



Chard Town Council

HOLYROOD LACE MILL, HOLYROOD STREET, CHARD, SOMERSET TA20 2YA

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Mayor: Cllr John Malcolm Town Clerk: John Furze

Annual Report of the Council - 2007.

Mayor's Annual Report to the Town 2006/7

As I am sure that you will be aware, 2006/7 has been a difficult time for Chard Town Council as it was faced with two tribunals – one from the Standards Board for England, the authority that regulates the conduct of Councillors and an Employment Tribunal, both of which have been well aired in the Press. There has also been a claim by the Guildhall Developer for some £700,000. Not surprisingly, these matters dominated thinking and meetings for much of the year.

In accordance with a decision taken a year ago, your Council has applied for recognition as a Quality Council. This means that your Council will be recognised as operating to a high standard. To achieve this award, various procedures and processes have had to be altered or improved. Matters such as agendas, minutes, reports, the amendment of Standing Orders, and the conduct of meetings have all had to be changed. Time has had to be spent by the staff on training courses and on making all the numerous adjustments that were necessary. The decision as to whether or not Chard has been granted Quality status should be announced very shortly. Why does Chard want this recognition? You will be aware of the impending reorganisation of local government. Whichever way the matter is resolved, it is the Government's declared intention to pass more decision making to Town and Parish Councils that have achieved the Quality Council status and this is likely to provide more funds for Chard and hopefully help to keep Council Tax under control.

As I have already said, the beginning of the year was dominated by a claim from the Guildhall Developer for a sum in excess of £700,000 for what he claimed was unpaid work. Confident in the professional advice we received both from our Lawyers and our Quantity Surveyors, we told the Developer to sue us if he had a case. Gradually he shifted his position and we were finally able to settle for £23,000, a figure very close to what we believed to be outstanding. This was a great result for Chard, particularly when you

consider the problems associated with Bath Spa, the Scottish Assembly and Wembley Stadium.

Over the years the Guildhall has had its 'knockers'. I am pleased to be able to report the following progress for the year 2006/7:

- (a) Bookings – up 21%
- (b) Usage – 26% increase (Number of hours used)
- (c) Revenue – 29% increase.

I am pleased to report the year 2007/8 will see the Guildhall licensed for marriages and continue to be a venue for receptions.

During the year the Guildhall has been subjected to a full Quinquennial Inspection designed to highlight deficiencies and suggest matters that require attention. It is the policy of the Council to implement any recommendations made by the Inspector. In his report, the Inspector praised the overall standard of the building, however, he did find:

- (a) There is some slight penetration of water in one corner of the Mayor's Parlour during severe weather.
- (b) There is damp in the Auditorium party wall – suggestions have been made how to remedy this problem and the necessary remedial action is already being planned.
- (c) On one occasion during severe weather in late 2006 water got into a service duct causing flooding in the Dressing Rooms. The full inspection failed to find why this might have happened. This is probably because at the time, the Caretaker carried out his own inspection and removed a quantity of builder's rubble from the ducts. There has been much severe weather since, but no repeat incidents of flooding, so we hope that the problem has been solved.

The success of the Guildhall reflects the hard work and dedication of the staff under the management of Mrs Sandra Hutchings. Naturally there are still some teething problems. For example, as the Guildhall usage increases there is a need for more caretaking cover. Towards the end of 2006, the booking system manifested several problems which have now been corrected. We apologise for any inconvenience caused and look forward to a successful 2007/8.

Finally under this section, I am pleased to be able to report that Chard Town Council has completed the purchase of Watts Brothers Store. A survey of the premises concluded that the general condition of the building is much better than expected. It will be used for storage and for other purposes.

Sadly for Chard, 2006 included two Tribunal hearings, the outcome of both have been well-rehearsed in the press. The preparatory work for these Tribunals took up hours of valuable time, including telephone conversations and meetings with our legal advisers. The net result was to divert the attention of the Council away from its day-to-day tasks. The tribunals are now over and I hope all those matters are behind us and that the incoming Council will be free to drive Chard forward.

