

# BUSINESS/STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 – 2019

(adopted at Full Council 28<sup>th</sup> August 2014)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose of Business Plan**

This Business Plan is the identification and method for the Town Council to work in a co-ordinated way in the best interests of all who use the Town Council's services. It is a statement of the Town Council's vision, purpose, aims, objectives and values.

The purpose of the document is to provide an overview of the Council's plans to continue to provide facilities for the town. The plan will set out the aims and objectives of the Town Council for a five-year period. The plan will be regularly reviewed to monitor progress.

The Plan will influence the direction and content of all other internal strategies and resources of the Council particularly through the budget process.

The Plan ensures that the Council can take a planned and consistent approach to:

- The design and delivery of Council services
- The achievement of Value for Money and best practice
- The identification of improved facilities and services
- The prioritisation and allocation of resources

This new Business Plan sets out for Councillors, staff and the community our mission, purpose and priorities for the next five years.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE TOWN COUNCIL**

Ongar Town Council was formed in 2006 and replaced the former Ongar Parish Council which had, in 1966, united the former parishes of Chipping Ongar, Greensted and Shelley together with the Marden Ash ward of High Ongar Parish Council.

The Town Council consists of four wards and is served by 15 elected and co-opted councillors. The last elections were in May 2011.

Ongar Town Council is one of the larger local councils in the Epping Forest District Council area serving a population of over 7,500.

There are five main committees, some of which have Working Parties made up of councillors who report to these committees.

- Finance
- Human Resources
- Open Spaces
- Public Relations
- Planning & Environment

Full Council is held on a quarterly basis.

Finance, Human Resources, Public Relations Committee meetings are usually held on a quarterly basis but additional meetings can be arranged or meetings cancelled if the agenda items are limited.

Open Spaces Committee usually meets monthly.

Planning & Environment Committee usually meets every two weeks.

All meetings are held at Basons, Basons Way, and are open to the public. At each meeting a period of time is set aside for members of the public to address Council on items on the agenda.

The Town Council holds Quality Status and was re-accredited in 2010. The Council met the eligibility criteria for the use of the Power of General Competence and resolved to use the Power in July 2012.

## **MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

The administration of the Town Council is carried out by the qualified Town Clerk who is appointed by the corporate body of the Town Council. The Town Clerk is required to carry out all the functions required by law as the Town Council's proper officer and to issue all statutory notifications. The Town Clerk is also the appointed Responsible Financial Officer.

The Town Clerk is supported by a Deputy Clerk, Assistant to the Clerk, Administrative Assistant, Open Spaces Supervisor and two Open Spaces staff.

The Council currently employs a total of 3 full time staff and 4 part-time. This figure will increase during 2015 to include a Manager, Assistant Manager and temporary/casual staff for the Sports Club at Love Lane.

## **VISION, AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The Town Council is committed to regularly examining and reviewing its responsibilities and settling a viable development plan for the future.

The Council will continue to work towards making significant improvements within the local community, in particular the Town Centre and the environment, by working closely, and where appropriate, in partnership with, other organisations.

The vision is to be associated with the creation of a successful town, where people want to live, work, play and visit with all residents having access to a high quality of life both now and in the future.

In order to achieve this vision, the Council will:

- Engage in an open dialogue with the residents to understand their needs, and in turn explain how we will address these needs within the resources and powers available to the Town Council.
- Provide high standard, cost-effective services to help meet the needs and wishes of residents.
- Assist and encourage other bodies to provide such services.
- Promote the best interests of the town for the betterment of the local community.

The Council's corporate objectives are:

- To enable residents to enjoy high-quality social, recreational and cultural facilities within the town and to seek the continuing improvement and development of these facilities in accordance with the desires expressed by residents.
- To encourage and promote the economic and commercial vitality of the town
- To consult with and take due regard of all comments received from other statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and individuals to ensure improving standards of service that meet with local needs.
- To help create a socially inclusive and caring community which embraces all its residents (irrespective of their sex, marital status, ethnicity, colour or nationality, ALL ABILITIES disablement, age, sexual orientation, religious or political affiliations) and seek to develop their well-being, knowledge, understanding and mutual co-operation
- To safeguard the environment in and around Ongar from inappropriate development and to maintain it for the future.
- To endeavour to respond to all correspondence within seven working days unless further information is required, in which case an acknowledgement will be sent.
- In trying to ensure that it is able to represent and promote these objectives, the Town Council accepts that it has financial responsibilities
- In all its deliberations the Council will take into consideration environmental, sustainability and ethical issues.
- Review and update the Strategic Plan on a six monthly basis

