

Alton Town Council



A Strategy for the Council

2010 - 2015

2nd Edition

September 2011

INTRODUCTION

Alton is an historic market town. Alton Town Council aims to protect this heritage and the environment, whilst providing the services, amenities and facilities appropriate to a twenty-first century community.

Alton Town Council was created on 1 April 1974 as a result of local government re-organisation and has the status and powers of a Parish Council.

The council consists of 13 unpaid councillors, elected for a four year term. They represent an electorate of 13,395 (December 2010), which includes the village of Holybourne as well as the town itself. The population of the parish is estimated at over 17,500. A similar number of people who live in the surrounding villages rely on Alton for many of their local services.

Alton Town Council owns most of the parks and open spaces in the town, which currently amounts to around 69 Hectares of land. Much of it is devoted to sport or informal recreation, although some of the council's land is leased to local organisations who maintain their own premises. The council also operates Alton Assembly Rooms, which provides a venue for a wide range of events. In addition the council is involved in providing allotments, play areas, Christmas lights, floral displays, public seats, bus shelters and events such as the Yuletide Festival and the Last Night of the Proms.

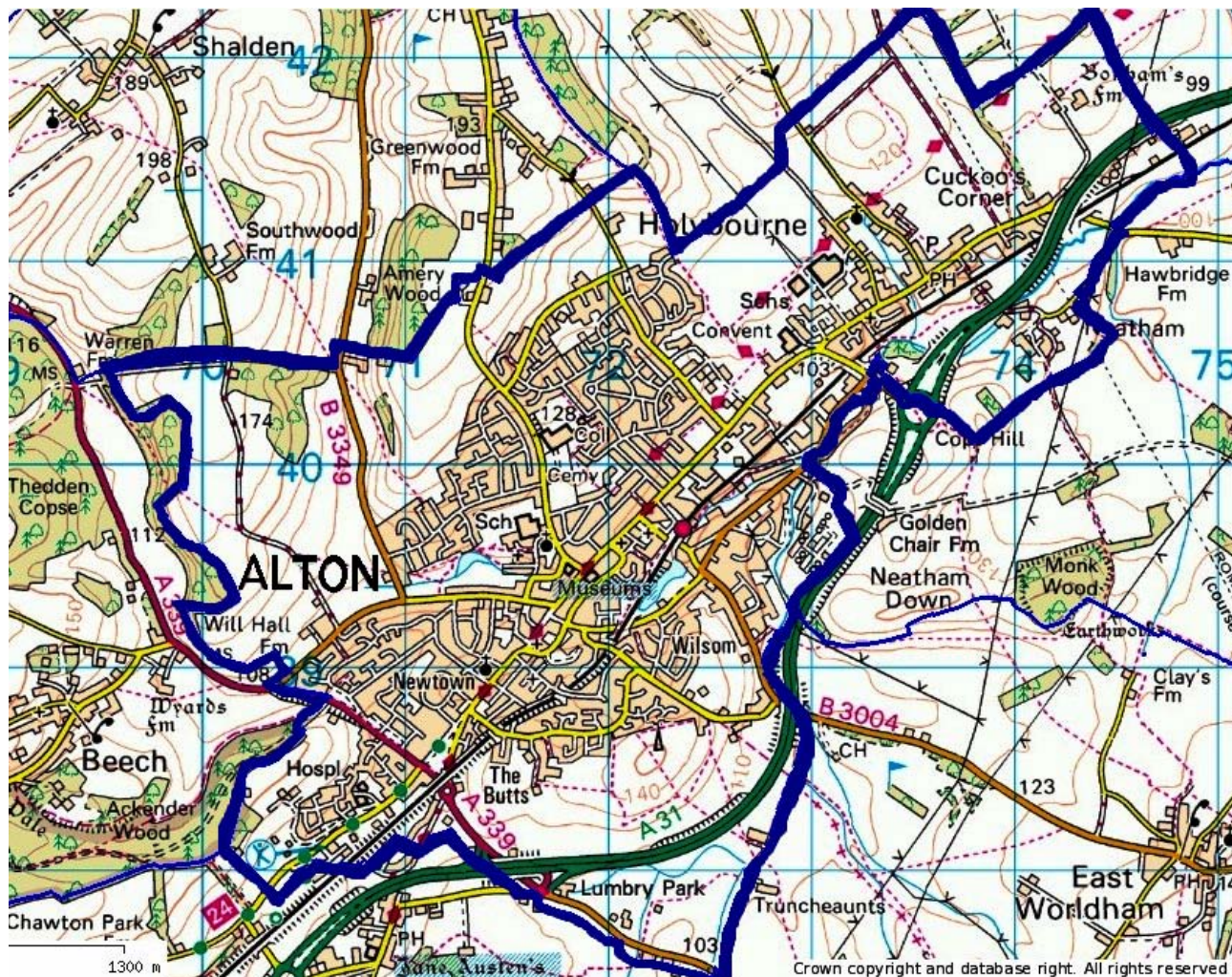
The Full Council meets six times a year, but much of its business is conducted by committees; Policy & Resources, Recreation and Planning & Transportation. These operate under delegated powers from the council, which retains ultimate authority. The council currently employs 14 staff to manage and deliver its services. It spends over £700,000 a year on service provision, with around two thirds of this coming from the council taxpayer and the remainder being met by income from rents and services.

