



Didcot Town Council Annual Report 2021/2022



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Mayor's Report



Dear Didcot,

As I write this Mayoral Report summing up my year, I have realised that I have had a fun, entertaining, memorable, unique, and great year. After I took over from Cllr Hards, who had a frustrating year with very few events being held and unable to raise money for charity due to the focus being on fighting the pandemic and everyone staying safe, I did not know what to expect or how my year would unfold.

My Mayoral year has been divided into four phases:

1) Lockdown and virtual meetings/events.

I had to put the Mayoral chain on myself on Zoom at the annual Mayor-making meeting

2) Cram loads of events in as it was late summer, and restrictions were easing.

For about three months, some days I was attending two or three events a day

3) Back to virtual, no events or restricted events.

This was when the Omicron variant was threatening to hamper our Christmas celebrations. Like many Mayors, I had to postpone or cancel a couple of my events

4) End of Mayoral term scramble!

This is the phase I am in now where events that had been postponed are being rearranged or trying to squeeze in before May 2022 when the current civic year ends and the next one starts.

Despite the unpredictable year, I have enjoyed and loved every minute of being Mayor. When I was elected and accepted to take on the role, to be honest I did not know what to expect. I had attended one event as a Deputy Mayor so my usual training I would have had was curtailed due to covid. I quickly realised that being Mayor and the chain was a great responsibility and that events, groups, schools etc wanted the 'chain' to attend as it made their event special. I also realised that children were very interested in the Mayor and what the Mayor's role was. The most frequent question I got asked, was 'what car did the Mayor have or drive?' I think children's expectation was that I was driven around so they were surprised when I said I did not have a big limousine or a chauffeur and that I try to walk or cycle to local events.

My aim for this year is to raise funds for my two chosen charities, Coeliac UK and Play2Give, and to raise the profile of Didcot. To support my charities, I have held a Barn Dance, cake sales, raffles, Santa fun run and on April 2nd 2022, I shall be holding my Mayoral Ball at the Civic Hall (check didcot.gov.uk to see if there are any tickets left). I hope that at the end of my term, I can present a big cheque to help these wonderful charities continue their great work.

I ensured that I made the most of TV, radio and newspaper opportunities to promote and reinforce how great Didcot is and that we have a great community spirit. I was impressed how the town and businesses came together to support those in need and the vulnerable during the pandemic, including helping those that needed a hot meal, groceries and shopping collected and helping children who needed a device to do their schoolwork. It was also great to see so many people visiting the Civic Hall to get vaccinated.

As Mayor, I chaired Council meetings and a public meeting on civil parking enforcement and the Gateway Project. In these meetings there is always a lot of debate and passion. I hope that I allowed everyone's voices to be heard and concerns listened to. I would like to thank all the Councillors, the Chairs of Committees and the Didcot Town Council staff for the hard work and commitment over the last 12 months.

It was a pleasure to attend events, from a Bollywood night, getting cut out of a crashed car to dressing up as Ironman! There are too many events to name, so I thought the best way to showcase some of these is by photos (see next page)

It has been an honour to be Mayor of Didcot and an experience I shall never forget. I wish Cllr Pam Siggers, the Mayor-Designate, all the best and that Cllr Siggers enjoys being Mayor as much as I have.

Leader's Report



I would first like to take this opportunity to thank those volunteers that have continued this year with the Pandemic response, helping with the first, second and booster vaccinations.

As we emerge from the restriction's council meetings have now resumed to face-to-face and public participation in person is now allowed. I would encourage residents to come along to a Full Council meeting to see what happens at one of our meetings.

Committees' reports/projects

Each committee has provided a detailed account of what has been achieved, below is a brief outline of some of those.

A new Property and Facilities committee was formed with new staff recruited to advise and help action the decisions made by the committee.

Edmonds Park

We now have approved plans for the new multi-use pavilion, and we are exploring funding options. Work for this will hopefully start later this year.

The splash park to be installed ready for use next year, the funding for this project is largely in place.

