



# **CHARD TOWN COUNCIL**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2008**

# **Mayor's Annual Report**

The end of this Council Year was marred by the sad and sudden death of our dear friend and colleague Cllr Jean Smith who passed away on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2008. Jean will be greatly missed by all who knew, and worked with her.

Our Council year started with a civic reception where Council received, its Quality Council certificate and Constable Bill Geddes our Beat Manager for Avon & Somerset Constabulary - awarded the Queens Police Medal, in the New Year's Honours list.

During this year the Town Clerk and I have attended meetings with surrounding parishes talking to them about clustering for the provision of services. I'm delighted to say we were both received with interest and respect and I am sure we shall hear much more of this as the initiative develops and Council grapples with the decisions and choices which become available. This type of council development would not be possible were Chard not a Quality Council with a qualified clerk.

After the years of turbulence within the Council it was important to have a period of stability and consolidation. A number of measures have been put in place to achieve this. The long running negotiations for the sale of a piece of land at Cedar Close were, at last, successfully completed. There are plans for the future, of which perhaps the most pressing is the need to secure suitable land for a new town cemetery. This is the unanimous wish of members and the Council will examine all available avenues to achieve this.

Talking of the Cemetery brings me rather neatly to our Amenities Department team. They have again out performed their colleagues at District Council when it comes to their street cleaning role. This proves the worth of a local agreement, this one with the District Council, which provides the service locally and is accountable not only to you but to the District Council as well.

Amenities and your Council were also involved with Britain in Bloom and last year achieved silver gilt status together with three other awards. All of this would not have been possible without the assistance of Chard in Bloom – an organisation set up to work together with the Council for the enhancement of the town. This is a good example of members of our community working with the Council to improve our town.

Another example of this type of partnership is the Bampton Avenue Residents Association who have worked with the Council and raised money to refurbish and modernise a play area. We must not forget Christmas Lights Committee who, under the leadership of Jill Watts, light up the town so well for all of us to enjoy at Christmas.

This 'working together' also involves the volunteers to run the Council's Tourist Information Centre. We now have fourteen volunteers who give advice and assistance to visitors and townsfolk alike and without them we could not run this valued facility for our Town. I must also pay tribute to other volunteers who

assist the council in a wide variety of ways not least of which monitoring the condition of our public rights of way – thank you one and all.

The Guildhall continues to be the subject of controversy – albeit lately more concerning its usage than its existence. I was not a member of the Town Council when in the latter part of the last century the brave and visionary decision was made to go ahead with the refurbishment. I have always taken an objective view and when you remember the project cost something like £2.2 million of which £1.8 million was a gift from heritage lottery funds resulting in what is now conservatively assessed as a £4m building. Had this action not been taken, large annual costs would have been incurred by the Council in order to maintain the listed building - the deal for the Town looks a good one. If we are to be proud of our Town we should have a civic facility that is the centre of the Town. In this last year I have had the pleasure of showing mayors from all over Somerset - and some from Devon and Dorset as well, around the Guildhall and I can assure you they were all, not only impressed but also, jealous, of this wonderful facility. Our thanks must go to the Guildhall team who keep this fabulous facility in excellent condition.

At a recent Guildhall & Tourism Committee meeting it was unanimously decided that a proper charge should be made for the use of this facility. We think, as your custodians, this is the right approach. The variety and number of bookings increases year by year and the advance bookings for this coming year are up considerably. The costs of running a facility such as the Guildhall are large and increased usage helps to offset the gap between income and expenditure.

During the year I have revived two traditions for the office of Mayor. The first was holding a Civic Church Service followed by a cream tea in the Guildhall. Thirteen mayors and leaders of councils attended this event from Somerset, Dorset and Devon. It was a shame the formal procession resembled more a race as a sudden heavy snow shower descended. The second, was having a Mayor's Charity and I hope you have all seen the shiny new vehicle which, with the generous help of the County Council, and many other equally generous donations from you, have all made it possible to purchase and also to provide funds to run the vehicle for the Tatworth and Chard First Responders. Provision of this vehicle enables them to carry out their life saving voluntary service much more quickly and efficiently.

