



MAYOR'S FOUR YEAR REPORT 2019-2023

Summary

As I was elected Mayor in May 2019, I felt it was important not just give a report for the last year but put it into context the challenges of the last 4 years. This Council has been through a rollercoaster of difficult times which have included service cuts by the IW Council and National Government, transformation, re-organisation, the Covid19 pandemic, the 2021 elections, the sad death of a monarch, the crowning of a new one, two Ryde by-elections, and a cost-of-living crisis. Ryde has not only survived it has grown, become more efficient, a quality provider of services and created jobs and opportunities. It has become an enabling and facilitating Council working together with the stakeholders of the Town. It has an identity, a new logo, corporate vehicles, and most importantly it has presence.

Ryde Town Council is now directly and indirectly supporting residents from ages 0 to 100 plus whether through community grants or providing direct services. Together with Aspire Ryde we have funded the Ryde Community Connector programme when it was cut by Isle of Wight Council.

This purposeful act led to Aspire Ryde not only joining forces with other voluntary sector organisations across the Island to deliver support for residents through Covid19 but has directly led to Aspire Ryde successfully winning the Island-wide Living Well Contract in 2022 which provides care for the most vulnerable and elderly.

Back in 2018 Ryde Town Council reacted when Isle of Wight Council cut youth services across the Island and established a bespoke Youth Service, Network Ryde.

This service has gone on to win awards, run the kickstart employment programme creating jobs for young people in the Town and, in 2023, successfully gained funding from the Youth Investment Fund for a new home for Network Ryde at St. Thomas's Church.

A resident (a working single parent) thanked Ryde Town Council for supporting her three children by providing access for them to opportunities which enabled them to develop their potential through Network Ryde. It also enabled her to work in the hospitality sector in the town which was growing due to Ryde Town Council investing in events and facilities that made the Town more attractive for visitors.

Key Achievements

It is not about buildings; it is about the people.

There is now a movement in Ryde to bring back derelict, empty and underused buildings for the people by the people. This may be a former printer's building (Monkton Arts) being turned into a lively cultural centre by local social entrepreneurs, bringing Appley Tower back into community use so people can visit inside and enjoy views across the Solent from its turrets, creative and social businesses reopening an empty department store in Cross Street into a new arts centre or young people taking over St Thomas's church in Ryde and turning it into a new Community Youth Centre and base for Network Ryde.

There is a cultural revolution quietly going on in the Town and it is the people of Ryde reclaiming many parts of its heritage.

This community action has been facilitated, encouraged, and supported by an inspired Ryde Town Council through the following actions:

- **Staff Team** - There has been a transformation and reorganisation of Ryde Town Council with the appointment of a new a Town Clerk, a Responsible Finance Officer and a Business Development Manager.

Other new appointments and staff restructuring have included the roles of a Youth Work Manager and a Community Development Worker.

In 2021, Ryde Town Council's Clerk was bestowed with the Best New Clerk award by NALC. Ryde Town Council is actively taking over services from the Isle of Wight Council in a more cost effective and efficient way.

- **Councillors** - A movement to encourage new councillors, diversify the council and ensure as many seats were elected in the town was established resulting in no co-opted seats at the 2021 local council elections. Fourteen seats were contested with two unopposed. Ryde has also had two contested by-elections in November 2022 and February 2023.

Strong democracy is alive in Ryde and councillors and staff now work collectively as a team ensuring a strategic and operational delivery of services with clear outcomes.

- **Strategic Plans** - The establishment and implementation of a Ryde Place Plan with the Isle of Wight Council and a Corporate Plan 2020-25 have been delivered.
- **Financial Management** - Enable the Council to build a future financial model that is not reliant on the annual precept (tax) of Ryde residents but one that also generates revenue, maximises grant income for projects, move the town council from renting property to ownership of assets, delivering services in-house in order to reduce costs, employ skilled staff to reduce outside procurement costs, efficiency savings and strategic borrowing for investment in new facilities and services.
- **Service Delivery from Toilets to Allotments, Deckchairs to Hosting Banks** - Ryde Town Council has moved from being a minor provider of services in Ryde to a very

significant one. It is investing in Island assets that declined under Isle of Wight Council's management. By maintaining and improving these services, residents and visitors' experiences of the town have improved, which in turn increases the economy of Ryde.

The biggest symbolic act by Ryde Town Council was the purchase of Ryde Harbour from the Isle of Wight Council, now rebranded as Ryde Marina and bringing back the hire of deckchairs and parasols on the beach and introducing the hire of kayaks and paddleboards.