The Amenities Team, under their energetic manager Andrew Hensher, has continued their work to improve the Town. The streets are regularly cleaned and to a high standard. Things are spoilt, however, by fly tippers dumping their rubbish in the streets, rather than

taking their black bags to the tip. The identities of some of the people responsible are known. Evidence has been forwarded to SSDC by the Council with a request the tippers be prosecuted.

Tonight, I particularly want to talk about the cemetery, the allotments and Britain in Bloom. Chard Town Council often receives favourable comments about the high standard of maintenance in the cemetery. Unfortunately, it is currently running at a loss of some £10,000 per annum. To help redress the situation, cemetery fees have been increased for 2007/8 and are to be further reviewed for 2009/10. Before the charges were increased, staff conducted a review of charges as levied by neighbouring authorities. Such a comparison shows that Chard cemetery is still excellent value for money.

Chard allotments are leased from a local farmer who reviews his rent every three years. 2007 is such a year and the Council will be passing on any rent increases to its allotment holders in October 2008. Under the agreement, Chard Council has to give one-year's notice of any proposed rent increases. We are grateful to Wessex Water for all their help and advice on how water can be supplied to the allotments. As a matter of fact the Council does not have a statutory duty to supply water to the allotments, but is pleased to help

In 2006, competing in the Britain in Bloom Competition, Chard achieved a silver-gilt award. This was an excellent result when you look at the size of the towns that Chard is competing against. In the judgment we were told the only reason we did not win a gold was because the judges saw a lack of community involvement. For 2007, and to answer this criticism, a group has been formed called 'Chard in Bloom' to develop community involvement and to try and win that elusive gold medal. If you, or any one you know, would be interested in joining this group, please have a word with the Amenities Manager at the end of the Meeting.

There are some other matters that I wish to bring to your attention, but not in any particular order. Chard TIC- Tourist Information Office. Chard TIC has a high turnover of contacts and is regarded as the busiest in South Somerset. It receives a small grant from SSDC, but relies heavily upon volunteer helpers to remain open. At the present time the TIC costs £17,000 per year to remain open. One of the tasks of the new Council will be to review the future, and the structure, of the TIC.

In 2006/7 Chard has received start up grants from our two County Councillors, Jill Shortland and Paul Buchanan out of their Community Funds. Jill has supported Stress testing for Christmas Lights £560, Christmas Lights Display £1000, TIC/Guildhall uniforms £750, Chard Young People's Centre £500, Chard Disability Action Group £200, £340 for money for trees to be spent in association with Chard in Bloom and the Community. Paul has given £1000 for Christmas Lights display, Avishayes pool fund £500, the cinema screen in the Guildhall £500, Chard in Bloom seed money £500, Chard Schools £1000, the Portuguese Association £500 and Chard Young peoples Centre £425. The Town is grateful to our County Councillors for their pump-priming support.

A new departure for 2006 was that the Christmas Lights were put up, operated and taken down by an independent Xmas Lights Committee. They ran several successful fund raising events in 2006 and will be doing the same in 2007. We thank all those involved for their work and commend them on their enthusiasm. Please support their fund-raising efforts so that the display in 2007 will be the best ever.

The 2006 Carnival was one of the largest in recent years and raised more money for charity as a result. This event was witnessed by visiting Mayors, yes, including Bridgwater, and the High Sheriff of Somerset. If there is to be a Carnival in 2007, volunteers are urgently needed to fulfil the role of marshalls – an essential component of Carnivals. Please help if you can.

