

The Right Worshipful Mayor of Hythe, Cllr. Neil Matthews
Town Mayor's Annual Report – 2006/7

The last year has been a very busy year for the Town Council and its Committees.

Council Meetings

There have been 13 Council meetings during the course of the last year. Its principal Committees – Finance and General Purposes and Plans and Works have met 9 and 18 times respectively. My particular thanks go to the Chairman of both these Committees – Councillor John Schoner and Councillor Dick Bushell respectively for all their hard work and support.

Charity Trustees

There have been three meetings of the full Charity Trustees together with two of the Charities Committee. The Town Council is responsible for the operation of four charities – Horn Street, Palmars, Eaton Lands and Davis Oaklands. It also provides the administrative support to the Wakefield Bequest, of which five Councillors are currently Trustees.

Town Council's Websites

The Town Council operates two websites:

The Portal website is www.hythe-kent.info which gives general information about the Town and the community as a whole. The Town Council also has its own business website.

www.hythetowncouncil.gov.uk The website is updated weekly and provides public access to Agendas, Minutes and other Council documents as well as facilities and hire arrangements. This website was started from scratch last summer and is dealt with internally by the Council staff.

Thanks in particular go to the two webmasters – Mr John Gabris and Mr Adrian Wilson respectively for their work on both sites.

This report will be placed on the Town Council website.

Oaklands – Primary Healthcare Centre

The Primary Healthcare Centre was finally opened in September 2006. This followed lengthy negotiations between the Hythe Town Council - acting as Charity Trustees - and Haven Health. Situated on the site of the former Dr Randall Davis' surgery, the centre has brought a much needed modern healthcare centre to Hythe. Haven Health provided new public toilets as part of the deal and it also re-surfaced the Oaklands Car Park, as well as redesigning the fire exit arrangements for the Local History Room and Museum. The Oaklands Toilets are now DDA compliant.

Oaklands – Local History Room / Museum

The Trustees have appointed Mrs Janet Adamson as the Hon Curator of the Museum and plans are afoot for the re-modelling of the areas, with some temporary exhibition of artefacts on a themed basis. The Trustees have also appointed an Hon Adviser for the Museum. Mrs Adamson has dealt with 27 queries, together with 28 donations to the Museum from the public since her appointment in June 2006.

It is anticipated that the Museum will be given a “new look” during the course of 2007/8 in consultation with the Hon Adviser.

Town Hall

The Town Hall has had to undergo treatment for dry rot during the latter part of 2006. The Town Council took the opportunity to upgrade its toilets to comply with the DDA regulations. The Town Hall has held 35 events during the course of the year and has been used by 18 organisations. It has of course been out of action for three months because of the dry rot works. It opened as part of the National Heritage weekend in September and it attracted 176 visitors on the day. The Mayoress and I attended and, among the exhibits were the civic regalia which attracted much attention. Particular thanks go to Tony Hill and other Members of both the Civic Society and the Hythe Tourism Forum for organising the day.

The Undercroft has been utilised on 11 occasions by charities and it is a focal point in the Town. Its use is free to local organisations.

The Civic Society hosts weekly tours of the Town Hall as part of their organised walks which take in the many facets of the Town's history – including Oaklands and its Museum.

Grateful thanks to the Civic Society for its many endeavours.

Town Council Surgeries

9 surgeries have been held over the course of the last year. Several have had to be cancelled due to the Town Hall works. They are held on the first Saturday of each month and are regularly attended by local residents and they are usually attended by two Town Councillors.

Eaton Lands

This vast tract of land forms a Charity which is administered by the Town Council acting as Charity Trustees. The 6 trees planted in the Northern Meadow last year have been carefully monitored by one of Hythe's Tree Wardens, Alan Joyce and we are very grateful to his, and his colleagues', ongoing work, both here and elsewhere. There is a significant area of Eaton Lands which is given over to two large allotment areas which are fully occupied with 67 plots and there is a waiting list of 9 would-be tenants. The Town Council rents these areas from the Charity. The allotments have been steadily improving over the years and thanks go to the Plans and Works Clerk and the Town Sergeant for the regular inspections.

