

# Godmanchester Town Council 2019 Annual Report



## A message from Councillor Sarah Conboy, the Mayor of Godmanchester

As we complete the first full year of the newly elected Council, I can honestly say I'm astounded by how much has been achieved on behalf of our residents. We have secured a significant number of capital projects where we have tangible things to show how we are spending your money for the benefit of the Town.



We have a newly refurbished Queen Elizabeth School which has now been open for a year; it's an important facility for the Town and we've been pleased the improved facilities have been well received. We secured significant funding for the Judith's Field building remodeling and that work, with additional funds committed by the Council, started in April. The Council's long held aspiration to have new skatepark has finally been realised and will be ready for use later this year. These are all significant projects in terms of scale and the effort required to make them a reality, none of which would have been possible without the support of our office team and the energy of individual councillors.

We invested a significant amount of time producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Godmanchester. This is a legal planning document which helps deliver the things you told us you wanted for our Town. You asked us to do what we could to reduce mass development, limit development that made traffic and parking worse, support small to medium businesses for local employment and to try to protect and enhance our green spaces. As part of your desire to see open spaces protected, we managed to secure several Local Green Spaces, restricting future houses being built on them. One of those sites was the Plant Nursery in Park Lane. As the District Council can no longer sell it for housing, they have gifted it to the Town Council. This means we can now develop the use of the site for increased community benefit.

You also told us you wanted to protect and enhance our river and this year the Community Association dredged Mill Lade. The Council are now setting aside money each year to be able to continue future dredging to make the most of this important Town asset. We've also invested in an ongoing planting and maintenance program to ensure our green spaces look good now and into the future. Where we have had development, the Plan has shaped what we've been offered, helping to ensure there is ongoing benefit to existing residents, as well as new residents. You asked for smaller houses and provision for older people as well as telling us that keeping football in the Town was important: developments along the A1198 will deliver more house variety, a care home and contribute to a 3G football pitch at the Rovers Ground.

During the Neighbourhood Plan consultation you told us about the things that mattered but couldn't be captured by planning law. We've been working on those too. Dog fouling was reported as an issue and the work done in the last two years with bag dispensers, bins, and employing a street warden means you tell us things have improved. You may have seen the new moveable speed sign: this is a direct response to your concerns about traffic speed. As I come to the end of my term on office as Mayor, I can reflect that your council team, elected volunteers and employees, current and from the previous Council, have worked tirelessly for residents. We are ably supported by so many of you and our community groups that help us achieve more than we could alone, and I'd like to thank everyone for their support. Godmanchester is a wonderful community: A Town that feels like a village where people are made to feel welcome and where people pull together for the benefit of all.

It's been a pleasure serving as your Mayor for the last two years and to be able to talk up all that makes Godmanchester so special. I look forward to supporting the new Town Clerk and the new Mayor when they take office in May.

**Godmanchester Town Office**

Town Hall, 1 Post Street, Godmanchester. PE29 2NB

**[www.gmccouncil.com](http://www.gmccouncil.com)**

t: 01480 388870 e: [townclerk@gmccouncil.com](mailto:townclerk@gmccouncil.com)

## Summary of accounts

The table below shows the actual receipts and payments for 2017/18 and 2018/19 and our budget for 2019/20.

<b>Godmanchester Town Council - Summary of Accounts</b>			
(NB the information supplied for the year ending 31/3/19 is from unaudited accounts)			
Year ending 31/3/18	RECEIPTS	Year ending 31/3/19	Budget 2019-20
£9,915.91	Queen Elizabeth Sch.	£28,056.73	£24,000
£6,468.09	Judith's Field	£353.75	£4,000
£3,571.32	Interest	£967.15	£500
£7,037.66	Other	£5,419.46	£1,000
£875.00	Allotments	£900	£900
£189,782.00	Precept	£202,300	£269,160
£45,000	Grants Received	£10,426	£250,000
£8,231	Cemetery	£10,070	£8,000
£42,726.01	VAT recovered	£72,907.70	£78,000
£186,849.11	CIL income	£224,068.65	£86,000
<b>£500,456.10</b>	<b>TOTAL RECEIPTS</b>	<b>£555,469.44</b>	<b>£721,560</b>
Year ending 31/3/18	PAYMENTS	Year ending 31/3/19	Budget 2019-20
£80,314.56	Town Office Admin	£101,556.65	£113,090
£9,521.88	Business Admin	£10,208.53	£6,350
£4,542.79	Insurance	£3,488.82	£3,500
£4,783.15	Civic Costs	£3,084.27	£4,100
£4,922.99	Communication & Tourism	£1,943.47	£13,850
£10,835.64	Grants Awarded	£10,226.71	£7,000
£0.00	Contributions to outside bodies	£0.00	£1,000
£4,277.41	Town Hall (facilities mgmt)	£7,574.07	£8,040
£296,483.07	Queen Elizabeth Sch. (facilities mgmt)	£106,912.10	£13,440
£12,757.08	Judith's Field (facilities mgmt)	£9,117.23	£326,300
£11,775.66	Other Property	£1,896.14	£1,000
£30,360.64	Environment	£25,595.16	£32,020
£7,873.13	Recreation areas/facilities	£3,205.40	£22,500
£875.00	Allotments	£900.00	£900
£31,117.40	Grounds Maintenance	£34,213.40	£39,200
£0.00	Churchyard & Cemetery	£0.00	£3,000
£0.00	Community Nursery	£0.00	£50,000
£195.75	VAT - non recoverable	£0.00	£0.00
£75,877.73	VAT - recoverable	£37,627.80	£100,000
<b>£586,513.88</b>	<b>TOTAL PAYMENTS</b>	<b>£357,549.75</b>	<b>£745,290</b>
Balance as at 1.4.18	£178,943.20	Funds Represented by:	
Add Receipts	£555,469.44	Unity Trust	£376,765.64
Subtotal	£734,412.64	Cash in hand	£97.25
Less payments	£357,549.75	Total	£376,862.89
<b>BALANCE as at 31.3.19</b>	<b>£376,862.89</b>		

