

Annual Town Gathering 26 May 2026

Holy Trinity Church, Church Street, Bradford on Avon



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Councillors present:

- James Atkinson
- Kate Bessant
- Sam Blackwell (Mayor)
- Kevin Elliot
- Alex Kay
- Ben Reed
- George Simmonds
- Chris Spence
- Katie Vigar
- Jack Vittles

Officers present:

- Ian Brown – Chief Executive/Town Clerk
- Sarah Hawkins – Accountant
- Val Baker – Administration
- Matthew McLaughlin – Communications Officer
- Kelvin Purnell – Venues Officer

Meeting clerk

- Sarah Howe – Committee Clerk

Apologies

- Cllr Ghika Savva
- Cllr Andy Gordon

Agenda item 1- Welcome

The Mayor, Councillor Sam Blackwell, presided over the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Annual Gathering. He introduced the outgoing mayor Councillor Jack Vittles who provided an update on the 2025/26 administrative year.

Agenda item 2 – Annual Report 2025/26 and update

Councillor Vittles began by thanking all associated with the town council: councillors, officers, town wardens, volunteers. He went on to say he was very appreciative of everyone's efforts.

He stated that the town council looks after lots of aspects of town life such as parks and play areas, St Margaret's Hall, the youth centre, tourist information, the market and cemetery. However, Wiltshire Council still looks after highways and regular refuse collections.

In conjunction with Wiltshire Council the town council are moving forward with a couple of projects. The Future of Transport consultation revealed residents would still like an additional pedestrian bridge. Wiltshire Council have found some money to move this project forward over the next 4 years and an outline business case is being prepared.

Wiltshire Council are also properly engaged with the town traffic management scheme. Wiltshire Council officer time has been allocated to the project.

A flood forum took place to help those affected by flooding events to state their case and understand how to instigate resilience measures. Residents and businesses were able to speak to various bodies including the Environment Agency, Wessex Water and Wiltshire Council. Councillor Vittles went on to mention that St Margaret's Hall is now days away from reopening and some resilience tweaks have been introduced in the face of future flooding events. The council is trying to diversify its income streams. Venue hire is one revenue generator so the reopening of St Margaret's Hall will be welcome in this regard.

BoA Youth is doing well and now has 120 or so children attending sessions. Poulton Park also caters well for children providing newly installed facilities

such as phase 2 of the play area (as well as renovations at phase 1) and the skate park.

The town council are also invested in maintaining and adapting the town's green spaces to cope with climate change. The green spaces officer and wardens do a fantastic job, looking after trees and wildlife areas and on the topic of climate change a carbon audit has been commissioned of the council's estate.

Overall Councillor Vittles believes the town council are very engaged, with accessible councillors, officers who are out and about and also available on the phone to listen and speak to residents. He thanked everyone again.

#### Agenda item 3 – Plans for the Future

The mayor began by thanking Councillor Vittles for all his efforts and service over the last two years, the groundwork has been laid for lots of projects going forward.

The mayor stated that the year ahead will be guided by the current 4-point Business Plan:

- a thriving town – successful economically, socially and environmentally.
- a flourishing community – where individuals thrive best
- a greener place – working towards carbon neutrality and improved biodiversity
- an engaged and efficient town council – listening and engaging because that is how the best decisions can be made.

Additionally: the Neighbourhood Plan review will continue. When the town began this process there was government funding available. This has now been stopped but the council will press on. The failure of the Wiltshire Council Local Plan will also create major issues and consequently increased development, without the usual checks and balances, is likely in Wiltshire and Bradford on Avon. By way of reassurance though, the mayor confirmed that the town council will be clear and engage with residents regarding any planning proposals.

The pedestrian bridge project has hit a sweet spot with Wiltshire Council, who are keen to improve their Active Travel credentials at the current time. A new

bridge will help open up the town centre, develop the market as well as provide a new crossing point, less likely to flood, for pedestrians.

The mayor also confirmed that engagement with Wiltshire Council regarding the traffic management scheme is far better than in previous years with regular progress meetings scheduled.