Ladygrove Lakes

The long-awaited pumps are working, and we will see this coming year if they make a difference, this will determine how we go forward in the management of the Lakes.

Willowbrook

This facility is now open and is being run by our current council staff, we are in the process of recruiting someone to oversee the use of the building.

Didcot Garden Town

As Leader I sit on the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board, I have talked about the need for timely infrastructure, preservation of our green spaces and the creation of new green spaces and the need for houses that are affordable for all. With all these requests comes the need for being sustainable in all we do, to be in line with our continuing commitment to action on the climate emergency we declared in 2019.

Civil Parking Enforcement

This year has seen the commencement of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE). The council has asked Oxfordshire County Council for a residents parking scheme to be expedited in areas close to the Gateway development.

Gateway Project

The demolition of the old Labour Club has finally happened; we are still awaiting the final plans for its development to come from Homes England and South Oxfordshire District Council.

Council Tax

The pandemic has had a deleterious effect on the finances of the Town Council. We have managed to keep to a minimum the increase in the precept that the Town Council receives from your Council Tax.

Councillor Denise Macdonald
Leader of Didcot Town Council
March 2022

Report from the Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee



It will be no surprise that the coronavirus pandemic has again made this year financially challenging when compared to a “normal” year. The Town Council has had a reduction in income of around £300,000 due to residents and businesses being unable to hire and use the Civic Hall. In addition, Willowbrook was handed back to us without warning by the contractor as they shrunk their operations to their one site on Milton Park. The consequence was we had around £130,000 of unbudgeted expenditure this year on repairs and

necessary improvements to make the building compliant, safe to open to the public and in a fit state for another contractor.

In all this time the Town Council’s costs have remained largely the same which has prompted us to substantially reduce our expenditure in a bid to avoid any redundancies or deplete our reserves while trying to protect the services we offer to residents. While life may begin to return to be more like our established ‘norm’, we have pragmatically developed a budget for next year that continues to assume income will be severely reduced.

During 2021/22 the Town Council has continued to integrate with the Didcot Civic Hall operation, and we are working to make the venue return to being a vibrant Town asset as soon as the country fully emerges from the pandemic. This initiative is led by the Property and Facilities Committee that is rolling out a programme of improvement and renewal. Although bookings are increasing, we anticipate it will take most of this coming financial year to get back to pre-covid levels of income. Despite the many challenges we are facing, Didcot Town Council constantly seeks and strives to improve services and provide the best value to the community for its small proportion of the total council tax bill collected by South Oxfordshire District Council.

Didcot Town Council has a history of supporting local voluntary groups and charities and their initiatives to deliver additional services for residents. Since April 2021 Grant Aid has supported:

- Didcot Food Festival
- Didcot Library
- Be Free Young Carers
- Citizens Advice
- Didcot Baptist Church
- Free Christmas Dinner Project
- Oxfordshire Play Association
- Sustainable Didcot – Wildlife Cafe
- Didcot Baby Monday

Plus, more applications are being processed and we encourage groups in the Town to apply; please see our website for details.

This is a summary of our budget for 2022/23:

The Town Council draws its income from relatively few sources and the Council Tax precept is by far the biggest source of revenue. The council continually scrutinises expenditure and works to identify potential savings as well as other sources of income, particularly accessing relevant grants for some projects. One impact of the pandemic is the loss of contract income from the Willowbrook Leisure Centre – an annual loss of around £83,000. Also, costs such as heating and lighting etc have fallen on the council although the limited reopening is making a small contribution. In addition, the Civic Hall income has shrunk by some £200,000 due to several lockdowns and availability limited to a few clients within the national rules.

A major cost is the £123,000 paid annually to service the original loan of £1.83 million used to refurbish and extend the Civic Hall and Town Council offices. The council maintains reserves that are earmarked for future maintenance or renewal of its buildings in recognition of the need to undertake remedial work to some of its ageing assets.

In 2022/2023 Didcot Town Council will receive £118.25 for each band D household. This is a small increase of £5.16 per band D property for the Town Council element of your Council Tax.

