



PENRYN TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

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Community Report

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Whenever people ask me what I do for a living and I reply that I am a Town Clerk, they respond, 'Yes, but what do you do?' I always find this a difficult question to answer and quite often give the flippant reply, 'Just about anything and everything.' However, in preparing this report on the work of the Council over the last year, I find that this is not so far from the truth. It is easy to forget among the complaints about dog fouling, littering, fly tipping and council tax charges, just how many services the Town Council provides to the people of Penryn, all for just £1.66 per week for a Band D taxpayer. I am pleased to report, that current projections indicate that the Council's spending this year will come in under budget, giving more flexibility for next year's budget setting which will no doubt be greatly needed.

Clearly one of the biggest expenses to the Town Council and to most organisations is the staffing. However, they are also one of the biggest assets and so for this reason, it is essential to invest in them wisely. Over the last year, two of the office staff have completed NVQ apprenticeships and the European Computer Driving Licence, a nationally recognised IT qualification, regular appraisals are carried out, and the Town Council will continue to ensure that its staff remain well trained and up to date with current practices. The Town Council has also negotiated new contracts with all of its staff to bring them into line with the current best practice.

Another very expensive asset that the Town Council has is its buildings. The Town Hall was redecorated in the last year and the demand for wedding ceremonies continues to grow. On the downside, the boiler in the Town Hall failed to pass its inspection this year and had to be replaced and a problem has arisen with the clock tower with water ingress that will need to be sorted out in the coming year. The refurbishment of the Temperance Hall has been completed and it is now a far better venue for the many people who make good use of it. The Town Council has also agreed to take on the Stuart Stephen Memorial Hall from the Trust, which is struggling to find funding for the building, and has recently started a refurbishment programme which should be completed later this year. The first phase has been wholly funded from grants, largely down to the hard work of the Town Mayor herself who submitted the Council's bids.

Following the success of the permit system in Shute Meadow car park last year, the Town Council has turned its attention to Permarin car park and will be introducing new terms and conditions of use to prevent the current problems with cars parked outside of bays and the use of the car park as a graveyard for unroadworthy vehicles. This should increase the spaces available for genuine users of the car park and improve access for emergency vehicles and refuse collections. In addition, the shoppers' spaces will be brought back into their intended use by the introduction of a time limit on parking.

The Town Council has also taken on new 'assets' this year in the form of the public conveniences at Exchequer Quay and Permarin car park. I put the term 'assets' in inverted commas as it remains to be seen over the coming year whether they are in fact an asset or a liability. Either way, there were strong representations from residents of Penryn to prevent Cornwall Council from closing these facilities, so the decision was made to take over the leases. This resulted in a small increase in the precept, but the blow was softened by the Town Council successfully lobbying the Harbours Board for a contribution towards the cost which we are pleased to have secured for the next two years.

The Council has also been busy trying to secure additional funding following the revelation that there were a large number of Section 106 Contributions for Penryn that Cornwall Council had not yet spent. In response, the Town Council set up a Section 106 Steering Group and put out a call for suggestions from members of the public. There was a very good response and the Steering Group continues to work with Cornwall Council to develop projects that could benefit from this funding.

This leads me on to the Penryn Arts Festival that will be held in July this year. This came about from a £10,000 Section 106 contribution from Lidl for public art in Penryn. This money was near its deadline for return to the developer and the Town Council and other stakeholders very quickly drew up an outline project plan to secure the funding. There is now an Arts Festival Committee and the list of events that they have planned is very impressive. The Committee has also managed to attract further funding using the original contribution as match funding. We hope that this year's Festival will be the first of many.

Another major event being held this year in Penryn is the Gorsedh Kernow. On Saturday, the proclamation ceremony was held, although unfortunately the planned procession was rained off, it was nevertheless an impressive sight. In September this year, the main event will be held on College Field, weather permitting, and there will be a full contingent of Bards processing from the Town Hall to the field and back again. There will also be a whole week of cultural events leading up to the ceremony. The Gorsedh Kernow attracts visitors and Bards from all over the world and we are extremely privileged to be holding this ceremony again in Penryn.

