



## Mayor's Report to the Annual Town Meeting

May 2024

It has been a privilege to serve Ryde as mayor over the past twelve months – what an interesting role it is; a heady mix of public-facing engagement and working with staff, councillors and others to shape, move forward and realise a vision for the town.

Ryde is an interesting town to be part of as we try to balance the best ways of improving and supporting the lives of residents alongside the need to become more attractive as a seaside resort and tourist destination. The success of both elements is, of course, intertwined.

It is certainly an exciting time to be in Ryde; there is much to celebrate and there are many opportunities for improvement; a number of seemingly perennial frustrations remain - for instance litter, the lack of constant, vandal-proof public toilets, litter and dog poo – all of which the staff team continue to work to overcome.

There are many projects and initiatives that the Town Council are continuing to pursue, some of which are bound, by their nature, to take time. Alongside the general ongoing work of the council, the ones that have had particular focus over the past 12 months include:

- **The skatepark** – the failing wooden structure was removed in the autumn and replaced by a temporary concrete park. I'm really pleased that this is so well used by skaters from across the Island and I'd like to thank Zoe Thompson and the skating community for their support and partnership with this – both in terms of joint funding and providing the expertise and muscle for the build. Plans are in place for a more permanent and larger multi-use park on the site.
- **Beach Accessibility** – this is a project in partnership with the Isle of Wight Council, Visit Isle of Wight, Hovertravel, the Ryde Community Development Trust, Unlimited Island, Isle Access and Grace's Bakery. It is nearing fruition now, thanks to the tenacity of Annette Steed and the additional support of the hard workers from Nettlestone and Seaview Men in Sheds – NaShers. This project will make the beach accessible to everyone this summer.
- **St Thomas's Church** – the new home for Network Ryde (the town's youth service) is nearing completion now and will open in July. This will allow the town to offer a far wider range of activities to a much larger number of young people, at the moment of secondary age.

It's a really good example of what is possible when appropriate funding is available and when we are able to access the expertise, we don't have in-house. It is a sign that the town council's support for and belief in children and young people is real and embedded and I'd like to thank Tara Bloomfield and Tim Wander as well as Bex Swan and her team for seeing this project and the planning behind it through.

I should also mention here the work that Bex and her team are putting into the pilot social action Youth Voice project, funded by Sovereign Housing. I look forward, over the next year, to establishing a youth council as a result of this project.

- **Memorandum of Understanding** between RTC and University of Portsmouth – the partnership continues to enable a number of projects and opportunities for both parties and remains a strong link for us with a leading, ambitious university. There is an increasing focus on the key area of educational aspiration and how to enable young people from Ryde and the Island to access the skills and knowledge they will need to build a strong future. A space to watch.
- **Vectis Hall** – unlike St Thomas's, the Town Council has not yet been able to attract the funding needed to secure and shape this building's future. We are currently working to ensure that the structure is protected from the weather and working with the Isle of Wight Council's Conservation Officer and others with appropriate expertise to find the right way forward for this building. Vectis Hall has a long history of neglect, and this was never going to be an easy or quick project – however, I'm able to report that work has begun.
- **Marina and Beachfront Initiatives** – like any seaside resort, we are at the mercy of the weather. Thanks to the marina team under the leadership of Jake Babington and Chris Turvey, sand moved by the autumn and winter storms has been moved back, replenishing our golden beaches and the marina and beachfront rentals (deck chairs, loungers, paddle boards, kayaks) are ready for the sun to shine. My fingers are *always* crossed at this point in the year. We have again commissioned Waterside Pool to provide beach lifeguards across the summer season and refurbished their base behind the Big Kahuna.
- **Work With Community** – Under the leadership of Alison Pearce, Ryde's Community Development Officer, we've continued to work with community groups and charities across the town, including Aspire, Men Only, Citizen's Advice, Ryde Library, School Family Liaison Officers and many others.

This has led to a more cohesive approach to supporting residents of all ages and to some great initiatives (for instance the Community Garden in Riboleau Street and Time Banking – of which more later). We have also continued to support community groups through the grants programme, although never as many or with as much as we'd wish to. We're always looking for other ways to support local groups and initiatives; for instance, we have entered into partnership programs with Ryde Carnival Association, and with Haylands Farm to enable better, more sustainable planting around the town.

As you'll be aware, Ryde Town Council has had little or no part in the **Interchange Project** which seems now to be nearing completion. However, we stand ready to support planting and to take on the cleaning of the toilets, but both of these require legal processes to complete before we can. The toilets are a particular frustration for the town council – and for residents and visitors. These should be open shortly – we are now awaiting the final sign-off from South West Trains.

A major focus over the last eight months has been the preparation for the **Town Board**, which will be responsible for decisions around and management of the funding attracted from the Department of Leveling Up, Housing and Communities – more of which later. I'd like to thank staff, in particular Lisa Dyer and Allan Bridges for stepping up to offer capacity so that this can be possible. Part of this work has involved a review and update of the town's Place Plan so that the Town Council is able to work alongside the Board as it begins its work.

Over the coming year, I hope that the Town Council can complete many of the above projects. It will be important to continue to do what we do and to do it all as well as we can. It will be interesting to see how the Town Board's work impacts on us all and how this may alter our focus.

My thanks, as ever, to residents for their ongoing support and to staff and councillors for their continued dedication and work to improve the town, particularly as we gear up for a busy summer season, with the prospect of unbroken sunshine and balmy nights between now and the autumn. My final thanks go to the team for arranging tonight's meeting – particularly to Hannah East, for whom this is the last engagement before she begins her rather overdue maternity leave. Thank you, Hannah – and good luck!

**Cllr Richard May – Mayor of Ryde**

**May 2024**