

# Henley Society AGM 2024 – Speech by Deputy Mayor Cllr Rory Hunt

Good evening all, and thank you for your kind invitation to join you here this evening.

The motto of Henley is “Semper Communitas”, always community. We are truly fortunate that as a town we live up to that motto, in no small part due to the wonderful array of community organisations such as the Henley Society. The part you all play in preserving the best of our town, and helping to improve the lives of those in and around Henley is not unnoticed, and it is certainly appreciated. Our Mayor, Cllr Hinton is very sorry she cannot be here this evening due to a prior engagement, but she and I share these views and she has asked me to pass on her thanks for all you do for our town.

Your Chairman, Geoff Luckett, expressed a wish to hear more about the strategic plan in my speech this evening. This is the first time the Council has created a strategic plan, and similarly the first time we have created a 5-year financial plan. Given that it is a rather long and living document I thought I would try and talk about the areas that align best with the aims of the Henley Society, and I am pleased to say that the lion’s share of the strategic plan aligns well.

## **The conservation and enhancement of the town, its waterfront and its setting.**

- The council has, this winter, procured and deployed much improved Christmas lights which were very well received by the town.
- Thanks to a lot of hard work, the council now have the legal registration of the Friday St Slipway and it is now open once more for use by the public.
- We have procured and are installing new litter bins, with an emphasis on attractive new bins, similar in design to the current ones, with a significantly larger capacity
- As part of our plan we will increase the current street cleaning regime by at least 50%
- Given the recent spate of vandalism, we will create and implement sustainable strategy for removing graffiti from all public assets
- The council will re-enter Bloom and we are striving to achieve the coveted Gold award
- Also, given the recent closures of banks and ATMs, the town centre manager is looking at options to have another free access ATM in the town centre, ensuring continued access to cash.
- We would also like to thank the Henley Society for their strong representations regarding the proposed Premier Inn by the station. I am pleased to say they have now exhausted all their appeals for their proposal, having missed the deadline to appeal to the Secretary of State.

## **To strike an appropriate balance between housing, a vibrant town centre, the provision of employment and leisure.**

- We have already delivered the Henley Adventure Golf course, which has proven to be a big success, with a 16% return on investment whilst providing a top class amenity and a good opportunity to celebrate the town’s history in the process.

- We are about to replace Mill Meadows Adventure playground – The tender has been awarded with works due for completion in June 2024 and thanks to hard work by officers and councillors alike, we have been awarded £65k grant from SODC towards these works.
- Furthermore, we will renew the Mill Meadows toddler playground – The tender has been awarded with works due for completion this Summer
- We continue to work with AFC Henley and Henley Hockey Club to provide top class new facilities, these will include a new 3G pitch and clubhouse at Jubilee Park.
- Whilst disappointed at the recent decision not to allow Henley to go to the next stage of the bathing water status application, it is still the aim of the Town Council to achieve this and we will continue to work towards it and support community groups in doing so and thus also having a lasting improvement in the quality of water in the River Thames,
- Regarding the economy, and supporting businesses, we will continue to monitor planning applications to help ensure robust response to potential loss of key employment sites and protect the town from unwanted development through proper scrutiny. However it should be noted that the Council is concerned by the proposed changes to permitted development rights and it was agreed at the most recent meeting of the Planning Committee that we will be making a robust representation against the changes.
- We will continue to work with agents and landlords to encourage suitable, complementary and sustainable tenants and to fill vacant units and we will work with Cash Access UK and others to help re-provide business deposit facilities.
- Furthermore we intend to carry out a sport and recreation audit and developing a tourism strategy to support residents of all ages, businesses and continue to make Henley an ever more attractive place to visit.

#### **The preservation of the town’s historical centre, its fine approaches and its trees.**

- This council is planning record investment in the Town Hall, replacing the windows and roof, doing our duty to maintain an iconic town asset and make it a more sustainable venue and home of the Town Council.
- We will also continue to maintain our other historic assets, such as the old fire station gallery and the West St Store.
- We have agreed a new multi-year lease on Red Lion Lawn, which will lead to better use and maintenance of a key asset at the entrance to the town by road or river and will provide a valuable new amenity to the town.
- The council is also going to adopt a tree planting strategy to preserve and enhance the greenery in our town.

#### **The relief of traffic congestion with improved transport links, better car parking facilities and improvements to bus and train**

- We are going to increase the town bus service from 3 to 5 days and plans for this are developing well.
- We will also increase the number of car club cars available, and we aim to increase the number of Henley residents who are members. This helps with our sustainability strategy, as well as helping residents who cannot afford their own vehicle maintain access to the road.

- The council has also started the process to install a pedestrian crossing at Rupert House school, among other places, with funds for the design work having been approved. This should help make our town more friendly to pedestrians and a safer place to be.

With our objective to have balanced budgets, close scrutiny of projects by the finance committee and making prudent, long term decisions in the best interests of the Town and its residents, should ensure that the projects are not just delivered, but are done so in a way that ensures that the Town Council can continue to provide value and continue to improve the town for generations to come. Of course we welcome the input and help of the Henley Society in achieving these aims. I have heard about many of your recent activities regarding reducing graffiti and HGVs, improving the cleanliness of the town and pressuring the EA to reopen the Marsh Lock horsebridge, the latter one a subject that I too have been quite involved in, along with Cllr Gawrysiak. I thank you again for the work you have done on these important issues and myself and the Town Council look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve our aims together.

Thank you and I wish you all the best for the year ahead.