

Report by the Town Mayor – Cllr Richard Noon - Mayor's Annual Report 2022-23

What a year it has been, and it isn't over yet!

We stepped into the current municipal year knowing that it was the now late HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. As expected, the privilege of being the Town Mayor during a period of celebration was an honour. I attended a whole range of events, from street parties, a couple of dinners and attended church services at the Parish Church to mark the Jubilee.

However, in September, the Town marked the passing of HM The Queen Elizabeth II – myself, Deputy Town Mayor Cllr King and Cllr Paul White worked alongside Rev John Dracup to enact and deliver upon plans that were established in the event of the death of the HM The Queen. It was a monumental occasion to be involved in. Attending the Proclamation at Huddersfield Town Hall; followed by reading the Proclamation at St Bartholomew's Church, Meltham was both surreal and an undoubted once in a lifetime.

Later this year; we'll mark the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III; celebrations will happen throughout the Township and I would encourage you all to participate to celebrate in whatever way you feel appropriate.

The Town Council have worked well this year to enable works to proceed at Robert Ashton Memorial Park; there has been a lot of work behind the scenes to get this far. I'd like to thank my fellow Independent Councillors for their endeavour to see this work progress and pass my thanks to Michelle Stevens at Kirklees Council for her diligent work.

In January the Clerk to the Council, Michelle Chard tendered her resignation; following her committed service since 2017, we're in a better place – however losing the Clerk to the Council during such a busy year and at the point in time we have done, without doubt has a debilitating impact.

Other activities that have been undertaken throughout the year that furthered our commitment to deliver on priorities highlighted through the Ask Meltham campaign include delivering a range of events, including activities at Meltham skate park and Robert Ashton Memorial Park over the summer. Myself and Cllr Jurczynsyn had the pleasure of hosting Meltham Moor Primary School Council just before Christmas; they asked lots of questions and delivered a number of letters providing their input into what they want to see happen at the park.

Further work has also progressed on key road safety priorities including work at the top and bottom of Acre Lane; this work commenced at the beginning of March. Speed measures will be implemented on Slaithwaite Road and an upgrade to the zebra crossing outside Meltham Co-op to a puffin crossing will also help to improve safety for all users. There is plenty more to do though; the Town Council will continue to work with the Ward Councillors to achieve positive change; the last couple of years have seen greater success when we work together.

I am looking forward to spending the remainder of my time as your Town Mayor celebrating our Pride of Meltham awards recipients and the Coronation weekend and appointing a new Town Clerk. I would like to thank Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Spencer King and Cllr Paul White and Rev John Dracup for their continued help and support during what has been a busy year. Finally, to my two special consorts who have put up with my continued absence from general family life, Alice and Oliver – thank you.

Annual Report on issues within the remit of the Planning Environment and General Purposes Committee 2022-23 Chair Cllr Paul White.

Looking back at the last year I find myself reflecting on how unusual this year has been. Every one of us has been impacted by both the pandemic and our gradual return to some form of normality as well as the fallout from the War in Ukraine and its resulting effect on the increases in the cost of living and in particular massive hikes in gas and electricity charges. Perhaps then not surprisingly one consequence has been a dramatic reduction in the number of Planning applications submitted. Since I've been on the Town Council (2011) we've seen a steady and increasing number of applications especially for extensions and improvements to houses as well as small scale, often single or more, houses on infill sites. But since last summer this has fallen dramatically to a trickle of applications and at some meetings, we've had no new applications to consider. We continued with actual meetings this year, providing a voice for residents who may be concerned about development proposals adversely affecting their lives. We have continued to vociferously object to all planning applications where it is clear there is over development or proposals that clearly impact negatively on residents in the township.

Despite the much smaller number of applications, many of these have been well presented and applicants have gone beyond, often to improve the look of their homes.

