

# Godmanchester Town Council

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## 2020/21 ANNUAL REPORT BY THE MAYOR OF GODMANCHESTER



Clearly the major event over the past 12 months has been the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. While this has affected all countries to a greater or lesser extent - and our thoughts go out to our twin towns and their losses - the UK has been hit very hard, and the current death toll does not reflect the long-term effects on those whose lives have been badly diminished by enforced isolation and reduced human contact.

However, the Godmanchester community pulled together strongly to help cope with the pandemic. We established a network of helpers across the town, so that each street had one or more individuals willing to collect shopping and medication for those neighbours who were self-isolating. Many tasks were undertaken by the Godmanchester Community Timebank, and the Godmanchester Foodbank also ensured that individuals and families did not go hungry. The Town Council was central to coordinating such effort, and for obtaining a £5,000 hardship grant for those in need. Many households also helped to produce items of personal protective equipment for the NHS (hospital gowns, trousers and facemasks), and the Council is grateful to everyone who contributed to this initiative. Following our first national vaccination on 8 December 2020, by mid-April 2021 over 32 million people have had a first dose, and 8 million of those both doses, of the vaccine. By the time you read this, all those living in Godmanchester in the top 4 tiers of risk will have had both vaccinations, provided by our excellent local medical centres.

We have all had to adjust to new ways of working, and this is equally true of the Town Council. Town Hall staff rapidly moved to working from home; the external Council staff have been redeployed helping to bring our newly-acquired Plant Nursery into operation; and all councillors have been highly active (via some 100 Zoom meetings and myriad reports) in continuing their work for the community. None of our staff were laid off or furloughed. I will not cover all that has been achieved despite Lockdown, which you can read in the individual Portfolio reports, but the pace has been maintained through the year. The Carnival, Gala and Christmas Market all had to be cancelled but, to lift spirits over Christmas, a working group of councillors arranged for special illuminations on the Town Hall, the which were very well received by the community and those from further afield.

As if the pandemic was not enough, major flooding was caused by exceptionally heavy rainfall on 23 December 2020. While river flood defences held, surface water inundated a number of houses and cut off some roads for a number of days. On the positive side, the same inspirational community spirit led to many individuals - including councillors and staff - coming out in the middle of the night to help



less fortunate neighbours with filling sand bags, pumping out water, and moving furniture to upper floors.

With an increasing proportion of our population vaccinated, we look forward to the possibility of a return to a more 'normal' life. We have many major improvements planned for the coming year, aimed at providing more facilities for all sectors of the community. Once the A1307 roadworks in Huntingdon are complete - and road traffic has assumed a steady state - we will be looking at means of improving the street-side environment; our customary beautiful floral hanging baskets will be installed in the summer. We also recognise that Godmanchester has grown at speed, and we are now some 30% larger in both population and housing terms than 3 years ago.

It is essential that we integrate all our new residents into the living heart of the Town and, to this end, councillors have continued to push extremely hard to ensure that all new developments provide high-quality accommodation and facilities for its residents.

If you have any queries over this report, please contact the Town Clerk - Vicky Pryce - by email or phone, or come to our first face-to-face Town Council meeting provisionally scheduled for 24 June.

As my current term of office draws to a close, I cannot over-emphasise my pride in what your Town Council and its employees have achieved for Godmanchester during an unprecedentedly difficult time - and I wish my successor a less 'interesting' mayoral year!



## ENVIRONMENT GROUP NEWS

The Environment Portfolio group of the Town Council is 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 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.

A large part of our annual budget is spent on regular grass cutting, tree pruning and watering etc; this took some £33,000 of our budget in 2020/21.

Additional expenditure has been associated with the start of the much-needed rejuvenation of our osiers beds, the wild area beyond the recreation ground, with our contractors GTS cutting down willows obstructing the river and the Community Association's Volunteer Group providing the muscle and equipment to clear the areas afterwards. The volunteers also removed decades of accumulated



deadwood, and planted new shrubs and plants provided by us. We also purchased 11 black poplar trees that were planted by our tree warden Cllr. Graham Campbell and his wife Carlie.

The Adult Gym on Queen's Walk is now complete with the addition of the final piece, an upper body workout for wheelchair users. This facility is free to use and hopes to promote fitness and wellbeing for those who use it. There have also been repairs undertaken to the play area fencing adjacent to it.

