

# BELPER TOWN COUNCIL



## ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23



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# INTRODUCTION

## By the Mayor, Councillor Katie Harris

### MAYOR'S OVERVIEW

It has been my great privilege to serve as the mayor of Belper for the last year. As we have come out of the COVID restrictions, it has also been a pleasure to be invited to attend a whole range of community events and celebrations which have highlighted the immense range of volunteers and charitable organisations who make the town such a lively place.

### COUNCIL MEETINGS

Members of the public are welcome to attend Full Council meetings which are usually held on the second Tuesday of each month (apart from August) at 7pm when time is set aside for the public to raise any matters of concern or to make their views known on any items on the agenda.

The Council also embodies the following Standing Committees:

- Finance, Governance & Staff Committee
- Facilities, Environment & Local Economy Committee
- Arts, Events & Heritage Committee
- Youth Committee
- The Herbert Strutt Charity Committee
- Planning Committee

In addition, there are a number of specialized working groups (WG) that are convened to research specific areas of business and advise the committees:

- Accessibility WG
- Communications WG
- Markets WG
- Car Parks WG.

### THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS:

#### **Making Belper more Accessible: Accessibility Strategy**

Unfortunately, the esteemed organisation 'Accessible Belper', closed at about the time of the last report; however, the Council continues to make improvements to the support provided to people with Disabling Conditions. Some of the areas the Council has worked on include ensuring that Grant applications to the Council cater for people with Disabling conditions; the development of a new Toolkit for businesses to help them be more

accessible; raising awareness at a number of the Belper Market days; making representations for better provision of services such as Accessible Taxis; examining the scope for better Community Transport provision which is more easily accessible; and liaison with the Leisure Centre to explore how to deliver new activities for people with Disabling conditions.

### **Action on Flooding**

The Council is keenly aware that the risk of flooding in Belper and Milford has increased in recent years. Consequently, it has prepared and developed a Belper Flood Watch Scheme and appointed several flood wardens under the Lead Flood Warden, Councillor Emma Monkman. We have affiliated our Scheme with Communities Prepared, a Groundwork South Project, and attended two training events. A Flood Plan for Belper and Milford has been created in conjunction with Derbyshire County Council and the Environment Agency and equipment has been procured for use during a flood in addition to additional support from the emergency services for those affected. The Flood Watch team has connected with other Councils and Flood schemes along the Derwent Valley and are now more prepared than ever to deal with flooding emergencies.

### **Electric Vehicle Charge Points (EVCP)**

Belper Town Council completed the installation of 12 Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the Coppice Car Park in Summer 2022. This is another of the actions that the Council has taken in support of its 2019 Climate Emergency Declaration. In addition, additional bike racks have been installed in the town centre in collaboration with Derbyshire County Council to encourage residents to 'take to their bikes'.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Belper**

The Council continues to receive occasional reports of anti-social behaviour which occurs mainly in the town centre during the hours of the 'night-time economy'. The Derbyshire Constabulary Safer Neighbourhoods' Team (SNT) respond to all incidents, within their resources, and residents are encouraged to report any occurrence on 101 (for non-urgent incidents) and 999 in an emergency. The Council collaborates with both the Community Safety Team at Amber Valley Borough Council and the Police and is committed to making sure that measures are put in place to alleviate the consequences of ASB.

### **Belper and Milford Community Speed Watch (CSW)**

Excessive and/or inappropriate speeding is dangerous and accounts for many unnecessary injuries and collisions. It is a criminal offence which affects the quality of life in many communities throughout Derbyshire. The Community Speed Watch (CSW) is a national initiative where active members of local communities join, with support of the Police, to monitor speeds of vehicles using radar speed detection devices. The Belper & Milford CSW Team is coordinated by Councillor Fay Atkinson and has organised training sessions for volunteers to help to reduce death and injury on our roads. The Council has

also been successful in its bid for a grant from Amber Valley Borough Council for a Speed Indicating Device (SIDS) grant which is awaiting installation.

### **Belper Youth Council**

The Youth Council of Belper continues to play a formative role and remains a strong force for both change and continuity in the town. Its key aim is to continue to build upon this and, to that end, the Youth Council focuses young minds positively, representing not just our youngsters, but the community in which they live. With new councillors, and in the challenging post-pandemic environment, these young people have started to make a real and positive impact. Under the current leadership the ideas of those who the Council represents are turned into positive action such as the recent application for funding for the new Youth Club. I am pleased to report that the Youth Council is creating new opportunities in Belper and is starting to make a real impact.

### **Belper Town Council Budget 2023/24**

Last year, because of the hardship inflicted by the COVID pandemic, there was no increase in the Council's precept, the portion of Council Tax that is raised for Belper Town Council. Consequently, notwithstanding the current economic climate, there has been a need to increase the precept in the 2023/24 Budget by 10%, in line with current inflation, to continue to be able to finance essential local spending. To achieve this, the Council has decided once again to offset some of the significant increases in costs by using its General Reserve. To that end, the precept will increase from £590,058 to £649,064 which means, for a Band D property, the charge will increase by £8.13 per annum or 69p per month.

