



Annual Report 2019-2020

Introduction from the Chairman/Town Mayor for 2019/20 – Councillor Neil Gibbs

2019 was a notable year for Stonehouse. After years of negotiation with our County Council, the much-anticipated work began on transforming the underused Town Hall building into a Community Hub incorporating a fantastic new public Library. Following delays due the pandemic the work is now virtually complete and Town Council staff will shortly be moving into our new bright and modern office suite. The transformation of the Town Hall will ensure the continued presence of a Library in our town at a time when nationally Libraries are closing wholesale. Our thanks go to Richard Lacey for project managing this scheme.

Work also began recently on the Old Chapel Rest Garden off the High Street making it into a fully accessible garden for everyone to enjoy. There is horticultural work outstanding due to the pandemic but when it is finished it will be transformed.

Sadly, the Britain in Bloom competition had to be cancelled this year, but the good news is that it will take place in 2021 and the council has managed to negotiate a 12 month carry-over on its contract with the plant suppliers so there will be no financial loss incurred.

Your Town Council has declared a climate emergency and adopted a new Climate Change policy that will run through all activities and future planning. The aim is to achieve carbon neutrality in line with the District Council. Additionally, we are taking steps to green-up our town spaces, planting trees and encouraging wildflowers in our parks which will improve biodiversity and there are plans to re-purpose the Stagholt field into a wildlife zone.

Pandemic restrictions have made life difficult and Council meetings now must be held virtually. The situation has been doubly difficult for our staff in as much as they have had to cope with remote working and being in temporary cramped offices. In addition, Govt legislation has meant the delay of local elections until 2021 meaning that all existing Councillors have been asked to remain in office for an additional 12 months. Some were hoping to stand-down in May, but I must pay tribute to all of them for volunteering to stay-on through this difficult time.

Last year we welcomed our new Town Clerk. Carlos Novoth is a former Dept Head at the District Council and lives locally. Carlos has been busy embedding himself into the community. He has introduced a new streamlined financial management system and has been extremely effective in dealing with our response to the pandemic. Ray Kaye was promoted to become our new Maintenance Manager. Rachel Russell became Deputy Clerk and Jayne Bailey added facilities management to her Communications and Customer Services role. As part of our recent Staffing Review we plan to employ a Grounds person and a Business Apprentice. These posts will be filled as soon as possible. We are grateful to our excellent, professional Locums, Roy Balgobin, Clerk, and Irena Litton, Responsible Financial Officer who gave invaluable support to the Council before we recruited our new Town Clerk. Thanks are also due to Lucas Edney who has provided continuing locum Groundsperson support.

In response to the pandemic, some fantastic work was done by the team in organising a team of local volunteers to assist vulnerable residents with shopping and other vital needs. A considerable number of people have been and continue to be helped in this way.

As I write, life is slowly beginning to return to our town. There's no doubt our local businesses have suffered gravely throughout the pandemic and what the true final price will be, we are yet to discover. What I do know is that we can all do our bit to support our local businesses by shopping here in Stonehouse as much as possible and keeping money in our local economy.

Stonehouse Town Council Income and Expenditure 2019-2021:

Income	2018/19	2019/20
Precept	275450	302800
investment interest & interest	3,089	4,580
CIL/s106	107	33,996
Grants	10,540	30,005
Leases	8,350	9,350
Facilities Hire	5,415	5,640
Stonehouse in Bloom	2,707	2,902
Events	2,271	1,705
Other	8,502	1,684
Sale of Stagholt	94,982	0
	411,413	392,662

Expenditure	2018/19	2019/20
Staff	106,106	139,826
General Expenditure	42,417	45,678
Streetscene	30,829	49,214
Building Overheads	26,088	31,747
Youthwork	34,150	35,286
Events	11,458	9,564
Stonehouse in Bloom	4,983	6,954
Equipment and Vehicles	2,738	1,771
Grants	2,606	4,839
Petty Cash	230	91
Reserves		61,006
	261,605	385,976

Grants received 2019-2020

Grants	
Gloucestershire County Council	£7,430
Healthy Communities Fund (Oldends Lane recreation ground)	
Stroud District Council Tourism Grant	£2,000
Gloucestershire Playing Fields Association (Oldends Lane recreation ground)	£2,000
Stroud District Council Market Towns Funding	£13,325
Barnwood Trust (Old Chapel Garden)	£5,250
	£30,005

Grants awarded 2019-2020:

Share and Repair (start up in High Street premises)	£2,000
Stroud District Council Neighbourhood Warden service	£250
Bandit Music Projects	£500
Stonehouse Allotment Association (toilet)	£250
PSALMS (equipment Club Pulse)	£500
St Cyr's Church (churchyard maintenance)	£499
Standish Parish Council (bus shelter Horsemarling Roundabout)	£700
Royal British Legion (Poppy Appeal)	£20
Stonehouse Community Association (Lunch Club room hire)	£120
	£4,839

The Council's financial statements for 2019-20 will be available on the Council's website following audit and during the inspection period.

We continue to work as a Quality Award Council by continuing best practice in the sector. Since April 2019, we have moved to a 2 committee structure: the Town Business committee and Town Environment committee meet monthly replacing three other committees. This has helped to speed up decision making and make best use of resources.

