

Godmanchester Town Council

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NEWSLETTER July 2020

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2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT

The Mayor of Godmanchester's Foreword:



Writing this in week 12 of the Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown, it is easy to assume that nothing major has happened during the year, but 'nothing' could be further from the truth.

Your Council has been extremely busy on behalf of all Godmanchester citizens; and here we must note that our numbers have grown by nearly 2,000 since this time last year, largely due to the progress with the Romans' Edge development. It is essential that our new citizens should truly feel part of the whole town – even if they have not been there since this was a major Roman settlement! There are many positive aspects of this development, with efforts having been made in its design to foster a spirit of community – by the treatment of pedestrian areas, the creation of housing groups, the provision of a successful Primary School and the range of shops in the commercial hub. In addition, funds have been provided by the developer to assist with facilities for the whole town – through Section 106 (S106) funding and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

These funds and those from other granting bodies, such as Sports England, AMEY-CESPA and the Looker Environment Trust, have been used to refurbish buildings and improve our open spaces, including our river frontages – there are further details in the following portfolio reports. This has been achieved without recourse to our more limited precept funds.



And Lockdown has not meant that the Council has stopped working, nor the Portfolio Groups from identifying and planning many other improvements for your town. One major change has been our taking ownership of the Community Nursery in Park Lane from HDC, which was achieved on 1 April 2020 despite the Lockdown, and we are looking to vastly enhance its amenity to the community as both a commercial and a social facility.

While such capital improvements are very visible, we must not

overlook the ongoing costs of maintenance of existing facilities: keeping the grass trimmed, pruning and lopping trees, installing hanging baskets, and an on-going programme of planting new trees – often in conjunction with Godmanchester in Bloom volunteers. 'Standard' administration also continues, whether it be the sad duty of managing the Cemetery, coordinating bookings for our halls (currently on hold) or managing Health & Safety checks, especially for our play equipment. These budget elements all come from Council Tax and charges.



As Mayor, I have also been very grateful to

all who have supported my various charity events, which has helped to raise over £2000 for local groups, and I look forward to further events once Covid-19 limitations are lifted. There are plans for a garage sale in the summer and a quiz night later in the year.

There are many people that I must thank on your behalf, and I apologise if I overlook anybody. Clearly the Town Hall staff – the Town Clerk, the administrators and town wardens – who keep the town running smoothly; my fellow town councillors who put in hundreds of hours of unpaid work to develop your ideas, and give such good and considered advice; and my wife for her unwavering support and help in running charity functions. We should also recognise all those community groups



who serve in so many ways – Godmanchester in Bloom, the Community Association, those helping with Scouts and Guides and so on.

However, let me finish where I started, with the Covid-19 pandemic. This last few months has seen so much help coming out of the community for the community, and I offer a special thanks to the Community Timebank, to the Godmanchester Foodbank, and to the Godmanchester Covid-19 Mutual-Aid Group for their actions during the past months. With such strong community spirit we can achieve anything – and may it continue long after this pandemic is consigned to history.

Cllr Richard Taplin
Mayor of Godmanchester

PROPERTY GROUP NEWS

The Property Portfolio Group has another busy year with two major projects coming to fruition.

The Judith's Field Pavilion redevelopment was completed in November after a difficult building programme that had to deal with asbestos and a previously fire damaged roof.

The original building had not been upgraded since its construction in the early 1980s. Now it has a brand new modern look with a metal roof, white rendered walls and bifold doors opening onto the field.

The kitchen and toilets are "state of the art" and match the standard set during the upgrading of the Queen Elizabeth School buildings the year before. The new building is fully insulated to a very high standard in response to climate change and the necessity of reducing energy consumption.

There is a main hall with storage and a smaller room that is ideal for meetings. Bright modern colours have been used throughout. We have provided an outside drinking fountain to help reduce the number of plastic drink bottles being used on the field. We have an outside tap to facilitate watering all the new trees that have been planted

this year. The building work was partly funded from S106 money arising from the Romans' Edge Development. This was negotiated with the developer some years ago.

General maintenance work has continued to the grade 2 listed Town Hall including anti pigeon spikes and an upgrade of the toilet facilities. The Town Clerk has now moved into the upstairs office whilst Reception remains on the ground floor.

The skatepark was the second major project. After two years of engagement with different parts of the Godmanchester Community and keen skateboarders a design was finally agreed. Skateparks help to keep young people active especially those who are not so keen to participate in structured team sports.



and was ready for use in the summer holidays.

A spectacular opening event was held in August in perfect weather. Professional demonstrations were included and competitions for all ages. All with a great sound track.

We applied for grants from Sports England, WREN and AMEY Cespa.

Fortunately all the grant applications were successful with the Town Council funding the remaining costs.

We worked with Maverick, the skatepark specialists, to provide a concrete park that tries to meet the needs of all groups including skateboarders, scooter riders, BMX and in line skaters.

