



Skipton **Town Council**

STRATEGIC PLAN **2019 – 2023**

Final Version – Approved by F&P Committee
April 2019

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, Skipton Town Council has changed considerably. From being a small Council with few responsibilities and just a couple of part-time staff, it has developed into a key-player in the life and well-being of the Town.

In the last ten years in particular, the range of services it provides has increased substantially. It has developed existing services, adopted new services – and has taken over a number of services and facilities from other Authorities.

The biggest changes have included taking over the management of Skipton Market and the adoption of a much greater responsibility for the promotion of tourism – a vital part of the Town's economy – and the continued development of events, festivals and similar activities.

In the last two years, the Council has undertaken a detailed and comprehensive review of its staffing and committee structures to ensure it has the framework to continue to develop and move forward.

This new structure, together with the scheduled Town Council elections in May 2019, provides the opportunity to take stock, to review progress to date and to review the challenges and priorities the Council faces.

This Strategic Plan, covering the period from 2019 to the next elections in 2023, has been approved by the Council's Finance & Policy Committee – and will be put to the incoming Council for further debate and formal adoption.

Mission Statement

“To proactively represent and provide high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective services to local residents. To work with others to help secure a robust economy for the Town - and to enhance and develop Skipton as a high-profile, vibrant and thriving visitor destination”

This Mission Statement underpins the Council’s overall approach to its mode of operation, balancing the requirements and aspirations of local residents and Council Tax payers with the need to maintain and develop Skipton’s position as a popular and high-quality tourist destination.

The Council will adopt a proactive approach to its role in the Community – and will look to develop both existing and new approaches to the provision of services.

The Council will work in partnership with other local authorities, organisations and community groups, including the Skipton Business Improvement District and the Skipton Chamber of Trade & Commerce.

The History of the Council

Skipton Town Council is part of a three-tiered Council system (along with North Yorkshire County Council and Craven District Council) and provides a range of services to the town of Skipton in North Yorkshire.

The Council was created as part of the Local Government Act 1972, which came into force in 1974 as part of a reorganisation of local government across the country.

The reorganisation saw the abolition of the old Skipton Urban District Council and Skipton Rural District Council and created the new Craven District Council alongside Skipton Town Council.

Responsibility for Council services was split between the two new authorities, with the bulk of services being taken on by the new District Council. Skipton Town Council took responsibility for a number of services specific to the Parish of Skipton and the role of Town Mayor was created. The chains of the former Chairman of the Urban District Council passed to the new Town Council, and a new crest was added to the chain.

Over the last 40 years, the role of the Town Council has evolved, taking account of changes in the Town - and it has adopted a number of new roles and services.

The Council has had a number of operational bases, including the Old Town Hall (currently Brody's Restaurant on Sheep Street) and a suite of offices above Barclay's Bank on Skipton High Street.

In March 2016, the Council moved back to its spiritual home and now occupies offices on the first floor of Skipton Town Hall, immediately adjacent to the original Council Chamber.

What We Do

The following is a brief summary of each of the services provided by Skipton Town Council. The list is in alphabetical order:

Allotments

The Council operates three allotment sites within the Parish of Skipton. There are two large sites, at Middletown and Broughton Road, and a smaller site at Burnside Chapel. There are approximately 350 plots in total across all three sites.

Availability of plots varies with demand, and the Council operates a waiting list when sites are full. Plot sizes vary, although the Council is moving towards standardising plots as and when the opportunity arises.

Plot holders are required to sign a tenancy agreement and pay an annual fee. The Council is currently investigating the potential for greater involvement by tenants in the management of allotments – via the creation of allotment associations.

Cenotaph, War Memorials & Statues

Skipton Town Council owns and manages, on behalf of the Town, the Cenotaph at the top end of Skipton High Street and a smaller war memorial adjacent to the lower entrance to Aireville Park on Gargrave Road.

The Council is also responsible for the statue of Sir Mathew Wilson, located outside Skipton Library on the High Street.

Regular inspections and maintenance take place - and specialist cleaning is undertaken as required, usually every five to ten years.

The Cenotaph and Sir Mathew Wilson statue were last cleaned in 2014.

Christmas Lights

Skipton Town Council works with the Skipton Business Improvement District (BID) to provide Christmas lighting displays across the Town Centre each year.

The joint funding arrangement provides for comprehensive displays on the High Street, Sheep Street, Otley Street, Newmarket Street, Keighley Road, Swadford Street, Coach Street, Water Street and Mill Bridge.

The displays are refreshed from time-to-time in line with lease agreements - and additional enhancements are usually made each year. A new scheme is scheduled to cover the five-year period from December 2019.

The Town Council manages the various contracts and oversees installation of the lighting and the main Christmas tree located outside Skipton Town Hall.

Churchyards & Closed Burial Grounds

The Town Council, by statute, maintains the churchyards at Holy Trinity Church and Christ Church in Skipton, together with the closed burial ground on Raikes Road.

This work includes the majority of grounds maintenance and grass cutting and the management of any trees, hedges and boundaries.

The Council is also responsible for floodlighting and the maintenance of the clock at Holy Trinity Church.

A community group - the Friends of Raikes Road Burial Ground - oversees an ongoing project to restore and maintain these historic grounds and to make them accessible to the public. A number of events and open days take place each year.

Civic Events

Skipton Town Council supports and assists with the organisation of many civic events throughout the year, including the annual Remembrance Day Parade and Wreath-Laying Ceremony in November - together with Armistice Day, St George's Day, the Battle of Britain Parade and Armed Forces Day.

