



# **WHITCHURCH TOWN COUNCIL**

## **“TIME TO LEAD THE COMMUNITY”- CORPORATE STRATEGY 2013-2015**



Adopted by the Council: 29<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

# Whitchurch Town Council

**Our purpose** is to be the champion for improving the quality of life for all of our community so that Whitchurch becomes a great place to live, work and relax.

To achieve this all members of the Council will work together to serve and lead the community with a determination to undertake the fullest range of services, responding to the wider need of its residents with fair and proportionate governance.

We will manage resources effectively and be an advocate and campaigning voice for the Town to be progressive.

**Our vision** is to grow Whitchurch to be a hub for the geographical area, a centre of excellence for its services to the local and wider community, whilst cherishing its sense of place.

To achieve this we will develop Whitchurch to realise its full potential, with good quality jobs, better homes, a vibrant town centre, a recognised tourist hub and an area which is prosperous and clean.

We will celebrate its unique heritage and facilitate more access to arts and culture and social facilities. More of the community will be encouraged to be more engaged and offered more opportunities for education, leisure, health and well-being.

**Our main priorities are to help:**

- **Enable more quality and sustainable jobs**
- **Engage the community and give young people a reason to stay.**
- **Provide more homes to match needs & aspirations**
- **Protect and enhance the local environment and celebrate our unique heritage**
- **Enable improved transport links and community facilities**
- **Develop the potential of the Council to deliver local services and effective leadership.**

Whitchurch Town Council promises to improve communication with the community using its power and influence as a minor local authority to further the best interests of the town as a whole.

We will listen and respect all points of view and will exercise our duties with tolerance, patience and understanding – in a fair and reasoned manner.

Whitchurch Town Council aims to lead by example, to operate effectively and efficiently, developing greater capacity and capability to achieve its priorities.

**OUR CORE VALUES:** The principles by which we will operate the Council are:

**Democracy and openness**

**Equality & respect**

**Working with others**

**Value for money**

Note; *This is Whitchurch Town Council's 'one page strategy', a vision and commitment to what we are here to do. From this a business plan will evolve with clear, smart objectives against which our community can measure our performance*

## FORWORD

Welcome to Whitchurch Town Council's first Corporate Strategy. It sets out our vision for the future and our aims and priorities over the next two years. As you would expect, it builds on the Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan, published in 2011 by a Steering Committee, representing the Town's communities of both place and purpose. It also supports a number of actions in the "Whitchurch and surrounding Area Place Plan", published by Shropshire Council.

In this document we have highlighted the role of the Town Council in achieving our Vision for the Town, because we recognise that it will take a strong partnership of a number of organisations to attain its goals. As the local authority closest to people and communities of the Town, we are uniquely situated to provide strong civic leadership. We also have a number of statutory duties and services to administer and intend to build quality into our ethos, to ensure we do this in the most efficient and cost effective way.

The elections in May 2013 have seen a new beginning for the Town Council, with renewed direction, new powers and opportunities and increasing capacity. **"Time to lead the Community"** is the recognition of where we are and what needs doing. It is a commitment to tackle the issues identified with vigour, over a realistic period of time. The Council has taken time to look at its rules, its capacity and its policies which are essential to it being able to operate effectively, however it all is about delivering improvements to services, facilities and standards in the Town. It will be careful with public money, but not afraid to invest in the future.

Whitchurch has a number of distinctive features which makes it attractive, a strong heritage and most importantly a friendly and caring community with a considerable number of voluntary organisations whose work and commitment are so vital to the area.

With the launch of this Strategy, we will be able to cherish our heritage and look forward to a new town logo, which will result in unprecedented promotion of our Town as a place in which to live, invest, do business, spend leisure time or just visit.

Great as Whitchurch is for those who live and work here, there are a number of issues which require attention if it is to cope with the unprecedented rate of change in people's lifestyles, demands and aspirations. These developments will be co-ordinated and driven by our Business Plan. We will also take them forward by producing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Town. We will report back to you regularly on progress.

Whitchurch is a fast developing local council, with growing confidence that it can deliver local services, provide the governance and the community leadership needed to re vitalise our town and that it can enable a range of partnerships to take forward the necessary regeneration.

This strategy is a response to issues identified in our situational analysis and the wishes of local people following public consultation exercises. It recognises that Whitchurch cannot develop in isolation and acknowledges key policy documents at principal council level.

We have consulted stakeholders on our draft strategy and the final document does contain a number of changes following the comments received. We now feel able to shape Whitchurch as a place which meets the expectations of its residents, businesses and community organisations.

Councillor Rob Hewson  
Whitchurch Town Mayor

Peter C Cooper  
Locum Town Clerk

## INTRODUCTION TO WHITCHURCH

Whitchurch is situated in north Shropshire, close to the Cheshire and Wrexham County Boundaries and in particular the towns of Wrexham, Nantwich and Crewe. Whitchurch benefits from a railway station on the Shrewsbury-Crewe line. The town has a thriving town centre and has the benefit of A49 and A525 bypasses around the town. The Whitchurch arm of the Llangollen branch of the Shropshire Union Canal is an important tourist facility bringing visitors to the town. It is the oldest continuously inhabited town in Shropshire and is twinned with the French town of Neufchâtel-en-Bray.

Originally a settlement founded by the Romans around AD 52 or 70, it was called Mediolanum, meaning the place in the middle of the plain. Roman artefacts can be seen at the Whitchurch Heritage Centre. The current name comes from 'White Church', which refers to a church from Norman period made from white stone. The current impressive church is St. Alkmund, a Church of England (Anglican) building. Dispensing with the colour tradition, it was built in 1712 of red sandstone and stands on the site of the earlier Norman architecture church. It is an important Grade I Listed building.

Whitchurch is the home of the JB Joyce tower clocks company, established in 1690, the oldest clock tower making company in the world, earning Whitchurch the reputation as the Home of tower clocks. Famous past residents of the town include composer Sir Edward German, who was born in the town in what is now a pub (the Old Town Hall Vaults). He is buried in the local cemetery. Locally, the Sir Edward German Music Festival - is hosted by St. Alkmund's and St. John's churches. Victorian illustrator Randolph Caldecott lived in the town for several years and many of the town buildings feature in his work. Sir Henry Percy (Sir Harry Hotspur) was killed in 1403 at the Battle of Shrewsbury and buried in Whitchurch; only for his body to be later exhumed and quartered. Also buried in Whitchurch is another medieval warrior Sir John Talbot, a military commander, who in 1429 fought French armies inspired by Joan of Arc. The local secondary school "Sir John Talbot's" is named after him.

