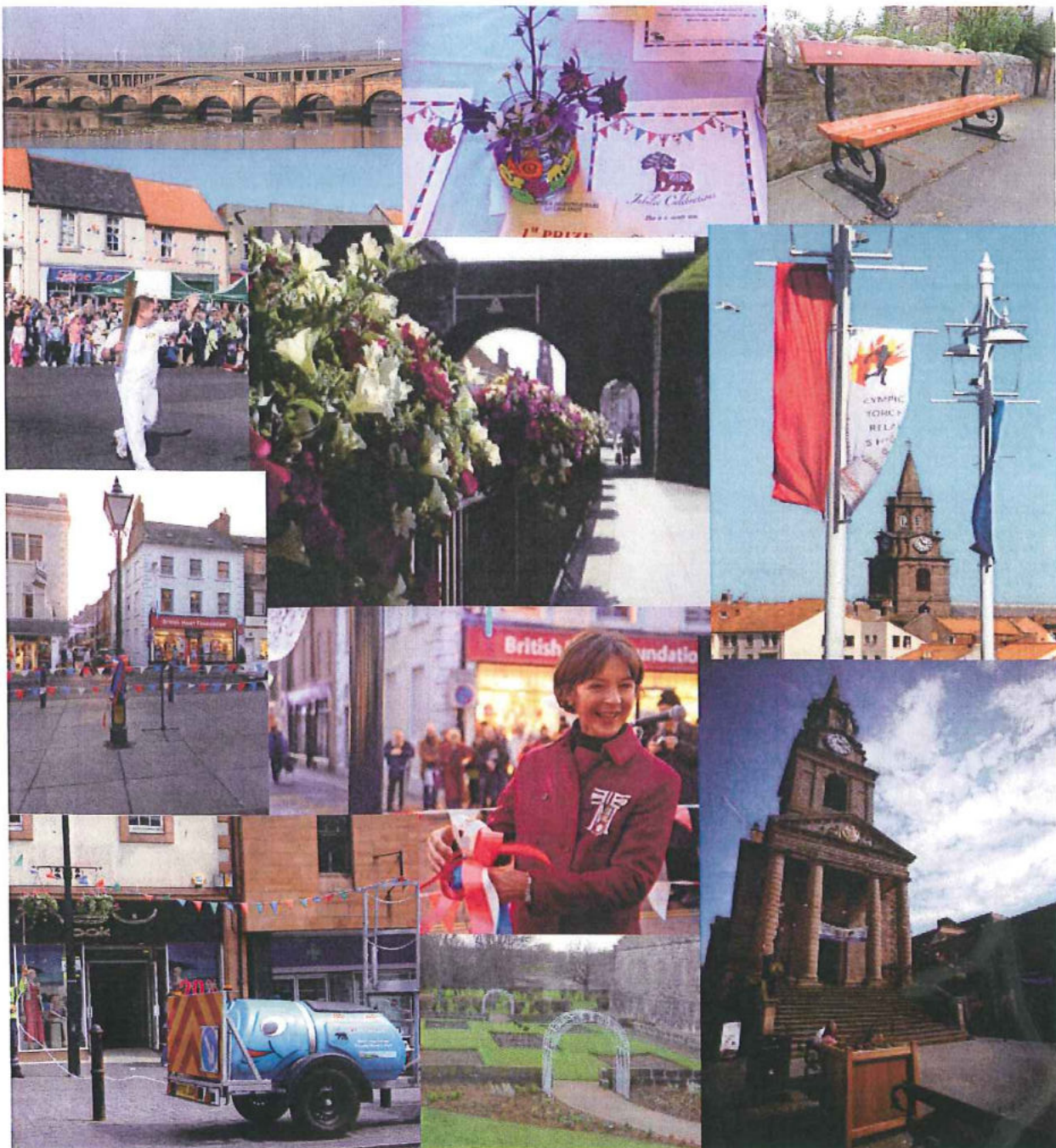


Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Report for the Year Ending 31 March 2013





BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Town Report 2012/13

Introduction

This year has seen the Town Council consolidating its work on services and projects as it aims to deliver the kinds of improvements which residents have said they want to see in Berwick, Spittal and Tweedmouth.

