



BARNSTAPLE TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Report 2015-2016



**Barnstaple Town Council
Barum House
The Square
Barnstaple
EX32 8LS**



Mayor's Report

It has been an honour to represent Barnstaple as Town Mayor over the last year, my second in a two-year term. I have attended 78 official engagements, and the Deputy Mayor a further 15. Some were important annual civic events such as Remembrance services, Mayor-Making ceremonies, civic services and carol concerts. Other less formal annual events included the Lions Club Picnic in the Park, the Armed Forces Exhibition, the Swimming Club Annual Prize Giving, Barnstaple Carnival and Velo Vintage. There have also been some new and 'one off' events this year such as the Special Olympics South West. Details of all of my engagements can be obtained from the Town Council offices.



As in the previous year, I have made community groups a particular focus of my Mayoral work, and I regularly join groups such as the Barnstaple Leg Club and the Barnstaple Dementia Action Alliance. These are not official Mayoral events but I think it is important to show the town's support for the vital local services that these groups provide.

Two highlights of my year were representing the town when meeting Prince Edward at the opening of the fantastic Seamoor Centre at the hospital, and the signing ceremony for our new twinning agreement with Harstad in Norway, the town that has for many years been the location for cold weather training for our Royal Marines based at Chivenor.

My charitable causes this year have been the North and West Devon Motor Neurone Disease Support Group, Families in Grief, Barnstaple Leg Club and Veterans Peer Support. Through fundraising and donations, over £5,000 has been raised for these organisations, with one more event to follow at the time of writing. I would like to think that my less formal approach to fundraising events has been a feature of my Mayoralty. My 'Easter Eggstravaganza' took the place of the traditional Mayor's Charity Dinner this year, and other fundraisers included the Really Big Quiz and a race night. In total over my two years as Mayor I have raised £12,500 for local causes.

I am Chairman of the Town Council as well as the Mayor, which means I preside over its Full Council meetings and am the main link between councillors and the paid officers of the Council. I am very proud of the work of our 24 councillors this year, particularly in taking on responsibility for our roadside verges which are looking much better, and in saving North Devon Record Office from closure. These are just two examples of how the Council is becoming a much more significant organisation in protecting services that are important to local people. This year we also started planning for a major refurbishment of the Guildhall, which we hope will become a much more widely used community facility as a result. In order to make these changes we have taken some very tough decisions, including the closure of Barnstaple Heritage Centre which I regret was not attracting enough people to make it a significant contribution to our heritage offering, and a complete restructuring of the Council's staffing. This was a difficult process and I am grateful to the staff for their co-operation and continued hard work throughout.

Cllr Mrs Valerie Elkins
Mayor of Barnstaple



Environment Committee Report

The Council's Environment Committee's remit includes maintenance of a range of planted areas, providing floral displays and street furniture, health and wellbeing, and the ever more popular Tidy Up Our Town (TUOT) initiative. TUOT week in April 2015 proved very successful, with community organisations and businesses taking time out to pick up litter and clean up planted areas across Barnstaple. In 2016, TUOT week and Community Day have been set back to May and we hope for slightly warmer weather to attract even more groups to our ranks! Another important event in our calendar was the Health & Wellbeing Day in the Pannier Market in October. It is increasingly well attended and provides free advice, help and activities aimed at promoting healthy living.



Our work on green and planted areas has gone from strength to strength this year. 24 areas are now sponsored by local businesses, community groups and individuals under our rebranded 'Get Barum Blooming' sponsorship scheme. Some of the town's most high-profile areas have been turned from eyesores to beautifully manicured gardens, and we estimate the value of this work to be about £15,000 per annum. This innovative scheme has attracted national attention, and many other towns have contacted us to find out how we have achieved so much. This year also saw us reach agreement with the County Council which has enabled us to begin maintaining Barnstaple's roadside verges. Many will remember the sorry state the town found itself in, with grass growing up to 4' high following a decision by the County to stop cutting altogether except where visibility was badly affected. We had quite a difficult time getting their attention, but a high profile media campaign showed that we meant business, and they have worked with us since then to ensure that we can protect this important local service. Barnstaple is looking much better as a result and I am proud of what we have achieved.



