

## **Finance and Audit Committee Report 23/24**

The Finance Committee is responsible for recommending and overseeing the annual budget together with all aspects of Staffing, Grants and the operation of the Information Centre. The committee works closely with the Town Clerk and Chief Financial Officer, Sally Thurston, who reports to the committee directly, and together we continue to review services and bear down on costs.

Inflation and high energy prices have made the last year a challenging one.

### **Finance:**

The committee is responsible for the overall financial security of the Council, setting and monitoring the annual budget. For 2023/24 the budget was set at £480,260 giving a Band D council tax rate of £149.67

We have been able to deliver all our commitments through the year and end the year with reserves at £802,010. This figure includes £405,717.57 in earmarked reserves boosted by £183,123 in CIL payments during the year to be spent on defined projects.

An Asset Replacement fund is held as a ring-fenced reserve for the renewal or repair of assets. This is currently £38,151 held as part of the earmarked reserve.

No additional borrowing was required in the year and FTC continues to pay down PWLB loans which were taken out to refurbish the Pump Rooms and the Corn Exchange. Our debt currently stands at £78,940.

During the year, the committee has also:

- Maintained financial records and received clean audits.
- Maintained sufficient reserves to meet possible contingencies.
- Maintained and reviewed the Council's asset register.
- Continued to fund staffing time for the Tidy Team initiative.
  
- Reviewed Council bank accounts and investments.

### **Staffing:**

Finance is responsible for overseeing the terms and conditions of council staff. We currently employ 13 members of staff both full and part time giving a full time equivalent of 8.5 staff.

Staffing accounts for 60% of the annual budget and has increased following the town's decision to support The Place. FTC is a living wage employer with all staff currently on hourly rates on or above the living wage rate of £11.44/hr.

Through the information centre staff provide a service to residents and visitors ranging from local tourist information, room hire, our museum, access to the foodbank and citizens advice. As the cost-of-living crisis has hit our community staff have faced increased pressure and provide an invaluable service.

During the year we also oversaw

- Annual Staff appraisal recommendations.
- Staff training requirements
- The Information Centre operation
- Staff recruitment.

Finally, I would like to thank staff, volunteers and councillors for their support and dedication, in maintaining services and planning future improvements in challenging times.

- Cllr. Steve Leniec, Chair of The Finance and Audit Committee
- [Cllr.leniec@faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.leniec@faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk)

## **Planning & Highways Report for Town Meeting 1/5/24**

Since the last Town meeting, the Committee has considered and commented on 49 planning applications. Of these the most significant were the reserved matters application for 125 houses at the land South of Steeds and for the development of Wicklesham Quarry.

The former application was rejected by the Planning Committee of VoWDC having considered Faringdon Town Council's submission that:

a) the Senior Urban Design Officer report stated that 28 of the affordable houses had gardens that were, on average, only 75% of the area specified in the Joint Design Guide and that an unspecified number did not have the requisite back-to-back distances.

b) 2.5 storey houses were contrary with the Great Coxwell Neighbourhood Plan.

The developer appealed, and the Inspector overturned the decision, so it will be built with the deficiencies stated above.

The latter was submitted as an outline application to OCC. The Planning & Highways Committee agreed that development on the site was in accordance with Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan Policy 4.5(b) and with Policies 4.3A, C and E, and 4.7A, B and E, but objected to the application on the following grounds: massing and height of buildings; provision for safe right turning on access and egress and safe crossing of the A420. These are matters that will be addressed by the relevant officers for the OCC Planning Committee.

There were also provisos and recommendations made regarding: on-site pedestrian and cycling provision; clarification of the ecological impact including an Environmental Impact Assessment and a separate Palaeontology Assessment; the involvement of the Oxfordshire Geology Trust and Natural England regarding the quarry walls and all arrangements regarding their protection; access for the public, students and researchers; public and academic access to the quarry walls and to the fossil bearing material must be permanent and guaranteed; fencing must be permanently maintained; access must not be restricted by site security requirements; a learning/interpretation centre should be provided to educate visitors about the significance of the Faringdon Sponge Fossils.

The application is still to be discussed by the OCC Planning Committee.

It should be noted that in the Evidence Base of the draft VoWH Local Plan 2041, a developer has registered an interest in developing this site and beyond for housing.

Revised parking restrictions in the Market Place have been recommended to OCC and implemented to enable easier access to shops on the Market Place.

Recently an application to build a children's nursery on land at Volunteer Way was objected to on the grounds of parking, vehicular congestion and pedestrian safety.

M L H Wise 29/4/24

The Facilities Committee has responsibility for the maintenance, upkeep and use of:-

- The Corn Exchange
- The Pump House.
- Portwell Pump and diver bench
- 2 play parks
- All Saints' Church churchyard
- The Town Park
- Clos Mélois and petanque pitch
- Benches in the Market Square
- Market Square planters
- Corn Exchange and Pump House hanging baskets
- Some bus shelters
- Some notice boards
- 2 red phone boxes
- The work of the Tidy Team

Current and recent activities:-

- External & internal assessment of the condition of the Corn Exchange is underway. A refurbishment plan will be produced.
- Replacement of the side doors of the Corn Exchange and installation of an up to date fire alarm system is underway
- Quotes to refurbish the Portwell Pump have been received. Funding to be discussed
- Plan for Town Park regeneration is underway
- Provision of solar energy for the Pump House is under investigation.
- Additional planters 'are now blooming' in the Market Square
- Clos Mélois. (formerly Eagles Park) is being used for petanque. The new planting (by Faringdon Twinning Association) is maturing well.
- It is intended that the usual twice yearly cuts in the wild area at the rear of All Saints Churchyard will continue, plus sensitive cutting to leave as much flora as possible whilst also ensuring the churchyard looks tidy and cared for.
- Trees in the Churchyard have been pruned
- Fire safety surveys have taken place in all FTC buildings. Work is underway to deal with issues arising.
- We're yet to find a low cost solution for the damaged telephone box in Canada Lane. Suggestions are welcome.

