

STRATEGIC PLAN (Draft)

2024 - 2027

Foreword

We are pleased to introduce the Town Council's third Strategic Plan to cover the period from 2024 to 2027 which is being published for consultation purposes.

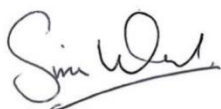
Building upon the progress made over the last four years our priorities remain broadly similar with some shifts in emphasis and updating to reflect changes in circumstances and to meet new challenges ahead.

The Town Council cannot do everything. We have to be clear on where best to focus our efforts to add value and achieve positive outcomes for our Royal Town. This can involve working independently or in partnership with others. This Plan sets out our priorities and provides the framework for guiding our key actions over the next few years.

Since we were first established in 2016 the Town Council has not increased its Precept (annual Town Council tax) which is the source of its income. This is no longer sustainable as costs have increased and demands have grown over the last eight years. We are therefore proposing a phased increase in Precept levels as referred to within the Plan. Additional more specific details will be provided as part of the consultation process.

During the period of the current Plan we have experienced the Covid pandemic and significant inflationary pressures affecting the cost of living. Undoubtedly these problems, which are outside of local control, have hindered progress on realising our ambitions for the town. Despite this much has been achieved in recent years though there is also more to do.

This new Strategic Plan 2024 - 2027 is intended to help us focus on meeting the key challenges ahead and make our Royal Town an even better place to live and work. As Leader and Chief Executive, we look forward to working with our partners, residents and businesses to help realise our Vision for the town which remains unchanged and is set out below:



Simon Ward
Leader



Olive O'Sullivan
Chief Executive

Our Vision “Founded in our past, working for our future to improve the environment, local services and facilities making Sutton Coldfield an even better place”

Review of Strategic Plan 2020 - 2024 (Achievements and Challenges)

Achievements - Some examples of progress made in relation to key elements of the Plan include:

- Established the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership (TCRP) and delivered new Masterplan for the town centre which was adopted by Birmingham City Council (BCC) as a Supplementary Planning Document.
- Secured Government funding support for town centre transportation works and, more recently, under the Town Fund initiative to invest in local people's priorities.
- Developed a Sutton Coldfield Active Travel Delivery Plan.
- Took professional advice and provided informed comments to BCC in seeking to influence key development projects within the town.
- Established and delivered a new Town Ranger service to maintain and improve the environment within the town.
- Secured agreement to the transfer of various assets from BCC including allotments and prominent public spaces, such as the land around Walmley War Memorial and Vesey Gardens, bringing them under local control.
- Delivered a variety of public realm enhancement schemes within the town.
- Commissioned an Appraisal of Sutton Park and review of alternative governance models as part of ongoing efforts to place the future of the Park on a more sustainable footing.
- Provided funding support for facilities such as the Sutton Coldfield Library and the Town Hall.
- Funded an independent survey of the extensive Sutton Coldfield archive and local studies collection as a basis for the development of a long-term plan to ensure the archive is accessible for future generations.
- Supported over 80 local groups through the award of grants via a refined Community Grants Scheme linked to our priorities.
- Established the Health and Wellbeing Partnership to strengthen joint working relationships with BCC / NHS.
- Led and co-ordinated the community response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the volunteer support at the Town Hall vaccination centre.

The above achievements are illustrative of the progress made across a range of activities.

Challenges - There is more to be done and a number of outstanding challenges remain key among which include:

- Complexity in the delivery of projects with many factors outside the Town Council's control.
- Matching resource requirements with our aspirations and the capacity to deliver.
- The impact of projected cuts in BCC services on the town.
- Timescales with long lead-in times for certain projects and associated uncertainties.
- Successfully integrating the Langley Sustainable Urban Extension into the town as further details emerge and this is progressively developed.
- Continuing to positively influence town centre regeneration proposals and help bring them to fruition.
- Procuring a new contract for the Town Ranger service
- Enhancing local resilience by strengthening partnership working arrangements with all sectors.
- Planning ahead for the Royal Town's Quincentenary celebrations in 2028.