This strategy document sets out the council's core activities and values. It contains an action plan to ensure that the council achieves its objectives. It is intended to guide council action and decision making, particularly where difficult choices are involved. **It is a strategy for the council, not a strategy for Alton.** The document will be regularly revised and updated to remain fresh and relevant.

Councillor Graham Hill
Leader of the Council

Councillor Robert Saunders
Town Mayor

MAP OF THE ALTON TOWN COUNCIL AREA



Alton Town Council is responsible for Alton and Holybourne. Surrounding villages have their own parish councils. The town is served by good road and rail links to London, the south of the country, major ports and airports. It is the largest town in the East Hampshire District and sits on the border of the new South Downs National Park.

TWINNING

Alton has been twinned with the commune of Montecchio Maggiore in the province of Veneto in northern Italy since 1998. In 2006 Alton also signed a twinning agreement with the town of Pertuis in the Luberon region of Provence in the south of France. Twinning is conducted by a separate organisation, which occasionally receives small grants, although the council does welcome official visitors.

The council also has a concordat with Holybourne Village Association and has exchanged messages of friendship with Alton, New Hampshire, in the United States on a number of occasions.

MISSION STATEMENT

Alton Town Council works to constantly improve quality of life for the people of Alton

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

Alton Town Council has identified its principal activities as:-

- Providing outdoor recreational facilities;
- Influencing policies and plans that affect Alton;
- Improving the appearance and built facilities of the town;
- Contributing to public safety and crime reduction;
- Supporting community activity.

In undertaking these activities, the council aims to deliver:

- High quality services;
- Value for money;
- A safe environment for all;
- Open, accountable government.

It achieves this by:

- Involving and consulting the local community;
- Effective management of assets and finances;
- Working in partnership with other organizations;
- Recruiting, retaining and valuing well-motivated employees;
- Appropriate training for councillors and staff;
- Regular reviews of the council's structure and procedures.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THESE TERMS?

High quality services

The council and its staff take pride in delivering the best quality services they can with the resources available. In particular, the council works to ensure that Altonians are not only satisfied with the services they receive and the way their enquiries are managed but can also be proud of their town, its facilities, environment and community spirit.

Value for money

The council seeks to ensure that money is not spent unnecessarily and that the benefits achieved are worth the cost. The council acts as the guardian of public money and remains at all times aware that tax payers' money is provided by the people of Alton and Holybourne. The council ensures that those seeking grants or enhanced services are clearly aware of this.

A safe environment for all

People of all ages and backgrounds should be able to feel safe at home, at work, at leisure and when travelling. In particular, the risk of death or serious injury should be eliminated as far as possible. This applies to councillors and the council's workforce as well as the public.

Open, accountable government

All meetings of the council and its committees are open to the public and normally have a section for the public to ask questions or make comments. The press and public will only be excluded where discussing a matter in public would genuinely prejudice the public interest, or disclose personal or commercially sensitive information.

Involving and consulting the local community

The council welcomes the views of local residents, businesses and organisations. It recognises the important role these can play in identifying local priorities and aspirations, as well as in shaping local services. Residents and visitors should be kept informed of decisions, events and services that affect them, as well as having the opportunity to influence them.

The council also created Alton & District Youth Council, to give young people an opportunity to have a say in the town's affairs. Representatives of the youth council regularly attend and contribute to meetings of the council's recreation committee.

The *Altonian* newsletter, the council's website and the local media are all used to inform the community and seek their views on local issues. The council also

organises public consultations and occasionally public meetings on specific issues. Recent examples include consultations on a proposed new allotment site, replacement of a play area and a master-plan for Alton Public Gardens.

