



**Chesham**  
**TOWN COUNCIL**

# **Interim Performance Plan**

## **2020/21**



## **2020/21 ANNUAL PLAN**

At this juncture we would be preparing a comprehensive Annual Plan that assesses our performance over the last year and sets out our blueprint for operating over the next. However, we find ourselves in the grip of an international health pandemic, which has had ramifications for all residents and organisations including Chesham Town Council. In line with Public Health England and central government guidance, as well as emergency legislation, we closed our commercial businesses, The Elgiva Theatre and The Moor Gym & Swim, and the Town Hall to public access on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March. We have furloughed a few members of staff and our remaining Officers continue to deliver the smooth running of Council affairs by working predominantly from home. Our Parks & Premises staff have been sub-divided into two teams and continue to deliver crucial regular works programmes across the town, as well as dealing with any emergency works that arise. In this environment our priority has been, and remains, the health and wellbeing of our staff and our residents, and how we respond to a fast changing and evolving situation. Our interim annual plan does not therefore contain the usual feedback on KPIs, although we have detailed progress where possible, and the detail of how we will set targets for the coming year will depend, in a large part, on how the health crisis is resolved in the medium to longer term and any ramifications thereof. We continue to react to new developments, focus on immediate matters, and continue to assess how we will operate in the context of global and local change. At this time, we would like to thank and applaud our staff who have shown great fortitude in the face of adversity and continue to serve the town of Chesham with their usual outstanding level of effort, dedication and excellence throughout these difficult times.

## **2020 AND BEYOND**

In the next five to ten years the town of Chesham and so, by definition, the Town Council faces a period of unprecedented change. Chesham is likely to have an influx of new houses and dwellings earmarked for it through a new Local Plan, probably adding some 10-15% to the population. The Council has committed itself to become carbon neutral by 2030 and support measures to reduce climate change across town, and the added pressures of housebuilding and an increased population will have a major impact. The Council's decision to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan is essential to set parameters on the question of housing, infrastructure and the environment.

At the same time, a major factor that will impact upon the Council is the recent merger of the District and County councils into a new unitary Buckinghamshire Council. The Council has submitted an expression of interest to be a pilot for devolved services from this new council, taking more control of local services for Chesham's residents.

The Council has a proud record in terms of leading on environmental and sustainability issues. The Council was the key driver in setting up the Impress the Chess group designed to protect and enhance the rare chalk stream that is the River Chess. It also plays an important role in the Flood Action Group. It has introduced wildflower areas across town. It helped set up the Local Produce Market to support and promote local, small-scale producers. And it operates in partnership with many community groups working to improve the environment. The Council itself is committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and sees itself as a leader and influencer for the town as a whole.

The Council is justly proud of both its major leisure facilities, the Elgiva Theatre and the Gym and Swim Centre, and acknowledges their importance in serving a growing town in terms of health and well-being. The Council recognises the need for significant investment in both facilities.

The next 5 years will present Chesham and its Town Council with many challenges and exciting opportunities. We have no doubt that the residents and your Council are up for the challenge and are keen to seize those opportunities.

## **Update on Work During 2019/20**

### **1. Responding to the ongoing phases of the Chiltern & South Bucks Local Area Plan, to reflect the aspirations and views of the residents of the town, and to decide whether to create a Neighbourhood Plan.**

The Chiltern & South Bucks Local Plan 2036 was published for consultation in the summer of 2019. The purpose of the plan is to set out policies used to determine planning applications, site allocations or propose new development (e.g. housing or employment) and broader land designations (e.g. Green Belt areas). The Emerging Local Plan or a Buckinghamshire wide Plan will replace the adopted Core Strategy (2011) and adopted Local Plan (1997) and will operate until 2036 or beyond.

#### **Progress in 2019/20**

The Council held discussions with the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and the Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company in the preliminary phase of developing responses to the consultations on the Local Plan and on the Community Infrastructure Levy. In its consultation response, the Council raised its concerns on a number of aspects of the Local Plan: in particular opposing the development of the Green Belt site to the North West of Chesham; highlighting inadequate infrastructure; the damage that will be caused to the water environment; and disagreeing with the large area of retail allocation proposed for the town centre, along with the allocation of key economic sites in the town centre rather than on the periphery of the town.

The Council determined that it would be beneficial to create a Neighbourhood Plan covering the whole of Chesham as soon as possible. The Chesham Neighbourhood Plan (CNP) will create a clear vision for Chesham addressing shortcomings in the proposed Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan. The Council aims to provide a credible alternative which develops brownfield sites and under-utilised land in central areas of town.

