



ANNUAL PARISH REPORT 2021



A challenging time for us all

I am honoured to have been your Town Mayor for the last twelve months, though it has been somewhat challenging.

The period of uncertainty caused by the Covid pandemic has affected every resident in some way, whether by illness, death, loss of income or being unable to see loved ones. The country has been in and out of lockdown with shops, businesses and restaurants intermittently opening and closing, and this has unfortunately led to the permanent closure of a number of well-known and established businesses.

We owe a great debt of gratitude not only to our NHS and their support staff, but to many more in the community who have worked selflessly over the last twelve months to keep our lives as normal as possible. Doctors and dentists have remained open, mail has been delivered, bins have been emptied and the emergency services have continued to operate. Many of our town organisations have supported (and continue to do so) many of our residents, not only with food and meals, but with moral support where there has been loneliness or other personal issues. This has been a continual example of the community spirit that exists in Marlow.

The Town Council has maintained business as usual. Whilst the office was closed to physical visitors, officers continued working and supporting residents with their queries over the phone. However, a large number of traditional civic events and activities associated with town organisations were cancelled, adapted or took place virtually.

We have all missed May Fayre, French Market, Love Marlow, Town Regatta & Festival, Pub in the Park, Marlow Carnival, Remembrance weekend, Santa Fun Run, Christmas lights Switch On and Carols on The Causeway. That said, we were fortunate to be able to broadcast a superb virtual Remembrance service and our Christmas lights were switched on virtually at 3.30 am on a cold November morning by Chris Evans. The Santa Fun Run also took place virtually, raising over £20,000 for local charities. A Christmas Drive-In also allowed a number of schools and organisations to hold some of their cancelled events at Marlow Rugby Club in a Covid-secure way and I thank Brand Events for helping the Council to organise both the Drive-In and the Christmas lights Switch On.

It is part of the Mayor's enjoyable duties to attend events held within the town, but unsurprisingly the vast majority of these were cancelled. Where possible, I was able to attend a number of events either physically or virtually, including

Remembrance service, Christmas lights Switch On and the Drive-In. Just before the December lockdown I was pleased to welcome three new businesses to the town and note that a number of our currently empty shops appear to have plans for occupancy. I know we all look forward to visiting our shops, restaurants, cafes and other businesses without restrictions in the coming months.

It is also usual for the Mayor to select a charity to support during their year and during the last year I have continued to support the initiative started by my predecessor, Cllr Chris Funnell, to raise funds to support mental health provision in Marlow schools. Unfortunately, my major fundraising event, the Mayor's Golf Day, was cancelled, but a number of donations have been received during the year. Together with Chris, I am looking to use these funds now that the schools are fully open.

Since 2019 your council has operated under the mayor/leader model that has allowed the Mayor (chairman of the Council) to be responsible for civic duties, whilst the leader, Cllr Jocelyn Towns, has fulfilled the non-civic duties and driven a growing list of projects and initiatives at a time when council services are expanding. Some of these projects are detailed in the leader's report. Cllr Jocelyn Towns has continued in this role for a second year to deliver our existing council services, whilst introducing new initiatives and services as efficiently and quickly as possible. We believe that this model has worked well and is the right way to use the skills of Councillors for the benefit of our community.

Marlow is a very community-orientated town and I'd like to offer a big thank you to all residents for your support. My thanks also go to all Town Councillors and to my Deputy, Cllr Bob Johnson, who has supported me and stood in for me on a number of occasions. Elections took place on 6th May and, by the time you read this report, a new Council will be in place.

The following Councillors did not stand for re-election and, on your behalf, I would like to thank them for their service to the town over many years – Suzanne Brown, Bob Johnson, Camilla Keighley, Kathy Thomson and Emily West. We would not function as a Council without the support of our officers, led by Town Clerk, Hilary Martin. Many thanks to them for running everything in the background.

I have very much enjoyed representing our town again and I wish you and your families well for the coming months.

Cllr Richard Scott

Town Mayor

RESOURCES

COMMITTEE

REPORT 2020/21

Cllr Bob Johnson

Deputy Mayor and Chairman
Resources Committee



The Resources Committee is responsible for the effectiveness of the resources of the Town Council. It meets regularly during the year and residents are very welcome to attend its meetings. The Committee aims to maximise the use of the Town Council element of your Council Tax and continues to provide excellent value for money in procuring and administering services for residents. Despite Covid restrictions, we have maintained our normal high service levels.

During the year ended 31st March 2021 and with the same level of Council Tax as the previous year, we have increased and enhanced our services, including:

- Expenditure on environmental projects – details in the Leader's report.
- Provided a fund for Covid related projects.
- Installed new electrical infrastructure for brand-new Christmas lights.
- Established provisions for possible lighting of the bridge and enhancements to The Causeway.
- Maintained our allotments and cemetery to a high standard.
- Better control of grass cutting.
- Use of reserves for new projects.
- Exceeded our budget on grants and donations to local worthy causes. Grant applications with a total of £10,085 donated.



In addition:

- The Celebrate Marlow Event was unable to be held this year due to Covid. In its place, we supported Marlow Christmas Drive-in, which allowed local charities and organisations to bring pre-Christmas cheer to the town.
- We continue to keep our children's play areas and green spaces in excellent condition.
- Further improvement in grounds maintenance with Gossmore recreation ground now back in use.
- We have continued the use of the Community Payback scheme with Thames Valley Probation Service. This enables the Council to use this service in areas such as path clearance to keep our town attractive.
- We have continued to provide half the cost of a Police Community Support Officer who is active in the town everyday. There has been good feedback on this service.
- We have continued to maintain the Town Cemetery to a high standard.
- The allotments are always in great demand and we continue to look for further small areas within the existing sites to address this demand.
- The Council achieved a clean financial audit.

