

Stowmarket
TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2023 / 24

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

stowmarkettowncouncil.gov.uk

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MAYOR'S WELCOME

To have been appointed as Mayor of Stowmarket was an immense honour, a great privilege and quite simply one of the proudest moments of my life.

The theme I chose for my Mayoral year was "Service to the Community" and my consort and I were privileged to attend 84 engagements to raise the profile of local charities and voluntary organisations, all of whom work tirelessly to help others and make individual lives just that bit better and brighter. I'm delighted to say that we raised over £4,550 for the two charities I supported as Mayor (AJ's Legacy and the Stowmarket Relief Fund).

There have been several notable accomplishments by the Town Council throughout my mayoral year, but I'd like to mention three of particular note. Firstly, this year has seen a massive increase in the attendance of some of our events. One has only to look at Stowfiesta, the Food and Drink Festival and the Christmas Fayre as evidence of the success of our Communities team. Of special note, it was a real pleasure to join over a thousand people who attended the first "Stowmarket Go Green Go Wild" event, organised by the Town Council to inspire and educate young people about the value of wildlife and the importance of protecting the environment. Secondly, we are becoming more and more aware of the link between health and well-being and sport and physical activity and consequently the Council pledged £100,000 towards improving sports facilities across the town and I'm delighted that over 50% has been allocated to date. Thirdly, the launch of the Town Ranger service which will improve the pride we have in our town.

We are all aware that Stowmarket is changing rapidly. Through the amount of commercial and housing development that is taking place, it is, in many ways unrecognisable from the town that existed just over a decade ago. The Civic side of being mayor is of crucial importance in promoting the town, and so I adopted an informal mayoral theme which I trust you have noted, and that was to get Stowmarket recognised as the Centre of the Universe. To this end, my consort and I attended eleven civic services across the County, and within the town, I was immensely proud to see our community come together for several civic and commemorative events throughout the year, most notable of which was Remembrance Sunday, which reflects the sacrifices people have made for our liberty, cultural development, and future.



A simple 'thank you' will never seem enough, but I am extremely proud of our town and its community, the people within it and the care that has been shown by them, and I would like to thank the people of Stowmarket for the opportunity to represent them.

NICK GOWRLEY
STOWMARKET MAYOR

TOWN CLERK'S WELCOME



Town Council elections were held in May 2023, which saw a new cohort of Town Councillors elected who will lead Stowmarket Town Council for the next four years. Of the 16 Members of the Town Council, 9 were re-elected for a further term and 7 were elected as Councillors for the first time at the elections. This has been healthy for the organisation - enabling us to draw upon the considerable experience of long-serving Councillors whilst also introducing new skills and ideas from the new Councillors.

The Town Council has developed a new Corporate Plan called "Proud of our Town". This sets our ambitions and priorities for the next four years with respect to Community & Engagement, Environment & Heritage, Place Shaping, Finance & Governance and Organisational Development. Alongside the development of the Corporate Plan, the Town Council pledged £100,000 to local sports clubs to help them develop their facilities. It also agreed to contribute up to £180,000 to introduce a new Town Ranger service which will be launched in the summer of 2024. The new Ranger service responds to requests received from members of the public to allocate more resources to maintaining public spaces in the town – so that we demonstrate a pride in the place where we live. I must also mention that 2023 saw the Town Council's most successful ever events programme with record attendance at many of our events. I would like to thank everyone inside and outside the Town Council who made this possible!

There is also a bigger picture for the Town Council to consider across the whole of the town. This has led the Town Council to launch a campaign called "A Fair Deal for Stowmarket". The campaign seeks to ensure that Stowmarket feels the benefit of the Gateway 14 development which is part of the Freeport East business growth and investment zone. The "Fair Deal" initiative has led to regular engagement between representatives of Stowmarket Town Council and Mid Suffolk District Council, with the Town Council making the case for greater investment in the town. We are hopeful that this can be achieved with the support of the new political administration at the District Council.

So all in all, the past 12 months has been a time of great change, progress and improvement for the Town Council. It leaves me feeling optimistic for what we can achieve over the next 12 months.

