

Annual Town Report, April 2017



The Right Worshipful Michael Lyons, town mayor of Hythe with Terry Reene, town sergeant

Foundations for the future

A theme of the last year has been change: a step-change in the way council officer operate; successes with our commercial operations which supplement the precept and help to pay for the services we provide; and successes with grant applications.

Digital delivery

Investing in new accounts software and staff training means we have improved our financial management and reporting. While remembering that some residents still prefer cash, we are also planning for an online booking service for the council's facilities. We have moved our email to a cloud based system so we are not dependant on a local server and so that officers can pick up email remotely. We have installed wifi so that residents, councillors, visitors and officers can view documents with less need for wasteful print. The council's website has been upgraded and relaunched

with a structured content management system and new content. As well as our regular quarterly print communication 'Hythe Watch', we have created and delivered news emails for interest groups depending on their preferences. There's a long way to go in our digital journey, but I am pleased with the significant progress we have made over the last year.

Modernising our premises

We made the radical decision to invest in the building at Oaklands where residents can meet council officers, attend committee meetings, and where our history room is located. The work will include improved disabled access, offering residents a choice of easier access for visits, or to contact us online if they prefer.

Campaigns

Dementia is a huge issue for our time. As people live longer, it has become even more important that Hythe is a dementia friendly town. A small team of councillors took the lead in forming a dementia awareness forum and I offer my congratulations and huge thanks to them for their work to date.

Security is important to everyone. I was pleased to meet our new PCSO this year. I also supported the council in its decision to fund a community warden for the town. We have extended the CCTV contract for a year while we research digital solutions.

Highways are managed by Kent County Council, but as with other councils, it is short of resource. I was encouraged that councillors at town, district and county level worked together across political groupings to propose solutions to the worst traffic problems in Hythe. I await the outcome with interest.

Quality is important for every corporation, whether private or public. I am pleased to say that Hythe Town Council has started its journey to obtain the Local Council Award Scheme. No doubt we will find ways to improve the way we do things. If that means better value for Hythe residents, then I am in favour.

Personal highlights

May 2016 I was delighted to be re-elected town mayor of Hythe. It is a great honour, and although I hoped that the council would re-elect me, it would have been presumptive of me to expect it. Later in the month, I passed the



speakership of the Cinque Ports on to the town mayor of Dover. The speakership rests with the town mayor of Hythe every seven years and I will always look back on my time as speaker with great fondness and pride.

July 2016 I was pleased to entertain guests on Civic Sunday - a celebration of public service. It's a chance to greet old friends and meet new ones in a relaxed atmosphere. As the civic allowance does not go very far, I funded the event out of my own pocket, but it was more than worth it to see everyone enjoying themselves.



Picture credit: John Gabris



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Later in the month, I had the great pleasure of participating in the Hythe Festival. Congratulations to the organising committee for a splendid job - including wonderful weather. My personal favourite was the teddy bears' picnic. Great fun!

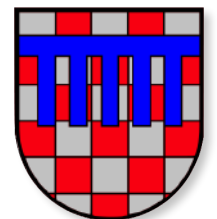
August 2016

On another beautiful day, I was delighted to be invited to the opening of the new Dungeness station of the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. Also invited was rock legend Roger Daltrey of The Who, a personal hero of mine.



September 2016

One of the joys of being town mayor is the opportunity to meet new people. I visited Bad Honeff, the German twin town of Berck sur Mer in September and forged some lasting links for the town.



October 2016 brought not just Speaker's Day, when the town mayor of Dover entertained other Cinque Ports' dignitaries - it also brought torrential rain. I give great credit to the hundreds of Dovorians who turned out to watch our bedraggled parade of mayors, mayoresses, sergeants and town clerks paddle through ankle deep flood water.

November

2016 brought two sombre occasions and a violent storm. I was invited by our long standing friends at our twin town in Berck, France to their remembrance commemoration on Friday 11th. Organised by the amazing team at Hythe Twinning Association, I found the day very emotional and moving. On Sunday, we held our own service in Hythe, and we were joined by the mayors of Berck and our other twin town, Poperinge, Belgium.





Also in November, Hythe was subjected to a massive storm that ripped through the town.