Work on the replacement community Pavilion at Edmonds Park was granted Planning Permission and we are now working on commissioning the build. The project to install a splash park is well advanced as are other smaller projects across the town.

Didcot Town Council is committed to making the environmental impact of all our activities a key part of our decision making and incorporates this aspect into the normal business of our committees. We are also working with volunteer groups in the Town and others to promote environmentally responsible and better ways of working for residents and businesses. To this end we have already invested in an electric vehicle and brush cutters and will be installing solar panels on our buildings during FY2022/23.

Budget Summary for 2022/2023	
Expenditure	£
Finance and General Purposes Committee	617,715
Grant Aid	45,000
Didcot Civic Hall	192,250
Environment & Climate Committee	383,574
Projects	109,254
Total	1,347,793
Less General Income expected	(100,231)
Less expected grant income – S106/CIL	(6,000)
Equals: total expenditure to be collected via Council Tax (the precept)	1,241,562

Councillor John Moody
Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee
March 2022

Report from the Chair of the Planning & Development Committee



Didcot Town Council's Planning Committee usually meets every 3 weeks, on a Wednesday evening. The main agenda item is any new or recently amended planning applications notified by South Oxfordshire District Council. The committee will also discuss and respond to correspondence and consultations from the district and county councils and others plus items from the Town Council's own Traffic Advisory Group. The meeting is open to the public and any attendees may address the committee on any agenda item. The committee is an advisory consultee to South Oxfordshire District

Council on planning applications; it is South Oxfordshire District Council who make the final decision.

At the start of the year the committee continued to meet on Zoom but in the autumn physical meetings resumed. However, we continued the practice of looking at all the plans and associated reports online as paper copies are no longer provided. It is expected that all members of the committee look at each application beforehand so that they can identify the important points. One advantage of looking at the South Oxfordshire District Council website is the availability of residents' comments which are often very informative. I would urge people to submit their comments quickly wherever possible as our meetings can fall early in the consultation period for an application.

Attendance by the public at meetings has been slow to resume but we were pleased to welcome two groups of residents recently and also a member of the local press who came to observe one of our meetings.

Most of the applications the committee views are householder applications for extensions etc. We continue to see a significant number of applications for infill development in the gardens of existing dwellings or on land in an otherwise built-up frontage. The committee assesses these applications whether they provide adequate parking and amenity space and do not pose an unacceptable loss of privacy or light to neighbours.

However, we have to recognise that South Oxfordshire District Council is working within a government framework that expects that planning permission will be granted unless significant planning harm can be demonstrated. This is quite a high bar and it is only planning issues that can be taken into account. There is a lot of pressure for housing at Didcot as it is seen as a sustainable location. When the Town Council objects but the case officer recommends granting planning permission an application is referred to the district council Planning Committee; whenever possible we send a representative to the meeting to put the Town Council's point of view.

We have considered various applications related to the building out of NE Didcot, including a housing site, a new community centre and a "multi-use commercial space" and a new primary school.

Below are some of the more substantial applications, discussed and responded to over the last 12 months.

Didcot Football Club

This application for 25 apartments on the car park currently used for Willowbrook leisure centre had been under consideration for well over a year, with several amendments, and was very controversial with local residents. The Town Council objected to the application. When it came to the Planning Committee at South Oxfordshire District Council in August 2021 they voted to grant planning permission but the process had not yet been completed at time of writing.

Abingdon Road

This application was for up to 176 dwellings and a country park in fields to the east of Lady Grove (the northern continuation of Abingdon Road). It was refused by South Oxfordshire District Council because the site was not allocated for development in the new Local Plan and is on the edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, among other reasons. However, it was granted on appeal by a government inspector.

Dualling of the A4130 from Milton Gate Junction eastwards

This application from Oxfordshire County Council as the Highways Authority forms part of the project to provide better infrastructure for Didcot using government HIF (Housing Infrastructure Fund) money.