Ryde Town Council is generating income and creating local jobs which will be reinvested back into the town. Young people in the town working on our beaches, whether through being lifeguards or deck-chair attending, provides life-skills to progress to future opportunities.

Finally, following the closure of Barclays Bank in Ryde, Ryde Town Council now rents out office space two days a week to them, so they are able to continue to offer their customers advice on various banking matters.

- **Partnerships and Collaboration** - The Ryde Place Plan calls for the council to build collaboration and partnerships with key stakeholders in the town through Memorandum of Understandings (MOU). One key aspect has been to strengthen relationships with Portsmouth and Ryde Town Council now has a three-way MOU with the University of Portsmouth and Hovertravel. This provides opportunities for Ryde residents and enables Ryde Town Council to tap into expertise. Ryde Town Council is also working on a Ryde Water Charter with Southern Water, meeting regularly with Officers of the Isle of Wight Council and developing partnerships with major organisations such as Ryde School.
- **Young People and Network Ryde** - Young people and the next generation of Ryde residents are at the centre of the town councils' mission and Ryde is the only local area on the Island that has a bespoke, award winning, youth service through Network Ryde. Over the last four years, Network Ryde has grown and has since secured a major investment through the Government's Youth Investment Fund to renovate and develop St. Thomas's Church into a new base for Network Ryde. Throughout the Covid19 pandemic, Network Ryde managed a youth Kickstart employment programme which has enabled many young people to gain employment.
- **Ryde Marina, Historic High Streets, Esplanade, Beaches, and Interchange** - Ryde Town Council is collaborating with the Isle of Wight Council and other stakeholders on major improvements for the town which will boost the infrastructure of Ryde High Street, Union Street and The Esplanade. This is a major part of economic growth for Ryde which will increase visitor numbers and encourage businesses to the town and create jobs. Ryde Marina has been transformed and in 2023/24, will see the fruits of labour by a skilled Beach and Marina Operations Team.
- **Community Response Forum and Warm Spaces** - In March 2020, a Community Response Forum was launched to support residents through the Covid19 lockdowns. It brought the voluntary and public sector in the town together to share resources and help the most vulnerable. In the last year, the forum has expanded and now focuses on

assisting residents through the cost-of-living crisis by providing warm places and support.

Ryde Library has become the centre of now directly funds a Community Development Officer for Ryde Town Council who is developing the forum. Hundreds of residents are now receiving improved support and help on a daily basis.

- **Ryde Community Development (Charitable) Trust and a strong community and voluntary Sector** - Ryde Town Council has worked on a financial strategy for Ryde that maximises investment in the town and tackles poverty. Ryde includes three of the poorest wards on the Isle of Wight which are also some of the poorest in the UK. The new Ryde Community Development Trust will work alongside Ryde Town Council to raise funds to support social initiatives and projects that improve opportunities in the Town.
- **Reviving, Restoration, and Realignment of Heritage** - The following areas have been a focus of redevelopment:
 - ◆ **The Department on Cross Street** - will be an Arts Centre with £2.5M of funding from the Arts Council England.
 - ◆ **Appley Tower** - This will be restored and revitalised through a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, a project which has taken about six years in the making. I was overjoyed to launch the start of work at the beginning of April 2023. The project is being led by a local charity, Natural Enterprise.
 - ◆ **St. Thomas's Church and Network Ryde** - Work has now started on renovating and restoring St. Thomas's Church into a new town Community Youth Centre with funding of £600,000 from the Youth Investment Fund.
- **Programme of Events** - 2022 saw the return of Ryde's full programme of events and 2023 sees the programme expanding to include several exciting new events as well long-term established ones such as Jubilee Celebrations, Jack Up, Love Mondays, Ryde Carnival, Mardi Gras, Merry & Bright, the Classic Car Show, Wight Wave Beach Sports Festival, Ryde Rowing Regatta and Isle of Wight Pride.

The new events include Armed Forces Day and the South Island Sevens, which is a multi-sports event on Ryde beaches and at the grounds of Ryde School. The recent Channel 5 film highlighted a range of exciting events held in Ryde.

- **Community and Town Resilience and Greening for the Future** - Over the last four years, Ryde Town Council has transformed its mission from a minor deliverer of additional services in Ryde to being a principal provider that provides a stronger platform for residents to influence and mould the town to be a great place to live and work in. It now has a team of staff and councillors and collaborative partnerships that attracts investment which enables local organisations and businesses to grow. It also has a strong resilience for the future to survive and prosper in order to combat the realities of the world we live in now, such as pandemics and a cost-of-living crisis. The biosphere, environment, green and blue spaces in the Town also need to become a stronger focus for Ryde Town Council.