Amongst other

damage, it tore the roof off Hythe swimming pool, and destroyed some of the beautiful trees along the canal and in Oaklands Park. We always put safety first, and the dangerous trees were cut back by lunchtime the next day. The destructive power of the storm and the two remembrance services reminded me of just how fragile and mortal we all are.

In **December 2016** we submitted a defence against an application for 'town or village green' status on Hythe Green. While no doubt the people who made the application did so with good intent, our legal advice is that if the application succeeds, we will have to stop activities such as car boot sales, fun fairs, circuses, running races and dog shows. Defending Hythe Green has caused uncertainty and costs council tax payers money in legal fees. I sincerely hope that we will see a positive result this year.

Later in December, I was taken ill with respiratory and mobility problems. I stayed in touch with councillors and officers by phone, email and briefing meetings, and thankfully I am now back in business.

Commercial income

Our super **sports pavilion** continues to thrive, reaching capacity on most days. The sporting facilities at South Road recreation ground are also approaching full capacity. Not only do they provide the council with income to pay for maintenance, but they also provide skaters, footballers, tennis players, bowlers and cricketers with the social and physical benefits of sporting activity, and combat obesity.

Weddings in the town hall have proved extremely popular - and so they should, since our High Street boasts a stunningly attractive town hall, some of the best restaurants in Kent and the beautiful coastline of Hythe Bay. The income from weddings is ploughed back into building maintenance.



Picture credit: Fleur Challis

Grants success

Together with the town clerk, I helped to put together a team to apply for a Grant from the **Coastal Communities Fund**. The £10,000 seed funding bid was successful, and the team used it to create and submit an economic plan to the Department for Communities and Local Government. The plan has five elements:



Connectivity - To create a more connected Hythe, improving transport and high speed broadband connectivity to sustain a growing population.

Identity - To develop a cohesive Hythe brand identity to increase its recognition and diversify employment base.

Tourism - To improve visitor numbers and improve the experience, by positioning distinct packaged offer.

Community - To create a sense of place for the community to improve quality of life and reflect the needs of the social mix for young and old.

Partnering - To partner and engage with like-minded local communities to respond to collective needs.

People news

Former town councillor **Alec Mayne** sadly passed away in December 2016. I will particularly miss his razor sharp analytical skills and his friendship.

It was fitting that in February 2017 **John Schonert**, another former town councillor, received an MBE for services to Hythe. John is chairman of our famous Hythe Venetian Fete, and does a super job in bringing this entertainment to residents and visitors.



We appointed a new museum curator at last, with **Kevin Bailey** taking up his post in January 2017. Kevin has some innovative ideas about making history more relevant to younger people, something I am sure we all welcome.

Long standing accounts clerk **Adrian Wilson** retired at the end of March 2017. Renowned for his dry sense of humour, he will be missed.

Summer concert season

We had another excellent set of reviews from residents and bands from last year's season of free concerts at Oaklands bandstand. In 2016 we publicised the events through our new website, email, local radio and press and posters through the town and I was delighted that so many people came to watch and listen.

Small Arms Corp

Hythe has a long and treasured connection with this unit. Although they are no longer based in Hythe, I was very pleased that we renewed our links with them over the last year, and they could review some of the artefacts in our history room. The Small Arms Corps will be returning to march in Hythe in 2018 and I am sure the town mayor at that time will make them very welcome.

Allotments

A great deal of work has gone into our four allotments sites, including the installation of a tank at Longbridge which harvests rain water for free distribution to allotment holders. However, I freely admit that neither I nor the council officers know as much about allotments as the allotment holders themselves, and I have been encouraging them to move to self management. I suspect this might take some years to accomplish.

Devolution

I watched the events concerning the failed attempt to create an East Kent super district unfold with interest. As a Shepway District councillor as well as Hythe town mayor, I don't see how the current three levels of local government can continue unchanged. Kent County has about 1.5 m residents - more than many small countries. It is not really local and does not seem to have the resources to achieve all it wants. Shepway District is both too small to be strategic, and too remote to completely understand Hythe's issues - and there are simply not enough councillors to do all the committee work. Hythe Town Council is community based, but does not currently have the people or financial resource to pick up the work from the other councils.

Something is likely to break and I want to ensure it is not your town council. I have encouraged council officers to prepare to run more local things here, and we have started by organising the floral displays at East Street roundabout where the management was previously with Shepway District Council.