Environment & Planning

Although Craven District Council is the local Planning Authority, Skipton Town Council is a statutory consultee in the planning process - and the Council's Planning Committee considers and makes recommendations on all planning applications submitted for work within the Parish of Skipton.

All meetings of the Committee are open to the public - and the views and comments of those present at any meeting are considered and included in any submission the Town Council makes to the Planning Authority.

Often, for larger or potentially contentious planning applications, the Town Council will advertise a larger public meeting to gather views and opinions.

Events & Festivals

Skipton Town Council plans, supports, organises and funds a range of events and festivals in the Town each year - either in its own right, or in partnership with other local groups and organisations.

The Council also works closely with the Skipton Business Improvement District (BID) to develop plans for new events and to enhance those already taking place.

Heap Parkinson Homes

The Council owns, in trust, two blocks of Almshouses on Otley Road in Skipton - comprising 11 units designed for occupancy by local people aged over 55.

Heap Parkinson Homes operates as a charity and is managed separately from the Council - although all 16 Councillors are trustees. A committee of Managing Trustees oversees the running of the homes.

A full, staged, refurbishment of all the properties is currently underway.

Marketing & Tourism

As part of its Town Centre Management function, the Council works with partner authorities and organisations to help promote tourism in the Town.

In particular, the Council works with the Skipton Business Improvement District and the Skipton Chamber of Trade & Commerce, having representatives on the executive boards of both these organisations.

The Council produces promotional materials, leaflets and posters and attends a number of tourism industry exhibitions and shows to promote Skipton as a tourist destination to coach operators and group travel organisations - under the Visit Skipton brand.

The Business Improvement District operates to a five-year Business Plan setting out its vision for the Town. The Chamber represents over 100 businesses across Skipton.

Petyt Library

The Council owns a substantial set of historic books donated to the Town by Sylvester Petyt.

The collection is managed by an independent set of Trustees.

Having previously been housed in a room at Skipton Library, the entire collection is now housed in the archive at the University of York, where the collection is in the process of being professionally curated and catalogued.

It is planned that a small selection of the most significant books in the collection will be displayed, on a rotating basis, as part of the refurbished Craven Museum, when it reopens in 2020.

Public Conveniences

Skipton Town Council operates the Public Toilets at Coach Street Car Park in Skipton, having taken over this responsibility when the facility was threatened with closure.

A £70,000 refurbishment of the toilets took place in 2014.

Following the refurbishment, the Council introduced a small voluntary charge for use of the toilets, which contributes to a fund towards any further upgrades or refurbishment which may be required.

The regular cleaning and securing of the facility is currently outsourced.

Recreation Grounds & Play Areas

The Council maintains a significant number of recreation grounds and play areas across the Parish. Many contain items of play equipment, all of which is regularly inspected to ensure the highest safety standards. Some areas also include 'runs' for the exercising of dogs.

The recreation grounds are:

Bold Venture Recreation Ground

Broughton Road Play Area

Burnside Recreation Ground

Lytham Close Play Area

Middletown Recreation Ground

Millennium Green Play Area

North Parade Recreation Ground

Pasture Close Recreation Ground

Raikes Road Recreation Ground

Shortbank Recreation Ground

The Ginnel Play Area

Three of the recreation grounds (Broughton Road, Burnside, Lytham Close) have recently seen major refurbishment and the installation of new and improved equipment and facilities.

The Environment Agency has recently funded some refurbishment at The Ginnel play area following substantial flood alleviation work to the adjacent beck.

The Council is increasingly working with developers and the Planning Authority to ensure fair amounts of funding from Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy arrangements for the provision of additional play facilities required following the construction of new housing developments.

Skipton Business Crime Reduction Partnership

Skipton Town Council is one of the core agencies supporting the new Skipton Business Crime Reduction Partnership (SBCRP) along with North Yorkshire Police, the Skipton Business Improvement District, Shopwatch and Skipton Town Against Night time Disorder (STAND).

The scheme links shops, hotels, pubs, restaurants and other businesses together via a central monitored radio link to share information about known offenders and suspicious or illegal activity.

Membership is open to all businesses in the Town Centre area.

The Council's Town Centre Ambassadors participate in the scheme, undertaking a co-ordinating role and encouraging both new businesses to join the scheme and existing members to fully utilise the available resources.

The scheme has had a significant number of successes in foiling and preventing illegal activities and shoplifting.

Skipton Market

Skipton Town Council is responsible for the management of Skipton Market - operating under a lease from Skipton Castle, who own the rights to hold the Market under a Charter granted in 1204 by King John.

The Market is held every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday - and takes place on the stone 'setts' along both sides of Skipton's historic and award-winning High Street.

Since taking control as Market Authority in 2012, Skipton Town Council has invested significantly in the promotion of the Market, and has completed a number of agreements with landowners to simplify the operation of the Market and to facilitate new traders.

Skipton Market was named as the Best Small Outdoor Market at the Great British Market Awards in both 2017 and 2019.

Also, in both 2018 and 2019, the Market reached the final in a public vote for 'Britain's Favourite Market'.

Skipton's Christmas Market was named as the Best Large Speciality Market in the 2018 Great British Market Awards.

Street Lighting & Street Furniture

Skipton Town Council is responsible for the maintenance of a substantial number of discretionary street lights (generally away from main highways), together with other items of street furniture such as public seating, litter bins and dog waste bins.

All are inspected and maintained on a regular basis. A contract is in place for the regular emptying of litter bins and dog waste bins.

Support to Community & Voluntary Groups

The Council acts as the administrative support to a number of local community and voluntary groups.

