

ARUNDEL TOWN COUNCIL

Draft Report on the Year 2022/23

“God Save the King”

We will always think of 2022 as the year when we celebrated the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee and then a few months later mourned her passing. This month we have celebrated the coronation of King Charles III with our procession, service in the High Street and dedication of the commemorative Rowan Trees. As a Council, we have provided opportunities for the community to share all of these events, and these occasions have been generally appreciated.

Events in 2022/23

During the year we instigated or supported many events in the Town. We flew the Ukraine flag in the High Street and helped raise a considerable sum for the Red Cross humanitarian work. Olivia Colman made a film in our High Street and we used part of our film income to support the community warm hubs as winter energy prices soared. On Queen Bee Day, Arundel was recognised as England’s first ‘Bee Friendly’ town. We are now well on the way to being recognised as ‘Dementia Friendly.’ Over 70 people attended our first Climate Change workshop, leading to initiatives to strengthen the team behind the Greening Arundel project, the launch of Arundel Green Living, which includes recycling things like toothpaste tubes and crisp packets that cannot go into Biffa kerbside collections, and the development of the Repair Café. After a slow start, our Environment working group has become highly active with a range of projects. With Arundel Post-Office we co-sponsored the Young Person’s Award for Sporting Excellence and discovered that there is a wealth of sporting talent in Arundel. When The Bell was faced with closure because no-one was willing to take over the editorship from Gill Farquharson, we stepped into the gap and The Bell will continue, with complete editorial independence.

Arundel has a huge heart.

In December we collected food and gifts for Home-Start and for struggling local families. Home-Start told us that the *“number and quality of donations was simply staggering.”* At Easter, we helped Arundel Brownies implement their ‘Eggcellent Idea’, which was to collect 500 Easter Eggs to distribute to people who otherwise might not receive one. The Easter Eggs went to Home-Start, My Sister’s House and to some families and older people, here in Arundel.

Over 600 performers took part in the Arundel at Christmas programme. Then, in pouring rain, on New Year’s Eve, we buried the Arundel Time Capsule, with the aid of some young people whom we hope will be present when it is opened in 70 years’ time.

Climate Change

Our Climate Change competition invited entrants in different age categories to submit practical, deliverable proposals for addressing the causes of climate change which could be implemented in Arundel. Each of the four winners has been given a small grant to enable them to develop their project. The judges were impressed by the quality of thought and research that had gone into the entries.

Volunteers and 'Team Arundel'

Our regular events - the monthly Farmers Market, Mayor's Sunday, Remembrance Sunday, Community Awards and, of course, the Festival - were well-supported. Arundel Festival of the Arts, for which the Council is the largest sponsor, is the biggest event in Arun. Last year, research suggested that most people believe that the event plays an important part in increasing Arundel's sense of community and pride in our Town. After long discussion, we have secured an undertaking from Arun District Council to fund some paid roles to make the Festival sustainable.

This programme was only possible because of Arundel's wonderful readiness to volunteer. People outside the town often find it hard to believe that a town with only 3,250 residents can find volunteers to make quite so many things happen.

Finance

2022/23 Financial Results

The Council's unaudited, accounts show that income for the year was £395,334. Slightly less than half that amount came from the precept (local tax). Our other income was principally earned from hosting a record 158 weddings during the year. This included some catch-up from weddings delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic and we are not budgeting for a repeat of that number this year. We also earned money from the Farmers Market and successfully applied for some grants, and secured a payment of £10,000 for the filming in the town.

Overall, we expect that the final accounts will show that our costs for last year will match our income once we have utilised part of our earmarked reserves to pay for the Town Hall restoration. We propose to create an earmarked reserve with the balance of the Film income for community projects.

Capital Expenditure

During the year, we spent circa £95,000 on repairing the leaking roof of the Atherley Chamber so that brides no longer have to navigate around red buckets when it rains. We had put aside money towards this cost in previous years. The next task will be to replace the decking on the terrace later this year. This terrace is key for our wedding parties, enabling them to have a celebratory glass of champagne whilst enjoying a fine view of Arundel and the Downs beyond.

We secured access to a £50,000 Public Works Loan which we will be able to draw down if necessary.

2023/24 Financial Outlook

Because of the money that we expect to earn, we have been able to keep the precept increase for 2023/24 to 3%, well below the rate of inflation, despite facing the same cost inflation as other organisations. We are budgeting to break even again this year, which has required us to reduce expenditure in some areas, including grants. We have spent less on the celebration of the coronation than we spent on the Jubilee last year. Breaking even is an appropriate goal as a Town Council our goal is to use our resources to benefit our community. Unlike a commercial organisation, we are not seeking to make 'profit' or build our reserves to ever-higher levels.

Campaigning for Arundel

One of our major tasks is to safeguard Arundel's interests and to try to secure the services it needs from other authorities:

Parliamentary Constituency: During the year we joined forces with Littlehampton Council to dissuade the Boundary Commission from putting us both into a new 'Arundel and Littlehampton' constituency. Happily, the Boundary Commission withdrew the proposal and we will continue to be part of Arundel and the South Downs.

Streetlights: We have campaigned to retain the appearance and character of our cast iron lamp columns in the Arundel conservation area. Cast iron lamp columns are being replaced with stainless steel across West Sussex. We have now been told that no changes will be made in Arundel this year, and that our cast iron columns will be rubbed down and repainted this spring. But we need to keep a careful watch on this.

Safe Cycle Path to Ford: We have never been closer to getting a safe cycle path between Arundel and Ford Station. National Highways like our scheme and recognise the support it has from the Arundel community, but they do not currently have the funds to progress it. However, they have assigned it high priority status within their 'Directorate Level Forward Look' for the funding programme that begins in 2025. We need to keep the campaign front-of-mind with all the stakeholders.

ADC Airbnb: Together with residents, we strongly oppose the Arun District Council proposal to build an Airbnb in River Road. We have spent hours arguing our case with ADC Councillors. We believe the tide is turning, with an increasing number of ADC Councillors coming out against the scheme. But it has not been withdrawn and we need to fight on.

'Bollardgate': West Sussex County Council have now agreed to replace the inappropriate bollard at the top of Kings Arms Hill. But we will have endured the current 'spot the difference' aberration at the top of the hill for far too long.

Mill Road camper vans: we have done everything we can - including offering to fund the entire process - to get West Sussex County Council to provide Arundel with a Traffic Regulation Order to prevent 'wild camping' on Mill Road. It has been suggested to us that the only way forward would be to introduce paid-for parking on the whole of Mill Road, a step which we do not believe residents or businesses would support. We continue to work on this issue and in the meantime the abuse of this beautiful Arundel promenade is infuriating.

A27 Bypass: we have engaged with National Highways to ensure that the design of the bypass, particularly the viaduct, did not increase the flood risk to Arundel. We also sought, with Arun District Council and West Sussex County Council to secure a south-facing entrance to the bypass from Ford Road, but eventually accepted that the technical issues and geographical constraints made this impossible.

The bypass is now postponed, but we will continue to keep a watch on it. We will also consider how we can deal with the long-term issues of rat-running, parking and traffic management in the town, now that the bypass is postponed.

Neighbourhood Plan: we have started the 3rd Arundel Neighbourhood Plan. No additional land is expected to be allocated for housing, but the plan has an important role to play in setting design standards for the town, protecting it from unwanted development, and addressing how we balance the potential conflict between conserving the character of the town and energy efficiency/reducing the causes of climate change.