DAVID BLACKBURN
TOWN CLERK

GOLD ACCREDITATION

Stowmarket Town Council re-adopted the General Power of Competence at its Annual Meeting in May 2023, and it continues to hold Quality Gold accreditation through the Local Council Awards Scheme which places it within 1% of Town and Parish Councils nationally, that hold the highest level of award under the scheme. The Award comes with the expectation that the Town Council will continue to be at the forefront of good practice and the Town Council is aware of its need to live up to this through its projects, events and services.



273,400
People reached on Facebook, 91.3% increase from last year

£82,026
38 Grants awarded to local groups and projects

100
Wildlife habitats gifted to local residents

84
Events attended by the Town Mayor

£50,000
Allocated to Stowmarket Sport Facilities Fund

10,000+
People attended Stowmarket Christmas Fayre

YOUR COUNCILLORS 2023/24



Town Mayor
Councillor Nick Gowrley
Nick.gowrley@stowmarket.org



Deputy Town Mayor
Councillor Terence Carter
Terence.carter@stowmarket.org



Councillor David Child
David.child@stowmarket.org



Councillor Darren Dordoy
Darren.Dordoy@stowmarket.org



Councillor Alan Edwards
Alan.edwards@stowmarket.org



Councillor William Howman
William.Howman@stowmarket.org



Councillor Colin Lay
Colin.lay@stowmarket.org



Councillor Kieran LaThangue-Clayton
Kieran.lathangue-clayton@stowmarket.org



Councillor Dave Muller
Dave.muller@stowmarket.org



Councillor James Patchett
James.patchett@stowmarket.org



Councillor Miles Row
Miles.row@stowmarket.org



Councillor Barry Salmon
Barry.salmon@stowmarket.org



Councillor Heather Salmon
Heather.salmon@stowmarket.org



Councillor Keith Scarff
Keith.scarff@stowmarket.org



Councillor Steve Slodzik
Steve.slodzik@stowmarket.org



Councillor Kate Yates
Kate.yates@stowmarket.org

YEAR IN REVIEW

NEW REGAL BANK PLANTING SCHEME

Stowmarket Town Council Staff, Red Gables Volunteers of Stowmarket (Eco), and Stowmarket Meadlands Men's Shed collaborated on a new planting scheme on the banks outside The Regal. This water-efficient scheme features over 1,000 plants, enhancing the bank's appearance. A ground-level irrigation system was installed to ensure all planted areas receive sufficient water. Impressively, 70% of the new design incorporates reused plants from the previous bank's layout.







YEAR IN REVIEW

APRIL 2023

FOODIE THURSDAYS

The introduction of Foodie Thursdays helped elevate the Thursday market by offering an alternative food trader each week throughout the summer. Additionally, benches and live music performances were provided, creating a vibrant and enjoyable atmosphere for visitors of the market.



KEEP STOWMARKET TIDY WEEK

Keep Stowmarket Tidy Week returned for its third year, dedicating a week to community efforts to clean up the town. Businesses, community groups, and residents joined forces, with the Town Council's social media channels sharing litter-related stories and information about local litter-picking groups. The main event of the week was the "Team Up to Clean Up" community litter pick at the Recreation Ground, where over 70 people gathered to collect litter from the surrounding area. After the event, volunteers enjoyed refreshments from the Café on the Rec.



MAY 2023

CORONATION & CAKE



To celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, residents joined the festivities despite the poor weather. The atmosphere was lively, with the local Pop Chorus providing music. Attendees enjoyed cupcakes from the Regal 1936 Café, and local care homes received coronation cakes delivered by Mayor Barry Salmon. Several dignitaries, including Reverend Michael Eden and the Royal British Legion, delivered speeches highlighting the event's significance, with Mayor Salmon praising the community's spirit.

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING



During the annual town meeting on Wednesday, 17th May, Councillor Nick Gowrley was elected Stowmarket Town Mayor by his fellow Councillors. Councillor Terence Carter was elected Deputy Mayor, and new Councillors Darren Dordoy, Kieran LaThangue-Clayton, Alan Edwards, Steve Slodzik, Kate Yates, Colin Lay, and James Patchett were welcomed. They joined returning Councillors Nick Gowrley, Terence Carter, Barry Salmon, David Child, Heather Salmon, Keith Scarff, Will Howman, Dave Muller, and Miles Row.