The Town centre of Whitchurch combines historic old buildings and landmarks alongside 1960s and later developments. It is an important service centre for the surrounding area and has a weekly charter market. The majority of shops are independently owned but there are some branches of national chain stores.

There is a range of community based facilities including a library, swimming pool, leisure centre, community hospital, day care centre, two community centres, youth centre, heritage centre, four places of worship (and two other Christian groups who meet in community buildings) and a multipurpose Civic Centre. Statutory education is provided by separate Infant, Junior and Secondary schools, and a private Primary school.

Whitchurch has many voluntary organisations and groups including successful sports clubs, service organisations like Rotary, youth groups, drama groups, Photographic Society, History and Archaeology Group, Wildlife Trust, and Waterways Trust. The Chamber of Trade supports local businesses, and other groups are active within the tourism sector. Many national and local charities have branches in Whitchurch. Whitchurch Rugby Club, founded in 1936, plays at Edgeley Park. The local football club, Whitchurch Alport F.C., known as the Allbran Allstars, now play in the Mercian Regional Football League.

Significant growth in Whitchurch took place in Victorian and Edwardian times and then at the end of the Great War, when much new housing was provided by the Urban District Council (UDC). Slum clearance and greater demand for housing after World War 2 led to the development of more council estates, scattered around the town. Remnants of the surrounding open countryside remained as green corridors into the Town centre. Early private housing estates were constructed mainly on infill sites. Since 1970 most private building has been on the edges of the built up area. In the Town centre there has been some more recent building of apartment complexes. The upper floors of some commercial premises have been converted into living accommodation.

## ABOUT WHITCHURCH TOWN COUNCIL AND OTHER GOVERNMENT

**Whitchurch** is a market town in Shropshire and forms the Whitchurch Urban civil parish. It is bordered to the south and south east by the Whitchurch Rural parish, to the north by Cheshire and to the west by Wales. Whitchurch was granted 'town' status in 1284 and has a market charter dating from the 16th century.

Whitchurch Town Council is one of the largest of 153 local councils within the Shropshire. Within this number, 16 are Town Councils of which Whitchurch is the fifth largest. Shropshire Council is one of two principal councils in the ceremonial and historic County, the other being Telford and Wrekin Borough Council.

Whitchurch was granted 'town' status in 1284 and has market rights dating from the 16th century.

Modern local government for the Town was originally formed as Whitchurch and Dodington Urban District, in 1894, replacing the Local Board, which had been established in 1860. The name of the district was altered to Whitchurch Urban District, in 1895, and a Council, consisting of twelve members was formed. In 1967, it was amalgamated with Ellesmere Rural District, Wem Rural District, and the urban districts of Ellesmere & Wem, as well as Whittington from Oswestry Rural District, to form the North Shropshire Rural District Council.

At this time, Whitchurch Parish Council was formed as the local council for the civil (urban) parish of Whitchurch

The North Shropshire Rural District survived until 1974 when it was abolished under the Local Government Act 1972 to form part of a new, larger North Shropshire District, by combining with Market Drayton Rural District. At this time, the Parish Council was designated as Whitchurch Town Council, which effectively had exactly the same legal status, powers and duties as a parish council but had a civic mayor as oppose to a chairman of council.

The district and its council were abolished on 1 April 2009 when the new Shropshire unitary authority was established, as part of the 2009 structural changes to local government in England. Whitchurch Town Council remained unchanged. The historic and ceremonial county of Shropshire, England, located in the West Midlands region, has two unitary authorities as the local authorities (Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Borough Council). Whitchurch Town is located within the Whitchurch and Prees Local Joint Committee Area.

Whitchurch is part of the North Shropshire constituency for Parliamentary elections and part of the West Midlands constituency of the European Parliament.

The Town Council has a coat of arms, the motto of which is *Floreat Concilia Salopiae* which translates as "Develop Shropshire's Councils"

### AN OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE TOWN

*This Section provides a summary of available information to give context to the Council's stated priorities. More detailed information is provided in the "Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan" (2011) and the "Whitchurch and surrounding Area Place Plan". Both of these are available or have links provided on the Town Council's Website. [www.whitchurch-shropshire-tc.gov.uk](http://www.whitchurch-shropshire-tc.gov.uk)*

Whitchurch is the fifth largest market town in Shropshire with a population of some 9,900 (mid 2010). Its population is comparatively young, with more residents under the age of 18 than over 65. 62% of the population is in the age range of 16 to 64, giving 6200 people of working age. In February 2012, the number claiming job seekers' allowance was 283, 4.6% of the working population. This is above the Shropshire, regional and national levels. Long term unemployment (longer than 12 months) is 21.8%, which is above both Shropshire and national levels, but below that for the West Midlands. The % of unemployed in the 24 years and under age group is also above the Shropshire, regional and national levels.

A higher proportion of residents work in elementary occupations or as process, plant and machine operatives than in professional, or technical occupations. The industrial estates contain some nationally and internationally known firms, but also local enterprises. Whitchurch shows a lower level of employment self-containment than other similar towns in the County with just 48.5% of the resident working population employed in the Town.

The location of Whitchurch and its good transport links provide potential for attracting and sustaining new businesses. In 2012, there were 3000 employee jobs located in Whitchurch. Excluding those who were self employed, 48.5% of jobs were occupied by men and 51.5% by women. Male full time jobs account for 39.3% of the total, male part-time 9.2%; female full time 22.4% and female part-time 29.1%. The service sector accounted for 85.7% of jobs, manufacturing 9.2% and construction 5.0%.

- The town supports above average employment in retail and wholesale (19.1% and 11.2% of all employees respectively compared with 11.9% and 4.5% for Shropshire).
- Significantly fewer are employed in manufacturing and accommodation and food services.
- A significant proportion of Whitchurch jobs are in health (17.8%) and education (9.3%).

Within Whitchurch there are approximately 500 businesses, the majority of which are small in size, with less than 10 employing more than 50 (Mint, 2012). The Town is particularly dependent on distribution, hotels and restaurants and the transport and communications sectors which absorb 45.8% of employees. National changes to pension arrangements in the future are likely to result in an increase in the number of people over 65 requiring employment. The proportion of people of working age in the Town is therefore likely to rise overall in the future.

