

Ellesmere Town Mayor's Annual Report for 2022/2023

It is both an honour and a pleasure, as Town Mayor, to present the Annual Report 2022/23 to the people of Ellesmere.

“There is a Chinese curse which says, ‘May he live in interesting times,’ and I think we can agree that we have been living in very interesting times. We have lived through a pandemic, the outbreak of war in Ukraine, a cost of living crisis, inflation, global uncertainty and an environmental crisis. Yet throughout this time, the people of Ellesmere have pulled together with that community spirit for which we are renowned, in good times and in bad.

In June, we celebrated the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee with a church service and beacon lighting, a Party in the Park, fireworks, and a shop window competition. Birch Road Nature Reserve was officially opened and we planted a number of young trees as part of the Queen's Green Canopy.

But in September, we experienced the sadness and solemnity surrounding the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The community marked this time of mourning by signing books of condolence, leaving flowers at the war memorial, and attending commemoration services. Many businesses expressed their thanks and respect for the Queen through their window displays.

Amidst this sadness, a new King was proclaimed. I was privileged to attend the County Proclamation Ceremony in Shrewsbury where last year's High Sheriff presented the county's mayors with a proclamation scroll to be read out in each town. This I duly did that same afternoon to a small crowd of onlookers who shared this historic moment.

The Royal process comes full circle with the Coronation of King Charles III next month. Plans are being finalised here for the celebratory weekend with garden parties, a church service, a treasure trail, plus a parade and family picnic at Ellesmere Rangers. There will even be the Mayor's Coronation Cake Competition! Ellesmere Town Council will mark the occasion by unveiling a commemorative plaque outside the Town Hall, and by giving every child in Ellesmere under the age of 17 a commemorative gift.

Having helped to coordinate the Coronation events, Members of the Council's Tourism and Events Committee will then turn their thoughts to tourism in general, looking for ways to attract more visitors to the area and to bolster the local economy.

Young people have continued to be a priority during the Council's year. The Town Council organised two Funtopia family festivals in the summer; new play equipment, including a disabled access roundabout, is currently being installed by Shropshire Council at the Cremorne Gardens; space and funding for a multi-use games area is being sought and, following a youth engagement project, a new TNS Youth Foundation Youth Café has started on Wednesday nights at the Town Hall. This complements the Tuesday evening Youth Project and will allow young people to express themselves in a positive setting with peer mentoring.

Youth organisations have been one of my Mayoral Charities this year and I have visited a good number of them already, including the guides and the scouts. I have been greatly impressed by the young people who attend these sessions and also by the group leaders who are so hard-working, committed and a source of inspiration to the young people.

I am pleased to have been able to hand over several grants earlier this evening.

Ellesmere is one of the safest places to live in the country, the main issues of concern continuing to be anti-social behavior and vandalism, drugs, and domestic abuse. West Mercia Police now have a permanent office in the Town Hall allowing for excellent liaison and from where they can have 24-hour access to monitor the town's CCTV. The Town Council receives monthly reports from the Safer Neighbourhood Team and Council representatives will sit on a new Policing Panel consisting of local stakeholders seeking solutions to anti-social behavior and other incidents.

Our Shropshire Councillor, Cllr Geoff Elnor, who is also a town councillor, has continued to Chair our Planning and Infrastructure Committee efficiently, dealing with local planning applications and liaising with Shropshire Planning Officers on behalf of the town. It is important to stress that Ellesmere town councilors are only consultees and make recommendations, we do not make the final decision. That is Shropshire Council. Nevertheless, it helps having a strong voice at Shirehall. The merits of a Neighbourhood Plan are currently being considered.

Cllr Elnor has also worked extremely hard on highways issues, which must at times have felt like an uphill struggle. However, progress is clearly being made with improvements to the main car park, line-painting, resurfacing and some potholes. He is determined to carry on representing the town's needs to Shropshire Council and a road plan is being drawn up to provide details of all the roads requiring attention. Residents will have taken note of the new Vehicle Activated Signs erected on Grange Road and the Mereside.