MAY 2023



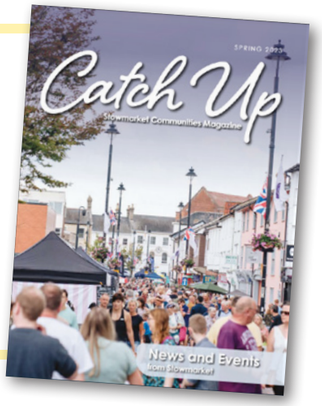
STOWFIESTA

StowFiesta, held on May 27th and 28th, was a fantastic event. The sunny two-day event saw a record-breaking number of attendees, with thousands of families and local residents coming together in large numbers at Stowmarket Rugby Club. A new layout was introduced, allowing more stallholders and food vendors to participate, offering a wider variety of choices. The music lineup featured local emerging talents and experienced bands, including Renegade 12, performing across two stages. To make the event family-friendly, a large selection of free children's activities was offered, including a climbing wall, Punch & Judy show, circus equipment, face painting, and more.

JUNE 2023

CATCH UP MAGAZINE

Catch Up magazine for 2023 landed on doormats across Stowmarket at the beginning of June. The annual magazine keeps residents informed about the latest news, activities, and events from across the town. Catch Up is also available throughout the year as seasonal newsletters during the summer, autumn, and winter months.



JULY 2023

STOWMARKET FOOD & DRINK FESTIVAL

The Stowmarket Food & Drink Festival featured over 60 stalls within the Town Centre, offering a diverse selection of locally and regionally produced food and drink, including Indian Street Food, Wagyu burgers, Thai cuisine, local gins, and baked goods. Live music by The John Peel Centre enhanced the atmosphere, allowing attendees to enjoy their refreshments in the sunshine. The event provided free family entertainment such as campfire sessions, pottery and bread making at the Food Museum, and a mobile petting zoo at Red Gables. Visitors also had the opportunity to sample beers and ales at the Festival of Beer and Brewing, watch Kitchen Theatre demonstrations, and engage with local chefs. With an estimated attendance of 10,000 people, the event significantly boosted local businesses as well.



YEAR IN REVIEW

JULY 2023

GLEMSFORD ROAD PLAYGROUND MAKEOVER

Glemsford Road Playground underwent a successful transformation, including painting fences, play equipment, and the toy cow. Additionally, a new gate latch and cradle swing seat were installed, and the tractor was refurbished, collectively enhancing the amenities of the playground.





AUGUST 2023

COMMUNITY CENTRE REFURBISHMENT

As part of the Town Council's Capital Projects programme, renovations commenced on the toilet block and the Munton & Fison room at Stowmarket Community Centre. The contracted company oversaw upgrades, including new accessible facilities, upgraded electrics, flooring, radiators, plastering, and decoration, marking a significant transformation towards creating an accessible and contemporary space that meets the community's needs.

SEPTEMBER 2023

ANNUAL GRANTS SCHEME

The Stowmarket Communities Grant Scheme opened for the 2023/24 financial year. This annual grant scheme supports local groups, charities, and organisations in their efforts to enhance the well-being of Stowmarket's residents. The grant offers up to £500 in funding for projects, events, and initiatives that address various community needs. Councillors approved the Town Council Grants Panel's decision to allocate funding to 27 of these groups at the end of 2023.



OCTOBER 2023

CIVIC SERVICE

Town Mayor, Councillor Nick Gowrley, held his Civic Service on Sunday, 1st October, at St Peter & St Mary's Parish Church. A procession from Milton House included Consort Heather Gowrley, Civic dignitaries, and organisations. The day was very well attended by the local community, promoting civic pride in Stowmarket.