In keeping with the core values and themes outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021 – 2024, a strong commitment has again been made to support the many volunteer organisations that make our town such an invigorating and caring community. A total of £107,225 has been allocated in annual grants to maintain and enhance the services provided by:

- Amber Valley Community Transport
- Belper Early Years (FUN)
- Blend Youth Project
- Citizens Advice
- Hope for Belper
- Fleet Arts
- Belper Leisure Centre
- Belper Youth Sports Festival
- Community Food Hub

In addition, the fund for small grants through which the Council provides financial support (usually less than £1000) to local organisations for projects and proposals which will enhance the quality of life of Belper residents, will remain at £20000 and community groups are encouraged to apply throughout the year. In the past, this funding has

benefited numerous community organisations providing an array of services and opportunity throughout the town.

### **External Grant Funding**

The Council works hard, through the economic development officer, to secure grant funding from external organisations for community projects whenever they become available. Grant funding through organisations such as the National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF), the Levelling Up Towns Fund, the Police & Crime Commissioner's Office, and the War Memorial Trust (WMT), remains available despite the constraints of the recent economic downturn and the Council will continue to identify funding opportunities and make appropriate applications as they become available.

### **Annual Civic Service and Belper Town Council Awards 2022/23**

The Annual Civic Service and BTC Annual Awards were held in St Peter's Church on Sunday 12th March and, as last year, were highly successful in showcasing the work of the people of Belper and acknowledgement of their achievements. In this almost unprecedented time of economic turmoil, the role of community organisations and exceptional individuals cannot be underestimated, and it is important that we continue to recognise this through our awards.

### **A New Council and Additional Officer for Belper**

The local council elections were held on Thursday 4th May 2023 and have delivered a new Council to serve the residents of our town. In addition, we have welcomed a new administrative assistant to the team at St John's Chapel to take care of the office duties on a day-to-day basis and assist the Deputy Town Clerk with the organisation of the Council's busy programme of events.

## **HOW THE COUNCIL SERVES THE COMMUNITY**

### **Looking after the Town**

The Town Council works in partnership with Amber Valley Borough Council undertaking many of the functions associated with much larger Town Councils. Belper and Milford areas are maintained to a remarkably high standard as can be evidenced by the parks, gardens, and floral displays. Every effort continues to be made to combat the problems of litter, fly-tipping, and graffiti.

As well as contributing to the environment, the Council plays an important role in the monitoring and consideration of all planning applications.

The Neighbourhood Plan went to referendum following a successful government inspection in May 2021 and was approved by 88% of those who voted. The Neighbourhood Plan now informs the recommendations made by the Planning

Committee of the Town Council and gives them the background legal structure on which to comment on all planning applications it receives. This will continue until the emerging Local Plan is delivered by AVBC and may adjust the background guidance.

### **Communicating with the Public**

As well as the Council's notice boards which are situated around the Town, the Council publishes all news, events, agendas, reports and minutes on its website and news items are also published on Twitter and Facebook. The Council also produces an eNewsletter, which is now in an electronic format. If you would like to be added to the distribution list, please contact [enquiries@belpertowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@belpertowncouncil.gov.uk)

### **Liaison with the Derbyshire Police**

The Police are invited to attend meetings of the Town Council and are given the opportunity to report on crime figures and to raise any relevant matter. They have attended several meetings during the past year.

### **Provision of Community Facilities**

The Council has now emerged from the COVID restrictions and is fully functional, but we continue to hold Full Council meetings in a more spacious venue at The Strutt Centre, to allow for social distancing if required. The Heritage Centre in St John's Chapel is available for hire by the community for daytime meetings and events.

### **Provision of Community Allotments**

The Council provides several allotments sited at Hunter Road which are managed by the Allotment Association in partnership with the Town Council. All the plots are in use and there is currently a waiting list; however, the Council is seeking further allotment sites so if you know of any suitable land that is available, please contact the Town Clerk.

### **Provision of Car Parking**

The Council currently provides parking facilities at the Coppice Car Park, Gibfield Lane and St John's, at the side of the Chapel. Following the levy of business rates on the Coppice Car Park, and the declaration by the town of a climate emergency, a Council Working Group has been working to investigate the options available to ensure that parking remains available to residents and visitors, at the lowest cost, and is fair on Belper council taxpayers.

### **Monthly Markets**

The Belper Markets are highly respected and are well attended with visitors from all over the area who enjoy the vibrant atmosphere and wide selection of quality produce which is always on offer. We have introduced a monthly Sunday Market specifically aimed at

the local community and small business concerns which Councillor Carol Angharad, and the Markets' Working Group, will continue to support.

### **The Community Orchard.**

Work to develop the community orchard at Snowberry Avenue on the Parks Estate is progressing through collaboration with Amber Valley District Council. More to follow of this worthy project later in the year.

### **Council Staff**

The Council employs five office staff: The Town Clerk, a Deputy Town Clerk, a Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), an Economic Development Officer (EDO), and an Administrative Assistant. The Council also has a highly successful Outdoor Team staff of four which continues to provide a sterling service to the town in many areas of outdoor custodianship. The dedication of the team to the town is outstanding and we all appreciate the work that they do in supporting both councillors and residents.