These include:

Skipton In Bloom

Incredible Edible

Friends of the Wilderness

Friends of Raikes Road Burial Ground

Most of these groups operate under a separate 'constitution' and determine their own priorities and workload, supported by the Council.

Councillors and Council Officers also support many other community groups by attending their regular meetings and providing ad-hoc assistance.

Tarn Moor Estate

The Tarn Moor Estate is a separate charity holding a substantial amount of land on the outskirts of Skipton which is held in trust for the benefit of the Community.

Skipton Town Council, as an entity, acts as the 'Custodian Trustee' for the land. This means that it owns the title to all of the land, but holds it in trust for the Charity.

In practice, the Council has no control over the day-to-day management of the estate. This is undertaken by a group of five Managing Trustees of which the Council nominates two.

Town Centre Ambassadors

Together with the Skipton Business Improvement District (BID), Skipton Town Council operates a Town Centre Ambassador scheme across the Town Centre.

In effect, this is a mobile tourist information service providing help, advice and directions to members of the public visiting the Town Centre.

The Ambassadors also keep a check on the local environment, looking out for litter, dog fouling, graffiti, fly-posting and other anti-social activities - liaising with the appropriate agency to help resolve the issue.

The Ambassadors are also an important part of the Skipton Business Crime Reduction Partnership, keeping an eye on the Town Centre and linked to the main scheme by radio.

Town Centre Management

The role of the Town Centre Management Team has grown in the last few years, reflecting changes in legislation, policing policies for non-civic events - and in the number and complexity of events and festivals taking place in the Town.

The Council employs an Events & Tourism Manager to oversee this element of the Council's work, which involves developing close working relationships with our partners in other local authorities, emergency services, community groups and, in particular, the Skipton Business Improvement District.

The Council also plays an active role, regionally and nationally, within the Association of Town & City Management (ATCM).

Town Twinning

Skipton is twinned with two European towns:

Simbach-Am-Inn

Located in Bavaria on the Germany/Austria border, Skipton has been twinned with Simbach for over thirty years - and very strong links exist between the two towns, including well-supported Twinning Associations in both Skipton and Simbach.

Erquinghem-Lys

Located in the north of France, close to Lille, Erquinghem-Lys has very close associations with the former Duke of Wellington's Regiment (now the Yorkshire Regiment) and the two towns twinned in 2009.

Trees

The Council is responsible for the upkeep of all trees and hedges across its land but, in particular, is responsible for the trees lining Skipton High Street.

These native lime trees were planted in 1897 to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

The trees are protected meaning that if they are damaged or die, they must be replaced. A number of the trees have been replaced in recent years - and this programme of replacement will continue as required.

Urban Grass Cutting

In April 2015, as part of cutbacks in its budgets, North Yorkshire County Council ceased all amenity grass cutting in urban areas across the county.

Skipton Town Council now undertakes all of this work within Skipton, to ensure that all areas of amenity grass within the Town continue to be cut. Generally, grass is cut on a regular basis through the season (from around March to September/October).

Council Committees and their Remit

Full details of the composition and meeting frequencies of the Council's various Standing Committees is set out in an appendix to the Council's Standing Orders.

The functions of each Committee are summarised below:

FULL COUNCIL

- To act as the ultimate decision-making body for the Council
- To set the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- To appoint the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Leader, Deputy Leader and Shadow Leader in line with legislation and Standing Orders
- To appoint Members to the various Council Committees in line with legislation and Standing Orders and to appoint Committee Chairs/Vice-Chairs.
- To set the Council's budget and precept each year
- To ratify the minutes and decisions of all Council committees
- To undertake any other function/s as required by legislation and Standing Orders

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

- To deal with any legal and statutory matters affecting the Council
- To agree, and recommend to Full Council, all aspects of Council policy
- To consider, on an annual basis, the budget and spending proposals of any other Council Committee.
- To formulate, on an annual basis, an overall budget for all of the Council's operations and to recommend that budget to Full Council
- To propose, on an annual basis, the level of the Council's precept and to make a recommendation to Full Council.
- To receive interim statements of income and expenditure in relation to the Council's agreed budget; and to monitor against target

- To periodically review cash flow and bank balances
- To receive and review the Council's annual Financial Statements and the Council's Annual Return and to recommend them to Full Council
- To monitor the Council's banking and investment arrangements
- To agree signatories to the Council's bank accounts
- To raise loans and other financial arrangements as required subject to Full Council approval
- To monitor the Council's insurances
- To oversee any leases of land or buildings
- To monitor Council contracts
- To monitor the Council's Asset Register
- To deal with all aspects of the Council's staffing arrangements
- To prosecute and defend legal proceedings as required for the protection of the Council and its interests.
- To address any other matters of finance or policy related business
- To set up ad-hoc Working Groups to address specific issues as felt appropriate by the Committee. Such groups to report back to the full Committee.

AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audit Function

- To monitor the Council's expenditure and to ensure it is in line with agreed policy
- To evaluate and confirm that the Council's accounts are correct, kept and presented in an acceptable legal format
- To appoint an Internal Auditor to carry out an internal audit prior to submission of the Annual Return.
- To agree any areas for review, in addition to statutory requirements, with the Internal Auditor.
- To appoint an External Auditor for examination of the Council's Annual Return, in line with Government procedures.