The Council gave unanimous support to a request from a local family whose teenage daughter had sadly died at the age of 13. Family and friends asked that a street on the new development south of Oswestry Road be named after Ella and, following discussions with Shropshire Council, the street will be named McCreadie Drive.

Ellesmere Town Council held a public consultation meeting to ask for views on a default 20 mph speed limit around Ellesmere. Everyone in attendance was in favour with a few negative expressions made on social media. It is now understood that Shropshire Council is considering a 20mph limit in residential areas throughout Shropshire and their deliberations will be followed with interest.

Ellesmere Town Council (ETC) and Ellesmere Rural Parish Council (ERPC) received support at a public consultation for their joint proposal to amend the parish boundaries. It was proposed that the urban area boundary be extended to include the major housing development to the south of Ellesmere and north of the canal; the small business park to the west of Ellesmere that has been identified for possible expansion; and part of the Conservation Area around the junction of the Llangollen Canal and the Ellesmere spur; and

it was also proposed that some of ETC's rural land beyond the Mere be included in the Rural area, which would make for a neater boundary. In effect, ETC would gain more urban and industrial land and ERPC would gain more rural land. The proposal has now been submitted to Shropshire Council for consideration.

The Town Council continues to work closely with other local organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, which works hard to promote the town. Having put a successful bid together last year, we are waiting for tree and paving work to take place before new seating and tables can be installed on the promenade. The town has been fortunate in that virtually all its retail space is taken and I was delighted last month to officially open Freshmere, the town's new fruit and veg shop, coffee and juice bar.

The Town Council's finances continue to remain in a healthy position although since the pandemic there has been a significant reduction in income from room hire at the Town Hall. The budget for the next financial year was set at the January meeting and councillors agreed to a 5% increase in the Council tax precept – equivalent to an increase of 16p per week for a band D property. This is in line with many councils in the country who are also working hard to support their communities during the cost of living crisis and will allow us to maintain the services that we provide for the community.

Ellesmere councillors sit on the joint Cemetery Working Group with councillors from the Ellesmere Rural Parish Council. There is now very little burial space left at the Swan Hill cemetery and new land needs to be found urgently. This will be a priority for the working group and the new Cemetery Coordinator, Andrew Chatting, who was appointed on the resignation of David Jones. We must thank Cllr Paul Goulbourne for all his assistance at the cemetery during the transition period.

Another change in personnel has taken place at Ellesmere's Market Hall. All Together Ellesmere decided not to renew the lease in March and we thank Lincoln McMullan for all his work. The new Shropshire Council lease has been signed by Project SY12 (CIC) who will now manage the building, the Tuesday Market and other events. Ellesmere Town Council still holds the Charter Market and prescriptive rights, and will receive monthly updates from Project SY12. The Council has agreed to continue paying for cleaning following the Tuesday Market. Two Sunday markets, a general one and a Farmers' Market, have recently been added to the offer and I understand that the Market Hall will be screening Coronation events over the course of the weekend.

The Town Hall itself is still struggling with a leaky roof and the Council has had to pay for emergency roof repairs. A new Town Hall working group has been set up to decide the best way forward.

Residents have continued to lobby councillors, worried that medical provision in the town is not keeping pace with growing demand, and that the problem will be exacerbated by new development. Councillors have agreed to write to the Shropshire Director of Public Health and members of the Integrated Care Board to request action and are setting up a working group to support health and wellbeing in the town.

As Mayor, I have encouraged the setting up of community groups that help to address unmet needs in the town. Whilst it is a troubling sign of the times that there is a need for food banks, the Food and Warm Clothes Sharing Project has stepped into that gap and provided food, toiletries, and pet food for people who are feeling the pinch during the cost of living crisis; warm clothes were available during the winter months. I would like to warmly thank the 40 or so volunteers who have run the project, the individuals and groups who have donated vital funds, and the generous members of the public and local businesses who have donated food supplies. Of course, this would not have got off the ground without the support of Our Space Community Centre who provided a room for the Food Share.

We have been in contact with West Mercia Women's Aid who have provided us with posters and pamphlets giving details of their free 24 hour helpline, and these are being posted around town and will appear on social media. The group – Women's Aid - has a rather misleading name as it helps both men and women experiencing domestic abuse. A domestic abuse advisor will now be a regular visitor to Our Space on days when both the food share and the library are open.

