

ILMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

MAYOR'S REPORT

I was chosen by the Town Council to become Mayor in May 2022, and my first year in post has been a busy one at times. My predecessor, Cllr Philip Burton, had been Mayor for 3 years, including a period of office during Covid lockdown, and was already a familiar face around the town before becoming Mayor. In my case however, few people knew who I was, and I soon got used to an opening question along the lines of "who are you then?" Even, more bluntly, "Who elected you then?"

Just to fill in a few background details, I came to Ilminster with my husband, Jobi, in July 2017 from Milton Keynes. We have two grown up children and a cat. My background is as an FE lecturer, for some 17 years and before that a spell in banking and business, for some 13 years. These periods of strife were punctuated by a role as a carer for young people with challenging learning and developmental needs.

My personal ethos is to try to do as little damage whilst on earth as possible, whilst being as caring as possible.

I have been a town councillor for 5 years now and will try to complete my current elected term with integrity and hard work.

I would like to record my thanks to the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Brian Hamilton for his on-going support and to the town councillors. Importantly, I would like to thank the team of officers who make things happen. Finally, but by no means least, I

want to thank my consort, Jobi, who didn't ask for this role but nevertheless carries it out without complaint.

Aims

It is easy to have lofty ambitions when coming into public office; the realities of achieving these are of course always more challenging. To begin with, the Town Council is a non-party political democratic body of 15 councillors. The council is governed by a suite of Standing Orders, under an umbrella of local government legislation. Mayors, like any individual councillor, have no power. So being Mayor is not about power or social standing, it is rather about representing the town and leading the council through taking the chair at full council meetings once a month.



The main aims of the council at this point in time are:

- To establish resilience in the town to cope with the challenges of climate change
- To support green initiatives
- To grow community engagement
- To continue to look after our open spaces, cemetery, recreational facilities and keep by laws up to date

Events Attended March 2022 – March 2023

Rather than list all of the events I have had the pleasure of attending as a town representative, here are some of the main ones, in no particular order, to give you a flavour of what I get up to:

The Annual Town Criers' Competition

Events celebrating the Platinum Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II

Civic Service for Yeovil Town Council

Ilminster Literary Festival 2022

Events for Macmillan Cancer Support

Party on the Park

The Ilminster Experience

The Christmas Lights Switch On

The Proclamation for the accession to the throne of King Charles III

The Axbridge Blackberry Carnival

The Ilminster Events for 'The Big Green Week'

Harvest Thanksgiving Service at Wells Cathedral

City, Town and Parish Conference 2022 in Yeovil



Remembrance Service at the Minster 2022

Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Day

Wadham School Awards Evening

Armistice Day at the Minster 2022

Choral Evensong with the legal service and presentation of the High Sheriff of Somerset 2023



Moving Forward

The move to a unitary authority for Somerset has meant that I will be representing Ilminster at the meetings of the Local Community Network (LCN) to which the town has been allocated. So Ilminster, South Petherton, Crewkerne and the associated parishes are now members of one LCN. I shall be reporting back to full council after each meeting and the details will be available via the Town Council website as is the case with all minutes of meetings and documents.

This will be an opportunity for the town to become involved with local government in a new way. Whilst it is easy to be cynical about the role and effectiveness of LCNs, my approach is that you either sit on the side-lines and criticise whilst hoping for the best, or you dive in at the beginning and try to have a positive impact on things moving forward. The Town Council is ambitious that Ilminster punches at least at its body weight, and I am more than up for the challenge.

On a local level, community engagement is more important than ever. The recent community survey received a pleasing response and will enable the council to

make more evidence-based decisions. The monthly surgeries are a way of continuing this process so please pop along and talk to us about projects you are excited to see happen and to get involved with.

Conclusion

We are fortunate to have a lovely town and a growing community. I am proud to represent Ilminster as Mayor and to talk to people that I meet at various events about the town.

I wish to end with a heartfelt thank you to everyone in our community who make this a wonderful place to live and work and go to school. Our community can only continue to grow positively if the community pull together, support each other, take part in the events and put their hands up for things that need doing. Yes, we all live busy lives but then we all want to live in a town where there are clubs, events and support available. So, let's keep going. Please continue to put up your hands, to volunteer to do the unpopular things and let's encourage others to do so. Remember, nothing will happen unless someone makes it.



OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE REPORT

It has again been a busy and productive year for the Open Spaces team.