It was completed in record time

The skatepark has been a great success. Purpose designed floodlighting has allowed the park to be used all winter, weather permitting. It has become a focus for younger people in the town. We hope it will be a great help to the physical and mental health of the Godmanchester Community and also help the fight against obesity.

The Council has funded weekly, professional skatepark lessons to meet our obligations with Sports England and to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to improve their skills. 2020 was to have been the year that skateboarding became an Olympic sport

Contrary to the fears of some people there has been very little vandalism and it is noticeable that there has generally been great respect for each other amongst all the users.

Looking forward to 2021 our next project is the construction of a robust public toilet building with full access for the disabled and nappy changing facilities. This will also have a store room for landscape maintenance equipment.

The Covid 19 pandemic has meant that all our buildings are currently closed until restrictions are lifted.

BUSINESS GROUP NEWS

The Business Portfolio Group comprises 4 Councillors who are tasked with providing advice and support to the Town Clerk and other Portfolio Groups on issues including the Town Council Business Plan, Policy development and review, current and new Business Activities, Projects and Acquisitions, Grant disbursement, the Youth Council, Twinning and Tourism, Information Technology, and Communications.

The acquisition of the Godmanchester Community Nursery at Park Lane has been completed, a Business Plan produced for its future horticulture use and a Manager has been appointed and took up his appointment in June. During the Covid-19 restrictions limited essential work has continued. But we plan to be open for business as usual as soon we are able.

The Business Group is representing the Council alongside the Environment Agency, Huntingdon District Council, the Community Association and Godmanchester in Bloom, in a major ongoing project to restore the site at Mill Steps and install a Fish Pass. We are still in the project definition



stage but, when complete, the Town will acquire a new green space recreational facility providing an ecological boost for the Ouse, and enhancing the Town's potential interest and attraction for visitors

Twinning activities continued throughout the year including the Wertheim Fanfare Band visiting us for Gala Day and the Mayor, or a Council representative, visiting Gubbio, Szentendre and Wertheim.

Godmanchester's Youth Council continues to meet monthly in term time. This ensures that we stay connected to and remain aware of the views of our younger residents. The Youth Council has also represented the Town's young people at civic events

In the past year the Business Group has overseen revision of the Policy for awarding Grants, and the charging structure for the use of facilities in the newly renovated Judith's Field Pavilion and Queen Elisabeth School. We aim to ensure our facilities are well-used and earn their keep.

Lastly, we have streamlined our internal processes to help better deliver Council priorities. This has included management of the Town budget. Now, each Portfolio Group is accountable for funding its own areas of responsibility, and a Budget Advisory Panel has been established, responsible for coordinating overall budget management and assessing the Precept requirement. The Business Group provides the Chair of this Panel.

PLANNING AND TRANSPORT NEWS

INFLUENCING NEW DEVELOPMENT



The Town Council is consulted by the District Council and County Council (for waste and minerals) on planning matters. During 2019/20, the Town Council has responded to 63 planning applications and subsequent revisions.

The most significant applications were detailed plans about the new estates and landscaping at Romans' Edge. On all of them, we recommended refusal because we had concerns about over-development, inadequate landscaping and poor design not being in accordance with the approved Design Guide. We continue to try and get the developer to improve the ugly swales, complete the landscaping that was promised, replace dead and damaged trees and provide litter bins.

NEW LOCAL PLAN TO 2036



The District Council finalised their Local Plan to 2036 in spring 2019. The developments in Godmanchester are 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 was removed due to flood risk concerns, but we are pleased a planning application is progressing to redevelop this derelict site.

UPDATE OF OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

In December 2017, our Neighbourhood Plan was approved by the District Council. The Plan describes the aspirations for Godmanchester and contains policies to help us influence development. We plan to update our Neighbourhood Plan to ensure conformity with the new Local Plan.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN GODMANCHESTER

Over the next few years, we may see nearly 1200 new homes completed in Godmanchester. We will get money from the developers that we can use to help improve the town, for example the improvements to the Judith's Field Pavilion partly paid from by money from Romans' Edge.

TRANSPORT MATTERS

The main A14 bypass around Godmanchester A14 has opened and, once the new road across Mill Common to the ring road is complete, should lead to massive reductions in traffic through the town. We plan to undertake a full transport study to establish where we have problems, for example on congestion and parking and the future of the medieval bridge into Huntingdon.

The Town Council has consistently opposed the proposal by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to build an elevated road across our treasured Godmanchester Meadows. As a partner member of the Great Ouse Valley Trust and with the support of our district and county councillors our efforts have been rewarded. We are very pleased to report that the road proposal has now been scrapped. New studies will now look at changes to the A141 and also traffic movement around St Ives.