On a personal note, Barbara and I have decided to retire from Council work. We were astonished when we realised that between us we have very nearly 30 years service to this town. We want to take this opportunity to thank Chard for giving us the opportunity to serve. I want to thank my Chaplain, the Rev Marilyn Tricker, who attended nearly every meeting of the Town Council and gave us some stimulating thoughts for the day. I want to thank all of the Councillors for their hard work in the last year, and I particularly want to thank the Town Clerk and the Deputy Mayor for their support, especially when I was away ill. Finally, I want to thank all staff for their hard work, the results of their efforts can be seen all around the Town. Barbara and I wish the new Council every success as they strive to build on what has already been achieved. The Town clerk and Departmental Managers are available to answer any queries that you may have at the end of the evening.

John D Malcolm
Mayor of Chard

Town Clerk's Report

The end of my first year as Clerk to this Council coincides with the end of the current Council. On 3rd May 2007 a new Council will be elected for a four-year period. New Councillors bring new opportunities to progress the development of the town and I, together with all the Council's staff, look forward to working with the new Council.

The Mayor in his report mentions some of the changes the Council has embraced in the last twelve months. It is to every Councillors credit that I have been empowered to implement all these changes, some of which have been quite painful for them, in order to prepare the Council for elevation to 'Quality' status. Hopefully, the decision to confer that status upon the Council will be made soon. It should not be understated just how painful some of these changes have been. 'We have always done it this way' and 'Why is it necessary' have been calls and comments heard but it is fair to say that, mostly, Councillors have given me one-hundred per cent support in changing the style of the Council in what in reality has been a very short time. It is also to Councillors credit that they have unanimously opted not to receive any allowance or expenses for their duties performed within the town.

The two Tribunals and the Guildhall settlement have taken a large amount of my time and involved me in many meetings and phone calls. All three have been resolved and the Council can hopefully move on to the more important, but equally urgent task, of developing the town and preparing it for the next decade.

Chard is wonderfully placed both geographically and strategically within the County. The impending re-organisation of local government will, I believe, create problems for many but equally some golden opportunities for Chard. It is my declared aim to position Chard to take full advantage of all opportunities which will inevitably present themselves.

The workforce of the Council has also undergone some radical reshaping and restructuring in the last twelve months and, aided by my Senior Management Team and supported by the members of the Finance and Personnel Committee, I have been able to reshape the workforce to cope with the increased demands being placed upon it.

For the future there are some difficult problems for the new Council to grapple with. Not least of which is does the town wish to continue funding a Tourism Information Centre or should it be funded by the private sector that inevitably makes the most from Tourism? Is it a public facility and if so how much is Chard willing to subsidise its operation?

In the short term I wish to gain the highly acclaimed Investors in People accreditation for the Council. This award sends a very clear message to all regarding the quality and standard of the Council as an employer, something I take very seriously.

I also want to obtain Green Flag status for Chard's flagship park; Jocelyn Park. With our Amenities Department supported by the 'Chard in Bloom' committee and hopefully some resident involvement I see no reason why Chard should not be able to gain this award – only the second in the District.

My first year has been challenging and very much as I expected. Hopefully, my second will see a change from simply being 'reactive' to being more 'proactive' and achieving more for Chard.

John Furze
Town Clerk

Organisation and Accountability

The Town Council has fifteen elected members returned from five wards each with three members. The Council Committees are Amenities, Guildhall & Tourism, Planning & Highways and Finance, Personnel & Licensing – although at present the Council does not have any licensing responsibility. Working Parties, Action Groups and Sub-Committees are evolved as required.

All meetings of the Council and its Committees are open to the public and press to attend. There are a few times during the year when by resolution in accordance with the requirements of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press

are excluded from a particular agenda item and these are usually, but not restricted to, matters such as 'Staff in Confidence' or for 'Commercial in Confidence'. At each meeting time is set aside, usually fifteen minutes, before the meeting starts for members of the public to address, make statements or ask questions of the Council.

At the end of each financial year the accounts of the Council are available for public inspection for a period of twenty-one working days. This period is advertised and facilities are made available for members of the public to peruse and examine the Council's accounts.