### **Plans for 2020/21**

Working with a Neighbourhood Planning expert, the Council is creating a draft Chesham Neighbourhood Plan (CNP) and will actively consult with the community to reflect its views and wishes. The CNP will then be submitted for independent examination. Providing the draft plan passes the examination stage, a local referendum will be held to enable the community to have the final say on the adoption of the CNP. Once adopted, the CNP will sit alongside any future Local Plan and provide a framework for deciding planning applications in Chesham. It will also ensure the Council receives the higher rate of 25% of Community Infrastructure Levy contributions from developers to fund local infrastructure and community projects.

The Chiltern & South Bucks Local Plan hearings that were due to take place in March 2020 were postponed as a result of COVID-19. The Inspectors then requested additional information from the local planning authority and in May 2020 set out their initial findings raising significant concerns that the District councils failed to meet their Duty to Co-operate with neighbouring planning authorities in the creation of the Local Plan. The Inspectors have said that there is a strong likelihood that Buckinghamshire Council's only option will be to withdraw the plan. The Town Council will continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure that it is able to engage in the process, whatever the next steps may be.

### **How has the project met the Council's objectives?**

Strategic Objective	How has the Project met the objective?
The Neighbourhood Plan should reflect all the Council's Strategic Objectives to a greater or lesser degree.	The CNP will meet Strategic Aims 1, 2 and 3 by providing greater protection for green spaces in town, creating a town centre policy to provide economic and commercial vitality and identify Areas of Special Quality and Local Heritage Assets to help protect the town's heritage.

### **Benchmarks – progress to date:**

- We have continued to liaise with local groups, particularly the CRCIC

- We submitted a consultation response to the Local Plan
- We decided to create a Neighbourhood Plan

#### **Future Benchmarks:**

- Continued lobbying by local elected Members to effect positive outcomes for Chesham.
- Ongoing liaison with local pressure groups.
- Town Council submits a draft CNP for independent examination
- The CNP is adopted by local referendum

## **2. Drive forward the devolution of services agenda, and ensure the Council implements and monitors the provision of new devolved services.**

Buckinghamshire County Council began a process of devolving down the responsibility for grass-cutting on highway verges to town and parish councils in 2015/16 and we took on grass-cutting for the town within the 30mph zones from April 2016. In 2017, we took on works for neighbouring local parishes and began to replace and install street signs across the Chiltern District as well as starting a wildflower trial on some of the town's verges. In 2018/19, we gained agreement to take back gritting the High Street during periods of cold weather and extended the number of local parishes that we are providing services to, to five in total.

#### **Progress in 2019/20**

The wildflower trial has been so successful, that the trialled verges will now be managed permanently for wildflowers and additional verges are now being trialled using the same management techniques and being monitored by Chesham and District Natural History Society.

#### **Plans for 2020/21**

The Council formally agreed to the principle of a two-year contract being confirmed with Buckinghamshire Council from April 2020 to continue the existing highway maintenance devolved services agreement. Furthermore, the Council has put itself forward as a pilot authority to take on extra services and facilities devolved from Buckinghamshire Council. As the council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency, we will be looking at the carbon emissions and ecological impact resulting from verge management and the potential for alternative management.

### How will the project meet the Council's objectives?

Strategic Objective	How the Project met the Objective
To consult with, understand and represent the views and wishes of the citizens of Chesham.	Response to public feedback has been pivotal to shaping our delivery of the verge cutting service.
To preserve the unique identity of Chesham and promote its heritage and its environment	By the creation of new areas of characteristic Chilterns chalk grassland habitat on verges.

#### Benchmarks:

- The area of grass verges cut by the Council in 2019/20: 102,056.9m<sup>2</sup>
- The number of cuts per year: 8 (*1 more than 2018/19*)
- The number of complaints received by the Council pertaining to verge cutting on Council maintained verges during 2019/20  
*Nine (three in 2018/19, but the weather conditions in 2019/20 made regular grass cutting more challenging)*
- Feedback from the community about verge cutting  
*The number of complaints received has still remained low and we have had positive feedback regarding the wildflower verge trial.*
- Number of road signs installed/repaired in 2019/20  
54
- Number of neighbouring parishes serviced in 2019/20  
Six
- Signage has been installed on our wildflower verges to explain the purpose of the change in management

#### Additional Future Benchmarks:

- Consider further Devolved Services in the light of the new unitary authority.
- Investigate the feasibility of alternative management of a greater proportion of the town's verges.