Repair Cafes are springing up across the country and Ellesmere recently set up its own version where, each month, people bring along broken items to be repaired at no charge by fixers who have a wonderful range of repair skills between them. Tea and cakes are provided, also free of charge, by hard-working volunteers. The collaborative nature of the project, the opportunities for social interaction and the generous donations made by satisfied customers make this a very worthwhile venture.

Ellesmere Community Cars is in its infancy with two part-time voluntary coordinators and a team of seven volunteer drivers. Replacing a scheme that petered out several years ago, Ellesmere Community Cars will provide transport for essential journeys (to hospital and other medical appointments, for weekly shops, or to the bank) at a cost of 30p per mile and with Shropshire Council paying an additional 20p to the driver.

Part of my duties as Mayor is representing the town at various functions across the county but perhaps my favourite part has involved visiting many of the thriving organisations and community groups that make up the rich tapestry of Ellesmere life. From church activities, to sports events, parent and toddler groups to older people's day centres, craft sessions to choirs, I thank them all for the warm welcome they have given me and congratulate them for what they achieve for members of the community both young and old.

Some of our residents were duly recognised for the support they gave during lockdown when they attended the Lord Lieutenant's Garden Party in June: Ifran Mukadam and Rosie Perez from Ellesmere Newsagents, Julie Edwards from Mere Motors, and Mandy Byrne who had worked at the Coop, all enjoyed a sunny afternoon with tea and cakes. The Rowlands family travelled to Telford to receive the Making a Difference Fundraising Award from BBC Radio Shropshire, and I was pleased to nominate Fizzgigs Community Arts group for a High Sheriff's award for their work spreading happiness in the community.

The progression of the seasons in Ellesmere is marked by a growing cycle of events that could not happen without the army of volunteers who give so much of their time: the

Classic Car Show and Rotary Regatta, the parade and Carnival (last year celebrating its 100th Anniversary), the Triathlon, the 10k and 2k fun runs and the Mere Mile, the Final Fling and Remembrance services in November, and the panoply of Christmas events including the magical Winter Festival and Carols in the Car Park.

Ellesmere Sculpture Initiative completed the Jebb Garden in the Cremorne Gardens commemorating Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children, and George, Ellesmere's very own Chinese goose, was commemorated with a statue in the waters of the Mere. The Council replaced the Princess Diana Memorial Tree that had sadly died with a rare tree with abundant white flowers in the spring and which is a fine addition to the diverse range of trees found by the Mere.

We must ensure that we never forget the unsung heroes who support our community throughout the year such as the Town Council's Sunday morning litter-pickers, Ellesmere in Bloom who beautify our public spaces, and the Mere volunteers who tend the gardens and clean the site.

Thank you to the Town Councillors who work throughout the year and do their very best to help make Ellesmere a fantastic place to live; thank you for all your hard work and support. I particularly want to thank Cllr Graham Hutchinson, the Deputy Mayor, for all that he has done this year, including in his role as Chair of the Finance and Resources committee.

During the year we said goodbye to Cllrs Tim Hunter, Jackie Thedens, Mark Sobczak and Judy Fenton, and we thank them for their contribution. We co-opted and welcomed Cllrs John Howard, Amanda Weeks, Hollie Anderton-Schofield, and Paul Johnson and look forward to working with them. We currently have one vacancy on Council that we hope to fill as soon as possible.

I would like to record my grateful thanks to the Town Clerk, Jo Butterworth, Deputy Clerk, Jean Hynes, and the new admin assistant, Gemma Whitley, who has quickly learned the ropes and works with Jo and Jean to provide an excellent service for the town. We are in very safe hands and their guidance is second to none. Ellesmere is extremely fortunate to have such a strong team.

I also wish to thank the caretakers and caretaking assistants who do a sterling job at the Town Hall. Every room is clean and well set out for the groups who hire this place.

Finally, I would like to finish by thanking you, the people of Ellesmere, who help to make this town such a wonderful place to live. Thank you for all that you do.

Cllr Anne Wignall

April
2023