Whilst on the subject of events, we must also remember that last year was the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and Penryn did not let the occasion go unmarked with a street party that was very well attended and was largely down to the organising skills of Councillor Mary May. Throughout the year, the Jubilee theme continued with various events to mark the occasion.

There were also many new initiatives that began in the last year which attracted the support of the Town Council. The Penryn Traders Group was set up following the demise of the Chamber of Commerce and there is a small, but very proactive group of traders now working together with the Town Council and other stakeholders to improve the town centre. In addition, the Town Council began to look at the regeneration of Glasney Field and this initiative evolved into the setting up of the Glasney Green Space Regeneration Group which is currently trying to find a solution to the drainage problems on the site with a view to producing a plan for the field that will be to the benefit of all residents of Penryn. Another very new initiative is Incredible Edible, a project for growing edible plants in public places which is supported by the Town Council. Finally, the Olive Branch, a community outreach project, was created in the last year and in its early days was given the support of the Town Council in the way of grants and discounted hall hire and continues to thrive.

The Town Council recognises the essential work that voluntary organisations play in improving the community of Penryn and this year the Town Mayor awarded, unusually, two additional Saracen Awards to Julie Tucker and Rose Webber, both very well deserved. We should also not forget that

the Town Council has awarded a total of £10,000 in Section 137 Grants to voluntary organisations and charities providing vital services to people in Penryn.

Penryn Town Council has also worked hard this year to improve its engagement with the residents of Penryn with a new improved website which was designed and built entirely by the Council's staff and is also maintained by them. There is more information available on the Town Council's website than ever before and in addition, we also have a Facebook page and Twitter account. The use of social media in this way is notoriously tricky as I found out to my cost recently following an attempt to raise awareness of fly tipping. Instead of hearing how outraged the residents of Penryn were by this blatant disregard for the environment and the people who are trying to enjoy it, I was shocked to receive instead a barrage of comments berating me for showing Penryn in a bad light. We live and learn!

As well as engaging with the public the Town Council also has to work closely in partnership with Cornwall Council and we have done this in a number of ways during the last year. Most importantly is the development of the Town Framework, which is part of the Cornwall Local Plan, and sets out the objectives for Falmouth and Penryn. The Town Mayor and Town Clerk sit on the Town Framework Steering Group. The Framework was the subject of a public consultation last year and a further public consultation on the Town Framework will be carried out later this year. Another issue which the Town Council has tried to tackle with Cornwall Council is that of dog fouling. We have been in talks with the enforcement officers at Cornwall Council and a targeted patrol was carried out in Penryn in March, with the cooperation of a small group of PCSOs. We also met with Council officers and negotiated a change to the road sweeping schedule to include St Thomas Street and St Gluvias Street.

Perhaps the most important way that the Town Council engages with Cornwall Council is in its role as a statutory consultee on planning applications. In the majority of cases, the two Councils are in agreement, but on occasion the Town Council's inside knowledge of the town causes it to disagree with the planning authority's decision. The Town Council was successful this year in persuading the Central Sub-Area Planning Committee to agree with its point of view on the one occasion that it strongly disagreed with the planning officer. We also continue to fight the appeal in relation to the pharmacy that has been operating from Asda's car park without permission since December of last year and are still awaiting the outcome. This has been a controversial issue with differing views on both sides from residents in Penryn, but the Town Council continues its stance and although will be happy to abide by the ruling of the planning inspector in due course, absolutely maintains the right to oppose the action of developers that attempt to bypass the proper planning process.

Finally, turning to the Town Council itself, the results of the uncontested election in Penryn have been published and Councillors Derek Prynne and Gary Mockett have chosen to stand down this year and will be replaced by David Garwood and John Hodge. I am sure the Councillors that are remaining will join me in wishing them both well and thanking them for all the hard work they have put in during their time as Councillors.

Again, this year, I would like to thank the Town Mayor, Gill Grant, in particular for her support throughout the year, our Cornwall Councillor, Mary May for keeping us abreast with developments at County Hall, and the Chairman of the Planning Committee, Mark Snowdon. I also thank my staff for their hard work and commitment and other members of the Town Council who have given their support in various ways over the year. I look forward to working with a new Council and Mayor in the coming year to keep on making Penryn a better place to live and work.