



## GREAT TORRINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

### REPORT OF THE MAYOR FOR THE ANNUAL PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

(Cancelled in 2020 – COVID 19)

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The past year has seen a number of changes at the Town Council. At last May's election Cllrs Cathrine Simmons and Nigel Stark stepped down and two new Cllrs, Cox and Rose had put their names forward for election. As the total applicants were the same number of places available, there was no election as such and all current Cllrs have been elected. I have to stop at this point and mention how saddened we are all were to hear the news of Nigel's death in the autumn time. Nigel was an excellent Cllr who took such pride in Great Torrington and contributed to community life in a myriad of different ways as well as his role as Town Councillor.

More recently we have been excited to welcome a new office administration officer, Kerry Jefferies, (at the beginning of 2020) and is a reflection of how busy the office has been over these past few years. I would like to say that there has been a greater engagement with the community and public and various groups within the town, which is of course our role, but also a privilege to do.

It was also encouraging for the town to be classified as The **Healthiest Town in the country**:

#### 2. ENVIRONMENT

- a. As everyone is aware, the state of our environment has been a key focus nationally over this past year. At the Town Council we have passed Motions to support the various initiatives around environment protection and retention.

**In April 19 the Council agreed that;**

This Council believes:

*That we in Great Torrington acknowledge the Climate Change Emergency and aim to support efforts and work with relevant bodies to make Torridge District zero net carbon by 2030.*

*All governments (national, regional and local) have a duty to limit the negative impacts of Climate Breakdown, and local governments that recognise this should not wait for their national governments to change their policies. It is important for the residents of Great Torrington, Torridge District and the UK that council areas commit to carbon neutrality as quickly as possible. We would be joining an increasing group of councils across the UK (Bideford Town Council and Bristol City Council to name two).*

*By passing this motion, we will not only heighten awareness of the severity of this situation but with future financial commitments and decisions generally aim to help further reduce carbon emissions.*

## **And in September 2019**

*“Great Torrington Town Council recognise the importance and the urgency of the climate crisis we are currently in and are working on solutions to the problem.*

*“Great Torrington Town Council would support a planning policy to make it compulsory for all new builds (for dwelling and employment use) to have sources of renewable energy (such as solar panels) fitted and ready to use on completion.*

*“Great Torrington Town Council also propose that Torridge District Council should lead the way on this and fit solar panels on the roof of Great Torrington’s swimming pool and other Council-owned buildings across Torridge.”*

### **b. ENVIRONMENT and TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP**

This group was established in the summer/autumn of 2019 and meets regularly to consider these aspects in more detail, reporting back into the Environment Committee.

### **c. ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

In the autumn of 2019 Members agreed a new policy that set out the priorities for the Town Council and has 8 main priorities;

- **Start with GTTC:** *No longer buy one use plastic/Reduce paper waste.*
- **Community Leadership:** *Looking at ways we deal with the “natural” around GT*
- **Town Tidy:** *Regular sessions*
- **Climate Emergency**
- **Plastic Pollution**
- **Travel and Transport:** *W Group*
- **The “Natural”** *Looking at ways we deal with the “natural” around GT. Jubilee Wood.*
- **Lobbying:** *TDC*
- **Repair, Re-use & Recycle:** *Repair Cafe*

In response to “Start with GTTC” category Members approved the below Motion in December 2019 for those who have a portable device;

- *“that Great Torrington Town Council offers the choice for Members to ‘go paperless’ and use personal electronic devices for viewing all council related documents during meetings.”*

In February 2020 we hosted the first “Repair Cafe”, aided by volunteers from the community. This event was successful and we are hoping that this initiative will grow as we go through 2020.

In February 2020 we also met with local landscape gardening expertise to look at our “maintenance programme” and in particular issues in relation to grass cutting and hedge trimming linked with biodiversity matters. Following on from this meeting Members agreed the following:

- a. Request officers to always consider environmentally friendly option when buying more tools and machinery.
- b. Continue to source local.
- c. Request Technicians to reduce use of leaf blowers where possible with a view to using manual tools.
- d. Restrict the use of herbicides and increase manual weeding.
- e. Experiment by minimising the cutting of “visibility” plots to the required quota of 4 cuts per annum between 01 April and 31<sup>st</sup> October, monitoring the situation throughout.
- f. Experiment by reviewing grass cutting arrangements at Woodland Vale and alongside Greenbank throughout 2020. Cutting along pathways and allowing for natural growth elsewhere to ensure we do all we can to offset carbon footprint and maximise biodiversity in the area.
- g. Publicise the above new approaches and experiments to the local community and record feedback.
- h. Create a compost facility at the allotment site for use by the tenants.
- i. Consider further opportunities to plant new trees, sow meadow seed and plant bulbs across the community.