Three major pieces of good news were received during the year. The Berwick Parks Project, a partnership between the County Council, Town Council and local residents, was awarded nearly a million pounds by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Berwick was also successful in its Town Council-led bid to be a Portas Pilot town, and was awarded £100,000 to be used in improving the town centre area. Towards the end of the year the Council was successful in its bid to the Get Going Community Transport Fund, winning £10,000 to help set up a town centre 'hoppa' bus service.

In addition, Berwick-upon-Tweed joined the rest of the nation in celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and was also honoured to be one of the communities welcoming the London 2012 Olympic Torch; for both occasions the Town Council played the leading role in ensuring the town looked festive and welcoming, and was helped by a very generous donation of wooden planters by local company Allan Brothers. Later in the year the town welcomed Her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland in her role as Lord Lieutenant, to mark the installation of a Jubilee lamp in Marygate.

Whilst these were all welcome events, work continued to address issues which affect the daily lives of residents. A variety of matters were raised direct with officers, and also through the social media campaign Berwick Deserves Better, which gives an opportunity to all residents to make suggestions about facilities and services which could be improved. One example of how the Town Council has responded to this forum is the decision to focus on reducing dog fouling, and steps are underway, working in partnership with Berwick Borough Housing and Berwick Deserves Better, to provide bags and dispensers and identify volunteers willing to assist in encouraging better use of both.

Where the Council cannot make a direct difference it has tried to ensure the voice of residents is heard where it matters, for example by hosting a public meeting to discuss the closure of the Maternity Unit at Berwick Hospital. Members also offer their views on strategic issues such as the evolving Local Development Framework.

Berwick-upon-Tweed is fortunate to have strong community groups and associations which work hard, entirely voluntarily, on events and projects for their locality. The Council has continued to support these with financial help through its grant schemes, and the results show the immense value of partnership.

The Town Council, as the democratically accountable local authority, is committed to ensuring these initiatives add real value to the community.

The Year in Brief

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION PROJECTS

Streetscape improvements

A number of small projects during the year have contributed to improving the appearance of the town. The Council share with the County Council the cost of painting the lower half of lamp columns on the new bridge, and also all the bollards across the bridge, in advance of the Olympic flame.

Bent and broken barriers in a number of locations have been replaced or repaired, and as issues are reported to the Town Council staff, they report these as appropriate to the County Council, which despite increasingly limited resources responds where possible.

Berwick Parks Project

The bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore Coronation Park and Castle Vale Park was successful, and the lead partnership of the County Council and Town Council, along with CARA, was awarded almost £1 million. Detailed plans have been put together, with initial tree works starting in March, and a planned completion date of summer 2014.

Flagstaff Park

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee triggered a proposal that the rose garden in Flagstaff Park should if possible be restored and improved to mark this very special occasion. The rose garden was cleared and new beds created during the winter. New roses were planted at the end of 2011-12, and planting of sustainable shrubs and herbaceous perennials towards the end of the municipal year. Two rose arches, incorporating the Town Council logo, and commemorating the Jubilee, were designed and made by Michael Lee of local firm Bob Lee.

Allotments

The Lion Allotments have now formally transferred to the Town Council under lease from Berwick Preservation Trust. They will largely be administered by the Lion Allotments Committee. A proportion of the rents (75%) will be transferred to the Town Council to be ring-fenced and kept for any maintenance or repairs. Once the existing waiting list which has been held by the Committee has been accommodated, those on the Town Council's allotment waiting list will be eligible to take any vacant plots on.

Play Areas

The Council commissioned a study of the play areas, which continue to be County Council responsibility, to see whether they were still in the right location for the present distribution of families and children, and whether the equipment was still the right kind in the right place. Its view on whether or not to consider taking on the parks will depend on the results of this study.

Spittal Splash Park has, despite many teething problems, provided a major and exciting contribution to the facilities for local children and visitors to Spittal. Responsibility for the Park will pass to the Town Council once legal agreements are reached and ongoing maintenance will be undertaken via a Service Level Agreement with the County Council.