PIP (Permission in Principle) Application for land at Brasenose Road

The committee strongly objected to this application for construction of up to four dwellings, as they had to a previous similar application. The application was refused by South Oxfordshire District Council.

The Gateway Site

The committee has just put in an objection reflecting the concerns of local residents.

We have responded to various consultations from Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council including the new Design Guide and Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule. We also responded to contact from local residents by getting involved in discussions about the new arrangements for bus routes in Didcot.

Councillor Eleanor Hards

Chair of the Planning and Development Committee

March 2022

Report from the Chair of the Environment & Climate Committee



The Environment and Climate Committee is delegated by Didcot Town Council to supervise and maintain the parks and recreational open green spaces which are owned or leased by the Council. These areas include Edmonds Park, Ladygrove Park, Smallbones Rec, Marsh Rec, Great Western Drive Rec, Loyd Rec, Stubbings Land, Mendip Heights and the Millennium Wood. The lakes at Ladygrove and the Cemetery at Kynaston Road make the combined land area over 100 acres.

The committee also administers five allotment sites with over 400 plots with the help of a users liaison committee who meet regularly to discuss their problems and their successes. At present all sites are fully committed and there is currently a waiting list for plots (100 plus).

Allotments have proved very popular and even more so during COVID lock down.

The committee also carries out the Town Council's policies on outdoor sports, leisure and recreational activities, and all general environmental issues, within the town. Indoor leisure facilities are dealt with under the Property and Facilities Committee.

The Environment Committee's budget covers the funding of the town's notice boards, play equipment within its parks, the grass verge cutting contract and maintaining the vehicles. A more unusual facility that the council provides and maintains are a number of bus shelters – see more below.

This committee considers climate change within its remit and a number of projects have progressed with this in mind (see bus shelter and allotment sections below).

Budget

In the financial year 2021-2022

Expenditure £145,264

Income £46,954

Net expenditure £98,310

At the time these figures are reported, the expenditure is on track to remain within the budget.

Ground staff support

The 100 acres of land that the council maintains is cared for by a dedicated team of full-time grounds staff, with some contract labour, led by an Outdoor Services Manager. This work load covers all general grounds maintenance including:

- Developing the Millennium Wood
- Tree care and new annual planting
- Allotment maintenance
- Litter clearance
- Cutting of grass and hedges, including the town's grass verges.
- Maintaining flower/shrub beds, hanging baskets,
- Play equipment inspection and repairs
- Marking out and providing sports pitches,
- Vehicle and machinery maintenance
- Provision of notice boards

Highlights of the Year

Edmonds Park:

Pavilion and splash park projects

The existing pavilion within the park was in poor condition – one could see daylight through the bricks from within! This has now been demolished but saving the electrical and water services for future use, e.g. park events. The hard standing where the pavilion was located will be used to site welfare facilities for use by the football club and potentially others hiring the grounds.

The new pavilion will be sited by the car park at the Park Road end and is currently going through the next design phase (the initial design and layout has already been agreed by council). The pavilion will provide a reasonable size hall with break out rooms, a kitchen and separate changing areas. This should prove a valued community asset when it is finished.

Another project planned is the splash park, to be located next to the new pavilion. Other towns in the area already have this popular facility and this will help even up Didcot's facilities with its neighbours. The park is in its final design stage and then subject to the planning process. It's anticipated that the project will be finished ready for the summer of 2023.

Ladygrove Park and lakes

Ladygrove lakes

In recent months, water has not been an issue for the lakes, but this remains a significant problem and the search for a reliable water source to top the lakes up continues. The council are now considering a bore hole to abstract water from but this is at an early stage.

Education is also a part of managing the lakes to prevent the public putting bread or other unsuitable items in the lake, which is harmful and dealing with non UK species, e.g. a catfish, that were released without council authority and threatens other fish.

It's noted, especially during recent COVID lock-downs, that the lakes provide a highly regarded and valuable resource in the town, much appreciated by anglers and public alike.