#### **d. JUBILEE WOOD**

There has been significant work undertaken at Jubilee Wood and the Town Council is grateful to Alan Williams who volunteers to undertake work, with a group of further volunteers at JW.

There has been progress in relation to elimination of raw sewerage flowing down over part of the meadow. Meetings with South West Water (SWW) and Torridge District Council (TDC) resulted in an eventual resolve of the problem by SWW. To add a further precaution, a drainage pipe has been laid under the path way.

In the autumn the Environment committee agreed a proposal to allow a “minimal intervention approach” to Jubilee Wood away from footpaths to ensure offsetting of carbon footprint and encouraging biodiversity in the area.

There has been tree planting and approx 60 trees were also been planted by Great Torrington School (GTS) in February. We are also looking forward to the summer when the Bluecoat School will also undertake tree planting.

Men’s Sheds have kindly made a gate that with lead members of the public from Jubilee Wood onto Common Land.

#### **e. CCTV**

In January the Chair of Environment along with the Town Clerk and Mayor and District Cllrs joined Richard Haste (TDC) and a representative from a CCTV provider to explore and consider possible options in relation to CCTV. The Town Council is currently awaiting a subsequent report re this matter for further consideration.

#### **f. Repair Cafe (RC)**

The Town Council together with Torrington Men’s Sheds, arranged the first Repair Cafe to coincide with the Devon-wide Repair Cafe day: The Big Fix” on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2020. This concept fits with the Town Council’s Policy of “Repair and Re-use”. The event was supported by local cafes who agreed to provide a half-priced hot drink for anyone waiting for a repair.

The initial event was successful and the Chair of Environment is endeavouring to recruit further appropriately skilled volunteers with a view to having another RC event.

#### **g. The Happy to Talk Bench**

Members agreed that one of the benches in the town centre should host such a sign.

#### **h. Lobbying Torridge District Council**

Members agreed to request TDC explores the feasibility of solar panels in their car parks.

#### **i. DONNACROFT**

There has been ongoing discussion with Torriddeside in relation to the club being self-sufficient. In the latter part of 2019, the club made a formal request to obtain a lease from GTTC to ensure they have some level of security of tenure. The principle was agreed by GTTC Environment and subsequent Council meeting in March and a lease is in the process of being drafted.

#### **j. BOREHOLE**

A borehole has been erected on the grass at the entrance to Donnacroft. The borehole belongs to South West Water and will be used to measure water levels. The Town Council allocated the £1,000 granted by SWW towards the cost of the new Christmas Lights.

#### **k. TECHNICIANS and PRACTICAL MATTERS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:**

- Grass cutting
- Weekly park inspections
- Weed control
- Overseeing the allotments
- Upkeep of bus shelters/Equipment
- Undertaking road closure activity
- Maintaining the Churchyard
- Maintaining Rack Park

#### **l. THE SKATE PARK:**

Repairs were made in March 2020 – Members are looking towards a site for a bigger skate park.

### **3. RECOGNITIONS**

Throughout the year, the Town Council has recognised a number of people for their involvement and input into community life.

- **Howe Plate Award:** David Squire in recognition of his outstanding service to the community of Great Torrington (T-I-B and Rosemoor) re Floral arrangements throughout the community.
- **Letter of thanks: Path behind Castle House nursing home:** Cllr Allin informed Members that a member of the public, Mr Kemp has, at his own expense, been tidying up the path which runs behind Castle House Care Home from Castle Gardens to The Commons.
- **Good Citizens Award (Mayor's Community Award):** Retiring Mayor, Cllr Davey presented the Community Award to Mark and Liz Duffy from Duffy's Home Hardware in

recognition of the work they had done to support the community of Great Torrington by installing an ATM in their shop after all the bank branches closed in the town centre. In addition, to also recognise the ongoing support they offer the town's people by assisting with various community events in the town throughout the year.

