

Ongar Town Council Annual Report 2022-2023

Ongar Town Council (OTC) welcomed three new co-opted Councillors to the council this year; Debra Barrell, (Shelley ward), Jason Gunn, (Marden Ash ward), and Rob Griffiths, (Chipping Ongar ward).

OTC make every effort to ensure that its money is effectively spent to benefit our community. We do this by controlling costs and maintaining effective financial planning and management, to ensure residents receive a high level of service quality and value for money.

This financial year, (2023 – 2024), OTC maintained the decision not to increase their proportion of the council tax levy. This translates into zero increases for OTC for several years, maintaining the same level as 2014-2015. This reflects the council's recognition of the challenges many of our residents are facing through the current cost of living crisis.

OTC continues to support local events and organisations that enrich our community for our benefit and deserve support for their dedicated work. The council has provided substantial grants to:

Recipient	Amount / Purpose
3Food4U	£2,705 for food storage container
Ongar Academy PTA	£2,000
Ongar in Bloom	£1,500 full costs for high street flowers and planting
Ongar Millennium History Society	£5,000 to establish a museum
Ongar Music Club	£1,000
Ongar Netball Club	£1,200
Ongar Town Festival	£2,000
Ongar Town Forum	£1,000 set up costs for the Farmers and Craft Market
Ongar Town Forum	£1,000 contribution to the Christmas lights
The Place to be Me	£5,000 for a new youth hub

The council recognises people who make a valid and notable contribution to Ongar with Citizen awards. OTC were unable to make these awards during Covid and presented the awards at the first opportunity to the following residents:

Carolyn Innocent: for her contribution to the Ongar Town Festival.

Kelly Stone: for her enthusiastic funding raising for the Christmas Lights.

Mary Dadd: for successfully leading the challenge of spearheading the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan.

An additional award made to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of the late HRH Queen Elizabeth II. This was presented to **Liza Portman**, for her dedicated work for the Scouting movement in Ongar.

OTC has an approved Neighbourhood Plan which sets out the aspirations of Ongar residents. The plan ensures that the interests of our residents and communities are taken into

consideration as a part of any guidelines for new housing developments in Ongar, of which there may be many in the coming years. OTC will continue to monitor progress against the plan, and lead on those actions within our jurisdiction that are needed to achieve the plan's targets and objectives.

OTC strongly agreed and supported residents in objecting to the unsuitable Greensted Road Development. The developer's application was rejected by Epping Forest District Council with many recommendations resulting from the process that included speaking to OTC and residents and considering their opinions and concerns in future applications. The housing development will go ahead, however this, and future applications, must take into consideration the community's opinions and the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan approved by residents.

The skate park land was reclaimed by the landowner for a housing development. OTC are now seeking advice. Firstly, whether there is a need for a Skate Park and, if so, for interested and experienced parties to come forward and work with OTC on the project. This is one of several priorities set out in the neighbourhood plan that aim to improve the opportunities, facilities, and environment for our younger residents.

The Ongar Town sign was irreparably damaged during recent adverse weather conditions. OTC will be replacing the sign in a more durable material. The design will remain largely the same but will be updated to include reference to the fact that Ongar was granted a royal charter in 1222.

The play area at the recreation field at Love Lane has been refurbished with new safety matting and the degraded wooden fencing replaced with a more durable plastic-coated metal one.

The former council offices at Love Lane have been refurbished both internally and externally, including a new roof covering. The offices have been leased for three years to a local representative company providing an income to OTC.

In celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of the late HRH Queen Elizabeth II, OTC plans were to plant seven native British trees in the nature reserve; one for every decade of her reign. As a consequence of the dry weather in 2022, OTC have been advised to delay the planting until 2023.

Following the sad passing of the late HM Queen Elizabeth II, the proclamation of HRH King Charles III succession was read out by OTC Chairman, Councillor Derek Birch, to a well-represented group of Ongar residents in St Martin's Church at the appointed time when the proclamation was read out nationwide.

To commemorate the coronation of HRH King Charles III, two additional benches will be placed in the nature reserve.

To improve Policing in Ongar, OTC have agreed with Essex Police to fund Community Special

Constables. These vacancies are currently being advertised throughout the county to identify suitable candidates for the roles.

Ongar is a rural community and, like other rural communities, rural crime is a particular concern. To assist Essex Police in combating rural crime, OTC have funded DNA kits to invisibly mark vulnerable equipment in an effort to reduce this crime. The DNA kits will enable the Police to identify stolen equipment, returning it to the lawful owners and prosecuting the perpetrators.

In line with the views identified in the Ongar Community Plan, OTC have been in discussion with Essex County Council to limit the volume of HGVs passing through our High Street in an effort to reduce the traffic vibration on our historic high street, improve safety and reduce the overall environmental impact.

Financially, OTC continues to maintain sufficiency of its financial reserves alongside designated funds that are annually increased for:

- a new cemetery;
- restoration of the cemetery chapel;
- land acquisition;
- vehicle replacement.

OTC are responsible for four play parks, a recreation field, street lighting, allotments, town CCTV, the nature reserve, the cemetery, and St Martin's churchyard.

Ongar Town Council continues to be committed to serving and improving the lives for all its residents.

Derek Birch
Chairman
Ongar Town Council
March 2023