The Trustees have entered negotiations with the residents of Tanners Hill Gardens to grant a deed of easement along the Bridleway to the rear. The Trustees are currently seeking financial assistance to improve the Bridleway for all users.

The northern meadow area continues to be maintained, with the grass amenity area to the south regularly cut 12 times per year and the wildflower element to the north managed so as to try and ensure its sustainability. Paths are cut through the meadow so that people can enjoy the area. Public Footpath HB 25 which runs through the meadow has been cut back and the woodland area's paths and steps have been recently refurbished.

Longbridge

This is a statutory allotment site and the Town Council, via its Five Year Plan, is proposing that allotment holders from the Shepway DC site in Green Lane might be moved onto the site, thus releasing that site for affordable housing which is in such short supply in Hythe. At the same time such a “swap” would enable the Longbridge site to be brought into full beneficial use, which it currently is not, with only three tenants. To date no further progress has been made with Shepway DC over this issue.

Twiss Road

The Twiss Road site is fully occupied with 23 plots and a waiting list of 30.

The Green

This informal open space area is the host to many activities including x 14 Boot Fairs inclusive of the Mayor’s Boot Fair. Local Charities and organisations benefit from these events and it provides them the opportunity to boost their funds.

It is also used by the large biennial events – the Festival and the Fete as well as circuses, fun fairs. It provides free car parking provision in the form of the Portland Road Car Park, as well as a play area and informal open space.

The Green is also the venue for the now traditional annual fireworks event. Hundreds of residents attended the event last year when it was held on 4th November. The Town Council’s Beacon was also lit on that particular occasion to mark the marriage of the Lord Warden in October. Another event for this forthcoming November is currently being organised.

Civic Activities

I have attended 102 events so far during the course of the year. The highlights have been the twinning association events to Poperinge, the opening of the Hop Museum, and the 25th twinning anniversary at Berck – sur –Mer last summer.

The newly instituted Civic procession on the day of the Annual Council Meeting was well received, with a significant number of primary

schoolchildren attending. It is anticipated that there will be representatives from all local schools and the local organisations in the Parade this year.

In November, I attended the House of Lords in company with the Lord Warden and other Head Port Cinque Port Mayors to lobby Kent MPs in an attempt to have provisions incorporated into the new Local Government Bill to enable the Cinque Port Towns to create Freeman.

CCTV

The Town Council operates an 11 camera system within the Town. The Council is in the process of upgrading the system to digital transmission and this will involve the replacement of some cameras and their lenses and the upgrading of others. The work is dependent upon the upgrading of the Shepway DC system and confirmation of the works at the Shepway terminal is awaited.

SEEDA and the Hythe Sports Centre

There have been 12 meetings of the SEEDA Steering Group and 5 of the Partnership. The Partnership and Steering Group has encompassed a great deal of knowledge and expertise over the past five years. 18 SEEDA projects ranging from seats, dog bins, town signs, information panels, CCTV, Skatepark equipment, the Hythe Guide, Town Walks leaflets, Seasonal Lighting, Hythe in Bloom, Hythe against Crime equipment, the Farmers Market, IT training have all been implemented or assisted. Membership representation on the Partnership includes : Hythe Civic Society, Hythe Chamber of Commerce, Hythe Against Crime, the Green Preservation Society, Hythe Bay School, Age Concern, WI and URC, KCC Youth and Community, Men of Kent and Kentish Men,

Much appreciation goes to all those who both sit on the Partnership and who have actively helped with all the projects.

The SEEDA Steering Group and Partnership is now concentrating its efforts on the final project ----- Hythe Sports Centre/ Hythe Sports

Pavilion and this has taken up a significant amount of work, time and effort. My thanks go to all those involved.