The committee has agreed some important objectives in the last year, and our achievements this year all contribute to our long-term plan. At the same time, we have had to make some difficult decisions, including a reduction in our focus on allotments. We have of course engaged with the local Allotment Association to see how they can help us ensure that this does not have too big an impact on our tenants, and I am pleased with the understanding that has been shown.

My thanks on behalf of the Committee to Deputy Town Clerk Mrs Kate Graddock, and to other Council staff for their efforts in delivering another year of increased workload. I would also like to thank my fellow committee members for their hard work and support during the year.

Cllr Arthur Windsor
Committee Chairman





Planning & Transportation Committee Report

The Planning Committee's main duty is to carry out the Council's function as a statutory consultee on planning matters. In the last year, we have:

- Considered 164 planning applications and submitted our comments to the Planning Authority. These included ongoing major developments such as the Anchorwood Bank site, proposed changes to Green Lanes Shopping Centre, and a significant residential development at Goodleigh Road;
- Led the Council's efforts to campaign for traffic improvements in the area of Seven Brethren, Barnstaple Retail Park and Anchorwood Bank;
- Submitted an application to designate the parish of Barnstaple as neighbourhood Plan area;
- Continued to contribute comments on the draft Local Plan;
- Highlighted concerns about the state of local roads and footpaths; and
- Contributed to the Council's Planning and Environment School, attended by towns and parishes from across North Devon.

My thanks to the Committee and to its Clerks during the year, Alan Barnett and Will Austin, for their efforts during another interesting year.

Cllr Mrs Julie Hunt
Committee Chairman



Staff Committee Report

This year has been an extremely demanding one for the Council's staff and I am very grateful and impressed by their professionalism during some significant challenges, including a complete overhaul of the Town Council's staffing structure which led to new roles for some, and a significant reduction in the number of staff.

I am delighted that our past efforts in developing staff are bearing fruit. In particular, the appointment of Kate Graddock to the position of Deputy Town Clerk is a testament to the Council's commitment, and a reflection of Kate's hard work and dedication.

Most of the Council's officers have experienced a significant change in their roles as we adapted jobs to fit the Council's new Corporate Plan, and they have responded positively to this. At the same time, we have said goodbye a number of officers and we thank Alan, Antony, Dion, Julie and Karen for their service.

We have maintained our longstanding commitment to training Council staff, investing in qualification and non-qualification training, and in team building.

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The Committee continues to value the work of volunteers, who provide additional expertise and capacity. Without them we would not be able to maintain our range of services, and my sincere thanks go out to them.

My thanks too to my colleagues on the Committee for their hard work this year, in particular on the review of staffing, and to the Town Clerk, Will Austin, for his supporting work. Will has delivered some demanding corporate objectives for all our standing committees. He has shown effective leadership skills and professionalism across all staffing aspects to ensure the integrity of the council is upheld.

Cllr Ian Roome
Committee Chairman



Rock Park Trust Management Committee Report

Over the last year the Trust, with the continued help and support of the Friends of Rock Park group, has been engaged in a range of activities to maintain and improve Rock Park as a facility for residents and visitors. These include:

- Overseeing applications for significant events at Rock Park such as the Picnic in the Park, the Race for Life, Barnstaple Marathon, and the 'Pump It' fun run;
- Support for Barnstaple Parkrun, with a commitment not to introduce charges and permission in principle for a statue in the park to celebrate their efforts;
- A new approach to dealing with unauthorised traveller encampments, which resulted in the only encampment in the last year being removed from the park within 24 hours;
- Agreement to the installation of wooden posts to prevent further unauthorised incursions;
- Finalised plans for the installation of a new water play feature;
- Maintenance of the play and adult gym equipment; and
- Completion of works to address damp problems at Rock Park Lodge;

The park was also the venue for our Remembrance events in November.

