

# Corsham Town Council

## STRATEGY

2008 – 2011

### 1. Introduction

Corsham Town Council represents the first tier of local government. It is a statutory body of 20 elected members and is subject to a wide range of legislation aimed at ensuring accountability and effectiveness. Most legislation consists of Powers (things it can do) but there are also a number of Duties (things it must do). Day to day management is carried out under the direction of the Town Clerk who is also the Financial Officer. There are eight full-time and one part-time staff employed by the Council in management, administrative and manual roles. The main source of income is the Precept but income is also generated from hire of facilities, the cemetery and flats.

### 2. Purpose of the Organisation

The Council exists to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the Corsham Area.

### 3. Our Vision

Corsham Town Council's vision is that 'Corsham will be the most desirable place in North Wiltshire to live, work and visit, with a safe, active, healthy and sustainable community based around a vibrant and useful town centre.'

### 4. Aims

The Town Council aims to improve quality of life in Corsham through encouraging an active, healthy and safe community, vibrant town centre and attractive environment managed in a sustainable way.

### 5. How the Council might operate in the future and likely priorities

The Council intends to build on the status as a Town Council following this recognition when it changed from being a Parish Council in 1999. Members have a mandate, through being elected to a statutory government organisation, to represent local people. Members are keen to demonstrate their interest in the Town and are willing to become more proactive and have greater input into wider issues such as transport and health. The Council is committed to managing its assets well and providing and facilitating good services locally.

Corsham Town Council achieved Quality Status in 2005 as a means of demonstrating its effectiveness as an organisation.

There is no desire to take on the role of decision makers in all matters as this may not be appropriate in certain areas such as Development Control. The Council has a role as service provider as well as facilitator and aims to build on its relationships with business and the Local Authorities. It seeks to influence the way services are run by North Wiltshire District Council, Wiltshire County Council and the successor unitary authority. Key issues impacting on the town over the next few years are car parking and transportation, the effects of a rapidly increasing population, and the transition to a unitary authority for Wiltshire, which will include the devolution of some services. Corsham Town Council is keen to ensure that these changes happen smoothly and help lead to a sustainable community. There is a willingness to support initiatives that serve to meet the Council's overall aim of improving the quality of life in Corsham.

Good communication between the Council and its customers is important and several methods of communication are used. These include a quarterly newsletter delivered to all residents, press releases, events such as the summer fete, web site, annual town meeting, annual report, and public participation time at all Council meetings.

The issues that are likely to impact on the Town Council have been identified as follows:

#### *Political*

- Unitary Council for Wiltshire
- Local Authorities moving away from direct service provision
- Town Council taking on devolved services
- Town Council taking on more responsibility locally in order to raise standards e.g. street cleaning
- Regional Government influence e.g. Planning
- Corsham is on the edge on the South West Regional Development Agency (SWERDA) area, being viewed as having no social problems

#### *Economic*

- Low unemployment, making it difficult to attract external funding
- Skilled employees could move away if larger employers moved out
- Need to identify suitable employment land
- Redevelopment of Basil Hill and future use of Rudloe Manor, Copenacre, Spring Quarry and The Cotswold Centre
- Seek to develop strong relationships with MoD and local trade/industry
- Transport links to and from Corsham for commuters
- Need to help ensure there is a good range of retailers
- Improve the quality of the town centre
- Parking issues and the impact of parking charges
- Encourage Corsham Estate to promote tourism

#### *Social*

- Further opportunities for young people
- Vandalism and anti-social behaviour
- Future of Springfield Leisure Centre
- Requirements of an ageing population
- Lack of NHS dental care
- Doctors waiting lists too long
- Effects of an increasing population
- Sustainability of Community Centres and their purpose/use
- Education – explore the size, relationships and specialist status of the schools
- Limited venues for community activities
- Good number of cultural events
- Importance of village halls to their communities

#### *Technological*

- Expanding and promoting the web site
- Need for equipment to enable better presentations and reports i.e. laptop & projector
- Consider future ICT support under a unitary authority

#### *Legislative*

- The Unitary Authority for Wiltshire will result in many changes and likely devolution of services
- The Town Council could have more powers such as the ‘Power of Well-Being’, which will enable it to carry out more functions

#### *International*

- Future of Twinning and clarification of the benefit to the town and how much support it should be given
- Success of the French morning
- Overseas tourists
- Increase in immigration and the effects of this
- Bed & Breakfast accommodation and how it is promoted, especially registered premises