Report of the Town Business Committee

The Committee, chaired by Councillor Neil Gibbs, has reviewed and revised council policies and scrutinised the council's finances. The Committee is responsible for the Town Hall and Youth Centre (The Pod) and ongoing council strategy content and direction.

The Committee has supported councillors and staff to undertake training to maintain standards and expertise. The Town Clerk is undertaking the Certificate in Local Council Administration training.

Councillors Parker, Parsons and Smith attended new councillor training by Gloucestershire Association of Town and Parish Councils.

Ray Kaye, Maintenance Manager has attended customer services and legionella awareness training. Ray and Jayne Bailey, Communications and Facilities Management Officer, have both updated their First Aid qualifications.

The Committee checks the draft budget and precept request before it is presented to Council. The Council has made an allowance for an increase in salary costs, youth services and town regeneration.

	2019/20	2020/21
Staffing	121,700	138,723
Grants	5,250	15,000
Climate	0	7,000
Business	165,730	166,780
Environment	24,000	30,300
Contingency	6,200	0
Gross Expenditure	322,880	357,803
Income and Use of Reserves	-20,080	-18,230
Precept	302,800	339,573

For a comparison of the precept with that of other parishes please see your council tax bill or visit our website www.stonehousetowncouncil.com/preceptcomparisons.

This year the Committee has

- Worked on details of lease with Gloucestershire County Council for co-

location of the library with the town council offices and provision of temporary premises for Town Council staff during the refurbishment and conversion of the Town Hall.

- Continued to move forward the planning application for a community hall funded by housing at Oldends Lane, commissioning reports as required by Stroud District Council Planning Services.
- Worked with The Door to deliver a youth club in The Pod, and supported more outreach work from the Door Staff. Worked closely with SDC on the Youth Forum for Stonehouse.
- Working on Council Strategy and Action Plan and policies including employment policies and a Staff Handbook. Recommended adoption of revised Financial Regulations and Code of Conduct; also, Grant award and Risk Management policies.
- Recommended the adoption of a Climate Change Action Plan.
- Allocated funding for a tree planting programme on Council land.
- Adopted a new approach to managing green spaces to increase biodiversity.
- Facilitated a programme of improvement work to the old Chapel Garden by acting as Lead Agency for grant funding from the Barnwood Trust.
- Recommended the purchase of a financial and asset management IT system to improve and modernise council processes.

The Committee is assisted by the Town Clerk/RFO and the Communications and Facilities Management Officer.

The Human Resources sub – Committee, Internal Audit Panel and the following working groups report to this committee: Business Networking, Canal Rejuvenation, Climate Action, Communications , Policy , Recreation, Youth.

Report of the Town Environment Committee

The Committee, chaired by Councillor Carol Kambites, has considered 99 planning applications during the year: the Council is a statutory consultee in the planning process but does not decide applications.

In 2019/2020 the Committee has:

- Supported the work of Stonehouse in Bloom as they prepared for the national competition in 2020, having won Gold and Small Town Category in the Heart of England in Bloom competition in 2019.
- The Events Group together with volunteers from the community put on a successful Goodwill Evening which the Town Council supported financially.
- Lobbied to keep the re-opening of Bristol Road Station on the agenda of key decision makers, holding a stakeholder event at Stonehouse Court Hotel in March and making an application to the Department for Transport Restoring Your Railway Fund.
- Through the Transport and Highways working group, liaising with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) Highways local Transport Manager on a range of issues including: the resurfacing of the shared space after the incinerator cable installation, parking changes on the High Street and supporting a proposal for a priority assessment for a School Safety Zone by the Shrubberies School
- Lobbied for GCC to refurbish bus stops outside SFK and at Foxes Field, Ebley Road. The Town Council have now taken on ownership of these two shelters and a new shelter opposite SFK. Arranged for cleaning of town centre bus shelters now in Town Council's ownership.
- Recommended the adoption of two BT phone boxes.
- Responded to consultations as received from Stroud District (Street Trading Policy, Governance Review. Draft Local Plan), Gloucestershire County Council (Draft Local Transport plan), Cotswold Canals Connected

- Responded to pre-application planning consultations relating to Wycliffe College and land at Queens Road.
- Started to plan reviewing the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan, including possible changes in relation to the Ship Inn site. The Plan has now been "made" by Stroud District Council and now forms a key part in the planning process.
- Continued as a Strategic Partner in Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Wild Towns Project in Stonehouse.
- Supported grant application to Gloucestershire CPRE to fund replacement ash trees
- Agreed to join Stroud District Road Safety Group and arrange for their mobile Vehicle Activated Sign to be temporarily placed at Oldends Lane.
- Agreed to become a local council charter branch of the Tree Charter.
- Agreed to set up Happy to Chat benches around the town.

The Committee is supported by the Deputy Clerk. The Deputy Clerk also supports the Town Council beyond the scope of the Environment Committee, assisting the Locum Town Clerk and Locum Responsible Financial Officer from April to September 2020 and then the new Town Clerk . A key task this year involved establishing the Town Council on electronic banking so that most payments could be made by transfer rather than cheque.

The following working groups report to the Town Environment Committee: Events, Transport and Highways.