Changing Context

The Town Council has not raised the precept, which provides the revenue to fund our services, since it was first established in 2016. Over the subsequent eight years the Precept level has remained the same at £49.96 per year for a Band D property. This is well below the average for comparable councils.

Over this period the costs of running the Council have increased and demands to support local service provision have grown. These trends are likely to continue and accelerate as the City Council reduces or withdraws services locally owing to its well publicised financial difficulties.

In order to raise the necessary funding to better meet future aspirations for the town and support our local communities the Town Council, as part of this review of the Strategic Plan, is consulting upon a £10 per year (for a Band D equivalent property) increase in precept levels in each of the next three years from 2025/26. This is referred to again later under the 'Representing our Community' theme and further details will be provided as part of the consultation on the draft Plan.

Our Priorities

In headline terms our Core Priorities are:

Representing our community most effectively

Regenerating the town centre

Planning for a sustainable future

Preserving and enhancing Sutton Park

Delivering more services locally

Celebrating local arts, heritage and culture

Sustaining thriving and safe local communities

A range of key objectives and actions linked to the above priorities follow on and the Town Council will pursue these over the lifespan of the Strategic Plan. These are indicative high-level actions which will be supplemented by more detailed work programmes / project plans for management and reporting purposes.

CORE PRIORITY - REPRESENTING OUR COMMUNITY MOST EFFECTIVELY

Objective:

To continue to provide community leadership, efficient governance and management of resources keeping these under review to support and help meet the priorities of the local community

Actions

- Increase the precept by £10 per year (for a Band D equivalent property) in each of the next three years from 2025/26 to ensure the Council's finances more closely match its aspirations and the priority needs identified particularly in light of projected reductions in BCC budgets;
- Play a lead role in the establishment of a Town Board to steer the preparation and delivery of a new Vision and Long-term Plan for the town;
- Pursue new partnership opportunities to enhance services and assets, supporting the development of the town and the local community;
- Continue to invest in our councillors and staff through the provision of training and development opportunities
- Seek to enhance the Council's Quality Council Accreditation to meet Quality Gold standard
- Identify and pursue opportunities to secure external funding support to improve facilities in the town
- Communicate and engage effectively with residents, local businesses and the voluntary sector

CORE PRIORITY - REGENERATING THE TOWN CENTRE

Objective:

To adopt a community leadership role in working with partners and key stakeholders to improve and regenerate the town centre

Actions

- Working through the TCRP seek to strengthen project delivery arrangements;
- Help ensure the coordinated development of publicly funded transportation improvements, enhancements to the public realm and redevelopment of key sites identified in the Masterplan;
- Explore options to relocate the Council's accommodation into the town centre to improve public accessibility and help stimulate further development and activity to support its regeneration;
- Engage with local businesses and their representative bodies to identify initiatives to make the town centre (including the High Street Conservation Area) a more vibrant place to set up and expand commercial activity;
- Ensure the Vision and Long-term Plan to be developed as part of the Town Fund initiative makes the relevant links to emerging town centre regeneration proposals.

CORE PRIORITY - PLANNING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR OUR TOWN

Objective:

To play an active role in influencing plans for major development/new transport infrastructure and reducing the town's carbon footprint

- Strengthen relations with BCC, as planning and highways authority, to ensure the Town Council's role as a statutory consultee is properly recognised and taken into account in decision making;
- Influence and help shape future planning decisions affecting the town identifying opportunities to improve the quality, connectivity and environmental credentials of proposed new developments;
- Promote the preparation and adoption of a Design Code for Sutton Coldfield to help improve the quality of planned new schemes;
- Strengthen liaison arrangements working with all interested parties in seeking to influence and help shape the Langley Sustainable Urban Extension in the best interests of the town as a whole;
- Ensure the town is well positioned to benefit from planned investments in public transport (rail/bus) infrastructure;
- Progress the Sutton Coldfield Active Travel Delivery Plan (November 2023) to offer residents and visitors genuine transport choice and enhanced walking and cycling opportunities in the town;
- Reduce traffic dominance by creating more people focused places and continue to work with key partners to reduce carbon emissions and enhance local biodiversity.