A major project over the past year has been the design, development and work associated with gaining Huntingdonshire District Council approval and planning permission for Skyworld, our new climbing structure on the Recreation Ground. This is scheduled for installation at the end of July 2021 and is intended to provide an exciting and challenging attraction for a family outing within walking distance. There are also plans afoot to upgrade our other play

areas with the first work starting soon at Judith's Field, when we will be replacing and enlarging the existing toddler fenced play area in readiness for new and exciting equipment for our younger children.



## BUSINESS GROUP NEWS

Against the demanding backdrop of working within strict Covid-19 guidelines, the Business Group has continued to provide recommendations and guidance to the Town Clerk and Council on issues ranging from overseeing the Town Community Nursery, Project development and acquisition, Grant disbursement, Information Technology, and Communications to involvement with the Youth Council and the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Twinning Association. In addition, the Business Group chairs the Council Budget Advisory Panel and thus helps to produce the annual Town Budget. We were delighted that, despite the numerous projects underway, we were able to limit the increase in Precept to 2% - 4p a day for a Band-D property.

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 have also attended a Town Council meeting via Zoom and gave us a thoroughly informative presentation of their work and views.

The Group was delighted to both negotiate a

Grant, which is helping to develop expansion of Community Nursery operations including the acquisition of new working and visitor facilities, and to recommend the award of grants to a range of causes including the Magpas air ambulance, Camsar, Bloodrunners, Young



Comrades, Godmanchester in Bloom, and the Godmanchester Community Association. The Group also spearheaded the acquisition of 3 fully automatic Defibrillators, which are being installed with 24/7 public access at Judith's Field, the Nursery and at School Hill. Group training sessions will be offered when Covid constraints allow, and the Godmanchester

First Responder is supporting us by ensuring continuing serviceability.

The Business Group is delighted that the long-anticipated work at Mill Steps is about to commence. It will provide not only a Pass, through which fish and eels can traverse upstream to spawn, but also the creation of an appealing area where the old Town Mill once stood. We believe that, when complete, this will be an attractive landscape and relaxing natural area for our Town and its many visitors to enjoy.



## PLANNING AND TRANSPORT GROUP NEWS

### INFLUENCING NEW DEVELOPMENT

The Town Council is consulted on planning matters by the District Council and County Council (for waste and minerals). During 2020/21, the Town Council has responded to 56 planning applications and subsequent revisions.

The most significant applications were further detailed plans about the new estates and landscaping at Romans' Edge. On most of these, 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 have spoken to the developer of 59 social housing units behind Cardinal Distribution Park and expressed our concerns about layout, housing density and noise attenuation measures.

We continue to work with the developer of the main Romans Edge site to improve the swales, complete the landscaping and allotments, replace dead and damaged trees and provide and empty litter bins.

### 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 will see more new homes completed in Godmanchester, including at RGE Engineering, Dexter's Farm and - hopefully - at Tyrells Marina which is currently derelict and an eyesore. These developments will also generate funds from the developers (Community Infrastructure Levy) that we can use to help improve the town.

### TRANSPORT MATTERS

The main A14 bypass around Godmanchester has opened and, once the new road across Mill

Common to the ring road is complete, should lead to major reductions in traffic through the town. We then plan to undertake a full transport study to establish where we have traffic problems in the town - for example on road congestion and insufficient parking.

We have advised the County Council (CCC) that it is too soon to consult residents and businesses on a possible trial closure of the road bridge to Huntingdon, because we wish to see how traffic settles down after the completion of the A1307 work and post Covid-19. CCC say they can only allow emergency vehicles and cycles over the bridge because of highway planning limitations, as a result of which buses cannot also use it, and bus services into Godmanchester would deteriorate.

We are pleased that the proposal for a third river crossing over the Ouse Valley from Wyton to the A14 has been dropped.

We had 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 could result.

### CHRISTMAS FLOODING

Heavy rain just before Christmas 2020 caused widespread flooding. Fortunately the new river defences held back river water protecting the old town but, sadly, many homes, roads and businesses were affected by surface water.

Some eight properties were flooded internally, while others were surrounded by water and a few roads were blocked for several days. We suspect that the flooding was exacerbated by a lack of maintenance of road drains, and ditches becoming filled with debris and silt.