- To receive, examine and oversee the implementation of, where appropriate, recommendations of both the Internal Auditor and the External Auditor.
- To ensure that Councillor Declarations of Interests are maintained.
- To ensure that Councillors adhere to the Member Code of Conduct and to examine any breaches.
- To monitor any complaints received by the Council and to ensure they are dealt with in line with Council policy.
- To monitor any Freedom of Information or Subject Access Requests
- To ensure that the Council meets its obligations under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

Scrutiny Function

- At its own discretion, or as directed by Full Council, to consider and evaluate any aspect of the Council's operations to ensure value for money, compliance with statutory legislation and adherence to Council Policy
- To report its findings to Full Council and to make recommendations for improvement where appropriate
- To maintain an overview of Council Standing Orders and make appropriate recommendations to Full Council
- To maintain an overview of the development of the Audit and Scrutiny function of the Council and make appropriate recommendations to Full Council

PUBLIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

- To consider, on an annual basis, a budget covering the Council's Estate functions and to recommend the budget to the Finance & Policy Committee
- To approve and monitor expenditure against budget to ensure spending during the course of the year remains on target
- To consider any charges made for the provision of facilities to the public and to make recommendations to the Finance & Policy Committee.
- To oversee all aspects of the management of the Council's Estate
- To ensure that equipment and other installations within the Council's Estate are inspected and maintained in line with recognised British and European Standards.

- To approve and oversee any contracts for the provision of work on the Council's Estate
- To approve the purchase of equipment, making recommendations to the Finance & Policy Committee as appropriate.
- To oversee the letting of the Council's allotment plots and other ancillary land
- To liaise with the Allotments Working Group and with any approved allotment tenant association(s)
- To encourage the establishment of Community Groups to assist with fundraising for and the maintenance and refurbishment of community land and other projects and to provide support to any such group.
- To consider any other matters relating to the Council's Estate as appropriate or as directed by the Finance & Policy Committee or Full Council.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

- To consider and comment, as statutory consultee, on Planning Applications lodged with the Planning Authority (Craven District Council) and impacting on the Parish of Skipton.
- To provide comments and/or recommendations to the Planning Authority on any Planning Application considered by the Committee
- To consider any other matter analogous to Planning and to bring to the notice of the appropriate authority any apparent breaches of the Planning Regulations.
- To oversee Council responses on matters surrounding the Craven Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (or any subsequent policies and/or legislation).
- To consider any matters relating to Neighbourhood Planning
- To consider requests from developers and/or other Authorities regarding street naming and other similar matters.
- To consider requests relating to road traffic measures, road markings, pedestrian or other road safety issues – and to make recommendations to the Highways Authority (or any other appropriate Authority).
- To consider any other matters relating to Planning as appropriate or as directed by the Finance & Policy Committee or Full Council.

EVENTS & TOURISM COMMITTEE

- To consider, on an annual basis, a budget covering the Council's Events & Tourism functions and to recommend the budget to the Finance & Policy Committee
- To approve and monitor expenditure against budget to ensure spending during the course of the year remains on target
- To oversee and encourage revenue generation from and the sourcing of grant funding towards the Council's Events & Tourism functions
- To oversee the planning, promotion and delivery of an appropriate range of events and festivals within the Town
- To oversee the promotion of Skipton as a tourist destination
- To oversee the Council's social media and website facilities
- To oversee the planning, promotion and delivery of appropriate civic events and projects
- To oversee support to the Mayoralty
- To oversee support to the Council's Twinning arrangements
- To consider any other matters relating to Events & Tourism as appropriate or as directed by the Finance & Policy Committee or Full Council.

MARKET COMMITTEE

- To consider, on an annual basis, a budget covering the Council's Market functions and to recommend the budget to the Finance & Policy Committee
- To approve and monitor expenditure against budget to ensure spending during the course of the year remains on target
- To oversee the operation and control of Skipton Market
- To monitor income from the Market and to oversee credit control
- To consider matters relating to the ongoing development and promotion of the Market.
- To monitor and uphold the terms of the Market Charter and to protect the Market against unauthorised competition.
- To consider representations from Market Trader Representatives

- To consider any matters relating to trader conduct referred by the Market Manager
- To oversee and monitor any lease, license or other agreements in place relating to the operation of the Market.
- To oversee the Market's links with NABMA and the NMTF
- To consider any other matters relating to the Market as appropriate or as directed by the Finance & Policy Committee or Full Council.

Website & Social Media

The Council, in line with legislation, maintains a website using a controlled and licensed .gov.uk domain.

The website address is: www.skiptontowncouncil.gov.uk

The website meets all of the Council's legal and statutory responsibilities in terms of adherence to openness and transparency regulations – but has become somewhat dated and unwieldy.

A full re-design of the website is due during the 2019-2020 financial year.

The Council also maintains a growing number of social media accounts – on both Facebook and Twitter. These are actively managed and monitored by Council staff.

Social media accounts are in place for the following. The number of 'followers' for each of the Facebook accounts (at the time of preparing this document in April 2019) is shown in brackets after each account.

- Skipton Town Council (1,208)
- Visit Skipton (3,791)
- Skipton Market (5,767)
- Skipton Christmas Market (10,934)
- Skipton Sheep Day (1,847)
- Skipton Christmas Lights Switch On (602)

Work is ongoing to develop and increase followers and engagement on each of these outlets.

Public Services

Background

One of Skipton Town Council's core functions is the provision of a number of quality public services to the residents of Skipton.

The Council's Estate includes a substantial number of open spaces, recreation grounds and children's play areas. It includes waste bins, seats, benches, discretionary street lighting, fencing, trees – and the operation of three allotment sites.

In addition, in recent years, the Council has taken on responsibility from other authorities for the upkeep of highway and verge grass cutting and the public toilet facility at Coach Street.