The 2021/22 budget seeks to improve and continue support of all the above services and we are delighted to announce that we can do this again without an increase in your Marlow Town Council Tax for the sixth consecutive year. This has been achieved through the enhanced utilisation of available resources, continually reviewing procurement contractual agreements and extremely prudent management. Your Council remains financially strong, with excellent levels of general and earmarked reserves, some of which are invested in longer-term investments. We review our reserves on an on-going basis and we will use all reserves appropriately to achieve our long-term objective of retaining and continually improving the attractiveness of our town. The various projects under consideration are mentioned in the Leader's report.



➔ Your council remains financially strong, with excellent levels of reserves

Chairman, Cllr Neil Marshall

Planning

Marlow Town Council is a statutory consultee to the local planning Buckinghamshire Authority. The Planning, Environment and Transport (PET) Committee meets every three weeks to review planning applications within the Marlow town boundary. We review all applications carefully and make appropriate comment or objections.

The bulk of applications reviewed each year are for minor extensions or changes of use and we have a strong correlation with the Planning Authority findings.

The Wycombe Local Plan was approved without any major changes affecting Marlow. It maintained our Green Belt protection areas against developer threats. A new Local Plan for Bucks will be developed in the near future, superseding the Wycombe Plan in due course, but it is still some years away and is unlikely to have major impact on Marlow.

Developments currently under consideration include Lidl taking over the former Waitrose site. We are pleased to see that the development of Regal House on Station Road, which has been empty for many years, is going ahead.



Environment

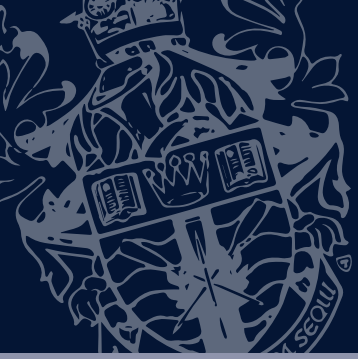
This is becoming an area of great interest for Marlow as well as for the wider community. An Air Quality Management Area has been declared for the Chapel Street, Spittal Street, High Street and West Street areas of Marlow and we are working with Buckinghamshires Council to alleviate the issue.

The PET committee set up an advisory panel of Marlow residents with professional knowledge in environmental matters to help raise public and commercial awareness of the issues and possible actions to improve our environment. The Town Council has appointed a professional adviser to assist in environment matters, completed its Carbon Audit and developed an Environment Performance Index, one of the first small towns to do so.

Transport

We are always mindful of the challenge of parking availability in the town, largely brought about by the vibrancy of the town itself. However, solutions that satisfy residents, shoppers and inward commuters (all of whom are essential to the viability of the town) prove to be very challenging. We are working with the new Buckinghamshire Council towards a post-Covid travel plan and with other community groups through the new Marlow Climate Action group (Marlow CAN).





LEADER'S REPORT 2020/21

Cllr Jocelyn Towns

This has been an unprecedented year for all of us, and we are still far from being able to resume life as we knew it! Our hope is that the roll-out of the vaccine will start to make a difference.



Despite lockdowns, it has been a busy year for the Town Council, and we have continued to work throughout the pandemic for the benefit of Marlow and Marlovians. We have helped the Meals from Marlow initiative with delivering meals, and we're grateful to the many other groups in the town providing food parcels and general provisions for the vulnerable and needy.

This has been a year for creativity, and the problem of how to deliver some of our well-known events was especially challenging. For example, both our Remembrance Service and the Christmas Switch On were filmed and delivered remotely last year. We also launched new Christmas Lights, which were very warmly welcomed and much needed to cheer up the town as we headed into more restrictions. The 'virtual' Switch On by Chris Evans, broadcast on social media, was especially well received. Many thanks to our wonderful sponsors who make our Christmas Lights possible.

We continue to be guided by our Town Vision. We have recently taken on an environmental 'expert' to help us deliver our environment strategy, as we work towards making Marlow 'an environmental exemplar town.' There will be more on this in the coming months.

The environment is important to us: it helps with our wellbeing and it needs our protection. There is a widespread desire in our community for more action, as evidenced by



the emergence of a number of voluntary groups with whom we are working closely.

Some of our actions to date:

- Banner placed on Spittal Street to alert drivers to cut pollution.
- Green areas designated for wildflower planting.
- Verge protection in Lock Road and the Claremonts coming soon.
- Litter Picking – we continue to support the Wombles, who do a great wonderful job.
- We are working with Wild Marlow on a number of initiatives.
- Supporting Releaf with their tree-planting project.
- Alleyway clearance to give as much space as possible for pedestrians.

We worked closely over the last three years with the Environment Agency and Buckinghamshire Council on the extensive flood relief scheme in Gossmore Park, Pergola Field and Pound Lane area. We are pleased to say that both Gossmore and Pergola have been returned to the Town Council. In the recent flooding the pumps worked well, keeping the surrounding homes clear of floodwater.

With more residents using their bicycles during this past year there was a call for more cycle hoops around the town centre. Working with Buckinghamshire Council we identified and installed 16 new cycle hoops in December.

Our new website was launched at the end of last year. Please do take a look; there is plenty of useful local information www.marlow-tc.gov.uk. We would also welcome your feedback via office@marlow-tc.gov.uk.

Marlow is a lovely town with a wonderful community ethos. This past year has really shown how residents have stepped up to help. We should take time to thank ourselves for what we have done and continue to do, as we embark on our 'new' normal.



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