Finally, the long awaited news that the District Council have purchased the Boden Mill with a view to redevelopment of the centre of town site is most welcome. It is too early to say what exactly will happen but we are determined, as the Town Council, to have an input, together with involvement from every section of our community, to make sure this important area is fully developed for the maximum advantage of our Town.

My thanks also go to my Deputy Mayor, Cllr Cath Morrison for her help and support throughout the year and to my fellow Councillors and Officers for their efforts on your behalf.

Martin J Wale  
Mayor of Chard

## **Town Clerk's Report – 2008**

I have been Clerk to Chard Town Council for two years and looking back over this period I am really surprised at the number of changes the Council has been through in a comparatively short period. (Please insert photo of John Furze somewhere around here)

The largest amount of change occurred when submitting our application for Quality Council status and it was particularly pleasing to achieve that coveted status in June 2007 at a ceremony attended by the High Sheriff of Somerset, the County Chairman of the Society of Local Council Clerks and the County Secretary of the Somerset Association of Local Councils. Chard Town Council now ranks amongst the top nine Councils within the County. Attaining this accreditation entailed a huge amount of understanding and acceptance on the part of Councillors of the need to change procedures and policies, for which I am grateful. The people of Chard may now be satisfied that all policies and procedures operated by this Council conform to a benchmark criteria laid down by central government. (Please insert the Quality Council logo somewhere around here)

The workforce of the Council have also undergone change – the Amenities Department in particular is now less top-heavy and more structured. The Council has outsourced the legal backup of its Human Resources to a firm of lawyers based in Chester – Ellis Whittam & Co. In turn the Council has a new Staff Handbook incorporating up-to-date legal policies and our dedicated lawyer ensures all aspects of staffing are conducted in an open, fair and legal manner. Staffing issues, some of which have been very high profile, have sadly been an aspect of life in Chard Town Council and these new measures go a long way ensuring those days are behind us.

The year has seen the introduction of a new statutory Councillors Code of Conduct. It varies considerably from the previous code issued in 2002. Councillors have to be very mindful of their personal interests and of ways these interests may be seen to prejudice their opinions. New sections dealing with bullying have been introduced and these strengthen the existing requirements for treating others with respect and bringing the Council into disrepute. Another new feature of the 2007 Code is that Councillors are no longer obliged to report a breach of the Code but have a discretionary role instead.

The Mayor in his report has mentioned raising the profile of the Town and I am delighted that the County Council has chosen Chard to be the Start point of the West of England section of the 2008 Tour of Britain. Not only will this bring Chard to the attention of national media but due to the rising popularity enjoyed by cycling in Europe, it will bring international media to Chard. This is a golden opportunity for all of us – residents and traders alike, to show off the town to the world. (Please insert tour of Britain logo somewhere here)

I was pleased to attend the awards ceremony of South West In Bloom held in St Ives last September. I was even more delighted when Chard came away with no less than four awards that day – more than any other town in the South West.

Praise must go to the Council's Amenities staff who ensure the plants are tended and watered, but praise and recognition must also go to a committee of volunteers, Chard in Bloom, who operate in parallel to the Council in a spirit of mutual co-operation. Chard has for a number of years attained the Silver Gilt standard in the competition and this year will go all-out to try to make Gold standard – watch this space!

Neighbourhood activity is very important, not only for South West in Bloom. This year has seen the birth of the Bampton Avenue Residents Association formed under the Chairmanship of Mr Andy Richards. This group of residents has not only formed itself into a Committee but taken moral ownership of the children's playground in their area and by working with the council have secured grants, hitherto denied to the Town Council for the improvement and replacement of most of the equipment. This is a first class example of residents being positive and taking control of their environment.

The year has been good for Chard and its Council. The Council's reserves are healthier than they have been for some considerable time and are up to the level laid down by the Audit Commission – 25% of annual turnover. The assets of the Council are well maintained and reasonably up to date – the exceptions being our vehicles, some of which are starting to show signs of old age. The Council has officers who are well qualified intellectually and in experience, and finally your Council is strongly committed to a spirit of openness and transparency in all its dealings.

Next year? We are still waiting for the Statutory Instrument (SI) that goes with the 2007 Local Government and Involvement in Health Act. The SI will spell out exactly how this Quality Council will be able to use the 'Power of Wellbeing' that is being extended to Town & Parish Councils. It encourages Councils at our level of government to cluster and work together for the greater benefit of the community – this will be a challenging period of opportunity for Chard and its Councillors!