The demise of the Hythe Sports Centre has been much publicised. The DCMS has finally brought the project to a halt on the grounds that it is both undeliverable and unaffordable. In October last year, the Town Council successfully accomplished the preparation of a Contingency Plan which has received planning approval. The proposed plans are on display in the Town Hall and will also be on display at the Town Council offices. The Council is now actively seeking external funding towards the building of this new facility. There is however a current Town Green application on the South Road Recreation Ground and the Council may well have to defend its position in a Public Local Inquiry in order that a new pavilion can be constructed and the use of the Recreation Ground can continue in its present form.

South Road

This area contains the chief recreational facilities of tennis, bowls, cricket, football, allotments and the skatepark. Other private clubs operate in this area with the benefit of leases from the Town Council.

Committees

The staff at Oaklands also have to deal with the administration of the Town Council's 18 Committees, enquiries from the public with special emphasis on dealing with planning applications and the Plans and Works Committee and Council has dealt with 223 to date. The major applications considered have included – Lydd Airport, Nickolls Quarry and the redevelopment of Whitegates. The Plans and Works Committee has a working group to study local historic buildings/structures thought worthy of listing. Thanks again to Alan Joyce of the Hythe Civic Society for his input in this particular regard.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee has dealt with 67 items over the course of the last year and it has been the "lead" Committee dealing with the Hythe Sports Facility.

Both Committees have placed pressure on both the District and County Council to undertake their responsibilities effectively.

The other Committees which include the Standing Orders Committee, CCTV, the Charities Committee which have met as and when required.

Arts Culture & Leisure Fund and Other Grants and Events

The Town Council grant aided the following organisations over the course of the last year, including :

Hythe and Saltwood Royal British Legion, Hythe Art Society, Hythe Twinning Association Hythe in Bloom (2 troughs @ the Town Hall) and the Hythe Chamber of Commerce.

Hythe in Bloom also received a grant of £1,000 from the Town Council towards the excellent displays around the Town. Considerable thanks are due to Mrs Sally Chesters and Mr Tony Hill for their hard work, along with their helpers.

The Town Council also provided a grant of £5,000 to the Hythe Festival Company towards the youth activity events on Hythe Green. The Festival was again a great success and I enjoyed participating in many of the events organised, especially the very early morning safari nature trail along the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch railway. The canal bank concert was also a very memorable event when the Lord Warden and the deputy Constable of Dover Castle joined us.

The Town Council also grant aided seasonal lighting on both the Town Square and the Hythe Town Hall. Thanks are due to the Chamber of Commerce for the organising of this project.

Other Local Organisations

Many thanks to the many organisations that work effectively within the Town especially through the SEEDA Steering Group and Partnership.

Appointments to Outside Bodies

The Town Council also has appointees to other bodies and I am very grateful to those Members who have served this year on the following bodies :

PFI Steering Group
Age Concern
Hythe Chamber of Commerce
Hythe Twinning Association
Kent Association of Parish Councils
Shepway Citizens Advice Bureau Management Committee
Hythe Tourism & Public Relations Forum
Shepway Tourist Action Group
Hospital of St Bartholomew and St John
Hythe Institute Fund
Hythe Sick Fund
Anne Peirson Trust
Newington Unknown Donor's Charity

Conclusion

Finally but sincerely, I would like to thank all the Councillors for their support during the year, the Town Clerk for her hard work and advice, Judith McCormick; my Mayor's secretary, Margaret Stewart for not letting me forget anything and keeping my Diary up to date, the Town Sergeant, Graham Johnson for making sure I get to the right places at the right time. Adrian Wilson and Jane Sorti in the office; and I wish Jane all the very best for the future following her retirement in May.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish those Councillors standing for re-election good luck and for those standing down my sincere thanks for all their hard work.

There are three Councillors that deserve our special praise however, for they are standing down after giving many years of service – unpaid!

Cllr Dick Bushell – 10 years service

Cllr Wendy Harris for 16 years unbroken service

And of course

Cllr Chris Capon who started public service in 1967 for the then Borough of Hythe and has continued since. He has the honour of being the Town's first Town Mayor of Hythe (1974).

Thank you Chris for doing 40 years unbroken service.

End