Ladygrove play equipment

The area the play equipment is in is subject to flooding and the plan is to relocate equipment where this is less likely and renew damaged equipment (the zip wire). A local resident designed a sandpit and this, along with the "steam engine" were agreed by council to proceed. The intended area proved unsuitable, due to flooding, but this project is still in play and anticipated completion in the next financial year.

The Annual Didcot Town Summer Fayre

This did not go ahead in 2021 due to COVID restrictions. However, it's anticipated that there will be a fayre this year on 6th August 2022.

Allotments

The allotments are an essential part of daily life to Didcot residents with over 400 plots in five sites in full use; through their liaison group the committee implements the plot holder's requests where possible.

A number of aspirational projects are in discussion from wildlife corners on each allotment site comprising a pond, wild flowers and an insect hotel, to potentially keeping bees, when a suitable site and location is found.

Trees

There are a number of "tree" projects going forward at present.

- Tiny forest project (a tennis court sized dense forest likely to be located within Edmonds Park area but not impinging on the football pitch areas)
- Queen's Platinum Jubilee canopy – two areas of trees in Ladygrove Park to commemorate this event
- Replacement of storm damaged trees
- Replacement of commemorative WW1 trees which no longer exist

Various funding sources for the above have been identified so the real issue is ensuring the trees are suitably protected once planted.

Bus shelters

Some success in siting a “green” bus shelter on Avon Way which incorporates a green roof (grass) and after much delay, panels on each side of the bus shelter by Cineworld. The officers worked hard with the contractor to ensure the panels were fitted.

Councillor Axel Macdonald

Chair of the Environment and Climate Committee

March 2022

Report from the Chair of the Property & Facilities Committee



The Property and Facilities Committee was set up at the start for the 2021 civic year in order to oversee all buildings owned and run by Didcot Town Council. The three main buildings currently are the Civic Hall, the Outside Services depot, and Willowbrook Leisure Centre, which we took over the running of following its closure.

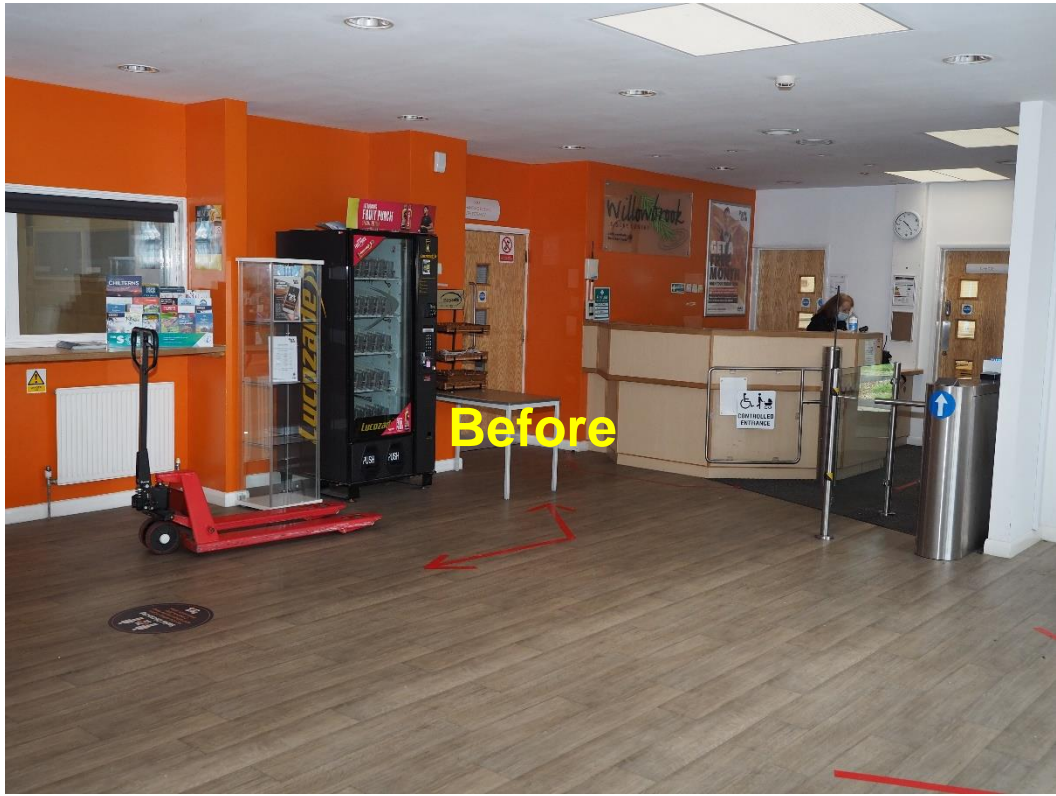
The re-opening of Willowbrook was a major project undertaken by council officers and the committee. This involved major renovation work throughout the building, which took time, to the frustration of the council and the local community, who were eager for it to open again. However, all the work done – which is too numerous to list here - was needed to meet legal guidelines, and to make its use a pleasurable experience after years of neglect.

