



BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL

TOWN COUNCIL PLAN

2019 - 2024



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Contents

1.	<u>The Town Council</u>	3
2.	<u>Blandford Forum</u>	4
3.	<u>Vision for Blandford Forum</u>	6
4.	<u>Town Council Responsibilities, Services and Assets (Appendix A)</u>	6
5.	<u>Partnership Working</u>	7
6.	<u>Context of the Plan</u>	10
7.	<u>Neighbourhood Plan</u>	11
8.	<u>Aims of the Plan</u>	12
9.	<u>Action Plan and Performance Monitoring (Appendix B)</u>	13
10.	<u>Annual Processes (Appendix C)</u>	13
11.	<u>Financial Summary and Budget Plan (Appendix D)</u>	14

1. The Town Council

Blandford Forum Town Council (BFTC) is the parish authority for the town of Blandford Forum. It is the third tier of government after parliament and the Dorset Council (formed in 2019) and its legal powers are granted to it and regulated by various government acts.

In 2008 Blandford Forum Town Council was the first council in North Dorset, and the fifth in Dorset, to be awarded with Quality Council Status and was reaccredited with this status in 2012. In 2016, it became the first council in Dorset to be accredited with Quality under the newly introduced Local Council Award Scheme. The Town Council strives to achieve these awards in order to ensure that it maintains high standards of administration, community engagement and accountability.

The Town Council supplements the provision of local government services in Blandford Forum. Responsibilities include the cemetery, play areas, recreational spaces, public conveniences, the Corn Exchange, CCTV, markets, street furniture and amenity areas. It also provides a range of social and recreational facilities and is involved in many events, while promoting and representing the town with other national and statutory bodies. For example, the Town Council acts as a consultee and lobbying force with both the Dorset Council and regional and national government putting forward the wishes and needs of the local community. The Dorset Council, which covers the whole of the county except Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, and has the remit for education, social services, highways, strategic planning, libraries, development management, environmental health, refuse collection, and economic development, amongst other service, and consults with the Town Council on such subjects as the Dorset Council Plan, the Local Plan and planning applications.

The Town Council has 16 Councillors, elected every four years (except for the election in May 2019 which presented a five year term in line with the Dorset Council), and the town is divided into five wards; Central (six Councillors), Badbury Heights (one Councillor), Old Town (three Councillors), Langton St Leonards (four Councillors) and Blandford Hilltop (two Councillors). The Civic Year runs from May to April. The roles of Chairman of Council/Mayor and the Vice-Chairman of Council/Deputy Mayor and the Chairmen of Committees are filled by Councillors who have been nominated and voted for by their Councillor colleagues.

Each year BFTC consults with the public on its budgets and calculates how much money it will need to provide its services or to do any planned capital projects. This sum, called the precept, is collected for BFTC by the Dorset Council as part of a household's council tax. The Dorset Council then passes on the precept to BFTC. BFTC does not receive any financial support from central government or the Dorset Council nor does it receive any business rates collected by the Dorset Council.

Prior to the county and district councils joining in April 2019, North Dorset District Council was unable to continue with many of their services that were of importance to residents, which resulted in the Town Council taking on the public toilets and amenity areas. The Town Council has been in a position, over the last ten years, where its services and facilities are expanding and therefore the staffing and resource requirements are too. For example, BFTC has made a financial commitment to the leisure centre, youth centre and other local organisations including the Citizens Advice, Blandford Information Centre and Museums. Other factors that impact on the Town Council are growth within the town, a lack of infrastructure and pressure on local government funding. BFTC therefore recognises its role in the future of the town and this document aims to address its vision for the town and how it will achieve it.

2. Blandford Forum

In 1731, a fire destroyed almost the entire town and even extended to parts of Blandford St Mary and Bryanston west of the bridge. Starting in a tallow chandler's shop in the town centre, the fire spread rapidly with the wooden fire engines themselves becoming early victims of the flames. Only a few properties escaped, mostly to the north and east of the town centre. Funds to help rebuild the stricken town poured in from all over the country including £1,000 from King George II due to an Act of Parliament passed to support the rebuilding of the town. Within a few years rebuilding was well under way and by about 1760 the new Blandford was complete. Its very special character arises from the fact that the architects, surveyors and principal builders were William and John Bastard, who were civil dignitaries of the town and two of the major sufferers from the damage. They designed and supervised the building of the new church, the town hall, grammar school and many of the key houses and business premises.