## Please come along to the Annual Town Meeting

Everyone is welcome to attend the Annual Town Meeting where your Town Council will explain in far more detail what work has been undertaken, what's in the pipeline already that may affect you and both ongoing projects & new ideas for the next several years. Each council working party will make a short presentation and then you will have the opportunity to quiz the council on any matters you feel are important. Afterwards there is a more informal opportunity to chat with your local Councillors.

This year's meeting will take place on Tuesday 7th May at 8pm in the Queen Elizabeth School (next to the Chinese Bridge)

## Property Portfolio Report

The Property Portfolio Group looks after the three main buildings in Town Council ownership: the Town Hall and the Queen Elizabeth School, both of which are Grade II Listed, and the Judith's Field pavilion at the top of London Road.

This was the first full year for the upgraded Queen Elizabeth School. The building was officially reopened at a ceremony in June by Dr Simon Thurley CBE, former CEO of English Heritage, who grew up in the town. An illustrated commemorative history of the building was published to mark the re-opening; it's available to see in the town office.

The building's exterior was substantially repaired, the brickwork re-pointed in lime mortar and the clay peg tiles replaced as needed. The internal toilets were expanded to take over the old public toilet block and the substantial damp problems have been resolved.

The outside public toilet is designed for disabled use and has nappy changing facilities. The automatic lock allows public access between 8.15am and 8pm in the summer months but these times may be shortened in the winter.

Users of the hall can now appreciate the modern facilities including excellent audio visual, improved acoustics, an automatic ventilation system with heat exchanger, underfloor heating, sprung wooden floor, modern kitchen and toilets including a new toilet for the disabled.



The Town Office was upgraded in 2016 and there is now public access to the Town Office on the ground floor. There has been some general maintenance to the building this year and the upstairs room is now used both as an office and occasionally as a meeting room. There are longer term plans to improve the entrance hall and the toilets and to possibly reopen the ceiling of the council chamber to expose the original oak trusses.

Vandalism has been a problem this year. An aluminium rainwater pipe was wrenched away from the wall of the Queen Elizabeth School and thrown into the river in the week following the re-opening. This took place in the early hours and was caught on our CCTV. Unfortunately successful prosecution of offenders is difficult and the police have taken no action in this case. Graffiti has also been a problem and life ring buoys have been thrown into the river. The council is looking at the possibility of installing a more effective CCTV system for all its premises.



The project to upgrade the Judith's Field building to the same standard as the Queen Elizabeth School is now underway. The building was constructed as a pavilion for the old GODSPA sports field in 1985 and is in need of modernising and upgrading for new uses. £250,000 of S106 money has been contributed through the Romans' Edge Development towards the total cost of approximately £330,000. Work started on site in April and should be completed by the Autumn. The work includes a new metal roof, new kitchen and toilets, an extended main hall with two committee rooms and an external activity area. In the future it is hoped to provide a new public toilet. It is hoped construction of the skatepark will also begin shortly including lighting & seating.



## Planning Portfolio Update

### Influencing new development

During 2018/19, the Town Council has responded to 75 planning applications and subsequent revisions. The most significant have been more details about the new estate at Romans' Edge, proposals for an enormous glasshouse down Cow Lane (subsequently withdrawn) and a new estate of 59 homes at Dexter's Farm along the A1198. In total, the Romans' Edge and Dexter's Farm developments will add over 900 houses to Godmanchester in the next few years.

### Completion of our Neighbourhood Plan

In December 2017, we completed our Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan describes the aspirations for Godmanchester and contains policies to help us influence development. We have also listed several projects and actions which people said were important to help make the town an even better place to live, work and visit. Now that we have a Neighbourhood Plan, we will get 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy that developers pay to the District Council, rather than 15%, and can spend that on projects to benefit the town.

### New Local Plan to 2036

We expect the District Council will finalise their 'Local Plan to 2036' this spring. The plan shows which sites are broadly supported for development and for how many homes. The developments in Godmanchester are still as we expected - 753 at Romans' Edge (although developers have already got permission for more), 90 on the old RGE site and part of the public car park at Bridge Place, and 15 at Wigmore Farm. The proposal to redevelop Tyrells Marina has been removed, but we still hope that this derelict site will be re-developed.