ENVIRONMENT NEWS

The Environment Portfolio Group of the Town Council are responsible for the maintenance and improvement of Godmanchester's external environment. This includes open areas such as the Recreation Ground and Judith's Field - incorporating children's play areas where we undertake quarterly safety inspections - but also the Cemetery and the closed Churchyard. Street furniture - benches, half the rubbish bins (the remainder are serviced by HDC), lighting and hanging baskets - but not the planters kindly provided by Godmanchester in Bloom.

The major part of our annual budget is spent on regular grass cutting, tree pruning and watering etc; this took some £36,000 of our budget in 2019/20. Additional expenditure has been associated with new planting at Judith's Field - overseen by Cllr Campbell - and improvements to the new Skatepark which was masterminded by the Property Portfolio, but paid for by the Environment Portfolio. On Queen's Walk we have rationalised the street furniture, including installing a boot scraper, and started to create an adult exercise area. Additional equipment will be installed here in the coming year and, if successful, we will look to creating similar facilities elsewhere to encourage exercise and improve the wellbeing of the community. We have also taken the opportunity to review and replace safety surfaces under play equipment in both areas, and a new seesaw is soon to be installed at Queen's Walk play area.

The Community Association's work on desilting the Causeway area, and using the spoil to regenerate the Recreation Area, has been

much appreciated, and we thank them and the Looker Environment Foundation for this work. Volunteers have also helped to clear areas of the osier beds, and a consortium led by HDC and involving the Environment Agency, the A14 Legacy Fund and the Town Council is currently planning on installing a fish ladder by the Mill Yard Sluice, which will also allow us to transform the Mill Yard Steps area into a facility for the community. This is a very exciting opportunity, and may possibly lead to other improvements along the Mill Lade and around the Recreation Ground. In due course we are also looking to replace LogWorld with a more ambitious and 'flood-proofed' structure. At the other end of town we have ambitious plans to transform the Cemetery from a somewhat bland environment into a true garden of rest, with additional seating areas and planting to beautify this location. Some additional flowering trees have already been planted, albeit they will need a few years to achieve their full potential.

The external environment is an essential part of our town, and all the more important during the current Covid-19 epidemic that is keeping so many at - or close to - home. If you feel that there are other areas which could benefit from our attention, please contact us via the Town Clerk.



GODMANCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS

(NB the information supplied for the year ending 31.3.20 is from unaudited accounts)

RECEIPTS

Year ending 31.3.19		Year Ending 31.3.20	<i>Budget</i> 2020-21
£28,056.73	QES	£24,736	£25,000
£353.75	JF	£4,472	£20,000
£967.15	Interest	£3,093	£2,000
£5,419.46	Other	£3,239	£1,000
£900.00	Allotments	£450	£900
£202,300.00	Precept	£269,160	£284,646
£10,426.00	Grants received	£159,100	
£10,070.00	Cemetery	£12,141	£8,000
£72,907.70	VAT recovered	£113,580	£48,000
£224,068.65	CIL income	£698,425	£98,000
	S106	£250,000	
<u>£555,469.44</u>	TOTAL RECEIPTS	<u>£1,538,396</u>	<u>£487,546</u>

PAYMENTS

Year ending 31.3.19		Year Ending 31.3.20	<i>Budget</i> 2020-21
£101,556.65	Town Office Admin	£84,353	£144,060
£10,208.53	Business Admin	£4,868	£9,734
£3,488.82	Insurance	£4,185	£4,500
£3,084.27	Civic Costs	£2,617	£3,050
£1,943.47	Communication & Tourism	£6,660	£13,200
£10,226.71	Grants Awarded	£8,390	£12,750
£-	Contribs to outside bodies	£1,000	£11,000
	Timebank	£1,920	
£7,574.07	Town Hall (facilities mgmt)	£4,403	£13,040
£106,912.10	QES (facilities mgmt)	£28,297.00	£16,040
£9,117.23	Judith's Field (facilities mgmt)	£363,873.00	£109,960
£1,896.14	Other Property	£306.00	£500
£25,595.16	Environment	£204,788.00	£29,600
£3,205.40	Recreation areas/facilities	£1,300.00	£18,500
£900.00	Allotments	£900.00	£900
£34,213.40	Grounds Maintenance	£32,113	£42,000
£37,627.80	VAT - recoverable	£113,580	£59,095
	Churchyard & Cemetery	£8,795	£8,000
	Community Nursery	£2,175	£25,000
	Mill Steps		£40,000
<u>£357,549.75</u>	TOTAL PAYMENTS	<u>£874,523</u>	<u>£560,929.00</u>

Balance as at 1.4.19	£361,130.00
Add Receipts	£1,538,396.00
	£1,899,526.00
Less payments	£874,523.00
BALANCE as at 31.3.20	£1,025,003.00

Funds Represented by:	
Unity Trust a/cs	£1,015,539.45
Cash in hand	£19.84

TOTAL FUNDS £1,015,559.29