

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL 2019/20

1. 2019/20 has once again been a very busy year for Cockermouth Town Council. Town Council meetings can now be recorded and filmed and as a result the Town Council has adopted a Protocol which is displayed at the entrance to our meeting room.
2. Elections were held in May 2019. Five new councillors, Stephen Barnes, Grace Bennion, Andrew Semple, Christine Smith & Richard Watson were duly elected.
3. The Town Council is consulted by the Borough Council on all planning applications within the town of Cockermouth and in all cases, comments have been forwarded to the Borough Council setting out the Town Council's views. The final decision on planning applications does not always agree with the views of the Town Council however the majority of decisions do agree.
4. Special Planning meetings are now held on the first Thursday of every month if required.
5. I am pleased to inform you that every square inch of available space in the Town Hall is now leased. The Citizens Advice Bureau continue to hold their outreach sessions each Wednesday in a ground floor office. Allerdale Borough Council enforces usage of our car park on our behalf.
6. Victoria Hall is currently leased by Mrs Bealt. The Vicky Business Centre opened on 21 February 2018 providing vibrant, flexible and affordable office space for home workers, start-up businesses etc. Flood resilience works were completed and paid for with a flood resilience grant and should help protect the premises from future flooding.
7. The Tourist Information Centre moved to the library on Main Street on 3 April 2017, along with Allerdale Local Links. The building transferred to Cockermouth Town Council in October 2018 and staffed by the Town Council in partnership with Cumbria County Council and Allerdale Borough Council. This arrangement has worked well so far. We hope to invite Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage to Cockermouth Library later this year.
8. Our website contains lots of useful information including councillor details, dates of town council meetings, minutes of meetings, events etc. Check out www.ckermouth.org. Agendas were published as of May 2019. We have also added a 'green section' to our website.
9. Our twinning links continue to flourish despite tough economic times. Exchanges to date include: -
 - 36th Anniversary Visit to Marvejols
 - We are currently planning the 37th Anniversary Visit to Cockermouth

Unfortunately several planned visits to Cockermouth have been cancelled this year

due to corona virus.

In June 2017 we became a 'sister city to Hebron, New Hampshire. Originally Hebron was part of a larger colonial town named after Lord Cockermouth. Cockermouth was founded in 1766. By 1792, it had grown into two geographically distinct villages. As a result, Cockermouth was split. The western portion became Groton and the eastern portion became Hebron.

A representative from Hebron visited Cockermouth in September 2019.

10. As a result of the town being awarded the Europe Prize in the year 2000 a Europe Prize Scholarship Fund was set up and has now become established and a great help to Cockermouth 6th form youngsters pursuing their studies in Europe. The Committee continues to raise money to keep the fund going for the foreseeable future. I have chosen the Europe Prize Scholarship Fund as my charity for 2019/20.
11. The Council provides allotments on two sites St. Helen's Street and the Gote. The Gote Road allotments were transferred to the Town Council from Cumbria County Council under a community asset transfer. There are currently approximately 30 people on the waiting list for an allotment. A successful presentation evening was held in the Council Chamber on 24 September 2018 for winners of the Garden and Allotment Competition. The Town Clerk continues to meet members of the Allotments Association on a regular basis.
12. The Town Council sponsored various events held in Cockermouth during 2019/20 including Cockermouth Carnival, Cockermouth Live, Taste Cumbria & Taste Christmas and Christmas Panto.
13. The fireworks display held in the Memorial Gardens was a resounding success and will be repeated again this year.
14. The usual Christmas activities organised by the Town Council took place and were well attended. The Christmas Lights were fantastic again this year. We continue to be grateful for the donations made by businesses, local organisations and individuals towards the cost of the lights despite tough economic times.
15. Civic events organised included our Civic Service & Remembrance Sunday. Unfortunately the picnic on the Memorial Gardens planned to mark the 75th anniversary of VE/VJ Day on Friday 8 May 2020 was cancelled due to corona virus. I will still lay a wreath at our cenotaph at 11.00am.
16. The Council's Internal Auditor, Jean Airey, a former Town Clerk of Keswick, regularly audits the Town Council's accounts and reports back to the Council. This year's annual accounts have been prepared and the Clerk will shortly be sending off the required Annual Return to the External District Auditor. The repeal of Section 150(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 now allows enables the Town Council to finally embrace modern banking methods.

17. The Council continues to employ Tivoli as their Maintenance Contractor.
18. A 30-year lease was signed with Cockermouth Junior Football Club for their future use of Tarn Close Sports Ground. Their vision involves the creation of a football centre at Tarn Close for use by all teams in the town, junior, senior and veteran serving in the region of 500 members initially. Their long-term vision involves the erection of a synthetic indoor pitch to serve Cockermouth and the surrounding villages.
19. Play areas and land at Greyrigg Avenue, Harris Park Extension, Isel Road, Towers Lane and Memorial Gardens continue to be maintained by Cockermouth Town Council. The Memorial Gardens play area has been fully refurbished.
20. The Localism Bill published on the 13 December 2010 aims to shift power from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and Councils by lifting the burden of bureaucracy, empowering communities and strengthening accountability to local people. A range of new powers and reforms will be introduced as a result of the Bill.