## **FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

### **General**

The Council set a precept of £267,578 for 2014/15,

The precept is the local tax levied by the Town Council which is collected on our behalf by Epping Forest District Council as the billing authority. The Town Council's Five Year Business Plan will seek to provide details of its future spending in order that residents can receive an indication of what the precept will be in the future.

Council Tax Band D for 2014/15 is £1,548.77 of which £102.56 is contributed directly to the Town Council.

### **Income**

The Council's income, including rental income, for 2014/15 is forecast at £24,000.

Additional income may also be generated, where appropriate, through renting, leasing etc of the Town Council's assets and/or through partnership working and planning gains.

### **Reserves**

The Council will adopt a risk based approach to its levels of reserves which will be reviewed annually or more frequently if necessary. The revenue reserves will continue to be increased to a minimum level that would be set at approximately three – six months operating costs.

Ear Marked Funds will be built up for specific projects identified through consultation with the community, and the budgeting process.

### **Allowances**

Councillors are able to claim an allowance for their duties. There is, however, to be a separate allowance to be given to the Chairman so that Chairman's duties may be performed throughout the year. The amount will be agreed at the 2015/16 budget setting.

## **THE COUNCIL FUNCTIONS**

For the purposes of the accounts, the Council functions are divided into budget heads, through the Omega Accounting System. Council services provide the following:

- Allotments
- Public Relations (Newsletter & Social Media)
- Mini Bus
- Environment (Street Lighting & CCTV)
- Open Spaces (Play Area Improvement & Maintenance) Also includes Nature Reserve and St Martin's church yard
- Cemetery
- Council Buildings (Bansons, Chapel, Love Lane Building & Love Lane Sports site)

## **COMMITTEES**

### **Finance Committee**

The Finance Committee is responsible for:

- Preparing, control and supervision of the budget
- Reviewing Fees & Charges
- Information technology
- Audit (external & internal)
- Insurance
- Banking & Investments
- Council buildings
- Leases and tenancies
- Mini Bus
- Budworth Hall clock
- Strategic Plan/Business Plan

Within the period of this Plan, the Council will:

- Continue to improve the budget setting and monitoring process and to identify efficiencies.
- Undertake a review of the Council's Information Technology needs
- Ensure accounting and audit procedures are completed in a timely manner.
- Review the Council's insurance requirements at least annually
- Continue to review the Council's investments
- Maintain and refurbish all of its properties and ensure that all statutory testing is carried out on a regular and timely basis.
- Review the current tenancies and update as necessary

- Encourage through promotion and advertising the usage of the facilities at Basons
- Monitor the Mini Bus budget
- Review the Strategic Plan every six months
- Consider the restoration of the Chapel and the provision of visitor facilities
- Maintain the MINI bus to a high standard
- Encourage the use of the Mini bus by local groups
- Annual maintenance of the Budworth Hall clock
- Review the feasibility of the Mini Bus every six months

### **Facilities at the Love Lane Site**

The Council is responsible for the Ongar Social and Sports Club in Love Lane.

Within the period of this plan the Council will:

- Work with partners to improve existing sports facilities, such as improve the quality of the football pitches, tennis courts etc
- Work with partners to secure grant funding
- Work with partners to increase and improve tennis facilities
- Encourage play schemes and coaching schemes at the site
- Promote special, high profile, events, including football/rugby/cricket finals etc
- Aim to increase public participation in outdoor activities
- Endeavour to run the facility in the most cost effective manner, at no cost to the Council tax payer
- Encourage through promotion and advertising both locally and regionally, the use of the facility for functions and sports

### **Human Resources Committee**

The Human Resources committee is responsible for:

- Personnel issues
- Health and Safety
- Policies review
- Training – staff and councillors
- Review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

Within the period of this Plan, the Council will:

- Continuously review the management structure and staffing levels to better reflect the changing demands of services and the needs of residents and customers
- Continue to improve staff care through induction and appraisal
- Encourage further staff training
- Review the contract with the independent advisor to ensure value for money