▪ **Certificates of Appreciation were awarded to;**

- a. Graham Rooke to thank him for all the work he has done for the community in Great Torrington and in liaising with this Council, through his work in the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.
- b. Ellie Carter, the youngest woman in the UK to fly solo. Members recognised what an incredible achievement Ellie has made at the age of 16 and wished her well for her future.

#### **4. SUPPORTING and WORKING WITH COMMUNITY**

***A number of initiatives have been undertaken that support the town, both financially and by engagement and involvement;***

**I. LLOYDS BANK PLC – SURVEY:** There was concern that the survey undertaken by Lloyds Banks Plc in May 2019 had not taken into account people who had stopped using the mobile bank due to location. The Town Council liaised with Lloyds and confirmed their intention to undertake another survey. Lloyds Bank was supportive and asked for outcomes to be passed back to the Bank. The survey was undertaken during November 2019 to the end of January 2020. Unfortunately, number of responses were poor and therefore not enough to establish any further concrete views.

**II. The Plough Arts Centre:** Requested a supporting letter from the Town Council as well as the Chair of the Dementia Friendly Working Group to assist in an application to fund automatic fire doors. GTTC and the Chair of the DFC Group provided a letter each and the application was successful.

The Town Council has also been involved in the “Power the Plough” initiative by lobbying other local councils (TDC, NDC and DCC) and facilitating a meeting for all parties to come together. District Cllrs have also worked hard at TDC in relation to the need for funding.

**III. Grants:** The Town Council and the Commons Allotment Charity have awarded various groups within the community and /or engaged for the community of Great Torrington to the sums of £26,300 and £4,950 respectively during 2019/20.

**IV. Outside Bodies:** Councillors also sit on/work with other community groups and report back to Council at each meeting. This is an opportunity for the Town Council to work integrally with a number of groups across the whole community of Great Torrington.

**V. Remembrance Sunday arrangements:** The Town Council undertakes all of the administration duties in relation to this event, including arranging road closures, compiling and printing of programmes and invitations and publicity.

**VI. Dementia Friendly Community:** The initiative to make Great Torrington a Dementia Friendly Community has continued to gain momentum throughout this past year. To-date, the following had been achieved;

- a. **Dementia Friends:** Over 50 people have attended a dementia awareness session organised by the working group. These sessions, which are open to all in the community, have been held on a regular (monthly) basis all year. In addition, Marion Pollinger and Gina Haselhurst (Dementia Champions) have hosted sessions at RHS Rosemoor, Dartington Crystal, Great Torrington Heritage Museum and Castle Gardens Surgery. Marion joined the Great Torrington Bowling Club at a 'get together' with other bowls clubs in South Devon and hosted a Dementia Awareness Session with them too.
- b. **An Information Pack;** has been designed, compiled and distributed.
- c. **Dementia Friendly Community Window Stickers;** have been supplied to businesses in town who have become Dementia Friends and who are pledging to take around 3 actions in order to turn their awareness into action.
- d. A "**Silent Space**"; a national project where outdoor spaces are designated 'Silent Spaces' for a period of time each week during which people switch off from technology and stop talking is being created in the Secret Memorial Garden at Castle Hill.
- e. The "Knit and Natter group" which meets weekly in the Town and Community Hall has knitted a large number of Twiddle Muffs and neck warmers for people in the local community who are living with dementia. They have been distributed amongst the Memory Café, local care homes and Dementia Support Workers for the Alzheimer's Society.

#### **Future Projects:**

- The working group is hoping to work with other local organisations to bring the Dementia Tour Bus to Great Torrington. The bus offers the opportunity for care workers and family members of those living with dementia to participate in an immersive experience to better understand the impact of dementia.
- The working group has been working on a number of activities for Dementia Action Week (May 2020), including an art class for people living with dementia, a special film screening at The Plough Arts Centre, a Community Information Event at the Town Hall, a coffee morning for the Memory Café and the official launch of the Silent Space. However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, Dementia Action Week has been postponed: it is hoped these activities will take place later in the year.

#### **VII. Statue and Letter of support: SISTER NIVEDITA:**

In the summer the Town Council worked with representatives from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre UK for the unveiling of a statue of Sister Nivedita positioned in the town's cemetery, which had been funded by the Chief Minister of West Bengal. The Town Council also wrote a letter of support (as requested) to London Borough of Merton in London for a similar statue to be installed in Cannizzaro Park, Wimbledon.