The team continues to work tirelessly on all of our open spaces, including our local nature reserve at Herne Hill. In particular: coppicing, laying hedges (a spectacular example of this can be seen along Canal Way), maintenance to paths and handrails and other detailed countryside management. This includes tree health monitoring for damage and disease as well as tree cutting for safety and removal of dead wood. Removal of trees is a great opportunity for Green Ilminster to replant with new trees and saplings. These activities produce large amounts of wood, which is stacked, seasoned, bagged and available for sale at the Wardens' Shed on The Rec. All proceeds are fed back into Ilminster Town Council funds.



Thanks are also due to Green Ilminster for their superb litter picking efforts around the town.

Nature lovers can join the volunteer programme to assist with jobs on Herne Hill and other Ilminster open spaces and are welcome at the new Herne Hill User Group meetings which are held in the old Town Council Building at regular intervals.

The reintroduction of the Rec Users Group also gives the community the opportunity to attend regular meeting and voice their thoughts for the development of the amenities.

The Wharf Lane recreation ground continues to be an area of development with plans well underway for the new fitness track. The purpose-built track will enable people of all ages and abilities to move between designated areas and make use of free-to-use outside gym equipment, helping to promote fitness and wellbeing in the community.

New benches continue to be placed in and around Ilminster taking in some of our spectacular views. There is also extensive work carried out by the team to maintain existing benches.

We are now entering the busy season for grass cutting at The Rec, Britten's Field and the cemetery. Other spring/summer gardening work includes regular watering of troughs, hanging baskets and gateway displays at the town entrances.

The wildflower meadow at West Crescent is progressing, with work ongoing to allow flowers to begin blooming soon.

The Open Spaces Team are now looking forward to warmer sunny days and the next exciting new projects....

WORK CARRIED OUT BY THE GROUNDS STAFF



New finger boards



Refurbished benches



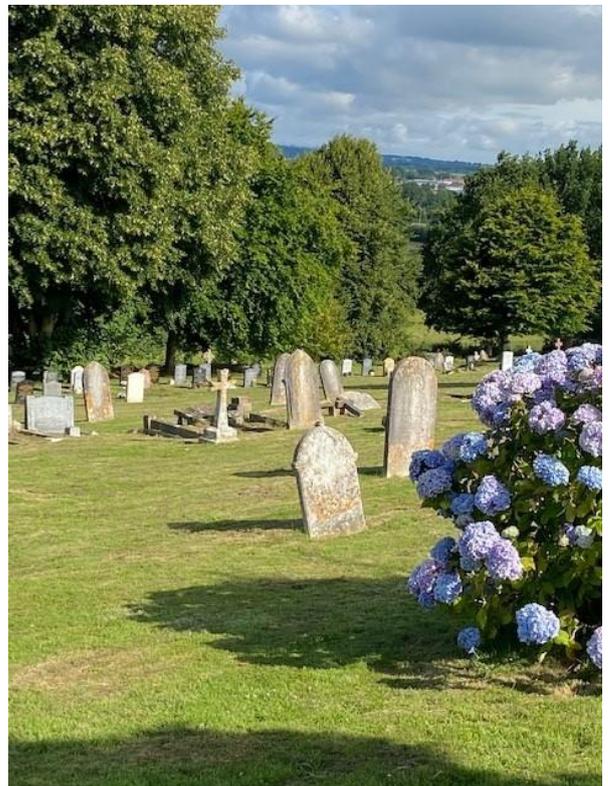
Replacement signs



Burma Star Garden rejuvenated



Outdoor chess table



Cemetery

PLANNING, HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE REPORT

It has been a busy year for the Members of the PHT committee. The committee reviewed 51 planning applications and provided material planning reasons to support or reject the applications as consultees to the planning authority.

Alongside discussing planning applications, the committee also received various requests from residents of Ilminster with many being supported by the committee. Some of the matters considered by the committee included the:

1. **Silver Street archway access** - In May 2022, Members requested that officers contact Highways to request that the yellow zig zag lines outside, what was Greenfylde CofE Primary School on Silver Street, to be extended to cover the archway entrance between Sweet Surprise and B Gibbs Funeral Services Ltd. Highways was contacted and the work carried out.
2. **A358 Public Consultation Review** – Members submitted a collective response from the Town Council using comments from their meeting held on 7th June 2022 to support proposals put forward from the Community of Parishes in the response to the revisions to the Public Consultation Review.
3. **Request for Traffic Calming Measures** – In August, Members authorised officers to contact Highways to establish what calming measures might be implemented along Whaites Drive. Highways were contacted and various measures were discussed and actioned.
4. **Zig-zags on Ditton Street** – Herne View CofE Primary School requested Members support their request to Highways to paint zig-zag lines on Ditton Street and re-paint the zebra crossing on Shudrick Lane which was agreed and actioned by Highways.
5. **Ditton Street pedestrian crossing proposal** - In December, Members carefully considered a request for a pedestrian crossing at the junctions of Ditton Street, East Street and Silver Street. However, they had to reject the proposal due to the area being a conservation area, and as the crossing would have to be situated 5 metres down the road, it would not be used.
6. **Consultation for double yellow lines on Bay Hill** – Following a request for double yellow lines to be painted across an existing H bar on Bay Hill, Members decided to reject the proposal to carry out a consultation following the advice provided by Highways, as the double yellow lines would have to be painted from the top of East Street to Townsend.

