

Mayor's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting – Thursday 13 March 2025

Presented by Cllr Peter Neil

I am pleased to present this report from the Town Council to the Corfe Mullen Annual Parish Meeting as the Deputy Mayor of Corfe Mullen and Vice-Chair of the Town Council. Unfortunately, the Mayor of Corfe Mullen and Chair of the Town Council is unable to attend the meeting this evening due to presenting awards at the My Time Young Carers Annual Charity Event.

The Clerk of the Council is also unable to attend this evening's meeting, however, I am ably assisted by the Deputy Clerk, Daryl Pearce, and Rachel Virrill, Senior Administrator.

It has been another busy year for the Council, and I would like to share with you some of the notable achievements over the last 12 months.

Town Council Elections and Appointments

As many of you will know, the Town Council elections took place in May 2024. The election was uncontested, with 11 elected members, leaving 3 vacancies. Due to having more than two-thirds of elected members and a qualified Clerk, the Town Council is eligible to exercise the General Power of Competence, giving us the ability to do anything an individual can do, as long as it is not prohibited by other legislation.

The Annual Town Council meeting was held on 14 May 2024, where I was re-elected as Vice-Chair and Deputy Mayor for the 2024/25 municipal year. Cllr Duncan Sowry-House was elected as Chair and Mayor, and I would like to thank Cllr Sowry-House for his support in this role over the past year.

In June 2024, the 3 vacancies on the Town Council were filled by co-option. We welcomed Cllrs Phillip Cuckston, Andrew Joyce, and Phil Purvis. All newly elected and co-opted members completed induction and mandatory training provided by the Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils (DAPTC) to ensure Councillors are well-prepared to serve Corfe Mullen residents.

The Council reviewed its appointment of the Internal Auditor and, in May 2024, extended its thanks to Eleanor Greene for her many years of dedicated service and invaluable support to the Council. Following this, the Council appointed Tim Light as the new Internal Auditor. Tim brings with him extensive experience in local government governance, and the Town Council looks forward to working closely with him throughout the 2024/25 financial year.

Infrastructure and Improvements

The Council has made significant progress in enhancing facilities and services in Corfe Mullen over the past year.

Bus Shelters: Last year, the Mayor mentioned that the Council had received requests from residents to install a new bus shelter by the Windgreen Roundabout. After much coordination with Dorset Council Highways, I'm pleased to report that two new bus shelters were installed – one new and one replacement – which I am sure you will agree are a welcome addition for bus users.

Recreation Ground Improvements: We have also made improvements at the Recreation Ground. A new safety fence was installed along Wimborne Road to replace the damaged previous fence, ensuring the safety of users. Additionally, the Council allocated CIL receipts from Dorset Council to replace the swings in the Recreation Ground play area, ensuring the equipment remains safe and enjoyable for young people.

Outdoor gym equipment was installed on the far side at the Recreation Ground, offering stunning views over the Stour Valley, whilst working out. The Town Council was committed to ensuring the equipment is accessible to all abilities, providing an inclusive fitness option for our community. The

equipment has already proven to be a valuable addition to the Recreation Ground, with the Council receiving positive feedback from users.

Defibrillator: The defibrillator at the Recreation Ground sports pavilion had reached the end of its life, so the Council worked with the British Heart Foundation to replace the equipment for the benefit of Corfe Mullen residents, particularly those using the Recreation Ground. The Council is also exploring additional grant funding and potential locations to ensure that defibrillators are accessible to residents across all areas of Corfe Mullen.

CCTV and Vandalism: Regrettably, vandalism has continued to affect the public toilets at the Recreation Ground along with other Town Council facilities. In response, we have installed additional CCTV cameras, which have proven helpful in identifying those responsible for damaging the facilities. We are investigating more secure options for the toilets and hope to reopen them soon.

The Council continues to collaborate closely with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and Dorset Council Anti-Social Behaviour Officers in response to ongoing issues with damage to play equipment and offensive graffiti, particularly at the skate park. We urge all residents to report any incidents of anti-social behaviour they witness to Dorset Police via the 101 non-emergency number, helping us to maintain a safe and welcoming environment for everyone in our community.

Village Hall: The Town Council awarded a grant to the Corfe Mullen Village Hall Charity for the installation of a loading bay and two accessible parking spaces at the front of the Village Hall and Council Office. This improvement ensures that visitors to the office and Village Hall hirers have easier access to the buildings. Further works are planned, including the installation of an enclosed porch at the entrance to the Village Hall and Council Office to deter anti-social behaviour, particularly with young people gathering under the current canopy. Additionally, there will be a small extension and improvements to the Small Hall of the Village Hall.

Office IT Systems: The Council's IT systems had become outdated, and concerns were raised about the vulnerability of the data and access to essential Microsoft programs. To address this, the Town Council engaged a local IT provider to upgrade our office systems. All users now access Council data via Microsoft 365, greatly enhancing the efficiency of our operations. Council email accounts have also been migrated to Microsoft Exchange. We are currently working on implementing a new digital phone system in preparation for the digital switchover in Dorset during 2025, and faster broadband is expected to be installed by the end of the current financial year.