At Highcliffe, the Council has now provided toddler equipment, and the swing for older children was re-located adjacent to the skate park but shortly afterwards removed as a result of vandalism. It is hoped that with equipment for younger children, use of the Highcliffe facility is more appropriate.

Berwick in Bloom

The Council continued to support the work of the Berwick in Bloom Committee, with some modest financial support. More spring bulbs were purchased and planted, and the tower planters formally located in Marygate were moved to the station area. They were replaced in Marygate by nine hardwood planters made and donated by Allan Brothers. They have added to the steady improvement in the appearance of the town centre, complementing the ongoing efforts of community groups across Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal.

Supporting Local Projects

Through the Berwick Environment Enhancement Scheme, BEES for short, a number of local organisations have received small grants as seed money to enable them to get projects moving which will improve the local environment. This year's grants supported the following:

Spittal Improvement Trust (£250)
Provision of compost, topsoil, shrubs and plants.

Berwick Visual Arts (An Initiative of The Maltings (Berwick) Trust) (£2,000)
To support Berwick Visual Arts with a lease to occupy The Gymnasium Gallery at The Barracks from English Heritage.

Community Assets

The Town Council is keeping a watching brief on assets which belonged to the former Borough Council and transferred to the County Council in April 2009. The County Council has agreed to transfer the former ladies toilet at Bankhill to the Town Council, and it is planned to restore this and integrate it into the Berwick Parks Project, for use as a store and base for staff and equipment.

Seats, bus shelters, litter bins and war memorials

On 1 April 2012, responsibility for over 300 seats in the Town Council area, as well as most bus shelters, provision of litter bins, and maintenance of Spittal War Memorial, was passed to the Town Council by the County Council.

Work is now underway to introduce a programme of restoration and maintenance for the seats, and replacement or removal where necessary. Work on all the seats on Spittal Promenade started during the year and should be completed by the start of the summer.

A scheme for dedicated seats has been set up, which ensures all costs are met by the donor; applications can be made through the Council website.

As glass and Perspex panels in bus shelters are smashed and vandalised, they are being replaced by heavy-duty metal mesh to try and reduce damage in the future.

Marketing Berwick

Considerable work has been carried out during the year to improve the information on www.visitberwick.com. The whole site has been changed to sit alongside the 'parent' Visit Northumberland site and will allow the Town Council to have much greater control over what appears on the site.

A full page about Berwick has been purchased in the main Northumberland Holiday Guide, and an enhanced entry purchased to ensure a good number of attractions appear in the Days Out and Attractions leaflet; both publications are produced by Northumberland Tourism.

Three pages dedicated to Berwick have been purchased in the Northumberland Coast brochure of the Northumberland Coast AONB.

As well as the annual events leaflet, a pre-visit leaflet about Berwick has been produced, with financial assistance from the County Council, with 30,000 copies being printed.

Berwick's Tourism Forum had its first meeting in March, with a group of representatives from all tourism sectors, to discuss marketing objectives and plans for the future. The group will meet monthly.

Dog Fouling and Seagulls

Two issues regularly mentioned as blighting Berwick-upon-Tweed for both residents and visitors are dog fouling and seagulls.

With the help of Berwick Deserves Better and the Berwickshire WOOFs scheme, the Council is in the early stage of setting up, with sponsorship from Berwick Borough Housing, a scheme to encourage more use of dog bags. The bags are already being distributed through a number of outlets and via residents' associations.

The Council has agreed to sponsor the printing of special notices asking the public not to feed seagulls, which the County Council has undertaken to have printed.

EVENTS

Jubilee Celebrations

The Council funded the bunting and banners which were put up throughout the town and provided a festive setting for the events which were organised to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The Town Council ran a shop window display, a Jubilee Fete and Tea Dance in the Town Hall, supported the Dewar's Lane Granary barbecue and live music, and worked to secure English Heritage's permission to light the beacon on the ramparts, one of the nationwide chain. The Council was also pleased to support the Diamond Jubilee Party on the Green organised by the Berwick Rotary Club and the Berwick Branch of Leukaemia and Lymphoma. All these events took place in sunny weather, and were very successful.

