

Holt Community Council

Annual Report 2023/2024

Hello and welcome to all of our existing and new residents.

Holt is a small historic medieval town surrounded by a predominantly rural agricultural community. It is bordered by the River Dee, the City of Wrexham (including the Industrial Estate), and the rural electoral wards of Rossett, Marchwiel and Bangor, and lies wholly within the County Borough of Wrexham. It has a population of around 3500 according to the 2011 Census, of which less than 1500 live in Holt itself. Further information on Holt and its community can be found on the Holt Village Facebook site, Wikipedia and via the Holt Local History Society.

Holt and its community are represented by a 10-member Community Council. Councillors are office holders who sign a declaration of acceptance of office upon their election or appointment - they are therefore a part of the local government structure of Wales. Although they carry out many community activities on a voluntary basis, they are not volunteers. At the head of the Council is the chairman, who is elected annually from amongst its serving Councillors. The chairman for 2023/24 was Councillor Dr. John Cubitt and the vice-chair was Councillor Steve Lewis. We meet formally on the last Tuesday evening of the month at 7.00pm, currently being held in-person at the Kenyon Hall, Holt. These are very structured meetings with full agendas. Anyone is welcome to observe and there is an opportunity at the start for public questions, but it is a working meeting rather than a public presentation. Depending on what projects are being dealt with, in order to be more proactive, members may meet in between monthly meetings as a 'Working Group' to deal with specific areas/projects to bring back to the full Council.

Your other Community Councillors for the Year 2023/24 were: Cllr Gill Jones, Cllr Arlene Shone, Cllr Jeremy Hughes, Cllr David Powell, Cllr David Munnerley, Cllr David Bithell, Cllr Joe Pridding, and Cllr Andrew Jones.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, states that, as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year, a Community Council must prepare and publish a report (an "annual report") about the Council's priorities, activities and achievements during that year. This is our second report which we hope you will find of interest.

Virtual Meetings

As a result of the Covid pandemic in 2020, the Council quickly adapted and transferred to virtual meetings in order for Council business to continue. We returned to in-person meetings in 2022 and under new Welsh Government legislation, the Council will now be looking to work towards hybrid meetings which will make it easier for members and the public to attend.

Skills Training

A skills matrix has now been produced for your Community Councillors and weaknesses in their knowledge or experience needed to fully fulfil their functions as Councillors have been identified. For example, your Chair has attended a course on Planning for Future Generations run by Planning Aid Wales and another on Understanding the Law run by One Voice Wales. Other Councillors will be attending courses in 2024.

Finances

Budget/Precept

The Council's budget for 2023/24 was £64857 and the precept requirement was £34635.

For information, here is a very brief explanation of how the precept is calculated:

In addition to the forecast expenditure for the Community Council, we have a reserves buffer of approximately one year's income in the bank for emergencies and contingencies. By the end of the financial year (31 March 2023), we did not spend everything that was budgeted for in the previous year due to various project delays, and so we were left with money in the bank, plus an estimated annual income from burials, the bowling green and toilets as well as VAT to be reclaimed. These income figures are taken away from the total we need to raise, leaving a balance to be raised via the precept.

At the end of the financial year 31 March 2024, the Council had actual spent £41736.61 with the unspent funds in reserve for refurbishment of the toilets and paths through the cemetery.

The Community Council has financially adapted to the changing interest rate environment by proactively placing some of its income and reserves into a high interest-bearing account. This will increase our investment interest income ten-fold.

Audits

Each year an Internal and External Audit is undertaken. The Internal Audit for the year ending 31 March 2023 was completed and there were only three minor recommendations which were actioned immediately. The External Audit for 2022/23 conducted by the Auditor General, Wales has revealed only one minor typographical error and no matters causing any concerns.

Castle Green

The transfer of the open space and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) land at the Castle Green estate to the Community Council has been completed along with the funds to support and maintain the site. £31050 has been set aside for the upkeep of the MUGA spread over 10 years and £34520 for the openspace management over a period of 15 years. These sums have, therefore, been financially ring fenced.