Allotment Improvements: The Council continues to work closely with the Corfe Mullen Allotment Association to ensure the allotment site on Broadmoor Road remains safe and well-maintained for allotment holders. Ongoing work includes the upkeep of car parks and communal areas. Unfortunately, the current raised beds have reached the end of their life and are in need of replacement. The Council is collaborating with contractors to rebuild raised beds that are fit for purpose and accessible to all. Additionally, the Allotment Association has received grant funding to enhance the balancing pond by transforming it into a wildlife pond, a project that is currently in progress and is expected to encourage more wildlife to the site.

Social Media: The Town Council agreed to establish a social media presence in an effort to engage with a broader range of residents in Corfe Mullen. As a result, we launched both a Facebook page and an Instagram profile. These platforms serve as a community noticeboard, providing regular updates on the work of the Town Council as well as relevant information from Dorset Council. We hope that residents who access social media are finding our posts helpful and informative.

Highways: The Town Council continues to work closely with Dorset Council Highways to support road safety improvements in and around the village. To assist residents with any concerns or

requests for road safety improvements, a Community Highways Request policy has been developed. Additionally, the Council is collaborating with Dorset Council Highways on the installation of dropped kerbs along the main arterial routes in Corfe Mullen, starting with Wareham Road. This work is ongoing and will be carried out over the next five years.

The safety and wellbeing of our residents and users of our facilities is a top priority. In response to feedback from users, the Town Council has worked with Dorset Council Highways to install pedestrian safety railings on the public footpath near the exit gate on Hillside Road from Henbury View Play Area, ensuring a safer environment for all.

Civic Regalia: The Town Council's civic regalia is being updated, including new pendants for the Mayor and Mayor's Consort, Vice Chair and Consort badges, and the introduction of a Past Mayor's badge. The regalia is being handcrafted and is expected to be ready later in the year.

Website: In the 2023/24 financial year, the Council allocated funds in the budget to redesign the Town Council website, with the aim of making it more accessible and user-friendly. We are pleased to announce that this work is now complete, and the new website was launched on 27 February 2025. We hope residents are finding it easier to navigate and that it serves as a valuable resource for staying informed about what's happening in Corfe Mullen and the work of the Town Council.

Assets of Community Value: You may recall from last year's meeting, the Mayor informed you of the Town Council's decision to nominate several locations within Corfe Mullen as Assets of Community Value. Under the Localism Act 2011, this enables the Council to identify and nominate land and buildings that are significant to the community for inclusion on Dorset Council's list of Assets of Community Value. Should these assets ever be sold, local community groups would, in many cases, have a fairer chance to bid to purchase the property on the open market. It's important to note that being listed as an Asset of Community Value does not impose any restrictions on what an owner can do with their property while it remains in their ownership.

The following assets have now been successfully registered with Dorset Council: Lockyers Middle School, the Royal British Legion, Lambs Green Pub, Dorset Soldier Pub, the County Field at the Corfe Mullen Recreation Ground, and Corfe Mullen Library. These listings are valid for five years. Applications for the 'Pound' at the top of Pardy's Hill/Blandford Road will be progressed in due course, and the re-registration of the BH Live Active leisure centre is currently in progress.

Community Engagement and Events

We have continued to support and host events that foster a sense of community in Corfe Mullen.

Macmillan Bike Ride: The Dorset Macmillan bike ride held in July 2024 raised over £25,000 for the charity, with the Recreation Ground serving as the starting and finishing points. We are excited to host the event again on Sunday 6 July 2025.

Corfe Mullen Carnival: In June 2024, the annual Corfe Mullen Carnival took place, with the Grounds Team assisting in setting up the events alongside Carnival Committee members. It was wonderful to see so many of you at the carnival, supporting local charities.

Community Coffee Mornings: Since November 2024, the Council has hosted weekly coffee mornings at the Village Hall. This initiative has provided a space for residents to connect with Councillors over free refreshments and discuss any issues or concerns they may have.

Christmas and Spring Fairs: The Village Hall Charity held its first Christmas Fair in December 2024, and due to its success, a Spring Fair will take place on Saturday 22 March 2025. We look forward to seeing you there and taking part in the Easter Egg trail and tombola.

Remembrance Sunday: The Council was pleased to once again organise the Remembrance Sunday Parade this year. Over 400 people, including Councillors, residents, and local community groups, lined the parade route and attended the church service. Together with the Royal British Legion, we honoured the Armed Forces and their families from Britain and the Commonwealth. We also remembered the vital role of the emergency services and those who have lost their lives due to conflict or terrorism.

The Town Council is grateful to St Nicholas Church for hosting the service and facilitating the live streaming of the commemoration, ensuring that those unable to attend in person could still take part.