The Council has a small team of in-house staff, headed by the Estate Manager, and their work is overseen by the Council's Public Services Committee.

All of the services provided by the Council bring with them a complicated set of legal and health and safety requirements to ensure that all of the Council's facilities are fit for purpose and safe for use by members of the public.

The Council has recently started a substantial review of services looking, in particular, at the cost and service benefits of external contracting versus in-house provision. At present, the Council operates a mixture of such arrangements with some services undertaken in-house and others delivered as part of external contracts.

The growth of new housing developments within Skipton has seen an additional demand for new or improved play facilities – and, over the last two years, there has been a significant increase in the Council's involvement in the planning, installation and onward maintenance of new facilities resulting from S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions from developers. The Council works closely with the Planning Authority's Sports Development Officer on the delivery of these projects.

The Council also provides assistance to third party community groups looking after Council-owned or Council-controlled assets – such as the Raikes Road Closed Burial Ground and ‘The Wilderness’, and is investigating revised methods of delivering allotment provision via tenant-managed schemes to increase the influence tenants have over the control of allotment sites, balanced against the need to reduce the subsidising of allotment costs by Council tax payers.

Additionally, the Council has become more involved in supporting a number of community-led initiatives via Skipton in Bloom – such as the ‘Incredible Edible’ project.

Challenges

- **The ability to continue to provide the best possible facilities and services in a challenging economic environment**
- **The need to maintain high maintenance and safety standards on limited resources**
- **The need to address the backlog of improvement work across the Council’s Estate**
- **The ability to assist in achieving the aspirations of local people in the level and type of local services provided and how they are run**
- **The need to address the relative financial implications of in-house versus contract-based service delivery**
- **The need to look to address the increasing financial burden of the provision of allotments, public conveniences and other similar services where such services are heavily subsidised by the Council**

Priorities

- **To ensure the highest standards of inspection and maintenance of the Council's facilities can continue to be met**
- **To review the relative merits and costs of in-house versus contract-based delivery of services**
- **To review, in particular, those services which are utilised by specific parts of the local community but are heavily subsidised by the Council**
- **To look at methods of greater community involvement in the operation of Council services**

Events & Tourism

Background

The Council's former Town Centre Management function has been developed in the last year to reflect a change in focus towards the future development of events, festivals and other similar activities – together with a greater responsibility (working with partner organisations such as the Skipton BID) for promoting tourism and the maintenance and development of Skipton as a tourist destination.

The Visit Skipton brand has done much to co-ordinate the focus for these activities and is helping to bring together all parties with an interest in developing visitor numbers and tourism going forward. In particular, the work to take the brand to a much wider industry-related audience via attendance at tourism-based trade shows has both raised the profile of the Town, encouraged additional visits from group travel organisers – and has increased interest in the use of Skipton as a proactive film and TV location.

The Council's own role in both delivering specific events/festivals in its own right and in providing support to others in delivering their own events has developed considerably in recent years – and the Council now needs to build on this success.

In particular, Skipton needs to look to the future and to develop a range of tourism policies and initiatives, together with an evolving range of events, festivals and other activities which encourage participation by younger people – and ensure that the Town remains a vibrant tourist destination for many years to come.

The Council has invested significantly in appropriate training for events staff to allow the Council to provide support to third-party organisations to help facilitate other events, festivals and initiatives not delivered directly by the Council. An enhanced team of 'casual' events staff has recently been recruited to help facilitate this – both in terms of providing free or subsidised assistance to appropriate community groups, and in providing services on a commercial basis as a potential revenue generator.

The Council continues to play an active part in industry-wide activities via membership of the Association of Town & City Management – which allows the Council to share and benefit from industry best practice.

Challenges

- **Maintaining and enhancing Skipton's position as a vibrant and popular tourist destination**
- **Addressing concerns relating to an ageing tourist and visitor demographic – and ensuring that Skipton enhances its appeal to younger people**
- **Maintaining and Enhancing Skipton's range of events & festivals on limited budgets**

Priorities

- **To investigate ways of developing Skipton's tourism offer and to maintain the Town's national profile**
- **To continue to develop the Town's range of events and festivals**
- **To work on initiatives to attract younger people to the Town and to develop a number of events aimed at a younger demographic**
- **To continue to investigate potential areas for revenue generation**
- **To enhance the Casual Event Staff Team to provide additional resource**
- **To develop and enhance the Town Ambassador Scheme and increase the number of volunteers**
- **To work closely with Skipton BID and other partners to develop initiatives in and around the town centre**
- **To continue to develop the Council's involvement with the Association of Town and City Management**

Twinning

Background

Skipton is twinned with two European towns – Simbach-Am-Inn and Erquinghem-Lys

Simbach-Am-Inn is located in the Bavarian region of Germany, on the border with Austria. The twinning has been in operation since 1983.

Erquinghem-Lys is located in northern France around ten miles from Lille and is very close to the Belgian border. The twinning charter was signed in 2009.

There have been a number of regular civic visits to and from both towns – although these have dwindled in recent years as a result of financial constraints amongst all three towns. The last formal visit to Simbach was in 2013 for the 30th anniversary; the last visit to Erquinghem-Lys in 2016 for a Yorkshire Regiment Freedom Parade. A low-key visit to Simbach was undertaken in January 2018. There is a Simbach Twinning Association active in both Skipton and Simbach – but no equivalent organisations in connection with Erquinghem-Lys.

The bulk of twinning activity centres on exchange visits between schools – or planned visits by groups of young people. The exchange visits to/from Simbach have dwindled somewhat in the last two years as a result of resource shortages at our Skipton schools.