### **3. To become a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030 and to enhance and protect Chesham's Environment.**

Chesham is fortunate to have a number of beautiful, and even rare, habitats including a chalk stream, chalk grasslands and woodlands. The council has increasingly worked with partner organisations to help protect these habitats, not just on town council land, but more broadly across the town. With the pressing urgency of the climate emergency, the council will be looking at local actions that can reduce Chesham's carbon footprint.

#### **Progress in 2019/20**

The council worked with Chiltern Society volunteers to monitor birdboxes in the Spring of 2019 as part of an ongoing project. Unfortunately, a late cold snap proved deadly for many broods of tits, but five broods fledged successfully from a total of 14 nest boxes located across the old town.

Our wildflower verge project continued with Chesham & District Natural History Society and Chesham Environmental Group, with insect and plant species being recorded by volunteers. Signage was installed on the verges to explain that the management regime has changed to benefit local biodiversity and we hope to extend the scheme to additional sites. Our work has also been recognised by the Natural Environment Partnership and BBOWT as being of significant importance locally and as an example to other local councils of how they could and should manage their highway verges.

Concerns over a number of environmental issues were raised in the Council's response to the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan consultation. Consultation responses were also submitted on the Environment Agency's water company drought plan guidelines, DEFRA's consultation on reducing personal water consumption and Affinity Water's 'Drought Awareness – Your Views' and their revised draft Water Resources Management Plan. The Council has also written to a number of schools with guidelines for how to conduct field trips to the River Chess to reduce negative impacts on this important habitat.

The Council launched Communi-Tree, a tree-planting project focusing specifically on re-introducing lost trees in the more urban areas of the town, with the aim of improving air quality and helping to create a network of habitats across town. Residents have helped to identify locations for the planting of 35 trees, have been involved in a number of community tree-planting days and continue to assist with general care and watering programmes. Phase 2 of the project is now in preparation and we aim to site up to 100 additional trees during the September to March planting season.

Since declaring a Climate Emergency, the Council has commissioned an independent ecological audit and is currently creating an action plan with the aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. We have already begun discussions with key partners, including Sustainable Chesham, on how we can work together to reduce the community's carbon footprint, and we

have been supporting the Chiltern Society's Cleaner, Greener Chilterns pledge, where residents can sign up to simple actions to reduce their environmental impact.

### **Plans for 2020/21**

We will finalise our carbon neutral action plan and begin to implement the actions across our services and buildings. Action plan progress will be regularly reported to the Community, Assets and Environment Committee, on which Sustainable Chesham is now represented, to ensure continued momentum and scrutiny. The Town Council wishes to act as a leader in the community on environmental issues, and (COVID-19 permitting) aims to hold public consultation events to work with residents and businesses to develop solutions to reduce the town's carbon footprint. An impartial and informative page will be created on the Town Council web site to signpost people to more information on the Climate Emergency. Tree planting is an important means of creating carbon sinks and the Communi-Tree project will play a key role in this.

### **How will the project meet the Council's objectives?**

Strategic Objective	How the Project met the Objective
To preserve the unique identity of Chesham and promote its heritage and its environment	The key focus of this work is to protect and promote Chesham's environment and its habitats.
To consult with, understand and represent the views and wishes of the citizens of Chesham.	It is clear that protection of the environment and tackling climate change is very important to Chesham's residents and we will be working with them to reduce the community's carbon footprint.

### **Benchmarks – progress to date:**

- Declare a Climate Emergency  
*Declared by the Town Council on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2019*
- No of verges and open spaces managed for wildflowers  
*12*
- Number of trees planted for the Communi-Tree project  
*35 in Phase 1*

### **Additional Future Benchmarks:**

- Creation of a management plan for Berkhamstead Field Community Meadow
- Further Communi-Tree planting



- Habitat enhancement project in the cemetery
- Measuring the percentage of the carbon neutral action plan completed

#### **4. Continue to support the Town's business assets, the Elgiva Theatre and the Moor Gym & Swim, in their efforts to modernise, provide improved facilities and services and best value for local Taxpayers.**

Both facilities are owned and managed by the Council. Built in 1998, the Elgiva Theatre provides a varied and popular range of entertainment including professional and amateur theatre productions, live music, one-nighters, pantomime and live screenings. The Gym and Swim facility provides a heated outdoor swimming pool open all year round and adjoining gym, football pitches, a tennis court and multi-court. It also provides changing-room facilities for the outside sports pitches as well as a pool hire facility.