A special thank you goes to the Carnival Committee members and all those in the community who supported the event. The parade could not have taken place without their help, and the Council is incredibly proud of the efforts that made this a well-organised, well-attended, and meaningful remembrance

Sustainability and Climate Action

As part of our ongoing commitment to sustainability, the Council continues to work with the local community to address climate change.

Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Plan: I continue to lead the Climate Change Working Party in developing a Local Action Plan for Corfe Mullen. The Council is committed to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss.

The Deputy Clerk is working with the Woodland Trust to provide free tree saplings for planting at the Recreation Ground. The saplings are expected to be delivered in March 2025. We will be holding a potting up event on Wednesday 9 April 2025 from 10am-12pm at the Grounds Unit at the Recreation Ground behind the Scout Hut. It would be lovely to see the whole community get involved in adopting and nurturing a tree for planting out in the Spring 2026.

Youth Services

The Town Council as the Sole Trustee of Corfe Mullen Youth Trust took the decision to temporarily pause the youth club and after school club at the Village Hall following the Easter break due to difficulties in recruiting trained youth workers. The Council is working to recruit a new full-time lead youth worker and hopes to resume services as soon as possible.

Corfe Mullen Sports Association

In December 2023, the Town Council resolved to take over as the Sole Trustee of the Corfe Mullen Sports Association. Unfortunately, the Charity Commission took longer than expected to complete the change of Trustees, with the Charity Commission Register being updated in July 2024. The Clerk has worked closely with the previous Trustees to ensure a smooth handover of all relevant documentation. As a result, all administration of the Charity is now managed by the Council office staff.

Collaborative Working

The Town Council is working collaboratively with Wimborne Minster Town Council and external agencies to improve the safety of users of Julians Bridge and Julians Road. Several residents have raised concerns regarding road safety, particularly for young people living in Corfe Mullen who attend Queen Elizabeth (QE) School. In response, both Town Councils are joining forces to draft a proposal to present to Dorset Council, as the Highways Authority, and to National Highways.

Armed Forces Covenant

In October 2024, the Town Council agreed to sign the Armed Forces Covenant, demonstrating our commitment to supporting those who have served or are currently serving in the armed forces. This pledge reflects our dedication to ensuring that members of the armed forces community are treated with fairness and respect within Corfe Mullen.

Grants and Community Support

During the year, the Council has awarded grants to local organisations that provide valuable services to the community. Some of the organisations supported include:

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| Corfe Mullen Foodbank | 536.10 |
| Corfe Mullen United Juniors Football Club | 850.00 |
| Vision Wimborne Dial-a-ride | 250.00 |
| Corfe Mullen Home Watch | 1000.00 |
| Planet Wimborne | 200.00 |
| Citizens Advice East Dorset & Purbeck | 1800.00 |
| Victim Support | 200.00 |
| Mosaic | 600.00 |
| Corfe Mullen Carnival | 1000.00 |
| Corfe Mullen Carnival (Father Christmas evening parade appeal) | 350.00 |
| Corfe Mullen 5km run and Children's one-mile fun run | 450.00 |
| Women's Institute | 200.00 |

Totalling: £7436.10.

Financial Overview

In January 2025, the Council approved a budget of £699,663 for the 2025/26 financial year. This included an increase in the precept of 9.90%, meaning a Band D property will see an increase of £13.73 per year, which works out to £1.14 per month. This increase will allow the Council to continue providing essential services despite rising costs.

Future Projects

We are continuing to work on several key projects, including the proposed redevelopment of the sports pavilion at the Recreation Ground and to continue with our work to develop the Neighbourhood Plan, with a relaunch expected later in the year.

Staff and Recognition

Rachel Virrill made the decision to step back from working full-time in the role of Deputy Clerk in order to spend more time with her family. As a result, Rachel has now taken on the role of Senior Administrator, working on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. In August 2024, the Town Council was pleased to welcome Daryl Peace as the new Deputy Clerk. Daryl brings a wealth of experience in local government, particularly in grounds maintenance, and is a valuable addition to the team.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our dedicated staff, including Catherine Horsley, Daryl Pearce, Rachel Virrill, and Becky Calendar, for their hard work and commitment to the smooth running of the Council. Their support has been invaluable, particularly during challenging times.

During the year, the newly formed Grounds Team has worked diligently to ensure all Town Council sites are kept clean, tidy, and welcoming for the enjoyment of residents. They have certainly been busy during the winter months, cutting back trees and shrubbery to encourage new growth in the

spring. The team has received some very positive feedback on their efforts, which is greatly appreciated. On behalf of the Town Council, I would also like to thank the team for their hard work and commitment to ensuring our green spaces are well maintained.

Acknowledgements

Finally, on behalf of the Mayor and myself, I would like to thank all the Councillors for their hard work and commitment to Corfe Mullen. Your passion and dedication ensure that Corfe Mullen remains a wonderful place to live.

I also want to extend my gratitude to the community for their ongoing support. Together, we continue to make Corfe Mullen a place to be proud of.

Thank you.