YEAR IN REVIEW

OCTOBER 2023

STOWMARKET GO GREEN GO WILD

The Town Council's Environmental Protection and Carbon Reduction Plan includes 24 points for action, one of which is hosting environmental pop-up events. Over 1,000 individuals attended the first Stowmarket Go Green Go Wild event on Tuesday 24th October, aimed at inspiring and educating about wildlife and environmental protection. Held at Milton House grounds and the Scout Centre, the event featured 30 interactive stalls, including those from Food Savvy, Suffolk Beekeepers Association, and RSPB. Activities included crafts, games, and a vintage carousel. The event was free to attend and received positive feedback, leading to a decision to hold it bi-annually.









NOVEMBER 2023



REMEMBRANCE

Armistice Day was marked by a ceremony at the Memorial Gates on Saturday, 11th November, followed by the parade, church service, and service of remembrance on Sunday, 12th November. Cadet Thomas Cotton joined Deputy Lord Lieutenant Anthony Fairbanks-Weston and Town Mayor Nick Gowrley in taking the salute. The event had a large public attendance, with support from the Parish Church and Royal British Legion.

POPULAR 90'S BOYBAND COME TO THE REGAL

On Saturday 4th November, The Regal welcomed East 17 to Stowmarket for a memorable night. The popular 90s boyband performed classic songs and engaged in a meet and greet at the 1936 Café Bar after the show.





YEAR IN REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2023

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The Christmas lighting and decorations throughout the town centre were installed, bringing a festive atmosphere to Stowmarket for the holiday season.



STOWMARKET CHRISTMAS FAYRE

This year's Stowmarket Christmas Fayre became one of the county's biggest Christmas events, attracting a record-breaking number of visitors. Thousands flocked to Stowmarket on Sunday, 26th November, to browse market stalls by local and regional traders. Independent businesses filled the town centre, selling everything from Christmas wreaths to handmade candles. The Marketplace was packed with people sampling food and drink, enjoying free fairground rides, and listening to live festive music. Stalls continued at the Food Museum, leading to an ice rink, animals, and a mini makers market in the Barn. The John Peel Centre featured live music, alongside a model railway display. Stowmarket Library hosted free children's craft sessions, creating Santa masks. In St Peters and St Mary's Church, the Christmas Tree Festival showcased trees decorated by the local community. The Regal sold out two showings of Santa's Christmas Wish, while The Mix held a Mixmas craft market with handmade goods. Red Gables hosted a charity fair with over 20 charities offering games, activities, crafts, and gifts. Local businesses experienced a busy day, with many people visiting Stowmarket's independent shops for Christmas presents and enjoying hot drinks in the warmth.







DECEMBER 2023

COMMUNITY TREE PLANTING DAY

This years Community Tree Planting Day took place on Tuesday 5th December., with Stowmarket Town Council staff and Volunteers of Stowmarket (Eco) collaborating to plant another six native, mature trees along the Recreation Ground Avenue pathway. These trees, Lime and Plane, were generously donated by Mid Suffolk District Council and were included as part of our Stowmarket Town Trees Eco Project. To date, this initiative has successfully planted a total of 912 trees!

YEAR IN REVIEW

JANUARY 2024

RECREATION GROUND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Stage 1 of the public consultation was underway as Stowmarket Town Council surveyed local residents regarding improvements to the Recreation Ground. Findings revealed a significant demand for enhancing safety measures (60%) and upgrading inadequate toilet facilities (55%). Although sports facilities and café amenities ranked lower in priority, popular suggestions included creating an outdoor performance space and improving the play park with new equipment and a dog deterrent fence. Following a stage 2 public consultation, plans for improvements are scheduled for implementation between 2024 and 2026.





FEBRUARY 2024

TOWN RANGER SERVICE

An initial outline proposal was discussed at the Operations & Services Committee on Wednesday 21st February, regarding the prospect of setting up a new Town Ranger Service. The introduction of a Town Ranger Service was supported in principle, with a final decision made at full council on Wednesday 13th March to approve the launch of the new service in the summer of 2024.