There is a clear desire within both Simbach-Am-Inn Town Council and Erquinghem-Lys Town Council to maintain and develop the links.

Challenges

- **Maintaining an active and appropriate twinning connection in a period where resources are stretched both at home and at our twin towns**
- **Dealing with the decline of exchange visits between schools in all three towns**

Priorities

- **To undertake a review of Skipton's twinning obligations – and to work with both twin towns to investigate ways of improving the relationship**
- **Develop links between young people in Skipton and our two twin towns**
- **Encourage participation of local schools and youth organisations**

Skipton Market

Background

Skipton Town Council took over responsibility for the management of Skipton Market in 2013, under a ten-year lease arrangement with the owner of the Market Charter Rights – Skipton Castle. The Council manages the Market under the terms of this lease and under legislation set out in the Food Act 1984 and the Byelaws for the Operation of Skipton Market, approved by the Secretary of State and sealed by the Council in 2014.

During the initial five-year period, the Council has addressed dwindling trader numbers through greater promotion of the Market within the industry and via a number of new initiatives to allow new traders to trial business concepts. Trader numbers are at their highest levels for ten years – and revenue from the Market has increased from c£55,000 to in excess of £100,000 per year. This has allowed the Council to enhance staffing resource.

However, the Council recognises that the market industry in general faces significant challenges going forward – and, whilst Skipton Market is better placed than many, it does need to address matters relating to an ageing demographic and in identifying where the traders and customers of the future will come from.

The Market plays an active role within the wider market industry (via its membership of NABMA) and has achieved a number of industry awards. It has been named as 'Best Small Outdoor Market' in both the 2017 and 2019 'Great British Market Awards' and was a finalist in the overall 'Britain's Favourite Market' public vote in both 2018 and 2019. The Skipton Christmas Market was voted 'Best Large Speciality Market' in the 2018 awards.

Challenges

- **Addressing increasing average age of traders and market users**
- **Operating a market with complicated land ownership issues**
- **The implications of potential changes to VAT and Business Rates**
- **Protecting the Market from other unauthorised market activity**
- **Addressing perceptions and low turnout at the Monday market**

- **Balancing operational needs with the impact of the Market on local residents and town centre users**

Priorities

- **To maintain trader numbers in an increasingly difficult retail trading environment**
- **To identify new and younger traders**
- **To maintain the profile of Skipton Market regionally and nationally**
- **To maintain visitor numbers – and to target the ‘visitors of the future’ and, in particular, younger market users**
- **To work with the Events & Tourism team to identify additional opportunities for the Market.**
- **To look at ways of aesthetically improving the Market**
- **To look at ways of minimising the operational impact of the Market on the Town**
- **To improve the safety and security of market staff, traders and customers**
- **To facilitate and license other market activities within the Council’s area of jurisdiction and to identify and control unauthorised activity**
- **To attract additional investment into the Market**
- **To continue to play an active role in the wider market industry**

Planning

Background

Skipton Town Council is a 'Statutory Consultee' on planning matters impacting upon the Parish of Skipton. That is to say that it has the legal right to be consulted on any such planning matter – and its views and representations on behalf of the residents of the Town must be taken into consideration by the Planning Authority in determining any application.

In recent years, the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as the basis for planning law across the country has had a substantial impact on the ability of the Town Council to influence planning decisions. In addition, the emerging Craven Area Local Plan sets out the basis on which planning policy will be conducted locally.

Whilst Skipton Town Council was involved in the consultation and, to some extent, the formulation of the Local Plan, its introduction – together with the basic framework of the NPPF, has created the need to ensure that any and all comments either in support or against any planning matter are based on sound planning principals.

By far the most substantial way in which any Town or Parish Council can have a direct influence on aspects of planning policy is through the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan – although any such plan must take account of both the Planning Authority's Local Plan and national legislation.

As such, the Council must balance any potential benefits obtained from the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan against the substantial workload, and possibly limited influence, working towards a plan will create.

The Planning Committee also plays a role in considering initial approaches to the Highways Authority (North Yorkshire County Council) for the provision of additional road safety measures or for amendments to existing measures.

Challenges

- **Ensuring that Skipton Town Council, and the residents of Skipton, have an appropriate voice in the planning process – and that the views of residents and the Council are heard by the Planning Authority**
- **How to influence planning policy within the Town, given the impact of the Craven Local Plan and the wider implications of the National Planning Policy Framework**
- **How to influence other regulatory functions undertaken by other Authorities – licensing; traffic regulations etc.**

Priorities

- **To ensure that Skipton Town Council can adequately represent the views of the residents of Skipton on all substantial or contentious planning applications affecting the Town**
- **To maintain an effective system of monitoring and analysing all planning applications lodged within the Parish of Skipton**
- **To define what the Council's role should be, if any, in identifying planning control breaches within the Parish**
- **To make a final decision as to whether the Council should work towards the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Skipton to operate alongside the wider Craven Area Local Plan**
- **To work in closer partnership with other authorities**

Finance

Background

Over the last ten years, along with the increase in the number and level of services provided by the Council, its financial obligations have become more complicated and onerous.

Put simply, the turnover of the Council has increased substantially – not just in terms of the value of the Council's precept, but also through the significant increases in other sources of income from, for example, grant funding; events; festivals and from Skipton Market.

The increased turnover brings with it a higher workload in managing the Council's finances – both on a day-to-day basis and in planning its finances and budgeting strategically.