##### **Progress in 2019/20**

###### **The Elgiva**

The Elgiva had a strong first six months culminating with a new pantomime production, which was critically acclaimed. New hirings and shows such as a major photography exhibition and business conferences were instigated. Towards the end of the year, cancellations began in earnest due to COVID-19 which will undoubtedly have an impact on the facility, the extent of which is yet to be determined as the crisis continues to evolve.

###### **The Gym and Swim Centre**

The Centre had a strong summer swimming season in 2019 and membership and usage for the gym held up well. The ladies changing room went through a much-needed upgrade. The question of a new membership finance and card/entry system remained unresolved since it was considered that the significant question of whether the facility be extended and/or renovated be determined first. Unfortunately, the Gym and Swim Centre was closed in March due to COVID-19.

##### **Plans for 2020/21**

At the time of writing, both facilities are closed due to COVID-19 and it is not known when they will be able to reopen and, when they do, to what capacity. Clearly this closure will have an impact on the council's finances and the priority first and foremost will be to ensure sustainability and viability for both businesses over the short to medium term.

Meanwhile both facilities will continue to progress the renovation and/or extension options while continuing to provide high quality leisure provision at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer once they are able to reopen.

### How will the project meet the Council's objectives?

Strategic Objective	How the Project met the Objective
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 the residents.	Investment has enabled a new, improved Elgiva web site and new stage lighting. Plans are under development for renovations and/or extensions to both centres to provide enhanced facilities.

### Benchmarks – progress to date:

#### The Elgiva

- The continued engagement with and strong support from the Elgiva Board.  
*Achieved*
- Development and agreement of a detailed extension design.  
*Achieved through amendments yet to be ratified by council.*
- The employment of a structural engineer to provide a costing for the build of the extension.  
*Achieved*

#### Gym and Swim Centre

- Review and take forward the initial feasibility study and develop possible improvement scenarios.  
*Achieved*
- Achieve staff and Member buy-in of a proposed development plan.  
*Revised plans from architects received reflecting officers and Members' view on a successful model*

#### Additional Future Benchmarks:

- The council is reluctant to set any benchmarks at this time due to the unique problems posed by COVID-19 and the current closure of both venues other than to work to achieving full operation and capacity of both as soon as practicably possible.

**5. Continue the programme of improving the Council's finances and financial systems by embracing and adopting new technology and working practices to streamline efficiency, simplify the reporting process and ensure the continued professional management of local Council Taxpayers' monies.**

**Progress in 2019/20**

A new Pegasus system was installed in the Autumn of 2019. It has aided officers significantly with the processing of financial data and will continue to deliver efficiencies once further software enhancements have been made at both business units and additional officer training has been completed. The new, modern system has enabled our finance team to continue their valuable work from home during the current COVID-19 crisis, which would not have been possible without the installation of Pegasus.

**Plans for 2020/21**

The focus will remain on ensuring all aspects of the Council's finance operation are duly aligned with the new Pegasus system.

**How will the project meet the Council's objectives?**

Strategic Objective	How the Project met the Objective
Chesham Town Council will ensure that the money entrusted to it by the residents of Chesham is securely managed and spent effectively on achieving the above strategic objectives.	Continuous monitoring and revision of budgetary control allows for more efficient use of taxpayers monies.

**Benchmarks – progress to date:**

- Design and implement a package of software upgrades to suit the needs of the Council subject to cost: benefit analysis.

*System purchased and gone live in October 2019*

- The implementation of a more modern, automated system of accounting and the provision of any necessary staff support and training associated with it.

*Training has commenced, but is required to be rolled out to all section heads*

**Additional Future Benchmarks:**

- Reduction of officer time in processing financial records manually into Excel and other recording methods.
- Gym and Swim Centre to become compatible with a new membership scheme.

## **6. Continue to work closely with Town Partners and strengthen the Council's relationships with community organisations.**

The Council is very fortunate to work in partnership with a great number of organisations who share our vision and have tremendous expertise. In recognition of this, the Council established the Town Partner Scheme to foster these relationships.

### **Progress in 2019/20**

The Council continues to work closely with Town Partners to develop relationships between the Council and the numerous important voluntary groups in Chesham who help deliver many of the Council's objectives. The Council was delighted to welcome The Chiltern FoodBank as its newest Town Partner in 2019. With the Council's declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency in 2019, the Council is working with Sustainable Chesham to look at ways of reducing the Council's and the community's carbon footprint. The Chiltern Society and Chesham Environment Group have been actively supporting the Council's Communi-Tree project.