Over the next five years the council will make greater use of existing and new media to create opportunities for local residents to express their views.

Effective management of assets and finances

The council has standing orders and financial regulations to govern its operations, which are reviewed regularly. It appoints appropriately trained and qualified staff to operate its financial systems and reviews annually the effectiveness of its systems and financial controls.

The council owns substantial land and buildings and aims to preserve and enhance the value of these assets. Each autumn, the council involves councillors and staff in identifying work that needs to be undertaken and potential improvement projects for consideration, before it sets its budget for the coming year.

Approximately one third of the council's income comes from sources other than the council tax. Most of this comes from the use of its assets, either as rent or hire charges. The council aims to maximise its income from non-council tax sources by setting competitive rents and charges.

Working in partnership with other organisations

The council works with many other organisations to achieve its aims, including Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council, the health, police and fire authorities, which all cover wider areas but undertake activities affecting the town.

Recruiting, retaining and valuing well-motivated employees

The council recognises that it achieves its objectives largely through the work of its employees. The council seeks to retain the skills and knowledge employees develop, ensuring that it has a confident, competent and committed workforce.

In particular it aims to achieve fair recruitment procedures, appropriate salaries, terms of employment and working conditions, supported by suitable training. The council recognises the benefits of diversity in its workforce and is committed to promoting equality.

Appropriate training for councillors and staff

The council is committed to providing ongoing training and development for councillors and employees, to enable them to contribute effectively to the council's objectives. Training is required to keep abreast of legislation and contributes to higher standards of service. The council values opportunities to meet other councillors and officers and discuss matters of mutual concern.

The council will set a realistic training budget each year and ensure that time is made available for training. It drew up a Statement of Intent on training during 2010 and is developing a training policy as a result of this.

Regular reviews of the council's structure and procedures

The organisation and committee structure will be reviewed at least every four years, along with council policies and procedures. This started in 2010, in preparation for the delivery of this strategy.

The council's Strategy Working Party has a remit that includes identifying barriers to achieving success, the resources required and changes needed to deliver this strategy. It takes a wide view of the council's activities, ensuring that all interests are represented.

PROVIDING OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Parks and green spaces are integral to the life of the town, they provide breathing space and are crucial to the successful functioning of urban communities. People pass by green spaces, walk through them on the way to shops, or stop to enjoy them. Parks offer places to relax and enjoy the natural environment away from the stresses of everyday life, to take children to play and for sport or recreation. In addition they play host to a range of events and festivals on both a large and small scale.

Key Principle:

- To ensure accessible recreational space exists to meet the physical and social needs of the whole population, now and in the future.

Why do we do this?

- To provide opportunities for safe, healthy activity and relaxation;
- To promote the town and build community spirit through the encouragement of team and club sports;
- To ensure easy access to the natural environment;
- To make best use of all open space and preserve bio-diversity.

Five-year Action Plan:

1) Develop an overall plan for the service

The council is developing a Parks and Greenspaces Strategy to raise the quality of these facilities and to help focus the council's allocation of resources to achieve its priorities. In particular this should ensure that Alton has the right amount, of the right facilities, in the right place, for people to achieve their aims. This overall plan will be approved during 2011.

2) Provide site-specific management plans for all sites

The council wishes to provide a range of open spaces to cater for all tastes/needs. Different uses require different management approaches and so each site should have its own individual management plan. This

will guide the future management of each site and set benchmarks against which performance can be measured.

Preparation of these plans should involve those who use or live near the park, as well as those involved in its management and those who make strategic decisions that may affect the site.

Individual sites will be addressed by a rolling programme of plans, which will be completed by *31 March 2014*.

3) Identify potential needs and uses for recreational facilities

The council will seek to identify demand for more of a particular activity, or where too much space is dedicated where there is little public demand. Examples of current areas for which there is a high demand include allotments, junior sports pitches and children's play areas.

4) Identifying potential new land for recreation

New facilities cannot always be accommodated on existing council sites. As the town grows, there may also be demand for open spaces closer to new housing developments. The council will identify potential sites for new parks and open spaces to meet future demand.

5) Develop educational access for relevant sites

Where appropriate, the council will provide and promote the use of relevant sites for educational purposes.

6) Develop community participation in the improvement and management of open spaces

The council will involve and consult the local community in managing its open spaces. This will involve those who visit, live near or do business near council sites, as well as transport providers and local people with specialist knowledge.

The council also aims to increase the involvement of volunteers in the maintenance of its sites, encouraging local pride and a feeling of ownership.