- Regularly review all Council policies at least annually
- The Standing Orders and Financial Regulations to be kept constantly under review and updated as and when necessary

## **Planning and Environment Committee**

This Committee is responsible for:

- Planning applications
- Enforcement, appeals and inquiries
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Public Footpaths
- Street Lighting
- Bus Shelters
- CCTV Management
- Parking
- Licensing
- Highways
- Town sign

Within the period of this plan the Council will:

- Respond to Epping Forest District Council on all planning applications
- Liaise with Epping Forest District Council in plans to develop paperless procedure
- Note all new Tree Preservation Orders and work done to protected trees in the town
- Liaise with suitable partners, such as Essex County Council to improve the quality of the street lighting service provided
- Maintain the Council's current street lighting stock
- Identify areas where improvement of street lighting is necessary and liaise with Essex County Council to provide this
- Maintain the current bus shelters
- Consider the provision of bus shelters if a need is identified
- Maintain and improve the current CCTV provisions
- To comply with all legislation in the operation of the CCTV systems
- To respond to Epping Forest District Council on licencing applications
- Work with the Highways Authority to improve the quality of the existing road infrastructure
- Consider measures to improve pedestrian safety and work with the highways authorities to deliver those measures
- Liaise with suitable partners, such as Essex County Council and the bus operators to improve services
- To maintain the Town sign

## **Public Relations Committee**

The Public Relations committee is responsible for:

- Newsletter/Annual Report
- Press releases
- Social media
- Twinning
- Community Grants
- Chairman's coffee mornings
- Competitions

Within the period of this Plan, the Council will:

- Endeavour to maintain the current frequency and standard of the newsletter
- Use the publication as a consultative document for any issues the Council wish to canvass opinion on
- Extend the distribution list to include schools, residential homes, waiting rooms, and community groups
- To ensure the Annual Report is delivered to every household in Ongar
- To ensure timely and regular press releases
- To ensure social media is updated
- Continue providing Community Grants to local clubs and organisations
- Organise Chairman's Coffee mornings at least twice per year
- Continue to promote the Council's community and allotment competitions
- Continue to work with the Town Twinning Association
- Maintain and enhance current relationships between the two towns
- Encourage cultural/school/educational/sporting links by local organisations and individuals
- Work closely with Ongar Town Forum and any other representative body to improve access to external funding
- Encourage partnership working to enhance the economy of the town, and to address issues of anti-social behaviour

## **Open Spaces Committee**

The Open Spaces committee is responsible for:

- Children's play areas including the skate park
- Jubilee Recreation Field
- Jubilee Nature Reserve
- Manor Square
- Two allotments sites
- Cemetery for burials and interment of cremated remains
- St Martin's (closed) church yard
- Dog waste bins

- High Street planters
- Litter
- Youth

Within the period of this Plan, the Council will:

- Continue to maintain and improve all play areas
- Review the use of the skate park facility and consider renewing the lease
- Improve play areas, replace or upgrade equipment as and when necessary,
- Expand the outdoor gym equipment at Love Lane
- Continue to maintain and improve the Jubilee Recreation Field
- Continue to work with Epping Forest District Council to ensure the cleanliness of Manor Square
- Maintain and improve the current allotment sites
- Continue to work with Ongar Allotment and Gardening Society (OAGS) to improve the facilities at both allotment sites
- Liaise with the land owner to secure a lease for Castle Street allotments to include the old Ongar Horticultural Society plots
- Maintain the cemetery to a high standard
- Continue to digitise cemetery plans
- Continue to digitise cemetery records
- Consider the installation of additional concrete rafts for memorials
- Commission a tree survey to be carried out every three years for all Council owned and managed land
- Carry out any tree work identified by the survey in a timely manner
- maintain and refurbish St Martin's church yard perimeter wall
- take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of all memorials
- to provide one new dog waste bin per year
- to review the dog bin emptying contract annually to ensure value for money
- to work with Ongar Allotment and Gardening Society to maintain the planters and tubs in High Street
- to organise at least two litter picking events per year
- to work with partners and the community to further reduce the amount of litter
- to continue to support Epping Forest District Council's Play in the Park sessions