Budget - 2024/25

The approved budget for 2024/25 was £72374 with a precept request of £36228. At the start of this financial year, the Council held reserve funds from which it has assigned funds for the following important village projects:

Refurbishment of the village toilets

Improvements to the Cemetery paths

Painting the Church Green and Dee Park playground equipment

Maintenance and Improvement of the Village

It is noticeable that in recent years, there has been an on-going issue with maintenance of our open spaces such as paths, the Castle grounds, Play Areas, public hedges and verges. These areas have been showing considerable vegetation growth because of our hotter and wetter seasons. This has the effect of sometimes curtailing the use of our village facilities by residents and visitors. At the

same time, Wrexham Borough Council's budget is under increasing pressure and there has been a battle to try and maintain the current levels of grass and hedge cutting. Furthermore, weeds are appearing frequently on our streets and gutters because of the environmental and safety cutback in weed spraying by Wrexham Council. As a result, hedge and grass cutting may be required more frequently in the future as our climate changes, and Holt Community Council recognises that it may need to take on a share of these additional maintenance responsibilities in order to keep our village's environment at the high level we all expect. This also applies to other maintenance issues such as litter picking and weeding.

On a more positive note, the cemetery grass is being cut now every 3 weeks.

Play Areas on Church Green and Dee Park

Your Council are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the play areas on Church Green and Dee Park. They have, in recent years, invested significantly in improving the safety of the area by supporting the installation of new matting. New equipment has also been installed at both sites and the equipment will be repainted this year.

Church Green benches

Benches on Church Green have been replaced as the previous ones were showing their age.

Defibrillators

A new defibrillator has been installed at Bellis's and the existing defibrillator at Nisa will be updated this year. In addition, a Bleed Trauma Kit has been ordered for the Nisa location.

Street Lighting

The Council own and are responsible for maintaining a selection of streetlights throughout the village. Any issues or faults with any streetlights along the main roads should be reported to Wrexham County Council, Streetscene or streetscene@wrexham.gov.uk . Alternatively, you can report these faults and any malfunctioning lights on side streets to the Clerk. Your Community Council has improved the efficiency of the lighting by installing LED lights to replace the old neon and tungsten bulbs.

Allotments

Your Council has a number of allotments that it owns and manages next to the cemetery. As stated in last year's report, the Council have improved, over the past few years, the infrastructure of the allotments by building modern fencing to define the plot dimensions, increase availability of plots by dividing a number into half and quarter plots, laying on water supply pipes for alternative plots and creating a hard standing area for vehicles.

The Community Council encourage those allotment holders having trouble maintaining their plots to the high standards expected to allow the growing list of enthusiastic gardeners on our waiting list the opportunity to participate in the allotment scheme. Anyone wishing to rent an allotment from the Council should contact the Clerk.

Bowling Green

The bowling green is a Council-owned and supported facility that is used by a small number of Groups and individuals during the warmer and drier months of the year. Sadly, numbers

using this facility has continued to drop over the years and your Council is finding it increasingly difficult to justify its maintenance and upkeep costs (£2250 In 2023/24).

CCTV

The Council provides and maintains CCTV cameras at the Public Toilets adjacent to the Car Park.

Annual Grant Applications

The Council sets a budget annually to be able to offer financial assistance to local groups and organizations. Applications can be submitted at any time but are normally assessed in October. For 2023/24 we are pleased to report that we helped 11 local and national groups/organisations to the sum of £3730.

Police

Your Community Council have always maintained strong links with North Wales Police and our Police Community Support Officers. When available from the Police, we review the crime statistics for our area which are thankfully relatively low. The current PCSO for our area is: PCSO Lisa-Marie Davies.

Whilst crime rates remain low, there have been a few rare incidents of anti-social behaviour, theft and drugs that have been reported and logged on the Police system. One area of concern to many in Holt for the year has been the increase in the number of drivers recorded speeding above the controversial 20mph speed limit in the village. The Police are aware of the issue and are monitoring the situation.

Web site

The Holt Community Council has built a new website (<https://holtcommunitycouncil.gov.uk/>) in the past year which has information about the recent and some past Council and Council business. The Council will continue to populate the site with past Council meeting minutes in the upcoming years.

Key Council Objectives for the Year 2024/25

The establishment of a Community Orchard.

Continue to provide support for our vibrant village and the friendly inclusive community at its heart.

Our long-term aim is to encourage sustainability, environmental awareness and renewable energy to enable us all to adapt to the risks of climate change.

Dr John Cubitt

Chair Holt Community Council