On 1 December, a new street lamp in Marygate to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee was officially switched on by the Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland, the Duchess of Northumberland.

Olympic Torch

Berwick was the first port of call for the Olympic Flame as it re-entered England on its way to London 2012. To coincide with this event, which attracted thousands of people, the Council arranged children's activities on Tweedmouth Green, live music along the route and specially made banners across the bridge. Partners arranged a celebratory Town Wall run and Dewar's Lane Granary provided a barbecue. One of the few sunny spots in the Northumberland stretch of the Relay, this was a memorable occasion for everyone.

Can Am Pipes and Drums

The Council welcomed the Can-Am Pipes and Drums from the USA and Canada, who included Berwick as part of their tour. They practiced on the Parade before marching to the Town Hall and performing to residents and visitors at the foot of the steps.

Supporting local events

The Council has supported, and agreed to support, the following local events through its grants scheme:

Berwick Arts and Crafts Group (£200)

Promotional leaflets for an Arts and Crafts event in Berwick

Spittal Improvement Trust (£2,000)

Spittal Park Official Opening. Spittal Gala. Seaside Festival. Christmas Santa Parade.

Berwick Detachment Army Cadet Force (£175)

To pay for the venue hire of the Guildhall to hold an exhibition about local service personnel who have served in the Northumberland Fusiliers and the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

5th Berwick Scouts – Summer Sounds at the Pavilion (£250)

To pay for Public Liability Insurance (£180), publicity posters / invitations and other minor expenses (2012).

Tweedmouth Feast Crowning and Carnival Committee (£2,750)

To cover the associated costs of the extended 2012 Feast programme.

Rotary Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed (£2,000)

Contribution towards cost of erection and removal of Christmas Lights.

Berwick Detachment Army Cadet Force (£175)

To pay for the venue hire of the Guildhall to hold an exhibition to begin the commemorations of the 250th anniversary of Minden Day.

5th Berwick Scouts – Palace Green Music Festival (£250)

To pay for a sound system and a sound engineer (2013).

Berwick Autumn Festivals (£3,000)

To promote the town's three Autumn festivals more effectively. Berwick Food & Beer Festival: 6 – 8 September. Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival: 25 – 29 September. Frontier Music Festival: 10 – 13 October.

Rotary Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed (£2,460)

May Fair Party on the Parade.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Riders Association Ltd (£800)

To assist with costs of the Riding of the Bounds event.

Christmas Lights and Trees

New lights and refurbishment of existing lights have been a major project for the town. The Council had power supplies introduced for eleven more new lights in Castlegate, and this now represents the completion of the investment in festive lights.

Seven Christmas trees were placed in locations in Berwick, Spittal and Tweedmouth, and the Council funded the putting up of the town's major display, the Rotary Club's lights across the new bridge.

The Council also ran a shop window display competition with the Christmas theme.

Remembrance Day

The Town Council, as in previous years, organised the annual service of Remembrance on 11 November, held this year in St Andrews Wallace Green and Lowick Church of Scotland, and following which the Civic Party led the parade to the War Memorial in Castlegate where wreaths were laid following a brief service incorporating the two-minute silence. Short services were also conducted at the Spittal and Tweedmouth War Memorials.

Civic Events

The Civic Party, as ambassadors for the Town Council, attended a large number of events during the year, from receptions for visitors from overseas, to events hosted by local businesses, voluntary organisations, schools and residential homes.

COUNCIL MATTERS

The full Council meets every two months, but much of the discussion and decision-making is carried out by its five Committees: Events, Environment and Regeneration, Finance and Resources, Planning and Staffing. All meetings are open to the public, who are excluded only where confidential items are being discussed. Each meeting has an open session at the start, when the public can raise issues of concern, or ask questions.

Supporting the Community

The Council agreed to a number of grants during the year for purposes which are to help benefit the residents of Berwick-upon-Tweed, or which have value but do not fit the criteria of other grant 'pockets'.

Citizens Advice Bureau (£20,000).