With the formation of the new Somerset Council, the committee are looking forward to another busy year ahead in Planning, Highways & Transport.

RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT

New Council Office

In August 2022, the Town Council moved its offices from North Street to a newly refurbished office space in the Old Magistrates Court on East Street. The new office has an accessible reception area and allows us to extend public opening hours to help residents with any queries they may have. The offices are open to the public on weekdays between 11am and 2pm. To show off our new offices we opened them up for a tour for Ilminster's Christmas lights switch on at the end of 2022 and welcomed over 400 visitors to see the historic cells and talk to Councillors and Officers about the Council.

Ilminster Tourist Information

Sadly in 2022 due to the ill health of one of the long-standing volunteers that had done a fantastic job running the town's Tourist Information, the Council's officers took over the running of the Ilminster Information Centre. With the existing team of volunteers, we are now running two tourist information points, at the Arts Centre and the new Council offices on East Street.

Appointment of Recreation Manager (play inspection)

In September 2022, we appointed a new Recreation Manager, who is responsible for the management of the Council's recreation spaces (the recreation ground on Canal Way, West Crescent and Winterhay Play Parks). He was previously a park ranger at Ham Hill and previous to that worked in the grounds team at Crewkerne Town Council. His wealth of knowledge and expertise has already helped guide Councillors and Officers in decisions about the renovation and management of these spaces.

Civility & Respect

In early 2023 the Council joined 1000's of other Councils in signing up to the Civility and Respect pledge. This means that all Councillors and Officers of the Council have committed to take a zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and generally strive to make the Council a great place to work and a supportive and welcoming environment for its Members.

Neighbourhood plan

Members of the community working with the council have now had the Neighbourhood Plan taken to an external Examiner for their comments. Once the recommendations proposed by the Examiner have been included in the Plan it will be taken to referendum for the people of Ilminster to vote on it. It is never easy to please all sectors of a community but those working on the Plan have worked hard to try to protect the town and the environment so that Ilminster is a place where people will be proud to live and work in for the generations to follow.

TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

2022-23 has been a very busy year for the office staff and the external works team. The biggest task of the year saw us move from the old North Street council offices to new premises at the Old Magistrates Court on East Street. We were very pleased to be able to show over 400 visitors around the downstairs area of the offices which includes the historic cells from when the building was part of the Magistrates Court. At the end of the evening all were released without any charges being brought.

We've also taken over managing the information point at the Art Centre and the maintenance of the New Road Cemetery. The grounds staff under the guidance of the Countryside Manager are working hard to bring Herne Hill to a level that will enable us to apply for Green Flag status. To help with this a new Recreation Manager has been recruited to the team and he is looking forward to developing and improving the playground facilities at both West Crescent and Winterhay amongst other things.

Many improvements around town have taken place over the past 12 months including new signs, benches, hanging baskets, recreation equipment, and other projects could only have been achieved through the efforts of the office staff in successfully applying for external grant funding to help this happen. Following on from the government funding being provided through the Lawn Tennis Association for the resurfacing of the free to use tennis courts, we will also be applying for funding for the play park facilities as well as a fitness trail in the coming months.

One of the biggest concerns for residents of Ilminster over the past year has been the increased risk of flooding faced by some of the people living in the town. In an effort to tackle this, officers have been holding regular meetings with representatives of various bodies in an effort to find long term solutions that will assist with their own efforts to prevent property being flooded. As a council we are now hopeful that we have identified locations in which to locate 3 resilience stores to assist at times of need and volunteers will be needed to distribute the equipment at these times. The Environment Agency have now confirmed that they are looking to carry out studies into the way in which the area under threat can be protected more in the future.

As officers we are equally excited and nervous about the changes that moving to a unitary authority will have on Ilminster. There is no doubt that the creation of the new Local Community Networks (LCN) will bring opportunities for the Town Council to work more closely with, not only with other towns in our LCN but also the smaller parishes surrounding us. The LCNs will provide communities with an opportunity to have a say in what goes on in their areas. As more information is known about these groups so we will publish it on our website for people to learn more.

We are as a team always grateful for the kind words of support that we receive and the compliments on the work being carried out. We are however aware there are always ways in which we can do better and we look forward to demonstrating this in the coming 12 months.

