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**Report of the Verwood Town Assembly held in the Council Offices, Vicarage Road, Verwood on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 7.00 p.m via Zoom**

1. The Chair was taken by the Mayor of Verwood Town Council, Cllr. Matthew Parker who was supported by 11 members of the Town Council.

2. **Mayor's Report**

On behalf of myself and Councillor Mrs Pat Morrow I would like to present this Annual Report.

This past year has been an incredibly difficult one where everyone experienced elements of not knowing what was going to happen next and simply giving it the best shot that they could. I would like to thank the office staff, Val, Jan and Micki for their ongoing hard work and adaptability, as well as each and every Member of this Council. Without us all working together and learning new ways of doing things, I do not believe we would have been as successful in dealing with matters as we have been.

With the odd teething problem, as a Council we have embraced home working and embraced zoom. By and large as a result we have managed to continue with Council Business and represent the residents of Verwood and Three Legged Cross to the best of our abilities. All residents who have needed our help have received it, we have continued with our regular meetings and been able to work on individual specific items.

During the last year we have understandably been focused on Covid 19 and as a Council we have been able to support the Verwood Coronavirus Community Support Group. This has been both financially by way of ongoing support funding, and also members where they have been providing anything from envelope stuffing, food parcel preparation and delivery and collection of Prescriptions. Our thanks go to the lead co-ordinator Shelley Rose and all local residents who have given their time in such an impressive effort of support. This support was also provided by Morrisons, the local Verwood Churches and many other businesses and individuals in helping their neighbours and friends. To me it has been a unintended bonus of the Pandemic to see how so many people have done their bit and I think this has enhanced the community spirit of Verwood and Three Legged Cross.

Councillor Mrs Morrow was able to open the new Three Legged Cross Teen Play area at Doorstep Green and Councillor Russell managed to get the first try out of the new equipment. The Amenities Committee have also just recommended for Approval by the Full Council, the replacement of three further play parks at Kiln Way, Crane Close and Ebblake Close This continues the intention of the Council to replace all of the playparks for the local children. Once completed we will then be looking at replacing Charlotte's Place in Three Legged Cross.

Attendance at events has understandably been restricted over the last year. However, with the power of zoom, there are other video conferencing facilities available, many members have been able to attend other events, meetings and training. In some

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respects some of the training has now become more accessible as the potentially significant travelling has been removed.

The one important event that we were able to put on was the Remembrance Sunday Service on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and I also attended with the Town Clerk and socially distanced veterans on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020. My thanks go to Steve Saville at Forest FM for his assistance in putting together a full recording of the service which was played over the radio and online, as well as another local resident who made a video recording over which we laid the audio. This was then placed on facebook so that as many people could experience the service and pay their respects.

One of the main achievements of this difficult year was the completion of the transfer of the lease for the Youth and Community Centre. A considerable amount of hard work has gone into this through the Working Party lead by Toni Coombs. Many hours of cleaning, sorting, repairing, policy consideration and other areas have been carried out. A new Youth Worker in Charge has been appointed who will be starting shortly. Once the restrictions have been lifted it will be all go on reopening and engaging with the local youth.

In the last year we have also completed on the transfer of the toilets at Ferret Green and the land adjacent to the Scout and Guide Huts from Dorset Council. This will ensure the ongoing availability of these assets to the residents. As a Council we have also worked diligently on responding to consultations placed before us, such as the Dorset Local Plan. The website has also been revamped during the year to make it more accessible and our thanks go to those involved in this improvement. Finally, we have also set up a working party to look at crossings in the area as well as one for the upcoming Queens Jubilee which will be meeting for the first time this Thursday.

I would like to finish by again thanking everyone for their hard work during this year and the continued support everyone is providing to each other.

**Cllr. Matthew Parker, Mayor of Verwood**

### 3. **Chairmen's Reports**

The respective Chairmen of the Town Council's Committees had submitted their reports, which gave a brief resume of their activities during the year as follows:-

#### **Amenities Committee Report 2020/2021**

The year has been unsurprisingly quiet for the Amenities Committee due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

In early 2020 the Council took over ownership of the play areas at Kiln Way, Ebblake Close and Crane Close. The Amenities Committee are currently looking at refurbishing these play areas with all new equipment and surfacing.