Highlights include:

- Upgrading the lighting in the main hall to make it legally useable for various sports
- Internal repainting
- Installation of new phone lines and WIFI
- External door repairs
- Fire alarm/intruder alarm and air conditioning servicing
- Plumbing and electrical works
- Sports equipment repairs
- Flooring replacement
- Deep cleaning

This work is still ongoing, including a project to fit LED lights throughout the building.

The pictures over illustrate some of the work undertaken:



It has been extremely satisfying to see Willowbrook re-open to the community, and again become a major asset to the town.

The Civic Hall has gone from strength to strength this year. It has also undergone many upgrades behind the scenes from boiler repairs to replacement lights to re-building parts of the perimeter wall. After hosting the amazingly successful Didcot vaccination programme, the Civic Hall is now fully open, hiring to many charities, business and community groups, and hosting the Didcot Town Council Awards evening. There are also two balls planned towards the end of the civic year, including the Mayor's Ball on April the 2nd.

One major project in the pipeline which encompasses the Civic Hall, Willowbrook, and the Outside Services Depot is the purchase and fitting of solar panels. This is such an important project, and one way Didcot Town Council is addressing the Climate Emergency. I am really looking forward to the completion of this project in the next civic year.

I would like to thank the council staff who have worked tirelessly to bring these many projects to fruition, especially our Property and Facilities Manager Nick White, and the Projects and Services Officer Stuart Mundy, and the hard work and commitment of councillors sitting on the Property and Facilities Committee.

Councillor Pam Siggers
Chair of the Property & Facilities Committee
March 2022

Report from the Chair of the Personnel & Administration Committee



The Personnel and Administration Committee deals with the internal Council activities such as employment contracts, recruitment, retention, policies and staff training.

The Town Council staff have continued to work professionally during the pandemic and I want to thank them for their continued hard work. This has enabled the Civic Hall to once again be opened to continue the vaccination programme.

Below are the key highlights over the past year.

- The committee have helped the staff to work flexibly between the Civic Hall and at home without disruption to Council services.
- No staff were furloughed; we have also recruited new staff to enable the Civic Hall and Willowbrook Community Centre to be available for use by the community.
- On-going review and updating of the staff handbook and Council policies.
- Identifying and encouraging staff to take up training to maximise expertise and develop skills within our teams.
- Exploring government schemes such as the Kickstart programme to encourage young people to employment.
- Staff continued to be on duty for the vaccination programme when needed to make sure residents could be inoculated and protected.
- Appointed a new Outdoor Services Manager and supported the outdoor team until the position could be filled.

Once again, I would like to thank all the staff for all they have done and continue to do for Didcot and the council.