My thanks go to Committee members, the Friends of Rock Park, and Council staff involved in delivering the Committee's work.

Cllr Mrs Valerie Elkins
Committee Chairman





Heritage, Culture & Community Committee Report

The Heritage, Culture & Community Committee replaced the Heritage Centre Committee in 2015, expanding its remit to include activities beyond its former focus on heritage. We now get involved in a much wider range of activities, partly as an important community contribution to things going on in the town, and partly as a way of bringing new audiences to our heritage buildings. In my first year as Chairman of the committee I am pleased with the progress we have made, and excited about our plans for the future.



One of the most difficult issues we have faced this year has been over the future of Barnstaple Heritage Centre. For many years the Council has tried to develop the Centre as a visitor attraction for both residents and visitors, but despite our best efforts we felt that the cost – some £50,000 every year – just wasn't achieving enough. Councillors decided that the best course of action would be to hand the building back to its owners, North Devon District Council, and to use the money to promote our heritage in more effective ways using the Guildhall as the centrepiece. This is a historic building, owned by the Town Council and at the very centre of Barnstaple with the highest level of footfall. We are developing ambitious plans to refurbish the building, and to open it up to a much wider range of uses than at present. The project will take two to three years to deliver, and until then we will continue to use

the available budget to support heritage, cultural and community activities in the town. As a starting point we are already expanding our town tours, and opening the Guildhall to regular public view.

St Anne's Arts & Community Centre has again delivered a year-long programme of activities. As well as being an established venue for music and arts events, the Centre has continued to host a range of activities for young people, including creative crafts workshops, film-making workshops, and a programme of holiday activities. We were sorry to lose Dion Sears this year, as she had put tremendous effort into the achievements to date at St Anne's. However, we now have an opportunity to enter into a new partnership with North Devon Theatres, which will see a major increase in the number of events and activities at this most historic of buildings.



Volunteers remain a vital element of our work and I am sincerely grateful for their continuing efforts, and for their patience and enthusiasm during a period of change. Our staff are at the very heart of the committee's work, and although we have been sorry to lose both Dion and Julie Parker this year, my thanks go to Kate Graddock and Sue Howson for making sure we continue to deliver on our commitments.

**Cllr Mrs Liz Davies
Committee Chairman**



Finance & General Purposes Committee Report

The Finance & General Purposes Committee oversees the Council's finances, but also manages the Council's civic activities and some other Council events.

We have been exceptionally busy this year and I am very pleased with what we have achieved as a committee. In addition to our regular responsibilities such as monitoring the Council's expenditure, setting the budget, awarding contracts, and organising civic events including Remembrance, Barnstaple Fair and the Christmas Fayre, the Committee has also:

- Led the campaign and negotiations to rescue North Devon Record Office and Local Studies Centre from closure. Devon County Council had been planning to close the facility and move important historical documents to Exeter, and in response to local opposition we have drawn together a partnership of organisations from across North Devon to secure the service for the next three years. As well as providing funding, the local community now has genuine influence over the future running of the Record Office;
- Led and organised a new twinning agreement with the town of Harstad in Northern Norway. Harstad has a longstanding relationship with North Devon, as the base for cold weather training for RMB Chivenor. Following an approach by the Marines, the Town Council entered into a formal twinning agreement at a ceremony in April 2016. This military link is one that isn't reflected in our existing twinning arrangements and so adds a new dimension in addition to the cultural connections we have with other twin towns. However, Harstad does have other things in common with Barnstaple – a strong musical and artistic offer, historic buildings and a similar-sized population. I believe this is a strong base for developing a lasting relationship, the first such arrangement between Devon and any Scandinavian country;
- Paid grants totalling £17,500 to 28 organisations providing support to the community;
- Started to look at how best to protect the future of Barnstaple Fair, whose current home at Seven Brethren could be lost to new development in the next couple of years; and
- Overseen a very challenging budget round, to make sure that the Council can deliver on its objectives and maintain its portfolio of historic buildings, whilst limiting the impact as much as we can on the level of Council Tax we ask from residents.