In 2011 there were an estimated 4,085 dwellings in Whitchurch with 54% being semi-detached, 32% detached and 14% flats, maisonettes and apartments. 69% of the dwellings were owner occupied, 17% rented from a social landlord and 14% rented from a private landlord. There is a hostel near the Town centre for young people moving out of the care system.

House prices in Shropshire are higher than national and regional averages, but less so in northern Shropshire towns. However, workplace wage levels are lower, resulting in an affordability issue. Unaffordable house prices in addition to a lack of smaller dwellings and shared accommodation contributes to out-migration of the young and can make it difficult for local people to live close by their place of employment. The number of households in Shropshire is forecast to grow faster than the regional average; this will put additional pressure on the housing market and means that substantial housing developments will be needed if there is to be sufficient housing supply to meet demand.

The future growth of Whitchurch will need to ensure that housing developments, service provision and job creation are considered as a whole. In the Town & Parish Plan survey (the Survey), there was a 94% support for starter homes, 88% support for the provision of 2-3 bed family homes and 68% support for larger 3-5 bed houses. Respondents had high recognition [89%] of the need for sheltered housing to support the elderly and people in difficulty. Support for bungalows [81%] rises with age. Single persons particularly, thought there should be more sheltered housing, bungalows and starter homes. Demand [67%] for Housing Association housing and property for commercial rent was significant.

Further development is constrained by the A41/A49/A525 bypass, the Shropshire Union Canal, the railway line and Whitchurch and Waymills industrial parks. The land between the existing built up area and these barriers could, potentially, be developed. The Conservation Area in the Town centre means that the style and quality of any new building work here is closely examined. Survey respondents were keen that the green corridors remain and 44% thought that modest development on land already allocated for building should take place. 33% [51% businesses] supported development up to the line of the bypass. A significant minority of respondents [27%] saw no need for more housing in Whitchurch.

A Skillsmart survey identified a total population of 45,527 living within a 20 minute drive time of Whitchurch. Analysis of consumer categories within the local population compared against the national average shows higher than usual proportions of Affluent Greys [38%], Wealthy Executives [16%] and Flourishing Families [11%]. All of these groups fall into a higher average income bracket. These

statistics indicate positive possibilities for attracting relatively affluent users to the retail outlets and services in the Town.

However, compared to the rest of Shropshire, Whitchurch Town emerges as relatively deprived, with almost half of the population living in the 20% most deprived areas in the county. The 2001 Census showed low academic achievement with over one third of residents having no recognised qualifications. Increasing numbers of young people are now accessing further and higher level qualifications. A Skillsmart survey in rated the town 7<sup>th</sup> in a UK wide survey of over 80 towns on overall retail experience. The Town offers a wide range of local retail services. Retail expenditure retention in the convenience goods sector is high at 81%. The town also retains 73% of expenditure for DIY goods, 76% chemist goods and 51% on electrical. In recent years, a number of new high street enterprises have been established and continue to flourish while others have been less successful, but pressure from a stagnant economy and the internet has increased in the last two years. The Survey identified strong support for development of the retail sector in the Town, 75% by all respondent and 34% of businesses.

There was significant support for the expansion of manufacturing [49%], Higher Education and training [48%], food production [46%] and specialist trades and workshops [44%]. 51% of business respondents saw Arts and Media as important compared to 33% of respondents overall. 46% of businesses saw tourism as an important area for expansion. An increase in technology and internet based business was most strongly supported by young people under the age of 21.

There are 'cradle to grave' learning opportunities in Whitchurch, with at least two playgroups and two day nurseries listed for the Town. The NE Shropshire Children's Centre has a base at the Whitchurch CE Infant and Nursery School. There is Whitchurch CE Junior School and Sir John Talbot's (SJT) Technology College and in addition a small private school. There is a lack of capacity at the Infant and Nursery School and the buildings at the Junior School and parts of SJT are old although both are kept in generally good condition. Any proposed residential building in the town will increase the demand for school places.

After the age of 16 many young people stay on at SJT, but in order to access particular courses some young people travel to other education and training provision in nearby towns. County Training provides additional opportunities based at the Talbot Campus. A small number of adult education classes are held in the Town. More courses are available in Wem and Ellesmere for those with access to transport. It is evident from pre-Survey consultation that there is a need for more vocational and non-vocational learning opportunities in the Town. There is a very active local group of the University of the Third Age (U3A) which meets weekly. Currently some 32 different interest and activity groups meet in a variety of locations.

In the survey response, there were very high levels of support for improvements to the facilities for learning for our children and young people [91%]. There was good support for the notion that these facilities should be available for use at all the times [90%]. The need for more opportunities for learning for jobs and skills was thought to be very important by 96% of respondents. The importance of opportunities for all to undertake academic qualifications were supported by 93% of respondents.

Whitchurch has a selection of large parks and number smaller areas with play facilities that are managed either by the Town Council or residents associations. The survey shows that 91% of respondents would like there to be more facilities and organised activities to be available in the parks. 98% of Survey respondents indicated the need for stronger action to be taken over anti-social acts. These include the dropping of litter and fouling by dogs.

There are clubs in Whitchurch for a very wide range of sporting activities most of which have their own dedicated facilities where these are required. The Swimming Centre and the Sports and Leisure Centre are both open to the general public. The Civic Centre has spaces for some sporting activities including indoor bowls and badminton. Private facilities are available for exercise and fitness. There is an equestrian centre near to the town.

There is a good range of opportunities for participation in culture and the arts, including Whitchurch Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, Whitchurch Little Theatre Group and a youth theatre group,

whilst touring productions also visit. Concerts are held in both Civic Centre and St Alkmund's Church. Two Edward German Festivals have been held which have attracted wide audiences and national recognition. Films are shown at the Talbot Theatre by 'flicks in the Sticks' and also in the Civic Centre.

Whitchurch Heritage Centre has achieved museum status which will enable it to attract additional grants to enhance the collections it holds pertaining to Whitchurch. It is possible that artefacts which are at present held elsewhere could now be returned to the Town. Whitchurch Historical and Archaeological Group have a collection of local photographs. Small art exhibition space is available at a coffee shop in town, at a small commercial gallery and occasionally at the Library but generally there is insufficient space. Many people go to surrounding similar sized towns for entertainment, rather than staying in Whitchurch.