Town RANGER
STOWMARKET TOWN COUNCIL

MARCH 2024



STOWMARKET TOWN AWARDS 2024 LAUNCHED

In March 2024, the launch of the Stowmarket Town Awards 2024-25 took place at The Regal Stowmarket. Members of the community, including local dignitaries, businesses, and community leaders, gathered to open nominations to the public. These awards honor the unsung heroes of Stowmarket, recognising their outstanding contributions to community life and their ability to inspire others. Nomination forms were distributed to all attendees, and we eagerly anticipate receiving nominations and celebrating the winners at the awards evening on Friday 27th September 2024.

SERVICES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As a Town Council, we undertake a diverse range of services and responsibilities aimed at enhancing the quality of life for our residents and visitors. This year, we have been actively engaged in managing and maintaining the following areas:

PLAY AREAS

We oversee the maintenance of six play areas across Stowmarket, ensuring the safety and functionality of equipment through weekly safety checks and annual comprehensive inspections by experts. These areas provide essential recreational opportunities for children in our community.

THE MARKET

Stowmarket's rich market tradition continues, serving the local community every Thursday and Saturday in the Market Place, offering a variety of fresh produce, clothing, and crafts. Our market remains a vital aspect of our town's heritage and economy.

SERVICES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



FLORAL DISPLAYS AND PLANTING

We enhance the town centre by providing vibrant floral displays, including hanging baskets, large planters, and flags, adding colour and charm, particularly during the summer months. Our hanging baskets, featuring water reservoirs, not only beautify the area but also contribute to water conservation and reduced maintenance time.

COMMUNITY SAFETY/CCTV

We prioritise community safety through collaborative efforts with the Suffolk Police and support for town centre CCTV. Our CCTV cameras equipped with the latest technology serve as valuable tools for law enforcement, ensuring Stowmarket remains a safe place.

WASTE BINS

We manage and maintain over 230 litter and dog waste bins throughout the town and surrounding areas, ensuring a clean and litter-free environment. Daily litter picking activities help maintain the cleanliness of designated routes, while our partnership with Mid Suffolk District Council ensures effective waste collection and disposal.

We remain committed to providing essential services and maintaining key amenities that contribute to the well-being and vitality of our community. Through proactive management and collaboration, we strive to create a safe, inclusive, and thriving environment for all residents and visitors of Stowmarket.



CEMETERIES

We maintain two cemetery sites, one area within the Old Cemetery is designated for the interment of cremated remains, providing a quiet and serene setting near two historic chapels. Surrounding areas are meticulously managed to promote wildlife and plant growth, fostering a space conducive to rewilding efforts. The New Cemetery features burial plots, carefully maintained to create a peaceful environment suitable for services and contemplation. We maintain detailed records of burials, and members of The Stowmarket History Group have documented various monuments.



ALLOTMENTS

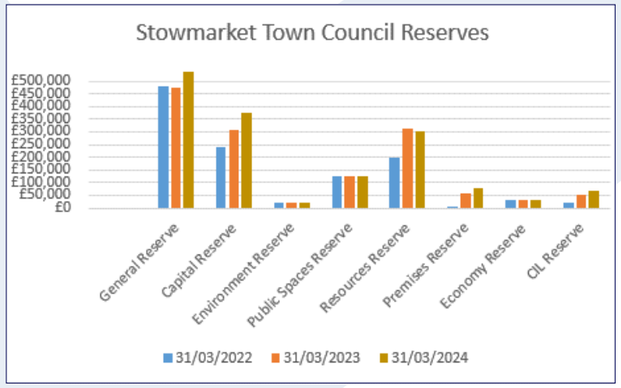
Renewed tenancy agreements and the allocation of vacant plots have ensured the continuity and vitality of our allotment community. New allotmenteers are welcomed, contributing to the vibrant community spirit within the allotment site. While demand for allotments remains high, priority is given to community groups and new allotment holders, with plans to expand available plots in the future.

SPEED INDICATOR DEVICES

We coordinate the Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) at various locations across the town to improve road and pedestrian safety. These devices have been effective in encouraging compliance with speed limits and promoting safer driving behaviours. Data collected from the SIDs is regularly monitored and shared transparently with the community.