## Grants Sub Committee Annual Report 2024

The town council provide rooms for both the Pump House Project and The Place. The Place also receive an annual monetary grant.

Discretionary grants to local organisations are also provided. In 2024.25 there will be a budget of £28,500 for this purpose. Local organisations can visit our website to find application forms and a grants policy.

To help make the town centre look well cared for and attractive the council also offer a planting and painting bursary for town centre properties. In 2024 grants of up to £250 towards painting and up to £80 for planting.

In 2023.24 the following discretionary grants were provided:

<b>GRANTS AWARDED 2023.24</b>	
<b>Name of Organisation</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Citizens Advice	£ 3,500.00
German Twinning Reception	£ 1,653.33
Pink Plaques	£ 438.40
Bromsgrove Day Centre	£ 1,684.00
Planting Southamton Street Carpark	£ 500.00
Be Free Young Carers	£ 3,000.00
Folly Trust Woodland	£ 3,000.00
The Place	£ 19,500.00
Planting and painting Bursary	£ 650.00
Tuckers Recreation Ground Trust	£ 1,365.00
Netball Club	£ 2,000.00
Youth Twinning (French)	£ 1,000.00
Artistic Skaters	£ 1,500.00
YoCo	£ 2,000.00
Folly Fest	£ 3,500.00
Root and Branch	£ 1,500.00
<b>Total Grants Awarded 2023.24</b>	<b>£46,790.73</b>

### **Room Hire and Office Space GRANTS AWARDED 2023.24**

<b>Name of Organisation</b>	<b>Amount</b>
The Pump House Project - Venue	£ 9,000.00
The Place	£ 7,000.00
Bangers and Beer Festival	£ 390.00
Whist Club	£ 150.00
Faringdon Games Club	£ 1,500.00
Folly Fest	£ 1,200.00
<b>Total Grants Awarded 2023.24</b>	<b>£19,240.00</b>

# Peter Castle Mayors Activity report

Apart from attending all committees and most working parties and meetings with the Town Clerk I have attended the following

- 21/4/24 Civic Service All Saints
- 6/4/24 Accepted gift of "Mavka" Corn Exchange
- 26/3/24 The Place Mgt Meeting
- 19/3/24 Police stop and search scrutiny panel
- 12/3/24 Opening of new sports/community hall Didcot
- 19/3/24 Stop & Search scrutiny panel
- 26/3/24 The Place Committee
- 4/4/24 Folly Trust Management meeting
- 6/4/24 Corn Exchange Mavka presentation and Film
- 16/1/24 The Place AGM
- 11/2/24 Cherwell DC Chairs lunch and auction
- 18/11/23 Mayors Rocks Disco
- 23/11/23 Anti-social behavior meeting at FCC
- 2/12/23 Christmas tree lighting and Market (AM and PM)
- 5/12/23 Freemasons Panto for special needs and disadvantaged Oxfordshire children.
- 2/11/23 Lord Lt Award Ceremony at Blenheim Palace
- 6/11/23 Town Meeting
- 11/11/23 War memorial 2 mins silence
- 12/11/23 Remembrance Parade and Church ceremony
- 10/10/23 High Sheriffs Law lecture Oxford
- 10/10/23 Glove Sermon and ceremony at Christ Church Oxford
- 7/10/23 Carterton Mayors Big Afternoon Tea
- 6/10/23 Attended Bangers and Beer Festival
- 2/10/23 Meeting with Head of Faringdon Community College
- 2/10/23 Meeting with Al Cane regarding "Mayors Rocks" disco on the 18/11/23.
- 26/9/23 The Place Management meeting

28/9/23	Faringdon Art Society Exhibition Opening
6/9/23	Remembrance exhibition meeting
19/7/23	Faringdon Cadets parade and prizegiving
7/7/23	Open Follyfest
6/7/23	Folly Trust meeting
4/7/23	Lord Lt and Bishop of Dorchester, evening at Dorchester Abbey
2.6.23	Twining Ceremony
22/6/23	Rotary Club Corn Exchange
19/6/23	Library official reopening
17/6/23	Big green day Corn Exchange
31/5/23	Town Meeting
18/5/23	Welcoming French Twinning guests

## **Faringdon War Memorial (and Old Town Hall) Trust**

The memorial service and wreath laying continued to be very well attended in 2023. A display was again held in the Old Town Hall.

This year marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day landings, the failed attempt to take the Bridge at Arnhem and the pivotal Battle of Kohima in the far eastern campaign in Burma. These will be highlighted in the Remembrance exhibition being arranged for this November. I am particularly keen that the forgotten Burma Army is given the recognition it deserves at this exhibition.

Cllr. Ford has been re-elected as chair with Cllr. Norris as vice for the next year. Willam Law remains as the RBL representative on the Trust.

The Trust can report that:

1. The heating within the Old Town Hall has now been repaired.
2. Matters are in hand to replace the current curtains within the Old Town Hall with new fire-retardant curtains that are also expected to help with improving insulation.
3. Energy use during events that are plugged into the Old Town Hall's electricity supply will now be monitored to analyse the amount (and cost) of electricity used as the energy bill last year was surprisingly high, even allowing for the Cost of Energy and Living Crisis. This analysis will inform future decisions regarding allowing free use of the Old Town Hall supply for events.
4. We will be continuing to allow discounted use of the Old Town Hall for the local whist club and free use of the Old Town Hall for charity events (such as the annual record fair).
5. We will be investigating solutions to allow greater space at the War Memorial for wreaths.