- VIII. Let's Talk Project:** The Town Council continues to support this initiative both financially and by providing accommodation for the meetings. In October 2019 Members agreed to continue this support for another year, period 01.11.19-31.10.20.

- IX. Christmas Parking:** The Town Council funded free parking on the mornings of Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December 2019 at Sydney House Car Park.

- X. **Neighbourhood Plan:** Torrington District Council passed the draft Plan to an external Inspector in Spring 2019. This was finally reported upon in December 2019. At the Environment meeting in January and February Council meeting Members agreed the recommended adjustments and the Plan was adjusted accordingly. Torrington District Council will take their Plan to Full Council on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020 with a view to holding a Referendum at the end of May 2020 if all agreed by TDC Members.
- XI. **Museum:** The Town Council continues to work with the Museum which is situated in the Town Council's building. The Museum is run by a small team of dedicated volunteers and the Council is appreciative of the work they do at the museum.
- XII. **New Christmas Lights:** The Town Council worked with district and county Cllrs to obtain funding and subsequently with Great Torrington Cavaliers who elected lights and Christmas tree in November.
- XIII. **Chapter 8 – Road Closure Training** was arranged by GTTC and included invites to other community groups. There were 3 local groups represented at the training and one from Bideford TC along with the Town Clerk and a GTTC Technician. This now expands the skill base for undertaking road closures across the community.
- XIV. **NORTH DEVON RECORDS OFFICE:** GTTC donated £500.00 for the period over the next 3 years.
- XV. **THE CHAMBER OF TRADE:** GTTC worked tirelessly with Devon County Council and the Chamber of Trade during the road closure in October 2019. The Town Council subsequently submitted a formal complaint to **DCC and subsequently a stage two complaint following the initial DCC response.**
- XVI. **THE CAVALIERS:** Working with the Cavaliers to invite local dignitaries to the August event.
- XVII. **GREAT TORRINGTON SCHOOL;** Cllrs supported interviews for the new Head and also gave funding for a drama project in early 2020

## 5. WORKING WITH OTHER AGENTS/GROUPS

- I. The Town Council received an invitation from the Rural Services Network to join the Rural/Market Towns Group. This is a nationwide group which has the aim of lobbying for funding for market towns and to share best practices amongst the network. The Town Council agreed it would be beneficial to the community and joined the group in November 2019.
- II. **SIGNAGE:** The Town Council has been and continues to work with Devon County Council and the Futures Group in relation to improved signage for the Town Centre.
- III. **DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL – DOING WHAT MATTERS ROAD PILOT:** The Town Council was happy to join with DCC regarding a new initiative from DCC Highways Team to

work with local Parish/Town Councils on a highways pilot scheme called Doing What Matters. The idea behind this scheme is for Devon Highways to improve the efficiency of how they deliver highway maintenance, looking at how they manage budgets and how they determine priorities with local communities.

The Highways team was picking a couple of Parish and Town Councils to bring into this process, so they can bring local community views into the decision-making process. Cllr Andrew Saywell has suggested that Great Torrington Town Council would be a good partner for this pilot.

- IV. **TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL - HERITAGE ACTION ZONE:** The Town Council supported the bid put to the Futures High Street Fund by TDC on behalf of GTTC and also was involved in some of the leg work prior to submission.
- V. **TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL – ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE FUND (AHF)** The Town Council supported the bid put to the AHF by TDC on behalf of GTTC and again, was involved in some of the preparation work prior to submission.
- VI. The bid was successful and GTTC subsequently worked with TDC in relation to meeting with the company assigned to undertake a feasibility study in respect of the Globe Hotel Project.
- VII. **Bike Racks:** The Town Council worked with Devon County Council to ensure installation of bike racks in the town centre.
- VIII. **Citizens Advice:** Is supported by the Town Council both financially and by offering accommodation on a weekly basis at the Council offices. Meetings are held from time to time to ensure all is working as it should.
- IX. **The Health and Social Care Steering Group:** Meets with various community members and the NHS/CCG with a view to being kept informed about the services being run from Torrington Community Hospital and to work for more.
- X. **Torrington 100**
- XI. **THE GUILD OF MACE BEARERS:** The Council joined the Guild of Mace Bearers in the autumn 2019.