FINANCE

The Town Council's 2023/24 budget has been developed through collaborative working involving staff and Councillors. This was led by members of the Town Council's Financial Strategy Group comprising, Councillors Nick Gowrley (Chair), Gerard Brewster, Miles Row, Barry Salmon, and Keith Scarff.



The Financial Strategy Group has considered the delivery of the Corporate Plan, the forecasts within the Town Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, the anticipated cost pressures for 2023/24 and the main risks to the Town Council's financial position.

Global events continued to have an impact on costs; with an average of 5% increases in supplier costs; but significantly higher increases in energy costs. This also impacted on the disposable income available for leisure purposes by customers.

The Council's total Budget for 2023/24 was £2,399,390.00

The total Precept for 2023/24 was £1,301,173.66.

The Town Council's element of Council Tax for 2023/24 increased by £0.168p (4.9%) per week for a Band D property.

Capital expenditure of £77,928 concentrated on premises upgrades at the Community Centre and Milton House Business Suite.

Stowmarket Town Council set a balanced budget with the remaining income required to achieve a balanced budget coming from service generated income. E.g. Room Hire, the Regal, events, and sponsorship.

The Council ended the year in a favourable financial position with a General Reserve of £536,000 and Total Designated reserves of £999, 542.

COMMUNITY GRANTS AND SPORTS FUNDING

At Stowmarket Town Council, we are dedicated to supporting and strengthening various networks and community groups that make a positive difference in Stowmarket for everyone. In the year 2023/24, our community grant schemes distributed a total of 38 grants amounting to £32,826. These grants provided vital support to a wide range of community groups, schools, and organisations, catering to various demographics including children, families, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities and special educational needs. Additionally, grants were extended to support sports, music, volunteering, befriending groups, as well as medical, mental health, and arts organisations. This funding demonstrates our dedication to encouraging an inclusive and welcoming environment in Stowmarket, ensuring it remains a thriving place to live, work, and visit.

In alignment with our commitment to sports and community well-being, Stowmarket Town Council has allocated £100,000 to establish the Stowmarket Sports Facilities Fund. This initiative aims to enhance sports facilities across the town, promoting sustainability and accessibility for all community members. During the 2023/24 period, we have already committed £50,000 to two local sports clubs for venue improvements.



OUR VENUES

MILTON HOUSE

Milton House, the official 'home' of Stowmarket Town Council, is named after the poet John Milton (1608-1674) and is one of the town's most attractive and historic buildings. It accommodates both public and private sector organisations, including the Suffolk County Council Registration Service and Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk. The Registration Service offers birth, marriage, and death registration services, and conducts ceremonies in the elegant John Milton Room, a stylish venue for weddings and civil ceremonies. The picturesque grounds of Milton House provide a beautiful backdrop for photographs. Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk has been a long-term tenant, occupying multiple rooms within Milton House. Additionally, Milton House provides office space for Life Resolutions.

In response to various organisational staffing and team changes throughout the year, it became essential to reorganise the office areas at Milton House. The Operations team undertook several projects to create additional desk space and improve working environments. Additionally,



a shift in public engagement with the Town Council since the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in decreased footfall at the Milton House office. Consequently, the Operations team adjusted the office space, replacing the reception area with a waiting area and creating additional working space to ensure adaptability to evolving circumstances. Furthermore, the Operations team completed a makeover of the driveway at Milton House, resulting in significant improvements to the front entrance, enhancing the overall aesthetic appeal of the building.

CAFÉ ON THE REC

The Café on the Rec is run by The Salvation Army and owned by the Town Council. It is a volunteer-led community hub offering coffee, snacks, bacon rolls, and pastries.
In September 2023, the café closed temporarily so our Operations team could work on an external refurbishment project. This project aimed to improve the look and feel of the café, ensuring it remains an appealing place for the community. The café reopened with a fresh, inviting appearance, ready to continue serving the community.



THE REGAL

The Regal has now been open for 3 years following its refurbishment and development as a multi-purpose venue in the heart of Stowmarket. This year was exciting for film, event cinema, and live shows.

The cinematic highlight of the year was the phenomenon known as "Barbenheimer". In the opening two weeks, there was 3,400 admissions for these two titles alone! Barbie and Oppenheimer accounted for over 10% of the total admissions for the year. It was wonderful to see a wide range of customers engaging with the film releases, many sporting pink and black outfits.