Councillor Denise Macdonald
Chair of the Personnel & Administration Committee
March 2022

Councillors

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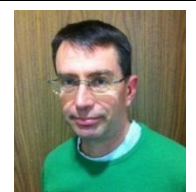
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Voting Committee Members

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Cllr John Moody (Chair)
Cllr Pam Siggers (Vice Chair)
Cllr Amanda Sandiford
Cllr Alan Thompson
Cllr Victoria Haval
Cllr Dave Chandran
Cllr Anthony Dearlove

Environment & Climate Committee

Cllr Axel Macdonald (Chair)
Cllr Celia Wilson (Vice Chair)
Cllr Marie Walsh
Cllr Alan Thompson
Cllr Phil Davies
Cllr Anthony Hudson
Cllr Paul Giesberg

Property & Facilities Committee

Cllr Pam Siggers (Chair)
Cllr John Moody (Vice Chair)
Cllr Marie Walsh
Cllr Bill Service
Cllr Anthony Hudson
Cllr David Rouane

Planning & Development Committee

Cllr Eleanor Hards (Chair)
Cllr Anthony Dearlove (Vice Chair)
Cllr Pam Siggers
Cllr James Durman
Cllr Melissa Mallows
Cllr David Chandran

Personnel & Administration Committee

Cllr Denise Macdonald (Chair)
Cllr Eleanor Hards (Vice Chair)
Cllr Anthony Dearlove
Cllr Victoria Haval
Cllr Phil Davies

Staff

- Janet Wheeler ~ Town Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer
- Fred Lamb ~ Outdoor Services Manager
- Nick White ~ Property & Facilities Manager
- Stuart Mundy ~ Projects & Services Officer
- Lucy Blake ~ Planning & Environment Officer
- Chelsey Lordan ~ Events & Communications Officer
- Teresa Tye ~ Mayor's Secretary & Administration Assistant
- Kate Buckle ~ Civic Hall Assistant (p/t)
- Steph Frankum ~ Civic Hall Assistant (p/t)
- Louise Dearlove ~ Civic Hall Assistant (p/t)
- Jacqueline Scott ~ Bookings Officer
- Dan Furby ~ Grounds Supervisor
- Richard Dowling ~ Grounds
- Steve Andrews ~ Grounds
- Brian McAloon ~ Grounds
- Mike Blake ~ Grounds
- Sam Cobb ~ Grounds
- Vacant ~ Apprentice
- John Jones ~ Gatekeeper
- Neressa Copley ~ Pavilion Cleaner

Balance Sheet

Unaudited accounts as at 28th February 2022

Year End 2021		Current 2022
£	Current Assets	£
82,634	Debtors	24,680
1,161,167	Cash at Bank and In-hand	1,285,642
<u>1,243,801</u>	Total Current Assets	<u>1,310,322</u>
	Current Liabilities	
95,255	Creditors and accrued expenses (repayable within one year)	69,742
<u>1,148,546</u>	Net Current Assets (Total assets less Current Liabilities)	<u>1,240,580</u>

Capital and Reserves

235,961	Current Year Fund	221,171
522,427	General Reserve	282,853
198,717	Building Repair Fund	98,717
1,500	Cemetery Fund	3,500
14,388	Skatepark Refurbishment	14,388
10,000	Ladygrove Lakes	10,000
5,000	Ladygrove Park	5,355
20,000	Ladygrove Lakes Staging Fund	20,000
20,060	Building Project Fees Fund	20,060
32,616	CIL	149,572
10,000	Election Fund	1,336
	Planting	3,464
	Arboriculture	6,989
	Sports Pitches	4,000
	Splash Park	200,000
10,000	Bus Shelters	3,282
500	GDPR Fund	500
114,972	VAT Contingency	114,972
13,405	CCTV	13,405
39,000	Pavilions	39,000
	EMR Groundskeeping Equipment	28,016
<u>£1,148,546</u>	Total Equity	<u>£1,240,580</u>

Contact Details

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website ~ www.didcot.gov.uk

Facebook ~ www.facebook.com/DidcotTownCouncil/

Twitter ~ twitter.com/DidcotTC

Feedback

Please use this form to provide feedback or ask a question about any service provided by Didcot Town Council, South Oxfordshire District Council or Oxfordshire County Council. You can also include any comments you may have on the Annual Town Meeting.

Name:	Telephone:
Address:	
Email:	
Comment:	

Return to:

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Response Required: Y/N
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