The resultant town centre, still largely unchanged today, forms one of the most pleasing and complete Georgian groups anywhere in England. Rebuilt as a single work, the town is basically uniform in design yet has individual flourishes to provide relief. Gradually life returned to normal in the town, the market continued to prosper and button making, wool spinning and gloving became major industries. Further wealth came with the coaching era, the building of fine hostelries to serve this new trade and an expansion of the town's brewing industry. In the 1860s the railway from Bournemouth to Bath came to the town but closed in the 1960s.

Blandford today still retains its former role as a market town that serves an important farming district. The parish of Blandford Forum is 409 hectares in area and the Dorset Data Book 2011 (Dorset County Council) recorded approximately 5,058 dwellings. It is the main service centre in the south of the District with an extensive rural hinterland. The 2017 Census showed that the town had a population of 11,013 and it has expanded significantly in recent years, with more than 1,400 new homes being built between 1994 and 2012 and a similar number planned in the period to 2033 within the Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan area.

The age profile in Blandford Forum is not typical of Dorset. There is a larger proportion of the population aged under 35 than for Dorset as a whole, with far fewer of those aged 65 or over (22%) when compared to the county (29%)¹. In addition, property prices are high in comparison with salaries earned. Public transport links have been reduced over recent years which, coupled with the last example, can make it difficult for people to live in the town and travel to work elsewhere. The lack of public transport is restrictive to residents of surrounding parishes and their inability to come to the town and shop impacts on the businesses and markets. The Thursday market is reasonably vibrant however the Saturday market is not well-attended and efforts are being made to resurrect this traditional element of the town since BFTC adopted this service (from 1st October 2016).

The town, like any other, feels the impact of online shopping and bargains being sought in larger stores on the outskirts of the town. However, the latest available data, from the Carter Jonas retail survey (2017), confirmed that 'Blandford is healthy compared with other places locally and nationally.

- Largest centre in North Dorset
- Blandford has 15% of the market share for comparison goods in North Dorset
- 12% convenience goods (Town Centre only) rising to 22% with Tesco (Lidl will have increased this figure)
- 14 convenience outlets (Town only) led by Morrison's and M&S
- 186 Comparison outlets

¹ Data taken from: <https://apps.geowessex.com/insights/AreaProfiles/Town/blandford>

Although heavy traffic has caused some changes, the town centre remains basically Georgian in concept and is now an important conservation area.

Blandford town centre provides a range of shops and other services for local people. The main convenience outlets in the town centre are the Morrisons supermarket off Greyhound Square (known locally as Greyhound Yard) and a small Iceland store in Salisbury Street. There is an edge-of-centre M&S food store to the south-east of East Street and a small Co-operative store in a more suburban location on Salisbury Road. A Tesco supermarket and Homebase store occupy an out-of-town site, on Stour Park in Blandford St Mary, and a Lidl supermarket is located to the north-west of the town. The town centre also has reasonable representation from national multiples (such as Boots, WHSmith, Costa, Subway and Holland & Barrett) and a wide range of independent retailers, both convenience and comparison outlets, mostly occupying the town's smaller stores. The town also has range of other uses such as banks, estate agents, cafés, public houses and restaurants.

Although Blandford has a fairly diverse economic base, Blandford Camp (located to the north-east of the town) is a significant employer of local people and supports a variety of local businesses. BFTC has an excellent working relationship with the Camp, which actively contributes to the community. It is anticipated that the Camp will remain a military establishment for the foreseeable future but changes to its role during the plan period could have implications for the local economy. In Blandford, 5,433 residents are economically active (employed or actively seeking employment).

The major employers in and around the town are Bryanston, Clayesmore and Milton Abbey Schools, Damory Coaches, the Dorset Council, Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust, Environment Agency, Hall and Woodhouse Ltd, Hospital Metalcraft, Iracraft Ltd, KJ Pike & Sons, Royal Signals, Sovereign Housing Association, The Forum School, and Tesco. The town is usually bustling and the numerous cafés and restaurants are seen to be busy, however the nightlife is limited and local groups strive to put on events to draw people into the town and encourage residents to socialise locally. There is a common aim to improve arts in the area and facilities for young people.

The factors identified above all contribute to a vibrant community, however, the town being a conservation area, the listed status of the many town centre buildings and the lack of infrastructure for an expanding town currently pose concern for the town's future.