Another highlight for The Regal was hosting the 90s boyband East 17. It was a sell-out evening, with the band commenting on how great the Stowmarket audience was.

The Stowmarket Operatic and Dramatic Society hosted yet another excellent pantomime with 10 sell-out performances.

As part of the ongoing maintenance at The Regal, the Operations team rearranged the rooms on the top floor to maximise available space. One significant improvement was the creation of a dedicated office space with desks for the management team. To address the growing storage needs resulting from the venue's expansion, the storage room was relocated to a larger area. This move ensures that the venue can appropriately accommodate its storage requirements, supporting its ongoing development and operations. Another area of work included enhancing the staff room to create a more comfortable and welcoming area for lunch breaks and relaxation for the staff, as well as redecorating the upstairs areas.

STOWMARKET COMMUNITY CENTRE

Stowmarket Community Centre, situated at Hillside in Combs Ford, is under the ownership and management of the Town Council. Serving as a popular venue, it caters to a diverse range of activities including learning, networking, fitness, volunteering, and social gatherings, attracting participants from all corners of Stowmarket.

Over the past four years, the Town Council has undertaken significant improvements at the centre. This year, notable enhancements include the renovation of toilets to incorporate accessible facilities and the upgrade of the Munton & Fison Room. Additionally, the Operations team has implemented various improvements across the rooms at the Community Centre, including a full decoration of the Main Hall and John Milton Room.

Every week, the Community Centre warmly hosts hundreds of individuals, becoming a vibrant hub of activity and an integral part of our community. In the past year, new groups and services have been introduced, further enriching the Centre's offerings. Moving forward, we remain committed to maintaining this positive momentum, enhancing our facilities, and ensuring that the Stowmarket Community Centre remains an inviting and inclusive space for all.



STAFF LIST

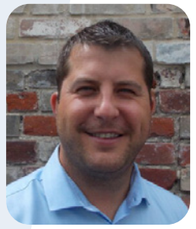
Moving into the new financial year 24/25, our current staff



Town Clerk
David Blackburn
davidb@stowmarket.org



Head of Corporate Services
Sally Goonan
sallyg@stowmarket.org



Head of Community Services
Karl Daniels
karld@stowmarket.org



Senior Operations Assistant
Matt Goodwin
matthewg@stowmarket.org



Town Ranger (Estates Specialist)
Roger Benstead
rogerb@stowmarket.org



Town Ranger
Neil Berry
neilb@stowmarket.org



Corporate Services Assistant Manager
Annie Reynolds
annekar@stowmarket.org



Leadership Support Officer
Sarah Ellice
sarahe@stowmarket.org



Public Services Officer
Liz Hughes
lizh@stowmarket.org



Town Ranger
Darryl Grieves
darrylg@stowmarket.org



Town Ranger
Hugh Fitzpatrick
hughf@stowmarket.org



Assistant Town Ranger
Mark Freeman



Community Engagement and Events Officer
Molly Watling
mollyw@stowmarket.org



Senior Communities Officer
Summer Lambert
summerl@stowmarket.org



Community Operations Co Ordinator
Emma Rogers
emmar@stowmarket.org



General Manager
Bethany Couch
bethanyc@stowmarket.org



Deputy General Manager
Billie King
billiek@stowmarket.org



Customer Service Manager
Lucy King
lucyk@stowmarket.org



Community Centre Manager
Heather Tooke
heathert@stowmarket.org



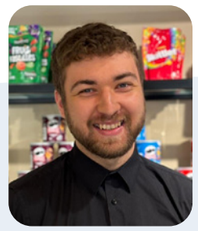
Operations & Estates Manager
Paul Merry
paulm@stowmarket.org