Improving local facilities and activities: 81% of all respondents felt that the 11-18 years group should have improved local facilities and activities. There was 40% support for providing more for older people and people with disabilities. Improved access for families on low incomes was supported by 36% of respondents. 35% of respondents thought that children aged 5 to 11 were a priority.

Sports facilities: 71% supported the provision of facilities for a wider range of physical activities and sports. The 22-45 years group gave this particular support [80%]. Provision of a combined swimming and sports hall on one site was considered important [51%]. Support for provision of a new swimming pool including a children's pool was particularly high with 22-34 years group [68%] and also with families [59%]. The provision of public tennis courts had 33% support. There was 24% support for the provision of more football pitches but 39% wanted to improve existing facilities for football, rugby and cricket.

Arts : The highest priority was for a local cinema [77%]. Support was particularly strong amongst young people. Provision of a theatre was supported by 46% and of a museum by 42%. This support was particularly strong in older age groups.

In Whitchurch there are many clubs and facilities for young people. Centre North East welcomes different aged groups on each evening of the week and on Saturdays and there are two voluntary church-based youth groups. Army and Air Cadets and Scouts and Guides and their younger and older affiliated groups meet each week. Clubs for at least eight different sports have young person sections. The Sports and Leisure Centre has many facilities open to young people and both the Junior School and Sir John Talbot's have representative teams. Young people can join the Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society and the Little Theatre Group and take to the stage in their productions.

Improving opportunities for young people came top in the list of priorities chosen by respondents to the Survey. The ordered list includes Multi Use Games Area, Drop in place like Coffee Bar, more informal meeting spaces, more green spaces for informal games, Skate Park/BMX facility, Climbing wall and other outdoor activities, Summer activities and play schemes, more opportunities to join clubs and societies, provision for regular art/music/drama and an outdoor roller skating rink.

The town centre of Whitchurch is a Conservation Area with some medieval and many Tudor, Georgian and Victorian listed buildings. The town centre has a 20mph one way traffic system along the main retail streets. The pavements have been widened and repaved and the kerbs dropped at strategic points to help wheelchair users and parents. There is a pedestrianised area in the Bullring with seating and planting. The Charter Market is held each Friday and a Farmers' Market once a month. The goods on sale are of high quality but the number of stalls has diminished over time.

Appearance: There was very high support for improvement of the appearance of the Town centre-pavements [94%], businesses maintaining the public space around their premises [92%], owners improving the building frontages [95%]. It was notable that many business respondents indicated that they are prepared to maintain areas around their premises [89%] and the frontages [97%]. There was 81% general support for more flowers and shrubs but business respondents gave 91% support.

Shopping improvements: There was a very high level of support for a wider range of shops [97%]. Overall 68% of respondents favoured the development of out-of-town shops.

Market: Whilst a majority thought that the market is good [66%] a significant minority [34%] thought that improvements are necessary. This might include more stalls [72%] and special markets [77%]. There was support [63%] for the Council paying for improvements.

Other issues: There was universal high support [89%] for improvements in access to buildings and pavements for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Most respondents [90%] supported provision of toilets in High Street and the Town centre. There was some support [75%], including businesses, for a bus stop near the Civic Centre. 67% of respondents supported the appointment of a Town Council Officer to promote the town centre and local area. 78% felt that information signs need improvement.

In total there are 109 listed buildings in Whitchurch. These are buildings of architectural or historical merit which are given special protection from unsuitable development. Most of the buildings in the central core of the town are listed and form part of the Conservation Area. Most are Grade II or II\* but the Parish Church of St Alkmund is a fine eighteenth century Grade 1 listed building. Many of these buildings are older internally than their outward appearance would indicate because many older buildings were later updated and given stone or brick frontages. Unfortunately many of the buildings are in need of care and redecoration and this is an issue for many town residents. The potential for increased tourism which the attractive street scene could present should not be overlooked.

The Civic Centre Complex replaced the Victorian Town Hall [damaged by fire in 1941], the Corn Exchange and Museum and Art Gallery. The Heritage Centre was opened in 1998. Its permanent displays include pre-historic and Roman artefacts found in the Parish, clocks made by Joyce's Clocks and a small art gallery. Small temporary exhibitions of local interest are frequently assembled. It is much used by residents of all ages and by visitors. In 2010 museum status was achieved and it is hoped that the facility can be improved by returning artefacts and archive material at present stored elsewhere. 96% of respondents strongly agree that there is a need to look after the historic buildings properly.

In Whitchurch, 9.8% of residents are aged 65-74 years and 9.7% are over 75 years. Whilst many elderly people live independently in their own homes, either owned or rented, there is provision for assisted living at Fairfields, Kingsway Court and St. John's Park. There are four residential and nursing homes and both senior citizens clubs and day centres. There is a Meals on Wheels service. Many older people are active in the clubs and organisations in the Town. The Town Bus Service which allows easier access to the Town centre and its facilities is particularly well supported by older people. There are some dropped kerbs along the streets and the speed limit allows older people to cross the main shopping streets in relative safety. The wider pavements in the Town centre mean that older people can easily use mobility scooters. There is disabled parking in the High Street, Green End and Mill Street and in all the public car parks.

There are three family doctor practices in Whitchurch. The Community Matron and District Nurses are based with both the GP practices and the hospital, which enables patients to move from the District Hospitals to either rehabilitation care in Whitchurch Community Hospital or directly into their own homes with community nursing care. Community physiotherapy and occupational therapy can also take place in the home. Whitchurch Community Hospital serves the town and the surrounding area. Its facilities have been updated several times in recent years. Sometimes this has been done with funds supplied by the very active and well supported Friends of Whitchurch Hospital. The local General Practitioners provide the medical support and the Shropdoc out of hours service has a base at the hospital. The hospital has a Rehabilitation ward – 32 beds predominantly for Rehabilitation and End of Life Care and Beech ward – a ward of 16 beds for elderly mentally frail patients. Older people are particularly dependent on this service since many in this age group are not car drivers and long distance public transport is difficult. Midwives and health visitors also hold regular clinics at the Hospital.

Whitchurch has recently lost its ambulance station which has provided a valued service. Shropshire Health Authority is consulting on future plans for Beech Ward and its services and there has been much support from Whitchurch residents for the retention of the facility. Local community health practitioners and organisations like Macmillan are coming together to provide high quality palliative and end of life care.