3. Vision for Blandford Forum

BFTC has the following vision for Blandford Forum and would like the town and the relevant authorities to be able to:

- Represent the views of the people of Blandford Forum in supporting the development of a coherent vision for the future of the town by way of ongoing consultation and a comprehensive Neighbourhood Plan
- Deliver a range of operational services as effectively and economically as possible
- Provide opportunities for younger people and young families to be able to live in the town – affordable housing and a more varied housing mix (more 1 & 2 bed properties for the under 35's)
- Develop the vibrant community – supporting all sectors of our community
- Continue to forge stronger relationships with key partners and community organisations
- Introduce a public sector hub – recognising the distance from the county town and the forthcoming loss of public service delivery at Nordon

- Create a more diverse economy – with knowledge based small businesses enjoying a high quality of life, a better retail and night-time economy offer, a developed heritage-based tourism offer
- Provide an infrastructure capable of coping with the demands that economic success brings – with a good road network and car parking where it needs to be
- Continue to support the improvement and introduction of facilities and infrastructure at the top of the town (north of the trailway)
- Respect our heritage & environment – having a co-ordinated approach to tourism, active engagement to ensure that new developments complement the town’s existing heritage, in a town that cares both for its rural environment and environmental sustainability
- Reduce its carbon footprint and increase biodiversity in conjunction with the Climate Change & Biodiversity Action Plan
- Have awareness of, and be in agreement with, the long-term phases of growth for the town and the area it serves with regards to the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan

BFTC’s actions to contribute towards the vitality of the town in support of the Vision are presented on the following pages.

4. Town Council Responsibilities, Services and Assets

See Appendix A for the complete list.

5. Partnership Working

BFTC works closely with various external organisations within the public and private sector, and community/volunteer organisations. The table below illustrates the different groups we work with and the subject matter:

Policy Area/Service	Partner/s	Why do we work with them?
Planning for Blandford Forum		
Overall	Blandford + consisting of Blandford Forum Town Council, Blandford St Mary and Bryanston Parish Councils Local residents	Localisation

Local Economy and Tourism	<p>The Blandford Business Support Group</p> <p>Dorset Council</p> <p>Blandford Information Centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of the business community • Strategic responsibility • Common Interest <p>The Town Council gets involved with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising events to attract tourism • Financial and proofreading support given to the Blandford Out & About booklet • Promoting the town to attract heritage-based tourism, including promotion in Coach Drivers' Club Yearbook • Administering and promoting the free parking days in the town.
Environment, Biodiversity & Heritage	<p>Town Museum</p> <p>Fashion Museum</p> <p>Railway Arches Trust</p> <p>Environmental Trust</p> <p>Dorset Council</p> <p>Rangers</p> <p>Blandford Civic Society</p> <p>Blandford War on Waste</p> <p>Community organisations</p>	<p>Key Providers</p> <p>Strategic responsibility</p> <p>Common interest</p>
Policy Area/Service	Partner/s	Why do we work with them?
Housing	<p>The Stour Valley & Poole Partnership</p> <p>Dorset Council</p> <p>Sovereign Housing Association</p> <p>Magna Housing Group</p> <p>Persimmon Homes</p> <p>Holland Estates (Blandford) Ltd</p> <p>Clemdell Ltd</p> <p>Bellway Homes</p> <p>Wyatt Homes</p> <p>Savills</p> <p>Bryanston (RFE) Ltd</p>	<p>Revenue & Benefits</p> <p>Statutory Housing Authority</p> <p>Major providers</p> <p>Major developers</p>

Highways, Transport and Parking	Dorset Council More Bus Company Damory Coaches	Highways Authority – to work together to improve on street parking, traffic flow and safety. Landowner of car parks – to lobby to retain a free car park for the town and keep charges low. Planning – to lobby for parking provision for new developments. Local Provider
Community, Wellbeing and Cultural	Clinical Commissioning Group NHS Dorset Council Doctor/dental surgeries Opticians Residential care homes Community organisations Schools Business organisations Town Team Local Churches Blandford Food Bank Community Kitchen Dementia Action Alliance	Key health providers Key arts provider Key recreation providers Key supporter of the town's Dementia Action Plan
Policy Area/Service	Partner/s	Why do we work with them?
Operational Services		
Allotments	The Allotment Management Committee and volunteers	Key providers
Sport and Recreational facilities, and Open Spaces	Dorset Council Community organisations Sports Clubs	Planning Authority/Landowner Common Interest Key Providers
Cemeteries	Funeral Directors, Grave Diggers and Stone Masons Commonwealth War Grave Commission	Customer representatives Maintenance
Municipal Buildings	Community organisations Dorset Council	Key users Planning Authority/Landowner