### *Environmental*

- Use of the underground areas when Basil Hill redeveloped
- Desire to preserve and promote the built and natural environment
- More pressure to develop green areas
- Some areas such as Gastard are not growing due to development restrictions. These settlements are becoming almost exclusively for commuters and retired people
- Acute shortage of property for first time buyers
- Need to keep abreast of the Local Plan and have input where possible
- High cost of housing generally
- Need to get the proportion of affordable and social housing right

### *Demographic*

- Ageing population, as young people are unable to afford to live in the Town
- The Council needs to have a better understanding of the issue

## **6. Analysis of the Council at present**

A SWOT analysis has identified the Council's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as follows:

### *Strengths*

- Corsham in Bloom, Christmas Lights and Summer Fete
- Good reputation – lack of 'sleaze'
- Good housekeeping, especially financial
- Non-political
- Pragmatic approach with no 'in-fighting'
- Effective teamwork and democracy
- Sound property/assets
- Good staff
- Good relationships with outside organisations locally and further afield
- Active Members
- Strong leadership

### *Weaknesses*

- Remote location in town with poor parking facilities
- Some successes not promoted widely
- Lack of office/work space to expand services

### *Opportunities*

- More involvement with retail and commercial businesses
- Provision of services in partnership with other Councils
- Increased income through the precept from Katherine Park and other housing development
- Possible creation of a visitors' centre to highlight Corsham underground
- Research and promote the Town's history

### *Threats*

- Reduction in level of services provided by Local Authorities e.g. ICT and Information Point
- Pressure on services through more housing
- Knock on effects of car parking charges, especially around the town centre
- Could run out of office and depot accommodation
- Loss of staff if they are attracted elsewhere
- Erosion of the rural buffers between Corsham and the surrounding settlements

## **7. Planning what needs to be done**

*Goals* – the Council would like to have a strong influence in how services are provided and decisions are made which affect the lives of the people of Corsham.

*Coping with the changes* – the Council will be responsive to the needs of the community and flexible in the way it tackles issues. It will be actively involved in matters of local interest and importance.

*Structure of the Council* – decisions will be made by the appropriate committee or officer depending on the nature of that decision. All key decisions will be made by the Full Council. The committee structure will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains effective. Working Groups and sub-committees will be used where particular issues are best dealt with by small, specialist groups. The staff structure will be reviewed from time to time to reflect changes in the workload and skills required.

*Systems* – systems and procedures will be kept under review by staff and committees to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Key processes will be documented to ensure consistency, enable a number of staff to perform the same task, and to ensure clear audit trails.

*Style* – the Council prides itself on being run on non-political lines. Members feel that working together for the good of the town is in the best interest of residents. Ward Members are encouraged to express local views especially when considering planning applications. Decision-making is usually as a result of consensus building with committee decisions only being made after giving members the opportunity to speak on the issue. The Council acts as one organisation rather than as several individual members.

The public are encouraged to participate in Council business through direct contact with members of staff, weekly Member surgeries and public question time at Council and committee meetings. Outside organisations are generally welcomed to attend meetings to discuss items of local interest.

Partnership working is encouraged and the council is prepared to take a lead role or facilitate where appropriate. The Council takes a pragmatic approach to problem solving with emphasis on its customers.

*Staff* – the Council has adopted positive HR policies and supports and values its staff. Investment is made in training and development, and recruitment processes are aimed at ensuring the right people are attracted to the organisation. Staff appraisals are carried out annually by the Town Clerk.

*Skills* – the Council is especially effective and efficient at housekeeping and building relationships with outside bodies. Its assets are well cared for. Members and staff have wide ranging skills as individuals and these skills are used to improve Corsham. Skills include: legal; financial; management; marketing; administrative; creative and community.

## **8. Planning how we are going to do it**

The Council now needs to decide what the Critical Success Factors are and set its objectives. These objectives must be SMART (Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time related).

These objectives will form the basis of a new Forward Plan which will continue to fit under the countywide eight key themes of: economy; education & lifelong learning; crime & community safety; environment, land-based & countryside; transport; social care/health; housing & the built environment; culture inc. leisure & recreation.

Policies will be agreed by the Council and its Committees and each Committee will put its own plans and procedures in place in line with the overall aim.

David J Martin  
TOWN CLERK

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