Openness and transparency legislation places a greater responsibility on local authorities to adopt clear and transparent processes – and to publish key information publicly so that Council Tax-payers and other interested parties can see how the public money controlled by the Council is spent.

Moving forward, the Council will need to adopt a policy of 'doing more for less', of looking at innovative new ways of providing services cost-effectively – and of proactively seeking new sources of income.

Through all of this, the Council needs to ensure it maintains its high standards of accountability. It has an excellent track record of meeting and exceeding auditing standards – and needs to maintain this as it moves forward.

Internally, and to assist in achieving all of the above aims, the Council needs to continue to develop its budget monitoring systems – both amongst senior managers and Councillors – and the new Council will need to consider, at an early stage, its general financial approach and priorities.

Challenges

- **The ability to continue to provide excellent local services in a challenging financial climate**
- **Maintaining the financial stability of the Council**
- **Maintaining the Council's obligations under openness and transparency legislation**

Priorities

- **To continue to develop efficient internal budgeting processes and to support the Management Team in effective departmental budget control**
- **To continue to identify cost-effective methods and to explore new ways of delivering services**
- **To continue to review and update Council policies and procedures**
- **To continue to meet statutory duties and associated deadlines**
- **To put in place effective Service Level Agreements with partner organisations**

Audit & Scrutiny

Background

The Council continues to maintain high standards in its approach to financial and regulatory matters.

For the last ten years, the Council has met or exceeded the audit requirements and expectations of both internal and external auditors – and no significant issues have been flagged up by auditors during this period.

Those matters which have been raised have mainly related to the need for the Council to review its staffing requirements and provision – and the comprehensive staffing review which has taken place over the last three years has addressed these few remaining matters positively.

As the new staff and Committee structure develops, the Council must be careful to ensure the same high standards continue.

In particular, the Council needs to look to develop its scrutiny functions – and the Audit & Scrutiny Committee will be allocating increasing amounts of its time to strategically reviewing both the way the Council operates and the decisions being taken, and work being undertaken, by the other Committees.

Adding this scrutiny to the excellent financial monitoring already undertaken will further strengthen the position of the Council.

Challenges

- **Maintaining the high standards of audit achieved over the last ten years**
- **Ensuring that the work of the Council as a whole is effectively monitored and scrutinised**

Priorities

- **To develop a rolling programme of scrutiny of the Council's functions and services to ensure continued efficiency and value for money**
- **To scrutinise the processes and decisions of the Council's various Committees**
- **To assist in the continued evaluation of the Council's policies and procedures**

Trusts & Charities

Background

Skipton Town Council is responsible for the operation of a number of trusts and charities. In some cases the Council itself (as an entity) acts as the trustee – in other cases individual Councillors act as trustees in their own right.

The key areas of responsibility are as follows:

Heap Parkinson Homes

The Council is responsible for the operation of two blocks of almshouses on Otley Road in Skipton. They are operated under a separate trust and all Councillors automatically become trustees on election. The day-to-day operation is managed by Council officers under the guidance of a board of Managing Trustees appointed from within the Council. The Council's Chief Officer acts as Clerk to the Managing Trustees.

A full scale refurbishment project is currently underway and this is being managed by the Council's Estate Manager – again under the guidance of the Managing Trustees.

Tarn Moor Estate

The Council acts as Custodian Trustee to the Estate and owns, in trust, a substantial quantity of land within and just outside of the parish. The day-to-day activities are managed by a board of Managing Trustees of which the Council appoints two. The Council has no direct involvement in the management of the Estate.

ST Housing – Company Limited by Guarantee

The Council is in the process of developing this Company Limited by Guarantee to oversee a potential community housing project on Council-owned land at Carleton New Road in Skipton. The project is potentially to be funded via a combination of Homes England grant funding and the proceeds of a recent sale of land. A Working Group of members and officers is overseeing the project – but not final decision on progression has been made.

Craven Museum Trust

This trust looks after the 'flying freehold' of the first floor extension to Skipton Town Hall utilised until recently by the Craven Museum. The Town Hall is currently undergoing a major refurbishment – and the sole role of the Trust is to ensure that the original purpose of the building remains linked, in perpetuity, to its use as a museum and community facility.

Other Trusts & Charities

The Council also has responsibility for overseeing a small number of other charities. These are, in the main, dormant or inactive and form the residue of a number of historic bequests to the people of Skipton.

Recently, the Council has resolved to undertake a detailed review of its involvement in all of the above – and the Charity Commission is currently requiring those responsible for dormant or inactive charities to confirm their intentions for the charities going forward.

Challenges

- **Maintaining a number of charitable obligations effectively alongside the Council's main business**
- **To ensure that each charity or trust is managed effectively and achieves its aims and objectives**

Priorities

- **To continue with and complete the refurbishment project at Heap Parkinson Homes**
- **To consider whether to go ahead with the proposed affordable housing development project**
- **To complete a detailed review of the Council's involvement with all of its various charity and trust commitments**

Staff & Member Development

Background

It is important that both Officers and Members are equipped with the skills they require to undertake their roles effectively and to ensure the Council is compliant in a world of ever-changing legislation.

Some training is a legal requirement, some is required if the Council is to be able to achieve industry accreditation, some is required for personal development and succession planning.

The Council aims to move from a reactive approach to training requirements to a more positive, proactive approach.

This proactive approach needs to be balanced against the workload requirements of the Council. In the past, training and development has suffered as a result of high levels of workload. The revised staffing and committee structure introduced in 2018 was designed with a view to ensuring that sufficient capacity should be available for staff in particular to undertake appropriate training.