Culture, civic and Twinning	Mortain Twinning Association Preetz Twinning Association Blandford Camp Royal British Legion Dorset Police and Community Support Officers Churches Together/local churches Community Kitchen Community organisations	Lead twinning providers Community event organisers
Markets	Dorset Council	Landowner To promote the town and work to rejuvenate the market
Refuse, management & recycling including grit bins (Town Council provides some grit bins)	Dorset Council Dorset Waste Partnership	Strategic responsibility
CCTV (Town Council owns the system)	Dorset Police and volunteers	Lead operators
Public Conveniences	Dorset Council	Landowner
Policy Area/Service	Partner/s	Why do we work with them?
Grants/Service Level Agreements	Local organisations Grants are provided throughout the year Service Level Agreements are in place with: Leisure Centre £50,000 a year CAB £2,500 Treads (youth organisation) £4,000 Youth Centre £15,000 a year Fashion Museum £2,000 Town Museum £2,000 Blandford Information Centre £2,000 Stour Valley Band £1,500	To support local organisations with an ongoing financial commitment and stability To assist with the long-term sustainability of the organisations To help them develop their infrastructure and profile to encourage community involvement

6. Context of the Plan

BFTC started its first plan period from 2007 to 2011, and has since held plans for 2012-2016 and 2017-2021. This Plan has now been updated to coincide with the new council term (2019-2024). Various tasks have arisen during these periods that were not identified, such as introducing WI-FI to two of our venues, improved play areas, introduction of new events, increased security and protection of our venues, adding to services at the cemetery and upgrading amenity areas. Some projects remain in progress which will need to be progressed during this plan's period. These continuing projects include:

- the Corn Exchange
- reviewing the infrastructure for the Grounds & Property staff to support their work on the amenity and play areas in the town
- reviewing our existing buildings to ensure they are fit for purpose both now and in the future to meet local community need
- several projects related to the Badbury Heights Development public open spaces and play areas once BFTC become the legal owners of the public land

This plan seeks to continue the work started in the previous plans and build on its success. The Plan is intended for residents, Councillors, staff and partner organisations. The financial climate and changes in government legislation such as the Localism Act will also bring new challenges for the Town Council to face.

BFTC has a large number of projects to achieve, which have arisen for a variety of reasons:

- Identified by the community, local organisations and/or councillors
- Identified in the Neighbourhood Plan/Local Plan
- Statutory requirements
- As a result of legal agreements
- Required to meet best practice

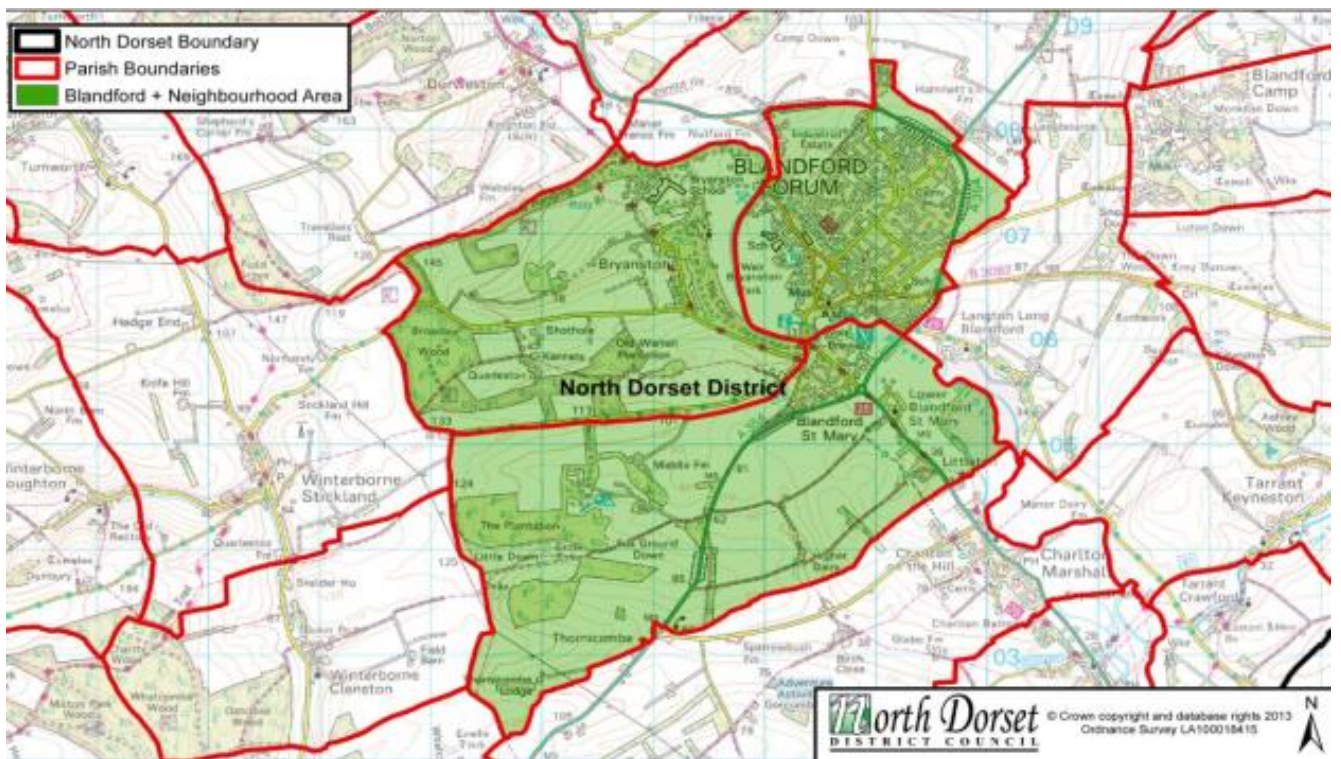
BFTC has a finite number of employees and limited funds to deliver these projects. The aim of the Plan is to prioritise the order in which they are progressed to make most efficient use of limited resources of money, manpower and time. Projects may be time limited and governed by dates or trigger points in s106 agreements, and legal deadlines of funding time limits set by external organisations. These factors, combined with the nature of project lifecycles, frequently direct the order in which the projects can be delivered.