GRANTS

Over the financial year the Town Council allocated £10,000 to be given out. Over the year a number of organisations applied for grants and these are listed below.

Grant applications 2022/23

Date	Organisation	Amount	Purpose
September 2022	Ilminster Christmas Lights	£500	To purchase replacement Christmas lights
October 2022	Ilminster Sports Club Ltd	£500	Play park – this grant was agreed in 21-22 and the funds were held over until completed
October 2022	Ilminster Chamber of Commerce	£500	To support the Ilminster Christmas Lights Festival
November 2022	Ilminster Library	£5000	Contribution to staffing costs
January 2023	The Meeting House/Arts Centre	£500	To upgrade IT system
January 2023	The Quakers	£160	To purchase food for the Warm Space
January 2023	Green Ilminster	£150	Tree planting around Ilminster
March 2023	St John Ambulance	£500	Contribution towards new support vehicle
July to March	Food Bank	£936.63	Up to £100 per month towards Supplies for the food bank

In addition to this the council made funds available for organisations to celebrate the Queens Jubilee and the Coronation of King Charles III.

The Town Council has allocated £10,000 to the Grants Budget for 2023-24 and organisations are encouraged to apply for funding to assist with their projects. Details are available from the Town Council at town.council@ilminster.gov.uk on how to apply.

COUNCIL TAX AND PRECEPT

Iminster Town Council has been very aware of the ongoing struggle faced by many families over the past year or so due to the cost of living crisis, high energy bills and rising inflation. The Town Council are not immune to these rising costs and have carefully considered the budget for 2023/24.

Over the financial year April 2022 to March 2023 the Town Council's **Expenditure** was **£375,498** with an **Income** of **£457,819**. The Town Council received a proportion of the council tax that each household paid to South Somerset District Council. The total amount of **Precept** paid to the Town Council was **£361,231**. The additional income was obtained from Market and licence fees as well as various grants that were applied for throughout the year. The surplus income that has been received has been allocated to reserves for projects and events that will be taking place in the coming months and years.

In an effort to keep any rises in the Town Council precept proportion of the overall council tax per household to a minimum the Town Council has looked very closely at its planned expenditure for the forth coming year. As a result of this it has kept the increase in the precept down to a 2.26% increase across the range of Tax Bands.

The table shows how Iminster Town Council's element of the council tax has increased for the year 2023/2024, from £2.67 for a Band A property through to £8-00 for a Band H property.

Band	2022/23	2023/24	increase	% Increase
A	£118.25	£120.92	£2.67	2.26%
B	£137.96	£141.07	£3.11	2.26%
C	£157.67	£161.22	£3.56	2.26%
D	£177.38	£181.38	£4.00	2.26%
E	£216.79	£221.68	£4.89	2.26%
F	£256.21	£261.99	£5.78	2.26%
G	£295.63	£302.29	£6.67	2.26%
H	£354.75	£362.75	£8.00	2.26%

It is anticipated that the total income the Town Council will receive from the **Precept** for 2023-24 financial year will be **£379,231** which will be used to deliver the goods and services.

RECREATIONAL GROUND USERS GROUP REPORT

The newly re-formed Recreational Ground Users Group held its first meeting on 30th November 2022 following the agreement by the Town Council to reform this group. It was seen as a useful forum for communication and information sharing between the wide range of users of the Recreation Ground.

The group is not able to make decisions but can make recommendations to the Open Spaces Committee and then on to Full Council for further consideration and implementation.

At this first meeting, Cllr Sue Osborne was elected Chair and Cllr Paul Sellers was elected Vice Chair. Present were Ilminster Town Council Officers, staff and representatives of the different user groups who make use of the grounds and its facilities.

Terms of reference for the group were agreed by all and these were then endorsed at a subsequent Full Council Meeting.

The group met a second time on the 24th January 2023. The discussion focused on the revised potential user group's agreements, notably the terms and conditions, including extending the length of time, (up to 10 years) the licences/ agreements ran for. This should help groups with grant applications for future funding where longer term agreements are needed.

The group also supported the angling club's request to the Town Council to purchase a disabled peg for the canal so those with disabilities can also have the opportunity to enjoy fishing at the canal.

There is also a wish from the group to involve our local schools by creating opportunities for them to feed their ideas into future plans. This work is ongoing.

I am grateful to the group members for giving up their time and the spirit of co-operation and positive enthusiasm that everyone brings to the meetings.

Thank you too to our hard working officer team and our ground staff for all that they do to keep the Rec in good shape.

I look forward to working with you all to ensure that we continue to have a recreation ground that everyone can feel part of and be proud of.

Cllr Sue Osborne