

## **Annual Report of the Mayor of Huntingdon, Councillor Karl Webb, to the Annual Town Meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Good evening everyone, welcome to our Annual Town Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what we, as your Town Council, have been up to in the past 12 months, it also gives you an opportunity to ask questions about the services we provide, or to raise any other matters that fall within the Town Council's authority.

**It is now my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the activities of Huntingdon Town Council for the Local Government Year 2020/21.**

### Introduction

The past 12 months have presented many challenges for all Town and Parish Councils due to the Coronavirus outbreak and lockdown back in March 2020. Huntingdon Town Council is fortunate to have a dedicated team of Councillors and staff working together to fulfil our obligations to the town and community, but of course, the pandemic did mean we had to look at new ways of conducting our business.

Under normal circumstances, the first meeting of the Local Government Year, is the Annual Meeting of the Council, Mayor Making, is to take place in May each year; but, with restrictions in force regarding public gatherings, the government introduced legislation to restrict face-to-face meetings throughout the country.

This meant that Councillor Steve McAdam would remain in office as Town Mayor, with me as his Deputy, until a time that the Annual Meeting of the Council could take place. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Councillor McAdam for remaining in office during such difficult and uncertain times.

### Annual Meeting of Huntingdon Town Council

The main purpose of the Annual Meeting, and the first business of the council, is to elect a Chairman of the Council (the Town Mayor) and a Chairman of each of the four Standing Committees.

The legislation in response to the coronavirus pandemic, gave three options to councils regarding annual meetings and elections. In August 2020, Huntingdon Town Councillors were presented with a report detailing the options relevant to electing a new Mayor:

- Option one - a virtual meeting to be held in May 2020 to elect a new Mayor;

- Option two – the existing Town Mayor to remain in office until May 2021;
- Option three - delay the election until a suitable date could be found, with the term of office of the newly elected Town Mayor extended until May 2022<sup>1</sup>.

Option three was recommended to the Members of Council, and subsequently, it was resolved to adopt the Mayor Making 2020 report and all recommendations therein.

Huntingdon Town Council's Annual Meeting eventually took place on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020; and although other Town and Parish Councils also held their Mayor Making events virtually, ours was the first Mayor Making -- that I know of – to be a hybrid meeting streamed online with the incoming Mayor and Deputy wearing full ceremonial robes.

At that Annual Meeting, I was honoured to be elected Mayor of Huntingdon for the ensuing municipal year. Councillor Padrica Kennington was appointed as Deputy Mayor.

Throughout the year, both Councillor Steve McAdam and myself were supported by the Reverend Jon Randall as the Mayor's Chaplain; Dennis Smith as Macebearer; and by Georgia Barker, Hayley Burns, and Teresa McLoughlin managing our appointments over the year; sadly, there were not as many events as we would expect during a mayoral term in office. I would like to thank each and every one of you for being there for us.

I would like to speak a little about each of our business areas, and the work that has been done during an unprecedented year.

### Huntingdon Town Councillors

We will shortly hear the annual reports from our Standing Committees, so I won't go into detail here, but I will say that all meetings in the past 12 months have taken place virtually. This has been a new experience for most but has enabled us to continue with the decision-making process and to ensure that we continue to work for the good of the town.

In October, Mrs Audrey McAdam was co-opted onto Huntingdon Town Council to fill the South Ward vacancy; Members welcomed Councillor McAdam and expressed their thanks to former Councillor, Alice Sedgewick for her valued contribution to the town during this administration and her previous time with the Town Council.

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Recces Committee held Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020. Available from: <https://www.huntingdowntown.gov.uk/uploads/recess-minutes-2020.pdf>

Sadly, this year we heard of the passing of three former Town Councillors; Valerie Brooker, Jill Watkin Tavener, and Tanya Forster. Tanya was also our Deputy Mayor from May 2013 until May 2015. Councillors and Town Hall staff, past and present, expressed their thanks for the dedicated service of our former Councillors, with our deepest condolences being sent to the families of Val, Jill and Tanya.

Before I move on to the Town Council staff and our business activities, I would like to take this moment to offer my sincere condolences to everyone that has lost a loved one or friend. This year has been devastating for families especially with the additional restrictions on how we say our goodbyes to those lost through natural causes, accident, or illness, including covid-related deaths. My thoughts are with you all.

### Huntingdon Town Council Staff and the Business of the Council

#### *Town Hall*

The Town Council's day-to-day business and services continued to be provided by our administrative staff, from the Town Hall when required, but also working from home whenever possible. The Town Hall and Community Centre have been closed to the public during this period.

There has been a change in personnel over the year, Kate Yerbury left the Town Hall to take on some new challenges, we wish her well in her new role. We welcomed Teresa McLoughlin as our new Amenities Office, and in January, we welcomed our Assistant Town Clerk, Natasha Pierson, back from maternity leave.

A lot of thought has gone into the new ways of working, and has clearly proven successful, so thank you to our Town Clerk, Philip Peacock, and our Responsible Financial Officer, Helen Merrick – who has also been our acting Deputy Town Clerk throughout the pandemic -- for keeping everything running smoothly and making sure our staff have been looked after throughout this period.

#### *Coneygear Centre*

The Coneygear Community Centre has been closed to the public for most of the year, but in line with social distancing regulations, it has been used whenever possible, one example being to train unemployed volunteers in a work-based project with Groundwork East. This project enabled volunteers to gain motivation and confidence as well as learning new skills – I visited the

team in October and was really impressed at the work they have done around the community centre.