CORE PRIORITY - PRESERVING AND ENHANCING SUTTON PARK

Objective:

To promote new arrangements for the management and development of the Park as a basis for helping to ensure that the investment necessary to secure its future is available

Actions

- Seek to positively influence and work with the City Council and other key stakeholders to develop a new Vision for the Park to reflect changing demands, pressures and opportunities;
- Work collaboratively in seeking to progress alternative governance arrangements establishing a Trust to place the future management and development of the Park on a more sustainable basis;
- In accordance with the Town Centre Masterplan and the Council's Active Travel Vision support measures to strengthen walking and cycling links between the Park, town centre and other areas.

CORE PRIORITY - DELIVERING MORE SERVICES LOCALLY

Objective:

Enhance the ability of the Town Council to support actions in making Sutton Coldfield cleaner and greener with more responsive local service delivery

Actions

- Progress with a phased approach towards the transfer of key local assets and associated services from Birmingham City Council;
- Further develop the Town Ranger service ensuring a proactive approach to the management and delivery of related environmental works throughout the town;
- Be a positive example to others in reducing carbon emissions and in working collaboratively to progress environmental and biodiversity projects;
- Enhance and/or extend green spaces, landscaped areas, floral displays, public realm, signage, street furniture, litter and cleansing services throughout the town;
- Manage and maintain green spaces, landscaped areas and allotments in a balanced way to enhance amenity and encourage biodiversity.

CORE PRIORITY -CELEBRATING OUR LOCAL ARTS, HERITAGE AND CULTURE

Objective:

To actively engage with and support our community to creatively celebrate, interpret and promote the heritage, character and identity of the Royal Town to residents and visitors

Actions

- Encourage greater collaboration between cultural activity and historical groups to enhance effective joint working and enable wider resident participation;
- Provide a community leadership role in planning for an engaging and creative programme of activities and events celebrating the Quincentenary of the Royal Town in 2028;
- Play an active role in developing a strategy to retain, preserve and promote the town's libraries together with its rich historical archive and local studies collection with improved local access;
- Encourage the development of a community events/activities programme throughout the town;
- Support initiatives to celebrate, interpret and bring focus to the heritage features and character of the town, including its three existing Conservation Areas;
- Work collaboratively with local partners to improve facilities and wayfinding for visitors.

CORE PRIORITY - SUSTAINING THRIVING AND SAFE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Objective:

To work alongside other organisations and community groups in preparing sustainable development programmes to promote thriving, healthy and safe local communities

Actions

- Facilitate greater co-ordination and collaboration across the voluntary, community, social-enterprise and faith (VCFSE) sectors to improve organisational resilience, sustainable local service provision and access to funding;
- Continue to refine and deliver responsive and effective Community Grant schemes in support of local VCFSE organisations playing an active part in meeting the needs of residents in the town;
- Work with partners and local community groups to improve health and well-being and especially the quality of life of our older residents, encouraging them to stay active and independent;
- Support the North District Delivery Partnership in plans to provide enhanced and integrated healthcare services;
- Strengthen the role of the Youth Panel in championing the views and engagement of young people to improve joint working with the VCFSE sector;
- Support town councillors in their ward engagement activities helping to ensure that decisions made reflect the needs and aspirations of the local community
- Work with the police and other partners to ensure the town is a place where residents feel safer.
- Work with partners and community groups to identify ways to improve the mental health of children and young people.

Delivery, Management and Monitoring

In a number of respects this Strategic Plan marks a transition from the plan-making phase of the early years following the establishment of the Town Council to a new delivery phase with all of the challenges that entails. Each of the high-level priorities set out in the Plan will be underpinned by more detailed work programmes / project plans. These will be used as a basis for reporting on progress on a regular basis to the responsible Committee and/or Full Council as appropriate.

The Town Council will regularly update the community on progress in delivering the Plan through various communication channels and an Annual Report will also be produced.