The town council currently organises lots of events for residents to enjoy and help support local businesses. Many events are free. As well as the flagship events the council is also keen to support smaller events organised by local groups through the provision of grants, where possible.

Longer term and despite how much the council could do if they chose to, finances remain a challenge and the symbiotic relationship between the council and volunteers helps the wider community and council with its activities.

Agenda item 5 – Clean up Bradford on Avon (CLuB)

The mayor introduced Derrick Hunt, one of the lead volunteers of CLuB. Derrick confirmed that the mayor is a member of the group of volunteers which helps the council clear footpaths across town, so the pathways are suitable for all abilities.

Derrick stressed the arrangement is a partnership between the town council and CLuB, with the green spaces officer providing guidance, support and the council providing public liability insurance. The town wardens are often working at full capacity so CLuB can step in and help, e.g. clearing up broken glass on the basketball court which is extremely time consuming in addition to clearing litter/debris and unwanted vegetation.

Other groups are also involved such as the Preservation Trust who provide some funding.

It is hoped that by clearing pathways, more residents and others will choose to walk around town instead of using cars.

The group also support each other and enjoy social time whilst working and on breaks.

CLuB will be at the BoA Join In day on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June at St Margaret's Hall and Westbury Gardens.

Agenda item 6 – Nature Volunteers

The mayor introduced Kate Nicholls of the Nature Volunteers.

The group began over 20 years ago when Barton Country Park was managed by Wiltshire Council. The volunteers meet once a month on the second Saturday, usually between 10am and 1pm depending on the weather.

The town council now manages Barton Country Park, and the green spaces officer leads the group in a variety of tasks, depending on the weather and season. Tasks include: deadheading, coppicing, maintaining the willow labyrinth (although this often requires additional volunteer help), installing a stag beetle larvae habitat, arranging beaver guards on orchard apple trees and planting out whips in the tree nursery.

Kate thanked the town wardens for all their assistance transporting equipment down to the necessary sites and volunteer Anna Hislam for maintaining the raised beds on the riverside walk near the swimming pool.

The Chair thanked all the speakers and all the volunteers for their hard work. He reminded everyone about the BoA Join In event on 6 June as a chance to see what volunteering opportunities are on offer in town, He reiterated volunteer help keeps the town council going and thanked all councillors, officers and volunteers for all they do.

The meeting closed at around 8.10 pm.

Appendix 1: Questions from the Public.

There were 4 questions in total

Q1 – a resident asked why the water fountain at Culver Close and one of the toilets at St Margaret’s Hall car park are not working.

The mayor said he would investigate the water fountain issue, subsequently it was confirmed there is a leak and the town wardens are investigating this.

The toilet is closed as the manufacturer is no longer in business and the supply of spare parts is tricky.

Q2 – a resident mentioned that ash die back has led to the death of many trees on council owned green spaces and beyond.

Is the council planning to scale up tree planting and possibly talk to other landowners too?

The mayor agreed it is sad to see so many trees suffer with this widespread problem although woodlands will recover.

Councillor Kay added in the case of Becky Addy Wood, the wood had become a bit of a monoculture of ash trees, so managing the dead trees will allow for greater plant diversity in the wood which is intrinsically healthier for the ecosystem. She also confirmed there are plans to continue with community planting schemes and the council tree nursery has planted up 100s of donated whips so in a year or two saplings can be planted out.

Q3 –A user of the youth and community centre asked when the broken showers will be fixed.?

The mayor confirmed a plan of works is being considered for the youth centre as it needs some updating. He reassured residents the centre is an important community facility.

Q4 – A resident who is also a member of Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon (CFBoA) thanked the town council for their support and efforts tackling the climate emergency. She sees that the aims of both organisations often coincide and there are many issues where everyone works well together.

She also mentioned the Wildwaters Festival which is taking place across several neighbouring settlements along the River Avon including Bradford on Avon in June. She had a QR code for anyone interested and confirmed both CFBoA and the town council are supporting the event.