## 6. POLICY and RESOURCES

- a. **Addressing Councillors:** GTTC agreed that the Council will no longer use “titles”, e.g. Mr, Miss, when referring to Cllrs.
- b. **Grants applied for:** The Town Council has applied for grants this year as follows;
  - i. Neighbourhood Plan Funding: The Council secured ongoing funding from “Locality” to support work on the Neighbourhood Plan.
  - ii. Highways Enhancement Fund: For 2 new lawn mowers.
  - iii. TDC: A bid for a new boiler on behalf of the Museum.
  - iv. Community WIFI application via European Funding.
  - v. GTTC purchased Christmas Lights – Majority of funding came from £1,000 for Borehole and District and County Council Cllrs’ grants.

### **c. Grants Awarded**

Members agreed to allocated £23,550.00 from GTTC funding and £4750.00 from the Commons Allotment Charity in 2020/2021.

Members agreed to support Great Torrington Secondary School's "National Theatre drama project" in the New Year to the sum of £300.00.

### **d. New/Revised Polices/Procedures and Documents**

- Risk Management Policy created and was reviewed later in the year
- Death of a Senior National Figure Protocol has been reviewed and updated
- A new Environmental Policy has been created and approved
- A Continuity Plan has been created and approved
- Standing Orders has been reviewed and updated
- Great Torrington TC Committee and Terms of Reference – reviewed and updated
- A procedure which allows draft minutes to be published prior to sign off
- All Councillors have new e-mail addresses to take them away from using personal e-mail addresses for Council business
- A new Social Media Policy
- Updated the Discretionary Policy (Pension)
- Updated Financial Regulations
- Asset of Community Value: Torrington cottage hospital

## **7. STAFFING/JOB DESCRIPTIONS**

- i. The Technicians had salaries reviewed in line with local comparisons
- ii. The Technician Post had a revised Job Description.
- iii. A new post of Part-Time (6hrs p/w) Administration Officer was agreed, Job Description compiled and post advertised and filled from January 2020

## **8. TRAINING:** The following courses have been offered to Members;

- i. Social Media Training
- ii. Planning Training
- iii. New Councillor training

iv. The Town Clerk will commence CiLCA training during the year.

## **FINALLY, and PERSONALLY**

I am delighted to report that I have had a very enjoyable and successful first term in office. I have thoroughly enjoyed representing our wonderful town and have, so far, attended 69 events on behalf of the town and town council, with Cllr Smith also stepping in for me at times.

It is no surprise that my age was an initial talking point as I am one of a handful of youngest Mayors in the UK to-date. Throughout the past year I have been warmly received wherever I have gone and have appreciated the support and advice from experienced councillors. However, I hope that I have also brought a new perspective, and in some small way, inspired other young people along the way!

I have met lots of new people during this past year, some of who will remain good friends to Will and I in years to come. It has also been an honour to be a member of the "Chain Gang" and great to get to know other Mayors as well. It has also been a privilege to represent Great Torrington at all of these civic events.

I'd love to talk about all of the activities, occasions and events but we could be here a while! I've had many 'wow' moments, one being the fantastic poppy project which I was honoured to help unveil in the town hall last November. This was a huge community effort and really emphasised the outstanding community spirit we have here in Great Torrington. It was quite an over whelming and emotional moment to see the poppies and share the moment with everyone involved and they should be immensely proud of their achievement.

One of my main aims this year was to help increase footfall in Great Torrington. Out of this came my 'Mayor's Challenge' whereby I challenged the people of Great Torrington to shop with and support our local traders. It was wonderful to see so many people joining in a realising what our town has to offer. I am currently in the process of evaluating how well this has worked with the potential to take it up a notch in the coming year.

I want to thank my fellow Councillors for their support during this year. The council is not run by just one person; we are a team and I believe a team which works together extremely well. I always make a point of mentioning to other mayors and Councillors across the area how proud I am to be part of such a diverse and hard-working council. The same applies to our staff who are always working hard to support our Councillors as they run with and develop various projects to help our town; and of course, are directly involved themselves.

We also have our two Technicians who work hard in our community and a plethora of volunteers who help us maintain our local heritage and traditions and also undertake work on behalf of the Town Council. We really are, "One Team!"

Cllr Keeley Allin

Mayor of Great Torrington