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An additional seat will be added to the new burial area at the Cemetery and Memorial plaques will be available to be placed on the seat.

It was decided that the Cemetery charges would remain the same for the coming year 2021/2022.

The Town Sign has been refurbished as the wording and crest had started to come away. There has been little to report from the Allotments, however they were given permission at the beginning of last year to construct a Wildlife Pond, work on this has not yet started.

**Cllr. Miss Kate Stephens – Chairman Amenities Committee**

### **Finance and General Purposes Committee Report**

The Finance & General Purposes Committee consists of 12 members and normally meets 11 times a year. It is responsible for the finances, administration, and organization of the council and deals with correspondence from other bodies including Dorset Council. We monitor the activity and the performance of the council as well as highway matters.

This last year has been extremely challenging with the restrictions in place due to Covid preventing the committee meeting in its normal face to face manner at the Town Council offices. We were forced to wait for relevant legislation to be passed to allow for virtual meetings to take place over Zoom and then adapt our meetings and practices to enable our meetings to proceed in the normal professional manner that they are conducted.

Despite these challenges we have continued to deliver a busy program of support and change during the year for the local community which has included:

- A working group, reporting into the F&GP committee has done a fantastic job in progressing the project to take over the Youth & Community Centre adjacent to Emmanuel School and the lease has now been transferred to Verwood Town Council and general refurbishment and upgrade to facilities has now been completed. The first working groups with vulnerable youths have already taken place and a newly appointed youth worker will be taking over the running of this fantastic facility very soon. This is a hugely exciting project designed to give improved facilities for local youths and the general community.
- We set up a fund to support the fantastic work of the Verwood Community Support group who have done an incredible job over the last year in supporting vulnerable residents in the community who have been forced to shield from Coronavirus.
- We have responded to numerous consultations including standards in public life and looked at new policies in regard to media.
- We have allocated Grant Aid to numerous organizations this year, which is particularly relevant, as some have seriously struggled with their finances due to the pandemic.
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The committee continue to monitor the finances of the council to ensure good governance and control of our spending to ensure that we spend our money on projects that support the needs of our residents and set an appropriate budget for future spending. The finances of Verwood & Three Legged Cross remain in a healthy position for the future.

I would like to thank all of the members of the committee and its working groups for their hard work over the last 12 months in what has been a truly challenging year, as well as thank our tremendous team of Val, Jan and Michaela who not only support our work but also support every resident in the Parish through the Town Council support channels.

**Cllr. Mark Thorpe – Chairman Finance & General Purposes Committee**

**Plans Consultative Committee Report**

Despite all of the impediments that have made it difficult to function this last year, and the conversion to virtual meetings, rather than personal ones, this committee has still managed to hear 116 Applications, and in line with its ethos to allow as many applications through as possible, we have only objected to 12.

We have had a number of members of the public sit in on our online meetings and have done our best to keep business moving along without unnecessary fuss or complication wherever we can.

In general terms, we meet every three weeks which enables us to comply with the statutory time limits planning applications require.

As I do every year, I would like to make it clear to anyone reading this report, that we are a purely consultative committee, and whilst we can object to an application, we cannot approve it, or reject it. That is left in the hands of the local planning authority for the region, and whilst we can be as influential as possible, we have no statutory powers as such to intervene in a meaningful manner.

If you want to be more familiar with how we consider applications that come before us, I suggest you read national planning policy HE2, which contains all of the items that we must consider for each application and lays the foundation for us to object if we do not feel that the policy is being adhered to.

Please also understand that as a result, if we do not object to an application, it does not automatically mean that we approve it. All it does mean is that we have not found reasons under policy HE2 to be able to object to it.

Those of you who wish to object to an application, must do so to the planning authority, although you may copy your objection to us, so that we can see your concerns.

As always, I would like to express the appreciation of this committee for the hard work and effort put in by our Town Clerk, Val Bright, and her assistants, Jan and Michaela.

**Councillor Martyn R Hudson - Chairman**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.16 p.m.

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Mayor