and skills, so they may grow to their full potential.

Two new youth support workers have joined the team to support young people in Corfe Mullen. The Council welcomes Lisa and Gemma and wishes them every success. I have also taken the opportunity to volunteer at the youth club, which has been a very rewarding experience.

The Town Council continues to fund the After School Club held at the Village Hall, which has been very successful and well attended. It provides a safe space for young people to hang out and engage with the youth support workers on any issues that are important to them.

You may remember, whilst the Village Hall was closed during 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 was due to commence in late 2023, however, unfortunately, this has not happened, due to the appointed contractor being unable to commit to the work. Therefore, Council is now re-tendering for the work and hopes the work will commence later this year.

The Council met in January 2024 to approve the budget for the 2024/25 financial year. A budget of £611,125.00 and precept of £551,125.00 was agreed which is an increase of 9.73%, and sees a Band D property increasing from £126.34 to £138.63 per annum, £12.29 for the year, £1.02 per month. Despite a greater rise in the cost of living, a rise which Council faces itself, members were keen to keep any increase to a minimum whilst still maintaining the services provided. This has been possible due to careful budgeting and the work of our Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer.

Council agreed to hold various civic events in the coming year with the first one being a Celebration of Service to be held on 21 April 2024 at St Nicholas Church. As Mayor, I want 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 about the diversity of Corfe Mullen.

The 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 Council is liaising with the Road Safety Team to investigate further provision of pedestrian crossings in and around Windgreen Roundabout and on Wareham Road, by Brownsea Avenue.

### **Grants awarded to local organisations during 2023/24**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Grant Awarded £</b>
Corfe Mullen Foodbank	440.80
Citizens Advice East Dorset and Purbeck	1500.00
Vision Wimborne Dial-a-ride	250.00
Corfe Mullen Carnival	1000.00
Corfe Mullen Carnival (Father Christmas evening parade appeal)	200.00
Legs and Company Leg Club	1500.00
Corfe Mullen 5K run and Children's one-mile fun run	250.00
Women's Institute	150.00
Corfe Mullen Allotment Association	500.00
Friends of Corfe Mullen Library	209.20
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>£6000.00</b>

The Council also awarded an additional small grant of £150 to Corfe Mullen Foodbank at St Nicholas Church to assist with the running costs of opening as a warm space for those residents who may be struggling to heat their homes as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

Many of you will be aware that Virgin Media is working across the village to install lightning-fast broadband. The Council is working with Sally, the local community lead on any issues experienced by residents during the work. If residents have any issues, the office has Sally's contact details, who is happy to be contacted so that she can try and resolve any issues as and when they happen.

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 Recreation Ground 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.