The Corporate Governance Working Party, which supports the work of the Committee, has again been very hard-working this year. All of our policy documents – some 30 of them – have been reviewed and updated, and the Working Party has carried out its annual and very detailed risk assessment across all of our responsibilities. Our external auditor has also given a clean bill of health to our accounts and governance arrangements.

My thanks go to fellow Committee members and to staff involved in supporting our work.

Cllr Mrs Sue Haywood
Committee Chairman





Financial Summary 2015-16 (Unaudited)

Committee	Expenditure (£)	Income (£)	Net Expenditure (£)
Finance & General Purposes	566,782	-624,919	-58,137
Heritage	76,904	-26,343	50,561
Environment	18,419	-11,567	6,852
Staff	17,241	-0	17,241
TOTAL	679,346	-662,829	16,517



Ward Budget Grants 2015-16

Recipient	Amount (£)	Councillor
Forches Roundabout Group Planting	250.00	Cllr Mrs J Carter
BTC - Planted Areas Scheme	125.00	Cllr Carter
Blossom Ark	125.00	Cllr Carter
St John the Baptist Church	50.00	Cllr Chamings
ND Foodbank	100.00	Cllr Chamings
Freedom Centre	100.00	Cllr Chamings
BTC - Planted Areas Scheme	250.00	Cllr Davies
ND Veterans Support	150.00	Cllr Elkins
Christ Church Barnstaple	40.00	Cllr Elkins
BTC - Planted Areas Scheme	100.00	Cllr Ms N Haywood
Newport Charity	150.00	Cllr Ms N Haywood
Forches Roundabout Group Planting	50.00	Cllr J Hunt
Freedom Centre	100.00	Cllr M Kennaugh
Living Options	70.00	Cllr J Phillips
Pilton Festival	150.00	Cllr I Roome
NDVS	50.00	Cllr I Roome
NDVS	200.00	Cllr I Williams
Rock Park Trust	50.00	Cllr I Williams
Devon Rape Crisis	100.00	Cllr Windsor
GO North Devon Ltd	150.00	Cllr Windsor
TOTAL	2360.00	



Town Council General Information

Mayor and Chairman: Cllr Mrs Valerie Elkins Town Clerk: Mr Will Austin
Deputy Mayor: Cllr Mrs Julie Hunt Deputy Town Clerk: Mrs Kate Graddock

24 Town Councillors are elected, and fifteen paid officers are employed to guide and support the delivery of these activities:

- Environmental – we maintain certain green areas, allotment sites and some footpaths, promote health and wellbeing, and organise events/activities.
- Heritage, Culture and Community – we deliver cultural and heritage activities at The Guildhall, Barnstaple Heritage Centre, St Anne's Arts & Community Centre, including town tours. We also maintain the Albert Clock.
- Civic and Ceremonial – We elect and support the offices of Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor, and organise key civic and ceremonial events.
- Planning – we are a statutory consultee on planning matters.
- Rock Park – we manage the park through the Rock Park Trust.
- Hire/Lease of Facilities – we have conference, meeting and events venues at the Castle Centre, Guildhall, St Anne's and Barum House which are available for private hire. We also offer long leases at Council-owned properties for office, retail and community uses.
- Community Representation – we provide a strong voice in representing the community to other local and national public sector bodies.

For more information and resources, please visit www.barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk, which provides details of all of our services and facilities, along with information about Town Councillors, Council committees, meetings, agendas, minutes, corporate policies, contact information and Council news.

See also our social media pages:

Barnstaple Town Council Facebook Page
Tidy Up Our Town Facebook Page
Get Barum Blooming Facebook Page
St Anne's Arts & Community Centre Facebook & Twitter Pages
Will Austin (Barnstaple Town Clerk) Facebook Page
Twitter @BarumTC
YouTube channel – www.youtube.com/user/perpetualchanger



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