There are three dental practices in the town and there is provision for National Health patients. There are three opticians and three pharmacies serving the town and surrounding area. A medical herbalist runs a centre in the town for alternative therapies and there are also private physiotherapist and chiropodist services.

Nearly 5 in 10 respondents placed “Extending medical and health treatment available at Whitchurch hospital and in the home” in their top 6 priorities. This suggests wide community support for the Hospital and its attendant services. It was the number one priority for people aged over 60.

Statistically North Shropshire is a relatively safe place in which to live. The crime figures are higher in the more populated Town centre of Whitchurch than in the more rural hinterland of the Parish but low in terms of a national and regional perspective. Good relations exist between the Police and the community helped by work done at Local Joint Committees and with young people in schools and youth groups. Neighbourhood Watch Schemes operate in parts of the Town. There is a police station in the Town. Whilst serious crime is very rare the more persistent and regular crimes include shoplifting and anti-social behaviour. It has been acknowledged that people’s ‘fear of crime’ is an issue which needs to be addressed. There is CCTV in the Town.

Most people feel safe during the day [93%] but many [63%] do not feel safe at night. Young people and older people [over 72] were the two groups who felt most unsafe, whereas those in the 35 – 45 age group were concerned the least. Respondents’ key concerns were related to anti-social behaviour. Many people wished to see more Police ‘on the beat’ [75%] and there was also support for improved CCTV [57%]. The highest support for the improved CCTV came from young people [67%]. 25% of all additional comments in the Survey related to aspects of Community Safety.

The Survey results indicated some positive comments about Whitchurch being ‘a great place to live and bring up a family’ and also some calls for the community itself to become more involved in creating a feeling of pride in the Town.

Whitchurch is served by three newspapers: the weekly publications the Whitchurch Herald and the North Shropshire Chronicle and the daily Shropshire Star. The free magazine Whitchurch Gossip is published monthly. The Whitchurch Town Guide is published every two years. Radio Shropshire and Beacon Radio broadcast every day to the Whitchurch area and from time to time Whitchurch FM Community Radio is available. There are three websites serving Whitchurch: [www.2shrop.net/whitchurchtowncouncil](http://www.2shrop.net/whitchurchtowncouncil); [www.gowhitchurch.co.uk](http://www.gowhitchurch.co.uk) , and [www.whitchurchsalop.org.uk](http://www.whitchurchsalop.org.uk) . Some clubs and organisations have their own websites.

Local authority information is available at the Shropshire Council Customer Service Point in the Heritage Centre and at the Town Council office in the Civic Centre. Further general information is to be found at the Library. There are notice boards outside the Civic Centre and some shops will display information in their windows. 90% agreed that there could be better use of the local press. 89% supported an information point in town with reliable, current and up to date information. 87% felt that a ‘What’s on’ magazine with an events calendar would be useful. 85% thought that more regularly updated internet information on the Town would be helpful. There was rather less support [56%] for appointing an events coordinator for the Town. Highest support for this came from the 21 – 34 years age group.

Respondents were asked which Community Events they would support. Some of these events already take place and some would be new or revived events. Across all age groups there was a very high level of support [80%+] for annual events – Food Festival, Town Fete, Carnival, Fireworks/ Bonfire Night. Positive support was given overall to a wide range of musical concerts or festivals – Pop or Rock 71% [young people 81%], Band Concerts 75% [older people 92%, young people 60%] Classical music 60% [older people 80%, young people 39%]. There was a very high level support for Amateur productions 82% [older people 94%, young people 72%]. It was clear from the Survey and all other consultations that the community wanted more events.

The Canal and Country Park area currently stretches much of the way from Jubilee Park to the Llangollen Canal. This Green Corridor is a route into the Town for visitors cruising on the canal, a route out into the country for town residents and is also one end of the Sandstone Trail for long distance walkers. Planning Permission for a small housing development may interrupt this natural corridor. Adjacent to the canal is the Greenfields Nature Reserve which is owned and managed by Shropshire Wildlife Trust. In the Parish, the Sandstone Trail stretches from Grindley Brook through the Country Park to the Victoria Jubilee Park. This and a system of adjacent circular walks is a popular walking route.

There was a high level of support [80%] for extending the Canal closer to the Town. This support was less amongst younger people. Very high support [88%] was recorded for developing other activities like fishing and canoeing along the Canal and Country Park and for nature conservation. Most support was in the 22-34 age group. 90% of respondents wanted further development of the Country Park.

There are a range of sites of environmental importance in Whitchurch. Some are protected and managed, like the Country Park and Greenfields Local Nature reserve and some like the land to the north of Claypit Street/Alport Road and land to the south of Wrexham Road, are privately owned. Many of these sites are under threat from development and some valuable sites have already been lost or may soon be lost.

The Woodland Trust manages the recently planted woodland alongside the Canal at the former Danson's Farm. In Whitchurch Parish there are 52.8 kilometres of Public Rights of Way, but in general they are in a condition which is well below the national average. Whilst nearly one third are easy to walk, another one third are obstructed.

There are only 12.5 half-sized allotment plots within the Parish, and at least fifty people on the waiting list. In the Survey there was very high support [over 90%] across the population for maintaining and improving the natural environment and access to it through improvements to footpaths. 89% of respondents supported improved provision for allotments.

Whitchurch is well served by transport links. The town is at the junction of the A41 Chester to Wolvehampton Road, the A49 Warrington to Shrewsbury Road and the A525 Newcastle-under-lyme to Wrexham Road. These roads are all linked by the Whitchurch bypass. They also provide a good link between the M54, M56 & M6 motorways. In and around the Town many road surfaces are very poor.

Whitchurch is on the Cardiff to Manchester main railway line. There is a range of long distance and local trains that stop at the unstaffed Whitchurch station. Currently, there are fewer northbound than southbound trains. Access to the southbound platforms is by means of a footbridge across the lines. This creates problems for users of wheelchairs, prams, pushchairs and bicycles who have difficulties with stairs, as do other passengers carrying heavy luggage. There is a frequent around-the-town bus service during the day and other routes connect to Chester, Shrewsbury, Nantwich, and Wrexham.

Of people responding to the Survey, 94% supported provision of the Town Bus service and 83% thought the service should include more of the Town. 69% of respondents wanted better bus services between towns. The train service to and from Whitchurch was considered by 97% to be essential to the Town. 89% asked for a more frequent stopping service. 96% of respondents wanted equal access to both platforms for all passengers including those with difficulties.

