

Annual Town Report

***Derek Kennedy, Chair of Hexham Town Council and Town Mayor
May 2022***

This is my 19th year as a Town Councillor, the last 12 months being my favourite time as a Councillor. My thanks go to every Councillor who gives their time voluntarily, to the Town Clerk Jane Kevan and Projects and Funding Officer Clare Mwande and to our workforce at the Cemetery. A special thanks to all our partner groups including Hexham Community Partnership, Hexham Youth Initiative, Northumberland County Council and all the other volunteers who help make Hexham the special place it is.

Thank you to my fellow Councillors from all parties and groups for having faith in me as Hexham's Mayor.

My reflections on the last year was bringing together the enthusiastic new Councillors to work with those with experience and blend everyone into an effective team to deliver for Hexham. No one has a monopoly on good ideas, only by working together do we as a group achieve optimum performance. We have had our moments over the year but for the vast majority of the time positivity has reigned.

Our ambitious plan has seen great achievements, helping Hexham to achieve the accolade "The happiest place to live in Great Britain" with huge coverage from national TV, radio and press.

We started quickly with Councillors attending regular Saturday Market Stalls where we converse with residents on all matters to influence the Town Council's agenda and we thank the Farmers Market for allowing us to attend. We have expanded our Social Media presence and engagement; we communicate regularly the local news including via Hexham TV, Hexham Courant and the Tyne Valley Express.

With Core Music we created the Bandstand Sessions regularly attracting 200 people and showcasing local talent. The Bandstand Sessions will return in Summer 2022.

The Net Zero Fair was popular with many stalls highlighting the huge amount of activity being conducted locally; further fairs will be arranged. We are moving our banking facilities to Unity Bank from HSBC, as part of our plan to be a sustainable organisation.

We have become an official Living Wage employer ensuring our employees receive reasonable pay to ensure a good standard of living.

The Hexham in Bloom volunteers continue their excellent work in making the town look colourful and I met with the judges recently and they did seem impressed with the work. The Cemetery which is of great sentimental value to so many achieved the Green Flag of excellence once again. A new biodiversity plan is being worked on with Hexham Spaces 4 Nature to develop sustainable planting at the Cemetery and across the town. Grow Hexham has been launched with the ambition to match those with gardens with those who would like to garden, we look forward to the results.

The relationship with Hexham Community Partnership has been reset resulting in much more conversations and more positive working together on all our joint ventures.

We continue to provide funding for Hexham Youth Initiative and we look to support and implement a new Skate Board Park in the Sele this year.

A new Projects and Funding Officer is now employed with Clare Mwande helping deliver our ambitions. We have agreed a 4 year action plan which will keep us on track to deliver the ambition.

Spook Night returned following the lockdowns and was very popular with young and old getting dressed up and enjoying themselves.

Remembrance Day resulted in circa 2000 people attending the service, always very poignant. I was proud to read poetry by Hexham's own war poet Wilfred Gibson.

Christmas Lights, not even storm Arwen could stop Santa and the festivities taking place. Festoon lights were added to make the park even more magical.

A COP tree was created at the Sele to celebrate the gathering of nations to agree climate actions.

The Lantern parade resulted in an impromptu party in the Market Place with the excellent Baghdaddies playing the music.

Developments in Hexham included the new High and Middle School, the Hexham Gate business park nearing completion and I was invited to open Lidl, Victorian Tap, Happy Shopper, SameSpace and Saks.

A constructive meeting with Egger, the largest employer in Northumberland, led to an agreement that we will continue to have a positive relationship.

The Link Cycling Minds has opened a unit to help those disadvantaged through cycling improving their mental and physical health.

Looking forward into 2022 and 2023, we have new Town Criers Joe Mills and Helen Wearmouth and they will provide additional attraction and sound to our events.

The Heritage Action Zone has been busy making plans and in the coming months you will start to see delivery of the projects.

We have a huge amount of events lined up including the Jazz Festival, Queens Platinum Jubilee, 800 years of Hexham's Market and 1900 years of Hadrian's Wall celebration.

New developments will see the apartments at the Old Swimming Pool and apartments and houses at the former Prospect House.

We will continue to work with partners and look for solutions at the former Bus Station, former Beales store, Police House and the former Middle School.

These are exciting times for Hexham and the Town Council will play a key role in leading the agenda.