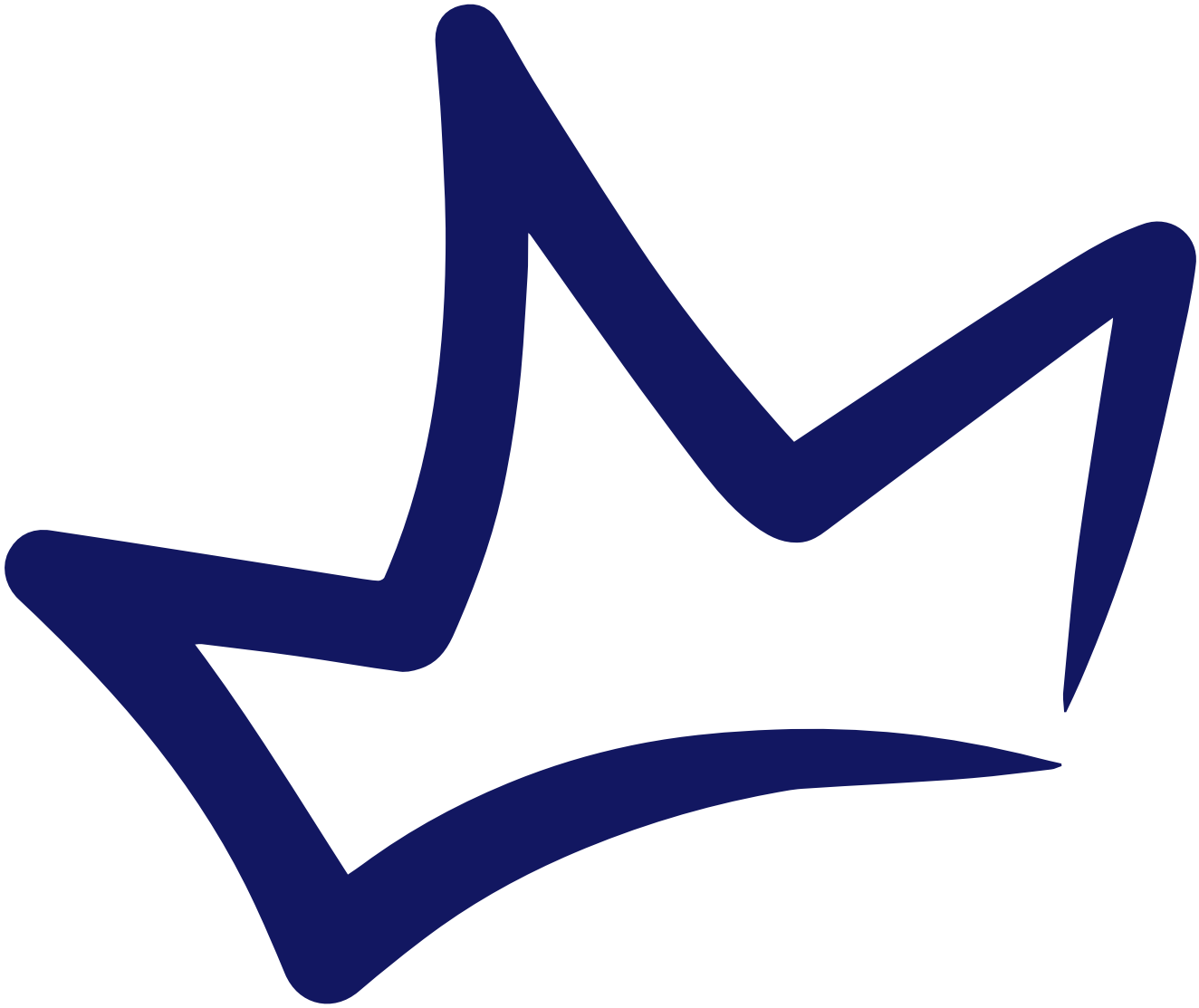
Assistant Operations Manager
Danni Lee
dannil@stowmarket.org



Cinematic & Technical Lead
Samuel Wilden
samuelw@stowmarket.org



Team Leader Apprentice
Archie Merritt
archiem@stowmarket.org



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Milton House, Milton Road South,
Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 1EZ

01449 612060
info@stowmarket.org

@StowmarketTC
@StowmarketTownCouncil
@StowmarketTC
linkedin.com/company/stowmarket-town-council

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

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