There was overwhelming support by citizens [94%] and businesses [100%] to keep free parking in the Town. There is a strong demand for more all day parking [87%], and for more car parks, while 60% of respondents wanted more consistently enforced parking controls. Extension of the bypass to completely encircle the Town was supported by 73% of respondents. There was no clear view on traffic calming measures, 61% versus 39%; but it was given a higher priority by under 15 year olds and families. There was very strong support for improved surfaces of roads and pavements [ 95%]. The provision of more 'safe from traffic' cycleways was strongly supported [80%]. The highest support came from secondary school students [92%].

## **SITUATION ANALYSIS OF THE COUNCIL**

It was of course essential to review the Town Council's capabilities and capacity before setting its future programme, to ensure it would be able to achieve its aims. This process has been informed by both a SWOT and PEST analysis of the Council's strengths and weaknesses and a business risk assessment.

The Town Council has had issues in the recent past which have inevitably concentrated focus away from core business. The Council is now keen to move on and use the new powers and freedoms given to local councils by the Localism Act, to play its part in taking the town forward in rapidly changing times. It

is keen to support the implementation of the community led Town and Parish Plan and work with Shropshire Council on the Place Plan.

The most recent internal audit report drew attention to the lack of a strategic plan. The Council has now appointed consultants to help it develop a Strategy and Business Plan, and to provide it with a locum Town Clerk until it can make a permanent appointment after a new council is elected in May 2013.

As a result of consistent budgeting, particularly the regular provision of Capital Funds within the Precept, the Council is financially sound and finances are well managed. The Council's General Reserve will be maintained at the target of +/- £90K. The Council has more than adequate Earmarked and other Project Funds (£190K) to move into the future. Priority must be given to establishing a Medium Term Financial Plan as an essential part of strategic planning and to assess the Project Funds currently being provided through the Precept. are adequate

It remains to be seen what the impact of the planned Civic Centre redevelopment will have on the council's underlying revenue Income and Expenditure in the future, but no serious deterioration in the council's strong revenue performance is expected. Detailed work on the Council's Asset Register is necessary to bring it fully in line with best modern practice. It will also be necessary to establish Treasury Management, Investment & Borrowing policies as a part of a sound governance base.

Some of the difficulties which the Council has encountered in recent times have been exacerbated by the absence of current and relevant governance rules. Members have agreed to look at how the organisation directs and controls its affairs, policies and functions.

The Council is able to provide a range of services and local facilities by utilising its property assets, some of which it owns the freehold of and others which are leased. These include:-

- Management of a Civic Centre on the High Street, which is leased from Shropshire Council.
- Operation of a weekly Market and monthly Farmers Market, partially on outdoors and partially in the Sports/Market Hall.
- Operation of the Sports Hall when not used as a market.
- Operation of a Heritage Centre/Museum in a building it owns. This building also includes a one stop shop/ Tourist Information Centre staffed by Shropshire Council.
- Let out craft units adjacent to the Heritage Centre.
- Provide "parish" street lighting
- Support a Joint Cemetery Board and may take over the direct management.
- Help promote tourism and local events.
- Give community grants
- Operate 14 green spaces including Jubilee Park
- Manage public toilets
- Operate 6 play areas
- Maintain a war memorial.
- Provide a reception for all Council services and a gateway to other public services.

The Civic Centre complex was built in 1970. However, in the survey many people indicated that they were dissatisfied with it. A major upgrade is proposed for the Civic Centre, Phase 1 of which is scheduled to commence in 2013 with a new High Street facade and redesign of the ground floor. The Town Council will contribute £120,000 to the cost of Phase 1, which will enable it to move forward in its desire to provide a central public service and civic hub.

The Town Centre services are clearly well regarded and supported. They appear essential to safe guarding the vibrancy and heritage of this small market town. Maintenance of the green areas is contracted out and the standard appears to be high. Both the bar franchise and parks maintenance agreements will need to be renewed in the near future and a review will be needed at this juncture. If the Council is able to get its direction of travel, basic governance and management in place in place, there is no reason to suspect that it could not take on other services in the future.

The Council has been getting some poor press and its image has suffered significantly recently. This must be tackled in a positive way on several fronts. The Council must articulate a clear direction when it

will then begin to have more good news stories to tell. Robust policies and governance documents will set the rules about who can speak on behalf of the Council and what information can or can't be released. It is important to build up good relations with the local media and to issue press releases on important matters. It must also be clear who shall be allowed to answer press enquiries and for them to be well prepared to do so.

The ethos of the Council must become one of making known what it is doing and why. Openness is the best policy but, of course, some information must remain confidential by law. There is always a conflict between the aims of data protection and freedom of information. But a positive and consistent approach will gain respect. The Council has a number of good things going on, not least the forthcoming Phase 1 works on the Civic Centre. This will be of considerable interest to local people, but it will be important to handle transitional arrangements well. Work on this has started in a planned way and will continue.

The Survey results show that 16% of respondents are fully aware of who their Town councillors are, 40% are quite aware and 44% are not aware. (for Shropshire councillors 14% are fully aware, 33% are quite aware and 53% are not aware). 7% of respondents feel that Town councillors seem sufficiently aware of their local concerns and feelings, 37% feel they are quite aware and 56% feel they are not aware. The Survey results show that 4% of respondents feel that Town councillors consult the local population very well, 35% feel that they consult quite well and 60% feel that they do not consult well. When asked about Shropshire councillors 5% feel they consult very well, 33% quite well and 62% not well.

The Survey results show that 5% of respondents feel that Town councillors publicise their decisions and activities very well, 34% think that they do this quite well whereas 61% consider that they do not do this well. For being kept informed about the work of their local Council, 75% of respondents think that the local press is most useful; newsletters have 71% support; Council websites have 53% support and public meetings have 54% support. Comments recorded in the Survey, at meetings and in conversations on the street showed that there is a common perception that proposed actions do not always materialise and when they do there is a lack of coordination.

The Council is not a large employer, but staff are potentially its greatest asset. It is important to develop, motivate, respect and reward them and of course to treat them fairly. It is also important for them to know clearly what is expected of them and to be empowered to do the job. Personnel policies, documents and processes need to be reviewed. As the Strategy and Business Plan develop, it will be necessary to review capacity relevant to expectations. The Council has responsibilities as an employer for providing a safe and healthy working environment for all of its employees but must also protect the health and safety of all persons coming into contact or being affected by its work activities, including service users, visitors, partners and volunteers as well as for ensuring contractors have safe systems of work. The most recent internal audit report refers to some unsafe lighting and the lack of regular checks on public liability insurance for stall holders. This kind of issue will need to be identified by risk assessments and programmed for action according to risk.