Councillors

The current Councillors for Chard Town Council are:-

Avishayes Ward

Mrs C A Morrison	Liberal Democrat
Mrs A Spencer	UK Independence Party
Mrs R T Wickenden	Independent

Combe Ward

Mrs B M Mooney	Liberal Democrat
Mr M J Wale	Conservative
Mr D R Hill	Conservative

Crimchard Ward

Mrs J L Smith	Liberal Democrat
Mr J S Evans	Conservative
Miss D R Goldsmith	Liberal Democrat

Holyrood Ward

Mrs S P Wyatt	Independent
Mr P D C Fitzgerald	Independent
Mr D J Orchard	Liberal Democrat

Jocelyn Ward

Mr J D Malcolm*	Liberal Democrat
Mr D M Bulmer	Independent
Mrs J C Shortland	Liberal Democrat

* Cllr J D Malcolm is Chairman of the Council which carries with it the title of Mayor of Chard

It should be noted that all Councillors retire in May 2007 and a new Council will be elected on Thursday 3rd May 2007.

Details of Councillor's addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses may be obtained on request from the Town Clerk and are also available on the Chard Town Council website – www.chard.gov.uk under the page 'Council Information Point'.

Council Officers

The senior officers of Chard Town Council are:-

Town Clerk	John Furze	john.furze@chard.gov.uk
Responsible Finance Officer	Terry Cutler	terry.cutler@chard.gov.uk
Office Manager	Sandra Pittwood	sandra.pittwood@chard.gov.uk
Guildhall Manager	Sandra Hutchings	Sandra.hutchings@chard.gov.uk
Amenities Manager	Andrew Hensher	Andrew.hensher@chard.gov.uk

Officers may be contacted through the Town Clerk at the Council Offices situated in Holyrood Lace Mill, Holyrood Street, Chard Somerset TA20 2YA. Phone 01460-260-378 Fax 01460-260-372 or by email at the addresses show opposite their name.

Information about the Council may be viewed on the official website www.chard.gov.uk. This details all Council and Committee meetings together with agendas and minutes.

Finance

The precept for the year 2006/7 was set at £466,711 equating to a precept of 109.01 for Band D properties. For 2007/8 the precept has been increased by 5.8% to £493,871 equating to a precept of £113.85 for Band D properties. The Town Precept continues to be in line with other towns of similar size within the South-West Region.

The Town Council has complied fully with the Audit Regulations and appoints professional Internal and External Auditors. Accounts for the previous year have been certified by the District Auditor.

Council Tax

Council Tax for the three Local Authorities responsible for Chard have been set for the year 2007/8 at the following levels:-

£113.85 for Chard Town Council
£135.85 for South Somerset District Council
£963.39 for Somerset County Council
£147.17 for Avon & Somerset Police Authority
£63.45 for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue
£1423.71 in total
Based on Band D Properties

Summary of Audited Accounts for 2005/6

Item	Expenditure	Income
Revenue Activities	£'000	£'000
Grounds & Maintenance	162	76
Street Cleaning	47	47
Burial	22	10
Allotments	2	2
Guildhall (inc loan Acc)	143	27
Tourist Information	37	28
Support Services	142	4
Precept	0	406
Other Services	27	6
Capital Activities	114	5
Total	696	611

The forecasted Accounts for the year ending April 2007 are as follows but it should be noted that these figures have not been audited and are only 'forecasts' and will probably change when the Audited Accounts will be presented to Council in the Summer of 2007.

Item	Expenditure	Income
Revenue Activities	£'000	£'000
Grounds & Maintenance	115	14
Street Cleaning	49	49
Burial	22	16
Allotments	1	2
Guildhall	163	33
Tourist Information	31	23
Support Services	172	7
Precept	0	467
Other Services	26	7
Capital Activities	81	8
Total	660	626

Other Legal Requirements

Chard Town Council is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998, The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Model Scheme) and has adopted the Model Code of Conduct for the conduct of Councillors in 2002.

John Furze
Town Clerk