### **Plans for 2020/21**

Chesham was once again due to represent the Thames & Chilterns Region in the national finals of Britain in Bloom in 2020, but both the regional and national finals were cancelled due to COVID-19. The Council is looking forward to supporting Chesham in Bloom in the national finals in 2021. The Recreation and the Arts Committee meeting has been renamed to the Community, Assets and Environment Committee to truly reflect the depth and breadth of its agenda.

### **How has the project met the Council's objectives?**

Strategic Objective	How the Project met the objective
To help create a socially inclusive and caring community, which embraces all its residents equally, seeking to develop their well-being, knowledge, understanding and mutual co-operation.  (a) Encourage community associations and other voluntary organisations which actively engage in projects that contribute to social inclusiveness and community cohesion.	The Council continues to work closely with its Partners to help deliver the Council's strategic objectives and support all our Partners to be sustainable.

## **Benchmarks – progress to date:**

### **Benchmarks**

- Number of town partners  
24
- The active involvement of the Town Partners in the delivery of Chesham Town Council objectives.  
*Ongoing*
- Ensuring that the Mayoral Awards are given annually instead of bi-annually.  
*Now established and ceremony takes places at Annual Town Meeting. The Awards have been extended to include an award specifically recognising volunteer teams.*
- Number of partnership projects in progress
  1. Chesham in Bloom – Wildflower beds in Lowndes Park
  2. Chesham Environmental Group – Wildflower verge trial
  3. Chesham Environmental Group – Berkhamstead Field Community Meadow management
  4. Chesham Environmental Group – Cemetery wildflower project
  5. Chesham Environmental Group – Meades Water Gardens maintenance
  6. Chesham Environmental Group – River Chess invasive weeds & litter clearance
  7. Chesham Connect – Christmas in Chesham
  8. Chesham Connect – Online Town Calendar
  9. Chiltern Society – Sponsored bird box scheme
  10. Chilterns Chalk Streams Project – Impress the Chess
  11. Sustainable Chesham – Chesham Local Produce Market
  12. Sustainable Chesham – Zero Carbon for Chesham
  13. Walkers Are Welcome – Heritage plaque replacement
  14. Chesham Museum – installation of heritage signs
  15. Friends of Chesham Cemetery – Cemetery nature project
  16. Fairtrade Chesham – Fairtrade Town status renewal
  17. Francis Trust – raising awareness of Town Picture located at the Town Hall

## **2020/21 OBJECTIVES AND PROJECTS**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a period of uncertainty for the Town Council. On the 1<sup>st</sup> April, the new unitary authority, the Buckinghamshire Council, came into being, replacing Buckinghamshire County Council and the district councils, including Chiltern District Council. However, the unitary and Town Council elections planned for May 2020 have been postponed until May 2021, due to the pandemic. As a consequence, all former county and district councillors are now unitary councillors until the elections, when a smaller number of councillors will be elected.

The Town Council has put itself forward as a pilot council to undertake more devolved services from the unitary council and will be liaising closely with Buckinghamshire Council to drive this forward. The town council has also been lobbying to address any potential democratic deficit

in the new unitary Community Boards. The Boards are intended to provide local devolution of power by bringing together Buckinghamshire Council councillors to work with local communities to help solve local issues and provide a link between the council, elected councillors and communities, but the proposed constitution prohibits town and parish councils from voting. The Town Council will continue to work closely with the unitary council as the new authority's arrangements evolve, to ensure that Chesham is well represented.

As explained on page 3, the future of the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan 2036 is currently uncertain, but the Council will be keeping a close eye on developments so that we can continue to represent the interests of Chesham at every stage of the process. Meanwhile, we will be pressing ahead with the creation of the Chesham Neighbourhood Plan, which will focus housing development on brownfield sites and under-utilised land in central areas of town. Meaningful consultation with the community is a vital part of this process, but our ability to hold consultation events will be dependent on the easing of lockdown, so this will be a significant factor impacting on delivery of the plan.

At the time of writing this Plan, COVID-19 has resulted in the closure of our three main facilities, namely the Elgiva Theatre, Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and the Town Hall. While the possible extensions to both the Elgiva and Gym and Swim remain 'live' projects, undoubtedly the council's main focus during the first half of 2020/21 will be looking at getting all three buildings back to full capacity as quickly as possible and considering any financial implications thereof.

A large focus of the Council's work over the next 12 months will be looking at how we can reduce our carbon footprint, with an aspiration to be carbon neutral by 2030. We are in the process of creating an action plan, following an independent eco-audit of our facilities and activities. We will also be working with Sustainable Chesham to look at how our town and community as a whole reduces its carbon footprint.