Whitchurch Town Council needs to recognise its operations impact on the environment in a number of ways. As a business it uses energy, causes emissions and operates green space, as a local authority it can protect and at times enhance the local environment both directly and by influencing others. It can also be an enforcer of local environmental standards. The Council intends to adopt an Environmental or Sustainability Policy to underpin a Corporate Strategy and undertake an Environmental Audit to examine the interaction between the business operation and its surroundings.

The Council currently has Quality Town accreditation and wishes to retain it. There are two main obstacles to its retention, one being the provision for 80% of members to be elected; the other is the lack of strict compliance with the rules of governance, administration and communication. Quality Town accreditation does not address business management good practice. Matters such as clear targets, performance monitoring and business risk assessments may well have alleviated these problems. It is essential these disciplines are put into place if recurrences are to be avoided. The Council intend to investigate the benefits of implementing an integrated quality management system specifically tailored to local councils.

Members bring a vast range of skills and experience to the table. However both local government and the world around it are fast changing and it is a good investment to develop their full potential. The Council should now define its own development programme.

## **MARKETING & PROMOTION**

Whitchurch Town Council's main areas of promotion are:-

The Town - Promotion of the Town to attract day visitors, shoppers and tourists  
Promotion to attract people looking to live in the Town  
Promotion to businesses looking to invest in the Town

The Council- Statutory and other information to help residents and businesses understand its decision making, policies and priorities.  
Marketing of its services to ensure accessibility for all

The Council will promote the Town on its Web-site, by improving signage, by supporting local events, by supporting local tourism and business initiatives and by helping local organisations with media articles and press releases.

The Council will market its services and promote local governance through its website by providing a newsletter and notice boards and by supporting promotions of other public bodies and the voluntary and community organisations. It will adopt a new logo which reflects the corporate image of the Council and firmly roots at the hub of the Town and its community.

The Council will investigate the need for translation of information into other languages or for the visually impaired and will promote Whitchurch as "disability friendly".

## **FUTURE DIRECTION**

Within the Council's 5 outward facing Strategic Priorities are set a number of supporting corporate objectives. For each of these we have listed the key broad actions we intend to take. These will be given more specific targets in our Business Plan, which will identify dates by which they will be delivered, outcomes and action champions. In addition we have given priority to an inward facing Priority to develop the potential of the Council-our efficiency, effectiveness and transparency.

### ***PRIORITY 1: ENABLE MORE QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE JOBS***

#### **1. Working in partnership to create jobs**

- **We will support the delivery of the Town and Parish Plan objectives to ensure new businesses are attracted to the Town and that existing businesses continue to thrive.**
- **We will support the delivery of the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy 2012 in Whitchurch.**
- **We will facilitate the development of high quality business locations through neighbourhood planning and the Local Plan & SAMdev.**
- **We will support improvements to business infrastructure including electricity supply to employment sites and next generation broadband.**
- **We will work with partners to develop a brand for Whitchurch and to promote Whitchurch Town as a place to live, work, shop and visit.**
- **We will support those without jobs to help them develop their skills and provide access to training, so as to improve their readiness for work.**
- **We will work with local training providers to help develop skill sets for the workforce.**
- **We will lobby for better adult education opportunities, to include vocational, academic and leisure courses.**

## **2. Working to create a tourism hub**

- We will promote tourism and Whitchurch as a destination not to be missed, capitalising on our heritage and location to visit places of interest in the locality.
- We will support a tourist information centre.
- We will seek to develop our parks and open spaces, pedestrian rights of way and cycle routes to increase the tourist trade.

## **3. Working to create a successful and vibrant town centre**

- We will work with partners to support retail businesses and promote the Town Centre.
- We will help make the public realm more attractive, with better traffic/pedestrian interface, parking and access, particularly for those with disabilities.
- We will facilitate the organisation of additional events which enjoy strong support from the community.

### ***PRIORITY 2: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY AND GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A REASON TO STAY***

#### **1. To support, develop and empower the community & voluntary sector**

- We will support and help develop community and voluntary groups which assist us to achieve our goals and those of the Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan.
- We will work in partnership with community and voluntary organisations for the benefit of the Town.
- We will support the Whitchurch and Prees Local Joint Committee.
- We will support and facilitate the Whitchurch Town and Parish Plan Steering Group in delivering the Plan's actions.
- We will ensure the value of the community & voluntary sector is recognised and encourage the involvement of a wider number of citizens.
- We will support communities having a greater input to the management of local services.

#### **2. To promote community cohesion**

- We will recognise and celebrate the diversity in the Town's communities of both place and interest.
- We will adopt, review and monitor a policy which advocates equality in governance, service delivery and employment.
- We will operate openly and share information through our website, community newsletter, notice boards and the media.
- We will promote fair trade in the Town.
- We will partner Shropshire Council in its neighbourhood working.
- We will ensure service accessibility to the deprived or hard to reach sectors of our communities.
- We will support better access and facilities for those with disabilities.
- We will deliver increased housing, including affordable and low cost houses in the Shropshire Local Plan.
- We will engage the older generations by encouraging them to apply their knowledge and skills within both the workforce and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector, use their spending power within the Town as well as being an advocate for those in need

#### **3. To promote health and fitness amongst our residents and workforce**

- We will support the development of sport and leisure activities which promote a healthy life style, or engage young people.
- We will lobby strongly for local health provision and services which are essential to or desired by our residents and work with enablers and providers on all health issues.

- We will provide directly or in partnership, a range of facilities which encourage an active lifestyle.
- We will support stay safe initiatives, at home, work or on the street.

#### 4. To give young people a reason to stay

- We will establish a Youth Committee and facilitate “young councillor” events.
- We will consult young people and take account of their views in developing policies and facilities.
- We will support youth organisations and facilities, and be an active advocate for improved services.
- We will attempt to retain young adults in the Town by encouraging more rewarding local jobs, improving leisure provisions and other activities and lobbying for sufficient affordable housing.
- We will support an improved range of formal and informal opportunities and facilities to better meet the needs of young people.