One of those new powers is the General Power of Competence (GPC). I am pleased to announce that on the 15 May 2019, the Town Council re-confirmed that it meets both criteria for eligibility for use of the General Power of Competence as set out in a statutory instrument known as the Parish Council's (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012 which came into force in April 2012.

21. The new General Power of Competence will fundamentally change the way Local Government behaves, giving them the same capacity to act as an individual generally which will enable us to do anything apart from that which is specifically prohibited. This will result in greater innovation and a new more confident entrepreneurial approach which should in turn lead to greater efficiencies, improved partnership working and the ability to help our community in ways previously outside our remit.
22. The Town Council adopted a revised Code of Conduct on 17 July 2012. Copies of the Code can be obtained from our website. The long-awaited report of the Independent Committee on Standards in Public Life (previously the Nolan Committee) on Ethical Standards in Local Government was published on 4 February 2019. It contains a special chapter on town and parish councils and many of the 26 recommendations intend to promote and maintain the standards expected by the public, relate directly to them.
23. The Town Council continues to maintain three bus shelters two on Main Street and one on Castlegate Drive.
24. The Town Council has worked closely with a number of voluntary organisations regarding a series of events planned to mark the 100th anniversary of the Great War. The Town Council has adopted a flower bed adjacent to Gote Bridge on the Crown Street side. This is currently being leased to the Rotary to commemorate

those lost during WW1. A re-dedication was held on 28 April 2019 following the refurbishment of the cenotaph.

25. Our speed indication device continues to be placed at 'speeding' hotspots around the Town. There have been issues with speeding down Gote Brow.
26. A community defibrillator has been installed in Kings Arms Lane. The Town Council continues to monitor and pay for the maintenance costs of this machine.
27. The Town Council were instrumental in the installation of cycle stands on the Main Street and are now responsible for their maintenance.
28. Usage of our banner poles on the Main Street has declined.
29. Six pieces of adult fitness equipment were installed in Harris Park Extension on 7 May 2019 following the receipt of a 6k grant from the United Utilities Legacy Fund.
30. All four public toilets transferred to Cockermouth Town Council on 31 July 2017. The toilets on Main Street have been fully refurbished. We welcome news of a commitment to exempt public toilets from paying non-domestic rates as this will result in a saving of over £2k per annum.
32. The Council Chamber became an alternative venue for Cumbria County Council's Ceremony Room based in Fairfield. Our first wedding was held on 14 October 2016. I am pleased to announce that our licence has been extended for a further five years.
33. An artist Nem Sarton has completed the wall painting on Cocker Bridge to assist and encourage pedestrians/visitors to continue their journey along Main Street and explore what Market Place has to offer. The artist has used traditional techniques and materials. The Town Council will maintain the sign going forward.
34. We have become increasingly concerned about the increase in theft and anti-social behaviour. I am pleased to announce that we have made a successful application to the Police and Crime Commissioner for £3k towards the cost of the installation and maintenance of a cctv camera on Main Street.
38. We participated in Eat/Drink/Engage in June 2019. The topic discussed was climate change.
39. Cockermouth Town Council declared a climate change emergency on 19 June 2019. A list of simple, achievable actions were drawn up and a task group formed.

As a result we are:

- Reducing the amount of pesticides used on Council owned land
- Exploring carbon offset schemes with local travel agents
- Exploring the use of green utility suppliers

- Exploring the planting of wild flowers on verges
 - Exploring the replacement of litter bins with bins which have separate compartments for recycling
 - Discussing various tree planting schemes on Council owned land
 - Recycling dressing up outfits through the library
 - Exploring the installation of electric vehicle charging points
40. We have been liaising with Stagecoach and Cumbria County Council regarding extending the Storey Homes bus service to nearby estates. This service will start on 4 February 2020. Any shortfall in revenue will be met by Cockermouth Town Council.
 41. Councillor Malloy will represent the Town Council at public inquiry into the stopping up of Footpath 223003, Land off Strawberry How Road. This was due to take place on 9th June 2020 however it has been deferred due to corona virus.
 42. Metalcraft Cockermouth Community Fund was launched in March 2020. Metalcraft Hope this fund will help to ensure a diverse range of organisations can continue to operate and grow. Organisations must be based in Cockermouth parish and be 'not for profit' organisations operating for the benefit of the local community. Our Foodbank was the first ever recipient and received £500 recently.
 43. The Coronavirus pandemic and the unprecedented in peacetime Government measures in response to the crisis (e.g. prohibitions on gatherings, social distancing, self-isolation and shielding of those deemed to be the most vulnerable have meant that the requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person with all members present in one place cannot be met. The introduction of new regulations, The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (coronavirus) (flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)(England and Wales) Regulations 2020 on 4 April 2020 has meant that we have had to work differently. Broadly speaking the Regulations enable us to hold remote meetings including by video and telephone conferencing for a specified period until May next year. They also remove the requirement to hold an annual meeting. I will therefore continue as Mayor of Cockermouth until May 2021.
 44. Our library and public toilets have been closed and many events cancelled.
 45. I appreciate that everyone is making sacrifices at the moment by staying at home.
 46. We are grateful to our NHS Staff and other key workers who are working so hard during this epidemic. I would also like to thank the thousands of volunteers who are helping the most vulnerable within our own communities.

Julie Laidlow - **Town Mayor**