### Transport Matters

The A14 building work is making good progress and once complete should lead to massive reductions in traffic through the town. However, we are concerned that the proposal for a third river crossing over the Ouse Valley from Wyton to the A14 is being reviewed again. We have concerns about the environmental implications of a new road across the valley running parallel to Cow Lane and the increase in traffic on the A1198 which will result.

Once the A14 viaduct across the railway and Brampton Road has been removed and the new A14 is open we plan to undertake a full transport study to establish where we have problems in the town, for example on congestion and parking and the future of the medieval bridge into Huntingdon.

## Environment Portfolio Update

The Environment Portfolio is tasked with the upkeep, maintenance and improvement of Godmanchester's open spaces, basically everything outdoors. The main areas are The Recreation Ground, Judith's Field, Devana Park, Buttermel Meadow, the Cemetery & Churchyard. The main jobs are looking after trees, fences, hedges and grass cutting. We organise frequent safety inspections on all of our play equipment, and then undertake the necessary repairs to keep them safe and useable. In addition, we undertake a full tree survey every 3 years, we maintain The War Memorial, park benches, 25 rubbish bins, lighting at play areas and dog poo bags. Our least enjoyable job is repairing the wanton damage caused by vandals. Unfortunately, if it can be wrecked there is a good chance someone will try. The time and cost to you, the local taxpayer, for repairs is an unnecessary burden on our resources.

### Actions & Achievements

Traditionally the bulk of the budget is spent on simple upkeep and maintenance tasks, such as grass cutting, hanging baskets, emptying rubbish bins and pruning and watering trees. This work is fulfilled within a maintenance contract at an annual cost of around £35,000. During 2018/19 we completed all of the high and medium priority work recommended in the triennial tree survey all in the first year! This proactive approach will save money in the longer term as there is less risk of branches falling and emergency work needed each time a problem arises. One potential major problem was averted when, after three series of tests, the unwelcome decision was made to remove the huge Plane tree that had stood at the entrance to the recreation ground for a couple of hundred years. However, every cloud has a silver lining, and the remaining specimen can now be seen in all its glory standing alone after having been hidden for so long. A replacement has been planted across from the original tree, in order to form a gateway once it has matured. As well as this new addition twelve new trees have been planted on the Recreation ground and on Queen's Walk, continuing the Town Council's plan to create an arboretum of interesting and exotic trees.

### Future Plans

A review of the hanging basket displays around the town has taken place which identified repairs & renewals necessary to make an even more attractive display this summer while increasing the total number to 35.

Major policy reviews have been conducted and the Memorial Trees and Benches Policy has been updated to include new sites to be available as most had been taken.

With the responsibility for managing the Cemetery the Environment Portfolio group plans to enhance the area with more flowering trees and shrubs to brighten it and make it a tranquil & pleasant place for reflection.

Mill Yard river steps and sluice, having been confirmed as in the ownership of the HDC, are looking to be the subject of some major renovation work with external funding options being investigated. While the Town Council had some years ago designs on refurbishment work in this area it never came to fruition due to uncertainty as to its ownership and therefore responsibility. The Town Council are looking forward to working with HDC and bodies such as Godmanchester in Bloom to deliver a worthy transformation.

In last year's report we commented on the ongoing problems of our river and its maintenance and the unfortunate inability

of the Environment Agency to help, due to their limited finances and resources. We are grateful therefore to the Godmanchester Community Association's for its intervention (via its Pollarding Society group), in undertaking the Floating Pennywort reduction as well as organising the desilting of the Mill Lade along the Causeway with a grant from the Looker Energy Environment Trust. The desilting work needs to be repeated regularly to ensure the viability of this important Town asset and, to this end, money will be reserved each year by the Town Council to enable us to repeat the exercise every 5- 6 years.

## Business Portfolio Update

The work of the Business Portfolio is to support and advise other council portfolio groups and to explore, debate and formulate recommendations to the Town Council on matters of process policy and administration.

In the past year the group has spent time on prioritising, rationalising and updating council policies and procedures to ensure that we comply with current legislation and advice. This has included supporting the town office staff and their considerable work involved in implementing GDPR, prioritising projects for the use of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts and awarding Community Grants.

Godmanchester Town Council have a great staff team. We now employ a full time Town Clerk, we are currently recruiting a new Deputy Clerk, we have an Admin Assistant, two facilities assistants and a street orderly.

The group oversaw the introduction of a time banking project in the town. This venture, although supported enthusiastically by its administrator did not make the impact or progress that had been hoped for. It also was unable to obtain the necessary grant funding essential to continue its activities into the coming year. With reluctance the closure of Time Bank in its present form was recommended.



An exciting development that is currently ongoing is the acquisition by the Town Council of the Community Plant and Tree Nursery. The green space that the Nursery currently occupies is owned by Huntingdonshire District Council, and as part of their rationalisation programme they plan to transfer the assets to Godmanchester. This project presents tremendous opportunities but clearly brings additional responsibilities and also has financial implications. In addition, there is the possibility of acquiring other parcels of land currently in the hands of the District Council; these are being investigated and carefully considered.