### **PRIORITY 3: PROVIDE MORE HOMES TO MATCH NEEDS & ASPIRATIONS**

- The key to creating new homes in Whitchurch will be through the Shropshire Council’s Site Allocations & Management Development Plan (SAMdev) and the Town Council will work closely with them to ensure we achieve balance between community need and the aspirations of developers.
- We will seek to ensure that there is a balanced development brief to include the various types of affordable homes, starter homes, self build and other homes to ensure retention and attraction of a workforce associated with the higher value industries and the particular needs of the young and elderly.
- We will use our neighbourhood planning powers to ensure appropriate numbers and types and design of dwellings which will satisfy our criteria of sustainable communities.
- We will lobby Shropshire as part of the Local Plan process, to ensure that we have the right type and numbers of development ensuring that we do not lose ‘the sense of place’ which is important to the Whitchurch Community.
- We will ensure we receive an appropriate share of the community Infrastructure Levy from development and also lobby Shropshire Council to use the new Community Infrastructure Levy creatively for the benefit of the Town.
- We will ensure that as the number of homes increases, proper provision is made for additional demands on services and infrastructure.

### **PRIORITY 4: PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND CELEBRATE OUR UNIQUE HERITAGE**

#### 1. Protecting and enhancing our Environment:

- We will support and promote initiatives to improve the public realm and seek to reduce litter, fouling and graffiti.
- We will promote the greening of our urban areas and ensure that planning takes account of the need to retain open green space and wildlife habitats.
- We will seek to influence others to look after our environment, through governance, responding to consultations and by example.
- We will keep the benefits and where possible enhance our natural environmental assets for the next generation, whilst encouraging access to them. A priority in this respect will be our conservation area.
- We will act as advocates for alternative energy measures, as an integral part of development in the Town.
- We will improve energy efficiency in our own facilities and operations and where possible include alternative energy sources.

- We will support projects and organisations to address the challenge of climate change. We will comment on licensing and planning applications where consulted by the principal council.
- We will be an advocate for the maintenance, improvement and protection of the natural environment and access to it.
- We will work with a range of partners on crime reduction and community safety initiatives.
- We will be an advocate for the development of community policing.
- We will support the principal council on emergency planning and disaster recovery.

**2. Protecting and enhancing our Heritage:**

- We will promote and support local heritage schemes in the Town and lobby to protect them where appropriate.
- We will actively support the management for our conservation area.
- We will support the reviews and maintenance of both listed buildings and buildings on a local list.
- We will work with parties to ensure that regeneration and new development reflects the heritage and traditional architecture of the Town.
- We will support the Heritage Centre so it continues to develop as a high quality and fully functional Town Museum

**PRIORITY 5: ENABLE BETTER TRANSPORT LINKS AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

**1. To enable better transport links**

- We will facilitate the development of a Local Transport Strategy for Whitchurch to ensure all transport services meet the needs of all residents and businesses.
- We will campaign for an integrated transport system and encourage use of busses and trains
- We will provide up to date information on transport services available on our website and in printed form
- We will encourage in all new development, safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle routes in and around our Town
- We will be an advocate for improved public transport links and development of inter-modal links.
- We will help develop safer routes to schools.
- We will seek to identify Whitchurch as a disability friendly town.

**2. To develop better community facilities**

- We will strive to ensure that all parks are developed where possible, well maintained with expanded facilities to increase use by all of the community.
- We will strive to improve the infrastructure for sports, culture and the arts to offer opportunities for all.
- We will seek to identify Whitchurch as a disability friendly town.

**PRIORITY 6: DEVELOP THE POTENTIAL OF THE COUNCIL TO DELIVER LOCAL SERVICES AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP.**

**1. To develop capacity and a diverse skill base within the Council**

- We will develop an active Member Training and Development Programme.
- We will develop and empower staff.
- We will consider priorities in the light of both business and safety risk assessments.
- We will be innovative in finding external funding.
- We will review our staffing resources and capacity in accordance with the strategic priorities and civic hub and appoint a permanent Town Clerk.

2. **To deliver excellent services according to both need and consumer choice**
  - We will continue to deliver our services and facilities according to outcome based standards.
  - We will, seek to operate devolved services from Shropshire Council, or deliver them in partnership, where value can be added. Where services are devolved to the Town Council, we will expect funding to follow the function but we will be prepared to put in additional funding where necessary, to raise standards above those normally provided by the principal council.
  - We will seek to become eligible for the general power of competence and embrace other new powers made available, which benefit our strategic aims.
  - We will develop the Civic Centre as a service hub for the Town.
  
3. **To achieve high performance by taking a more integrated approach to management**
  - We work towards implementation of a recognised quality management scheme as a driver for greater efficiency and value.
  - We will seek to retain Quality Town Council status.
  - We will deliver the Corporate Strategy objectives through an outcome focussed Corporate Business Plan and related performance management.
  - We will develop personnel policies and review conditions of service.
  
4. **To have excellent communications and transparency**
  - We will improve the content of the Website.
  - We will issue a quarterly newsletter to each house and business to keep everyone informed
  - We will review our Publication Scheme and publish an Information Guide
  - We will publish an Information and Data Protection Policy
  - We will review how residents can become more involved in our decision making
  - We will report to each meeting on any decisions which have not been implemented
  - We will report progress on our business plan to each meeting cycle

## **HOW IT WILL BE DELIVERED**

Whitchurch Town Council recognises that it does not have the legal powers or resources to bring about all of its goals on its own. It will undertake an analysis of all organisations and projects which support its goals, many of which are identified in the Town and Parish Plan or Place Plan. It will then put its corporate shoulder behind them and, where possible, help fill gaps in provision using its unique position.

It will use its Business Plan to translate its Strategy into actions, providing details of how it will achieve and fund its aims and specify targets against which its progress can be judged. Performance data will be collected each committee cycle and reported to councillors, together with financial management information.

Whilst being the democratic hub of the Town and having an ambitious agenda, the Council recognises that it can only make a real difference if it works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary organisations. It will strive to ensure each partnership has objective targets, is effective and accountable.

The Council will gradually build its capacity, resources, skills and knowledge and use them to move forward its stated priorities. The Council will aim to retain Quality Town Status and will consider using an integrated quality management system to embed a business and service approach into its ethos. It will continuously “up its game” to tackle enthusiastically the challenges which lie ahead.