The Coneygear Centre Manager, Shilpa Desai Sakaldip, and her Assistant Manager, Sally Marchant, have supported several projects and community engagement throughout the year, the most recent being the Coneygear Centre being used for Covid testing using Lateral Flow devices.

I won't go into detail as we will be hearing from the Leisure and Community Services Committee later, but I can say that Councillors and Town Hall staff have been very proud of the support from Shilpa and Sally, as well as that of Peter Haynes and his team, throughout this crisis.

### *Grounds' Estate Team*

The Ground's Estate team had initially been stood down during the lockdown, but as the guidelines changed, the team were keen to catch up on the backlog of work.

The Grounds' staff, led by our Head Groundsman, Peter Haynes, were divided into teams to minimise unnecessary contact and as a safety bubble to ensure that our open spaces, parks and gardens, cemetery grounds and allotments were well maintained. Unfortunately, for most of the year, the play areas have had to close to the public.

Around the town, bedding plants and some smaller displays were put in place, these included a Florence Nightingale theme at the Sebastopol Cannon site, a Hunts FA 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary display opposite the Bridge Hotel, and the Mayflower display at the Bus Station.

Peter and his team also supported the Coneygear Centre staff with the distribution of hot meals for the Older Peoples Program.

### *Cromwell Museum*

After a complete refurbishment of the Cromwell Museum, it was a real blow that it had to close, but the pandemic did not stop our curator, Stuart Orme, from promoting the museum and the life of our most famous resident. Stuart has produced regular YouTube videos on the history of Cromwell. Stuart hosted a series of online lectures with guest speakers, the advantage of being online was we were joined by people from around the world listening to the Winter lectures, well done Stuart, I enjoyed every one of the talks. Stuart has other projects on the go, so keep an eye out in the local press for more details.

## *Crematorium and Cemeteries*

The Town Council's largest project to date is the building of our Crematorium and Cemetery. Work on the construction is progressing well, despite some delays caused by the covid restrictions and weather, but we look forward to seeing the Crematorium open soon.

We are pleased to welcome Samantha Smith as our new Crematorium and Cemeteries Manager. Over the coming weeks, Samantha will be joined by three new members of her team filling the roles of Deputy Manager, Technician, and an Office Assistant.

As you can imagine, a project as big as this does not happen on its own, many people have worked hard to get us to where we are, but I would just like to give extra thanks to Carol Rigden, as the Project Manager, I know how dedicated she has been to keep this project on track.

You may be surprised to know how active we have been over the year, I am not going into detail, but I shall just read out a few of the highlights:

### Selected Highlights by Month

May 2020:

- VE Day – due to the restrictions in place, residents were asked to observe a two-minute silence at home.

June 2020:

- Wreath Laying for Armed Forces Day – Mayor & Mayoress, with the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress observed a Minute's Silence, the Mayor laid a wreath on behalf of Huntingdon Town.

July 2020:

- Councillor Training sessions, the first of a series of virtual courses with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils (CAPALC) were offered to councillors.

August 2020:

- Wreath laying for VJ Day, the Mayor, Mayoress and small civic party able to attend a socially distanced service at the War Memorial
- The Mayor's Cup – socially distanced football match between Huntingdon Town and Stevenage FC. Mayor, Mayoress and Deputy Mayor in attendance

#### September 2020:

- Social distanced presentation with the Station Commander, RAF Wyton, to mark the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Freedom of Huntingdon being granted to the personnel at RAF Wyton
- Wreath laying to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Britain

#### October 2020:

- Virtual Mayor-Making Service, as previously discussed, this took place in the Town Hall and Online
- Online meetings of the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Twinning Association (the mayors of Huntingdon and Godmanchester, are both honorary Presidents of the Association)

#### November 2020:

- We held a limited, socially distanced, ceremonial Remembrance Day Service a few days before Remembrance Day. This was to ensure people did not gather in numbers at the memorial, sadly, the rules at the time meant that if we had too many people in attendance, we would have had to cancel the service.
- On Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day, I laid a Wreath on behalf of the Town – some residents and former service personnel did go to the War Memorial but kept the Market Square clear
- Christmas lights were installed around the Town Centre, unfortunately, we were unable to hold an official ‘switch on’ ceremony, or weekend Christmas Market

#### December 2020:

- Supporting the BID team with Christmas stalls and street entertainers, also working with HDC promoting Think Local, judging Christmas Window decorations
- Delivering Christmas presents to the children at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital’s Holly Ward and Special Care Baby Unit
- Community Centre staff and Estates Team – cooking and delivering meals for the Older People’s Program

- Socially distanced Christmas services at St Mary's and All Saint's churches, these included a live broadcast over Huntingdon Community Radio

January 2021:

- The Precept for 2021/22 was set, details of which will be given in the Finance Report

February 2021:

- Community Centre is being used for rapid community Covid-19 testing, using lateral flow tests. These tests are for people without any covid symptoms and are offered at no cost.

There were so many things that I could report, but the list above gives an example of our support within the community. Even with covid measures being implemented throughout the year, the business of the Council has continued to function efficiently and professionally, I have been extremely proud of the way our Councillors and staff have conducted themselves, despite some difficult times.

I hope that, as residents, you are confident that your Town Council has looked after the needs of Huntingdon as best it can. Please do let us know if there are areas within our responsibility that you feel could be improved or changed.

Thank you everyone.

Councillor Karl Webb  
Town Mayor of Huntingdon