John Furze  
Town Clerk

## **Organisation and Accountability**

The Town Council has places for fifteen elected members returned from five wards each with three members. At the time of writing there are three vacancies, one each in Holyrood, Avishayes and Crimchard Wards. The Council Committees are Amenities, Guildhall & Tourism, Planning & Highways and Finance & Personnel. 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.

In accordance with statute, 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. As the Council is committed to a policy of openness and transparency any reasonable request to view the accounts, or any other aspect of Town Council work, will be accommodated at any time of the year.

## **Councillors**

The current Councillors for Chard Town Council are:-

### **Avishayes Ward**

Mrs C A Morrison	Liberal Democrat
Mrs A Spencer	UK Independence Party
VACANCY – Election on Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2008	

### **Combe Ward**

Mr A Kenton	Liberal Democrat
Mr M J Wale*	Conservative
Mr D R Hill	Conservative

### **Crimchard Ward**

Mr D Keitch	Liberal Democrat
Mr D M Mears	Conservative
VACANCY– Election on Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2008	

### **Holyrood Ward**

Mr D J Orchard	Liberal Democrat
Mr S Dowell	Liberal Democrat
VACANCY– Election on Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2008	

### **Jocelyn Ward**

Mr D M Bulmer	Independent
Mrs J Kenton	Liberal Democrat
Mrs J C Shortland	Liberal Democrat

\* Cllr M J Wale is Chairman of the Council, which carries with it the title of Mayor of Chard

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](http://www.chard.gov.uk) under the page 'Council Information Point'.

## **Council Officers**

The senior officers of Chard Town Council are:-

Town Clerk	John Furze	<a href="mailto:john.furze@chard.gov.uk">john.furze@chard.gov.uk</a>
Finance Officer	Terry Cutler	<a href="mailto:terry.cutler@chard.gov.uk">terry.cutler@chard.gov.uk</a>
Office Manager	Sandra Pittwood	<a href="mailto:sandra.pittwood@chard.gov.uk">sandra.pittwood@chard.gov.uk</a>
Guildhall Manager	Sandra Hutchings	<a href="mailto:sandra.hutchings@chard.gov.uk">sandra.hutchings@chard.gov.uk</a>
Amenities Manager	Andrew Hensher	<a href="mailto:andrew.hensher@chard.gov.uk">andrew.hensher@chard.gov.uk</a>

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. All enquiries for the Guildhall Manager should be directed through the Guildhall main number 01460-65282 or through the email address shown above.

Information about the Council may be viewed on the official website [www.chard.gov.uk](http://www.chard.gov.uk). This details all Council and Committee meetings together with agendas and minutes.

## **Finance**

The precept for the year 2007/8 was set at £493,871 equating to a precept of £113.85 for Band D properties. For 2008/9 the precept has been increased by 5.4% to £520,505 equating to a precept of £117.83 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 2008/9 at the following levels:-

£117.83 for Chard Town Council  
£142.44 for South Somerset District Council  
£999.90 for Somerset County Council  
£154.32 for Avon & Somerset Police Authority  
£66.58 for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue

£1,481.07 in total  
Based on Band D Properties

### **Summary of Audited Accounts for 2006/7**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>Income</b>
Revenue Activities	£'000	£'000
Grounds & Maintenance	115	6
Street Cleaning	48	48
Burial	21	13
Allotments	2	2
Guildhall (inc loan Acc)	167	29
Tourist Information	47	28
Support Services	137	2
Precept	0	467
Other Services	46	18
Capital Activities	60	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>621</b>

The forecast Accounts for the year ending March 2008 are as follows but it should be noted that these figures have not been audited and are only 'forecasts' and may probably change when the Audited Accounts are presented to Council in the Summer of 2008.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>Income</b>
Revenue Activities	£'000	£'000
Grounds & Maintenance	179	43
Street Cleaning	50	50
Burial	21	16
Allotments	2	2
Guildhall	194	43
Tourist Information	20	15
Support Services	157	1
Precept	0	494
Other Services	35	17
Capital Activities	11	84
<b>Total</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>765</b>

### **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 Mandatory Code per Model of the 2007 Code of Conduct for the conduct of Councillors.



John Furze  
Town Clerk