Housing sites

As I mentioned in last year's report the planning applications for new housing sites in parts of Meltham like Mill Moor Road and Helme Lane have now stopped. We had no planning applications for new housing sites this year. However, building work does continue at several existing sites, which is causing much concern especially where developers pay too little attention to the disruption to residents' lives. However, Kirklees Local Plan (which controls where, and if, new houses can be built) has no further fields/sites allocated for development. This means that there will be no new sites allocated for housing until the Plan is reviewed next time in the early 2030's. At that time the process will start all over again, and it is then that we need to be vigilant in our defence of our green spaces.

Tackling Grotspots

We have continued with our work to clean up and tackle 'grotspots' and welcome residents telling us where and what is required. Overall, we've been able to keep on top of this and many residents have commented that things are much better. Our campaign to prevent dog fouling has also had some success and we aim to roll this out in other parts of Meltham with more posters in the Township. It has been particularly gratifying to see examples of Meltham residents helping in this regard by putting pressure on dog owners to take more care as well as many residents helping by picking up litter as they're out and about. Yes, it's true, there are 'good fairies' out there who do pick up your litter! Please be mindful and not drop it in the first place.

We want to thank all those residents that help to keep our town a clean and green place that we can all enjoy.

We did consider a wider number of issues and consultations throughout the year, and this will continue. Working with our other ward councillors we now have several speed indicator devices at various locations in a bid to help drivers slow down when they're speeding. A traffic calming scheme has been designed for Slaithwaite Road (official data confirms the worst road for speeding in the township), which has been out for consultation, and should be implemented in the next few months. A replacement of the zebra crossing outside the Co-op with a safer Puffin crossing is funded and will be constructed shortly. Also an initial scheme drawing to reposition bus stands in the town centre, to reduce traffic congestion, has been prepared, and we continue with our ambition to repurpose the bus station/turning area to provide additional parking, disabled parking, electric vehicle points and more usable space for community events, as well as continuing to be a place for our local buses to stop. We've also lobbied for other highway safety improvements elsewhere so watch this space!

Finally, may I thank my fellow Councillors, for their continued diligence and invaluable input, and in particular our Town Clerks, Michelle and Angela, for their good humour, expert advice, and sheer hard work in these challenging times.

Annual Report on issues within the remit of the Properties, Administration and Finance Committee 22-23 Cllr D Haigh.

At the time of writing this report in the final quarter of the municipal year we are finally seeing the disruption caused by Covid 19 for so long to council operations decline, we can even meet in person.

Our work throughout the year has been facilitated by the diligence and planning of our now retiring clerk Michelle Chard. Her instigation of structures and processes during her time in Meltham, have made our budget monitoring and setting more scientific and totally compliant with financial regulations and audit requirements, and provides a full itemised scheme of delegation and process.

Much of our work during covid 19 has been systems maintenance, however we have replaced a faulty defibrillator in Meltham centre and financed a new one for Helme, and finally introduced the hanging flower baskets into the village centre, to name but a few of the key purchases/contracts.

The careful budgeting and building up of reserves have allowed the council to embark on a scheme to renovate and improve the Robert Ashton Memorial park play area and associated garden. Initially planned to be part funded by section 106 monies resulting from planning agreements with developers.

However as progress with receiving monies, from developers was slow, in November 2022 the council agreed to find the full £203, 000, (as the need to replace items had become urgent from a healthy and safety perspective) needed for the capital works and hopefully the 106 monies can be used for further work for the Township in the wider grounds of the park.

We are cognisant as a committee and council of the effect that inflation and energy prices are having on our electorate; as such we have taken great care to produce a realistic and carefully costed budget for 2023-4.

Our work cumulated in February 2023 with the council approving the final draft budget for next year and agreeing on its submission to Kirklees council for the council tax process. The rise taking account of inflation and using savings in areas that could be helped cushion costs in the future lead to a budget rise of around 0.4% compared to this year.

Can I thank my committee and the retiring Clerk for their assistance and help during the municipal year it is much appreciated, and it was good to finally meet in person!!