Recognising the increasing importance of the service to local residents during a time of economic recession and dramatic changes to the welfare system, the Council made an immediate grant to the Berwick CAB to ensure its service was able to continue being provided.

Tweed Music Centre (£250)

Publicity material to promote new and existing activities and concerts.

Berwick Youth Project (£250)

To help run a series of outdoor activities during the 6 week summer break.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Fair Trade Group (£85)

To print 100 Berwick-upon-Tweed FAIRTRADE TOWN window publicity stickers.

Honorary Freeman

No Honorary Freeman have been nominated during 2012-13. Any resident of Berwick-upon-Tweed may nominate someone to be an Honorary Freeman; details of the criteria,

and a nomination form, can be down-loaded from the website www.berwick-tc.gov.uk

Youth Council

During the year the Council set up Berwick-upon-Tweed's first Youth Council. With representatives from local schools, and chaired by Hannah Cummins of Berwick Academy, the Council meets monthly. Youth Councillors have come forward with their views on what needs to be done in the Town Council area from a young person's perspective, and has provided valuable input to the play strategy which the Council has commissioned. Members are now actively considering ideas for a new centre to provide the facilities and activities for young people which they feel they are missing.

Planning Issues

Applications for planning permission are referred by the County Council to the Town Council for comment, and the Planning Committee meets every month to consider these and agree a view, which is then sent to the County Council. These views are taken into account along with all those which are submitted by residents and other bodies.

The Committee welcomes the views of residents; the monthly meetings are open to the public, and information about local planning applications can be found by logging on to: http://www.berwick-tc.gov.uk/town_council/committees/planning.htm

Portas Pilot

Following the success of the Town Council-led bid to become a Portas Pilot, the delivery is being managed by the Town Team, led by Ed Swales, now established as a company limited by guarantee with 3 directors. The County Council, via its development arm ARCH, is the accountable body for the finances, and has committed to matching the funds from DCLG. The 3 original projects are a revitalisation of the charter market, improvements to the appearance of buildings in Marygate, and the provision of marketing advice to selected businesses in the town; after due consideration and discussion with local groups, this programme is being reviewed and being adapted.

Working with Others

Local voluntary, public and community organisations have invited the Town Council to nominate representatives to serve on their committees and steering groups. Full details of these organisations and the current Town Council appointees can be found on the Town Council website. These appointments are reviewed annually.

The Council has also contributed to the debate over Berwick's economic regeneration. As well as representation on the Berwick's Future Group, the Council has responded to consultations about the County's Core Strategy and issues such as parking restriction proposals, the closure of Berwick Maternity Unit, the sale of land at Berwick Academy for the provision of a new hospital, extension of the Designated Public Place Order, and public transport services.

Guild of Freemen

The Council administers admissions to the Guild of Freemen at a quarterly meeting presided over by the Town Mayor. This year the Mayor has admitted 29 men and women, whose families and history are part of the fabric of Berwick life.

The Town Council received its entitlement to a share of the surplus of the Freemen's Schedule III monies, which this year was £89,893, a valuable additional resource for the Council.

ACCOUNTS FOR 2012-13

The accounts for 2012-13 are currently in preparation.

Receipts totalled £199,422. This includes £90,282 received from the Freemen. Estimated payments totalled £255,529.

The cost of the Town Council to a Band D property was £26.92, equating to a little over 50p per week.

Details of all the Council's receipts and payments can be found attached to the Finance and Resources Committee agendas, which are posted on the Town Council's website.

The Government appointed auditor BDO Stoy Hayward LLP carried out the audit of the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 and issued the Town Council with the Notice of Conclusion of Audit on 12 September 2012.

STAFF

The Council's staff in 2012-13 comprised a full-time Town Clerk, a part-time (0.8 FTE) Assistant to the Clerk and a part-time (0.4 FTE) Finance Officer. The staff establishment therefore totals just over two full-time members. In addition, during the year a Website Development Officer for www.visitberwick.com has been working in a temporary capacity to re-develop the website.

The Sergeant at Mace and Halberdier continue to look after all matters relating to the Civic Party.

Sue Finch
TOWN CLERK