7) Insist that other owners of open space improve maintenance and access

The council is determined to set an example for other providers of open space to follow, to draw to their attention any lapses in maintenance and press for corrective action.

INFLUENCING POLICIES AND PLANS THAT AFFECT ALTON

The council strongly believes that local people should be involved in decisions affecting them, their neighbourhood and the future of their town. Despite its limited statutory powers, the council has a significant role on behalf of those who live or work in Alton, ensuring that those involved in planning the town's future take account of local views and aspirations.

Key Principle:

- To ensure that the plans and strategies of all organisations whose operations affect Alton fit within the vision for Alton as already expressed in ***Alton 2020***.

Why do we do this?

- To provide an effective conduit for the views of local people and a coherent expression of their vision for Alton;
- To disseminate the vision for Alton as widely and as often as possible.

Five year Action Plan:

1) Identifying the relevant decision makers at the higher authorities and outside agencies which affect the town and develop opportunities for regular liaison and communication

In 2010 the council set out in writing the relevant decision makers at the higher authorities and outside agencies, which affect the town. This list will be reviewed annually.

The council will continue to develop opportunities for regular liaison and communication with these individuals.

2) Review the list of appointments to outside bodies; establish good cause for each appointment and the council's requirement of each appointee

The council is invited to appoint representatives to certain other bodies. These were reviewed during 2010 and will be reviewed again in 2012 to establish good cause for each appointment and set out the council's requirement of each appointee.

3) Work with partners to review and update the vision expressed in *Alton 2020*

In 2002 the council initiated a Market Town Health Check, a community project that led to the publication of *Alton 2020*. That document sets out a vision of Alton's future and the action needed to achieve it. The council will work with partner organisations to review and update the vision expressed in *Alton 2020*, within the next five years.

4) Exploiting existing and new media as conduits for local views

The *Altonian* newsletter is delivered to every household in the Alton Town Council area four times a year. It is also available on the council's website. Each copy is produced and delivered for less than the price of a second class stamp.

Over the next five years the council will make greater use of existing and new media to create opportunities for local residents to express their views.

5) Scrutinise planning applications and make recommendations where appropriate

The council will scrutinise and comment on planning applications within the required timescale.

6) Promote environmentally friendly building policies

When responding to consultations on planning applications the council will promote greener, environmentally sustainable, energy-efficient building policies wherever possible.

7) Encourage adoption of the Local List

The council will encourage EHDC to adopt the local list of buildings and features worthy of protection, produced by the Alton Society.

8) Encourage development in accordance with the Town Design Statement

In responding to consultation on planning applications the council will refer to the Town Design Statement where appropriate and seek development in accordance with its contents.

IMPROVING THE APPEARANCE AND BUILT FACILITIES OF THE TOWN

Our everyday environment contributes greatly to our general demeanour, so the appearance of our town helps set our mood as we go about our working day. Clean streets and pavements, along with attractive, well maintained buildings, whether old or new, are much preferred to cluttered roads and rubbish-filled derelict sites.

Key Principle:

- Making Alton an ever more enjoyable place in which to live, work and visit.

Why do we do this?

- To protect and improve our environment;
- To encourage use of the town centre and built facilities to ensure ongoing viability.

Five Year Action Plan:

1) Provide a site-specific maintenance programme for all buildings owned by the council and a business plan where appropriate

Over the next five years the council will produce a site-specific maintenance programme for each building that it owns, which will then be updated annually. The council will consider ways of improving the energy efficiency of its buildings as part of this programme.

A business plan will be developed for Alton Assembly Rooms before the end of 2011, for the Finnimore Pavilion by April 2012 and for other facilities from 2012 onwards.

2) Produce a maintenance, improvement and replacement programme for street and open space furniture

Within five years the council will develop a maintenance, improvement and replacement programme for all street and open space furniture owned by Alton Town Council.

3) Motivate retailers and agencies in the town centre to take more responsibility for the appearance of the street scene and ensure that the town council is setting a good example

The council will continue to develop schemes to motivate businesses to take more responsibility for the appearance of the town centre. It will also ensure that the town council and principal authorities set a good example.

4) Promote the use of developers' contributions to improve the town

The council will take the lead in producing imaginative proposals for the use of developers' funds to improve the town.

5) Review and update the council's bye-laws and ensure they are widely known, understood and enforced

Over the next three years the council will review and update its byelaws. The council will also ensure they are widely known and understood by publishing them on its premises and on the website. The council will ensure that its staff and security patrols are aware of and enforce its byelaws in an appropriate manner.