Challenges

- **Maintaining and developing the highest standards of professional development for Council officers during a period of rapid change and financial challenges**
- **The need to allocate sufficient time to training needs during periods of heavy workload for the Council**
- **Ensuring that Councillors (and, in particular, new Councillors) are equipped with the knowledge and training required to make appropriate decisions on behalf of the Council**

Priorities

- **To ensure that Officers and, where appropriate, Members of the Council are provided with the required training and skills opportunities to ensure the Council is in the best possible position to undertake its existing duties and responsibilities – and is fit for purpose going forward**
- **To ensure relevant Officers have the required training and qualifications to allow the Council to achieve industry accreditation standards. In particular to ensure that the Chief Officer & Finance Manager have sufficient time to complete CiLCA training and assessment by the end of the 2019-2020 civic year**
- **To ensure that Members of the Council have the required training to understand the role they play in the Council and local community, together with the obligations placed on them under the Council's Code of Conduct**
- **To fully implement an agreed staff appraisal scheme**
- **To work towards effective succession planning amongst senior staff**
- **To commence work towards achieving 'Investor in People' status**
- **To work towards ensuring the Council has a sufficient, dedicated, training and development budget to ensure the above targets can be met.**

General Power of Competence

Background

Until 2012, Skipton Town Council was an accredited member of the former Quality Council scheme. The scheme lapsed at that time following a national review of the changing needs and priorities of Town and Parish Councils.

In 2015, the Government introduced a new 'General Power of Competence' (GPC) for Town & Parish Councils. The new legislation gives accredited Councils the power to undertake virtually any activity without the need to ensure that it has the power to do so through a raft of general legislation.

GPC accreditation is, however, linked to a number of training and qualification requirements for both officers and members of the Council – and it requires a number of criteria to be met relating to the election of members and Council policies and procedures.

The Council is now in a position to allocate resource to the required training and background work and can now move towards accreditation. The process will take at least twelve months – but the required work should be achievable to allow adoption of the powers at the Council's Annual Meeting in May 2020.

Challenges

- **Removal of time constraints on background work and training requirements**
- **The need for both officers and members to undergo the relevant training**

Priorities

- **To undertake the required background work, together with the required Officer and Member training to facilitate the adoption of the General Power of Competence (GPC) in May 2020**

Youth Council

Background

In several areas of this strategic plan, reference is made for the need to encourage greater engagement with younger people.

The need to do this is particularly significant in aiming to secure the continued success of Skipton Market and of the Visit Skipton, Events and Tourism functions.

The need for greater involvement by younger people applies equally, however, to all aspects of the Council's business.

Also, national trends show a worrying decline in the involvement of younger people in local government at all levels. UK statistics show that less than 5% of local councillors fall into the 18-25 age range – and the figure is not much higher amongst 26-34 yo's.

Skipton Town Council has never actively engaged in the creation of a meaningful Youth Council – but there is evidence of success at other Council's in the sector, and the concept is particularly successful in Erquinghem-Lys, one of Skipton's twin towns.

There is further evidence that the more successful Youth Councils play a meaningful role in the work of the Council by feeding back directly to an appropriate Council Committee and by having some 'real' decision making and limited budgetary responsibility (under the guidance and authority of Members and officers).

Challenges

- **The need to engage more actively with younger people and to encourage greater interest amongst younger people in the work of the Council.**
- **Addressing the older age profile of Councillors**

Priorities

- **To look to establish and develop a Youth Council to work alongside Skipton Town Council**
- **To identify the remit of such a Council and to ensure its role is meaningful**
- **To look to include some funding provision for a Youth Council to be included within the 2020-2021 budget process**

Partnership Working

Background

An important part of the Council's work involves partnership working with other organisations and authorities – both locally and as part of wider industry involvement.

In particular, the Council works very closely with Skipton BID – which has just been renewed for a third five-year term – and for which the Council provides accommodation, administrative and accounting support and assists in the delivery of BID-funded projects. The Council's Chief Officer sits on the BID Board. The Council recharges the costs of the services it provides.

A substantial amount of work has been undertaken to strengthen links and partnership working with Craven District Council, North Yorkshire County Council and North Yorkshire Police – and with organisations such as the Skipton Chamber of Trade & Commerce on which there is Councillor and officer representation.

As part of potential revenue generation and community support projects, the Council has looked to develop further its offering of support to both community groups and commercial organisations in terms of services such as event and traffic management.

On an industry-wide basis, the Council has forged close links with NABMA (The National Association of British Market Authorities) and with the ATCM (Association of Town & City Management). Both of these provide extremely useful forums for sharing industry best practice and maintaining the profile of Skipton on a national basis in the Markets and Tourism/Town Centre Management arenas.

Challenges

- **Maintaining a co-ordinated approach to issues within the Town and in project delivery**
- **Avoiding clashes of initiatives and duplication**
- **Balancing internal workload with support to partner organisations**

Priorities

- **Maintain an active role in developing partnership working with other agencies**
- **To develop closer working relationships with other local authorities with an interest in Skipton – CDC and NYCC**
- **Continue to provide support to Skipton BID – and to agree a detailed Service Level Agreement for all support services provided**
- **Formalise and play an active role in the ‘Town Centre Partnership Working Group’ comprising STC, CDC Licensing & Cleansing, North Yorkshire Police, NYCC Highways, Skipton BID**
- **Look to provide external services (i.e traffic and event management) to other town/parish councils; the ‘third sector’ and other not-for-profit groups.**
- **Look towards economies of scale through partnership working with other local town and parish councils**

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