**Town Mayors Report 2023/24**

As Town Mayor I have had the privilege of being the Chairman of the Town Council for a 4th year and once again would like to thank my fellow Councillors and the Town Clerk and council staff for their hard work and support. Riverside Community Centre is proving to be an ideal hub for council and community activities and together with the library and Information Centre it provides a welcoming and much valued community resource.

As a council whilst delivering our core responsibilities we have continued our work to enhance the lives of residents in the parish. Supporting all the town events including our annual Remembrance Service and Town Lights Switch-on at Christmas. We have worked alongside other community groups to provide support for residents. An example of this is funding the Citizens Advice Service which is co located with the affordable food hub and the Community Fridge. Council has just agreed to fund a Citizens Advice Service to run from Heathfield.

I would like to thank Mark Wells, Town Clerk and our Groundsmen Roger and Peter for their dedication and commitment in working together to support the councillors to maintain and improve our parish. Policies and process are continually reviewed to strengthen and improve the strategic and financial operation of the council.

Bovey Tracey Town Council is committed to continuing to embed the climate emergency declaration across all Council services and activities, considering the environmental impact of decisions taken. Work is still ongoing to reduce the Town Council’s Carbon footprint.

Residents have continued to support the development of wildflower verges in the parish and this year you will see we are starting to see the results of the groups work with wildflowers at Bradley Bends, Le Molay Littry Way, the fire station, and Mill Marsh Park. Friends of Mill Marsh Park have planted 20000 bulbs in Mill Marsh Park.

**Planning & Environment Committee**

The Town Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications within the Parish boundary. During 2023/24 the council issued observations on 108 planning applications.

In addition to commenting on applications, a key planning responsibility is to contribute to other plans and policies which affect development in the town. In the last year the Town Council has been involved in consultation around a refresh of the Teignbridge Local Plan, 20 mph speed limit schemes and Off-Street Parking Orders.

**Finances, Resources & General Purposes Committee**

Our Town Clerk has continued to inform and guide our activities and manage our budget well. As a result we are monitoring and trying to maintain a reasonably healthy level of reserves to enable us to have a sound financial footing. Our financial processes continue to be stringently audited (internally and externally) to ensure we are complying with the law and best practice.

**Proposed Precept for 2024/25**

As we know, a Parish Council gets its funding by receiving a small amount of the local Council Tax. This is referred to as The Parish Precept. The Council has agreed a budget spend of £342,000 for the forthcoming year. To fund this expenditure, the Precept will increase by 4.99%. The increase would raise the Band D Council Tax for Bovey Parish to £93.40 pa (from £88.96). This increase to our revenue budget relates to a number of key areas and a more detailed breakdown can be provided on request.

The key significant capital spend by the Council this year includes the redevelopment of Mill Marsh Park Play Area. This was jointly funded by Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy. We still have a Public Sector Works Loan to pay back, and our annual repayments are budgeted within the figure just provided. We charge for the hire of the centre, which is an important income stream towards the running costs and repaying the loan.

In order to protect our finances, minimise risk and maximise our income we invested a significant proportion of the Council’s reserves this year with various banking institutions in accordance with our Investment Policy having reviewed and agreed a more ethical investment strategy for the Council.

**Recreation, Parks and Property**

Countless visitors enjoy our parks each year and the residents of the town can at times be greatly outnumbered by visitors. In October 2023 we were excited to receive Gold following our South West in Bloom application for the Town. A special mention must go to our Groundsmen, Roger and Peter, who are out in all weathers managing and maintaining our assets and to all the amazing groups that entered the Its Your Neighbourhood Section. A big thank you to all the businesses who displayed hanging baskets. In addition, the Town was awarded the following:

**It’s Your Neighbourhood Award**

Friends of Mill Marsh Park – Outstanding

Bovey Tracey Garden Club - Outstanding (for St Marys Well)

Bovey Tracey Primary School – Outstanding

Bovey Tracey Garden Club -Outstanding

Growing Spaces – Establishing

**South West in Bloom Commercial, Leisure & Business Award**

 Brookside Restaurant - Gold

 Bell Inn 3rd place - Gold

There has been a significant focus this past year by the Council to consider the environmental impact of decisions. To achieve its carbon emissions reduction targets, a local Council must first measure all of its existing carbon emissions and then design a measurable action plan to bring them down to 'net zero'. Since the carbon baseline was done in 2021/2022 the main focus has been to reduce the council’s use of grid electricity. Solar Panels on the Riverside Community Centre were commissioned in late November 2022 and have reduced the grid electricity by 50%, from 21644 to 10822 kilowatts annually. Rationalisation of electricity meters on other sites that the town Council no longer need has reduced consumption from 2754 kilowatts to 1,986 a reduction of nearly 30%.

In addition, our Groundsmen have trialled two electric vehicles in an effort to ascertain what would be a suitable electric replacement for the current grounds maintenance vehicle. We are yet to identify a fit for purpose vehicle as a replacement.

We have supported the local swimming pool with a significant grant to invest in their green energy systems in order to reduce their on-going costs and help to secure their future and a grant to Bovey Paradiso from the Community Infrastructure Levy following the implementation of a new external groups policy. Other groups supported with grants include: Moorland Community Care, Bovey Tracey Carnival Committee, Bovey Youth Café and Teignbridge Citizens Advice.

Last year the Town Council took over the redundant Football Pavilion at the Recreation Ground as it was no longer being used by the Football Club and was a strain on their finances and this has now been let for the purposes of a gym.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have contributed so much to our community over the past year, and we look forward to continuing to work alongside you.