We are very grateful to all the local volunteers who came out and helped their neighbours during the crisis. Huntingdonshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council are currently undertaking an investigation (due to be published in the summer) which should lead to improvements in the case of future extreme weather events.

## PROPERTY GROUP NEWS

The Property Portfolio Group has continued to look after and maintain the Queen Elizabeth School, the Town Hall and the Judith's Field Pavilion during the pandemic. The public toilet on School Hill has been kept open when permitted under Government guidelines. All other facilities have been closed.

The Skatepark has been forced to close during lockdown periods but is now open with social distancing.

A defibrillator has been added to the Judith's Field pavilion and a further defibrillator will be fixed to the wall of the Queen Elizabeth School as soon as listed building consent is granted.

Our buildings are all covered by CCTV and a new policy document on CCTV usage is being prepared

A new public toilet with facilities for the disabled and for baby changing will be constructed during May at Judith's Field. There will also be a store room for grounds maintenance equipment.

Throughout the year the council has

worked hard to procure a new Multi Wheel Fun Track on the old BMX area on Judith's Field. Following a public announcement a working group was formed comprising enthusiasts, families and three town councillors to hear presentations from potential specialist contractors and to make recommendations. The idea is to provide a family friendly facility to appeal to all ages and all skill levels. The track will make an important contribution to both the physical and mental health of the community and will complement the existing skatepark. It had originally been hoped to open the new track in time for the summer holidays. However, the process has meant that construction now looks unlikely to be commenced before the Autumn.

Litter has continued to be major problem on all council sites in spite of valiant efforts by many councillors and volunteers to keep our town clean and beautiful. It is hoped to organise a major community awareness campaign to address the problem.



# GODMANCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS

(NB the information supplied for the year ending 31.3.21 is from unaudited accounts)

## RECEIPTS

Year ending 31.3.20		Year Ending 31.3.21	Budget 2021-22
£24,736	QES	-£63	£25,000
£4,472	JF	£941	£20,000
£3,093	Interest	£556	£500
£3,239	Other	£3,508	£600
£450	Allotments	£1,350	£950
£269,160	Precept	£284,646	£296,748
£159,100	Grants received	£5,480	£0
£12,141	Cemetery	£12,576	£10,000
£113,580	VAT recovered	£27,764	£0
£698,425	CIL income	£3,060	£31,671
£250,000	S106	£0	£0
£0	Nursery Sales	£11,804	£10,000
£0	Nursery Contributions	£1,612	£1,612
<u>£1,538,396</u>	<b>TOTAL RECEIPTS</b>	<u>£353,234</u>	<u>£397,081</u>

## PAYMENTS

Year ending 31.3.20		Year Ending 31.3.21	Budget 2021-22
£84,353	Town Office Admin	£117,191	£164,228
£4,868	Business Admin	£3,234	£5,200
£4,185	Insurance	£4,246	£4,500
£2,617	Civic Costs	£206	£3,050
£6,660	Communication & Tourism	£7,492	£8,500
£8,390	Grants Awarded	£4,039	£8,250
£1,000	Contribs to outside bodies	£8,991	£1,000
£1,920	Timebank	£0	£0
£4,403	Town Hall	£0	£5,215
£28,297	QES	£11,161	£17,010
£363,873	Judith's Field	£18,320	£10,600
£306	Other Property	£5,793	£4,000
£204,788	Environment	£15,472	£27,500
£1,300	Recreation areas/facilities	£14,436	£11,000
£900	Allotments	£900	£950
£32,113	Grounds Maintenance	£29,986	£49,000
£113,580	VAT - recoverable	£27,764	£5,000
£8,795	Churchyard & Cemetery	£3,601	£8,800
£2,175	Community Nursery	£37,263	£25,000
£0	Capital Projects (CIL)	£0	£426,000
<u>£874,523</u>	<b>TOTAL PAYMENTS</b>	<u>£310,095</u>	<u>£784,803</u>

Vat Claimed £27,764.32 Vat Due £10,972.46

Balance as at 1.4.20	£1,015,559.29	Funds Represented by:	
Add Receipts	£353,234.00	Unity Trust a/cs	£1,058,156.57
	£1,368,793.29	Cash in hand	£2.92
Less payments	£310,095.00		
Sundry Creditors	£538.80		
<b>BALANCE as at 31.3.21</b>	<b>£1,058,159.49</b>	<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<b>£1,058,159.49</b>