6) Promote greater community use of other built facilities wherever possible

The council will seek to achieve greater community access to built facilities not in its ownership. It has identified facilities that have potential for greater public use and has initiated dialogue to achieve this.

CONTRIBUTING TO PUBLIC SAFETY AND PEACE OF MIND

Everyone wants to feel safe in their home town, to know that children have a safe place to play and that they can sleep safely at night. High profile media cases often influence public fear of crime more than personal experience. The council believes it should take a leading role in giving residents the confidence to continue their daily lives without concern for their safety.

Key Principle:

- To maintain Alton's reputation as a safe place to live, work and visit.

Why do we do this?

- To contribute to the reduction of the level of crime and disorder;
- To help reduce the fear of crime;
- To prioritise public safety on council-owned property.

Five Year Action Plan:

1) Introduce CCTV in the town centre, monitor its effectiveness and extend the system as appropriate

The council achieved its target of installing CCTV in the town centre by 2009. Its effectiveness will be monitored over the next three years and the council will report on it annually.

2) Provide summer security patrols to discourage crime and vandalism on council sites and review effectiveness regularly

Since 2004 the council has provided summer security patrols on its sites, to discourage crime and vandalism. The council will continue to provide these and will review their effectiveness annually.

3) Scrutinise licensing applications and make recommendations where appropriate

The council will scrutinise licensing applications within the required timescale and make recommendations to the licensing authority where appropriate.

4) Continue a rolling programme of surveys of tree safety and other potential hazards on council properties

The council will continue the programme of tree safety surveys started in 2007 and review other potential hazards on its property.

5) Build effective partnerships with other agencies and ensure more positive communication of relevant facts and figures

The council will build more effective partnerships with agencies involved in public safety. It will ensure more positive communication of relevant facts and figures to reassure local residents and businesses.

6) Encourage public participation in crime reduction schemes

The council will promote crime reduction schemes it is aware of, to encourage public participation in them.

7) Encourage more recreational outlets in the town centre

The council will support planning applications for suitable recreational outlets in the town centre, to increase the variety and quality of evening recreation.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

We are social beings who thrive as part of a community, but a town does not automatically become a community. In this busy, fast-paced, highly mobile twenty-first century world, it is all too easy for people to become disengaged from their immediate surroundings, leading to social isolation and separation from traditional networks of support and neighbourliness. As the parish of Alton and Holybourne has grown, it has become ever more important that we work to ensure that this is a community and not just a place to live.

Key Principle:

- To promote and maintain a sustainable community.

Why do we do this?

- To encourage new residents to become involved in the town;
- To promote a vibrant community spirit;
- To reduce social isolation.

Five Year Action Plan:

1) Encourage the compilation and maintenance of a register of all local organisations, clubs and societies

The council will encourage the compilation, by an appropriate organisation, of a publicly available register of contact details for local organisations. Inclusion in the register would be voluntary and aimed at promoting effective communication with those groups, as well as helping the public to make contact with them. The register should be completed during 2011 and kept up to date thereafter.

2) Working with our partners, develop a regular and wide-ranging public events programme

Working with a variety of partners, the council will develop a regular programme of events from 2010 onwards, particularly during the summer, catering for a wide range of tastes and age groups. Events will be focussed on drawing larger numbers of people into the town and encouraging local shopping.

3) Promote local organisations through links from the town council website

Local, non-profitmaking organisations will be able to have a free link to their website from www.alton.gov.uk upon request. The council will promote the availability of this facility to local groups.

4) Encourage local organisations to nominate people to attend the Town Mayor's reception

Local organisations will be invited to nominate people to attend the Town Mayor's annual reception, in recognition of their service to the community.

5) Promote the council's grants budget as initial funding for new activities and include details of EHDC grant funding in our policy

The council will continue to promote its grants budget as a source of initial funding for new activities. The council reviewed its grants policy in 2010, including details of East Hampshire District Council grants and their grant-finding service within it.

6) Review and improve the *Altonian* and encourage more articles from third parties

Within the next two years, the council will review and improve the *Altonian* newsletter, encouraging more articles from third parties.

7) Widen distribution of council's printed publications

The council will examine ways of increasing the distribution of its publications (such as the Town Guide and other leaflets) from 2011 onwards, to create greater awareness of community activity.

**Alton Town Council
Town Hall
Market Square
Alton
Hampshire
GU34 1HD**