7. Neighbourhood Plan

Blandford Forum Town Council, Blandford St Mary Parish Council and Bryanston Parish Council ("the Councils"), have been working together under the title Blandford + ("the Steering Group") to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the area overleaf.

Blandford will continue to be a focus for growth in the North Dorset area. It is one of the main service centres in North Dorset and serves a sizeable rural hinterland that contains a large number of villages. We accept the need for the further growth of the town over the long term, beyond that already planned for and are actively identifying and bringing forward sites for new dwellings within the Neighbourhood Plan area.

BFTC has long sought to address social and other infrastructure weaknesses in the northern half of the town. The housing expansion to the South and East of the town over the last three decades up to the A350 bypass and into the AONB has not been accompanied by supporting social or commercial infrastructure.



Plan A: Designated Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Area

The purpose of the new Neighbourhood Plan is to:

- Ensure Blandford gets the essential infrastructure it requires e.g. to address Dorset Council’s urgent requirement for a new Primary School
- Redress the 5 Year Housing Land Supply shortfall
- Identify and remedy the lack of employment land in Blandford
- Strengthen the planning strategy for Blandford, protecting the town and surrounds from unsuitable planning applications
- Significantly reduce the lead time to adoption required for the new Dorset Council Local Plan Review

8. Aims of the Plan

- To establish and clearly document BFTC’s overall vision of project priorities and detail how and when these projects may be delivered.
- To give clear direction for resource planning and budget setting decisions.
- To guide discussions and decisions with the community and partner organisations.
- To support the BFTC vision of a professional, proficient Town Council developing quality facilities and services within the community.
- To be dynamic, responsive to demand and open to change.

There are three themes that support BFTC’s vision of a professional, proficient Town Council developing quality facilities and services within the community.



Professional & Proficient

To ensure we can achieve our goals we will –

- employ up-to-date management techniques and work practices
- audit and review procedures
- develop new policies to progress our professionalism
- retain Quality Gold status
- retain General Power of Competence

Provision of Facilities & Services

We will aim to –

- provide good quality, accessible amenity areas
- provide good quality, accessible play areas
- provide multi-purpose venues that are 'fit for purpose'
- to fulfil the Town Council's Statutory Duties to:
 - Act with regard to crime and disorder
 - Consider conserving biodiversity and the impact on the environment
 - Provide allotments if there is a demand
- work with our partner organisations to improve the living environment
- help to preserve the town's unique historic heritage
- improve upon our existing provision

An Excellent Employer

To ensure we fulfil our vision we will –

- value and support our employees
- exercise our duty of care towards our employees
- assist our employees to maximise their potential
- instil a culture of excellence and continuous improvement amongst employees

9. Action Plan and Performance Monitoring (Appendix B) – see also the Budget Plan at Appendix D

In order to achieve its vision, BFTC has developed an Action Plan to cover each of the three areas. This will focus our resources and communicate our plans to the community, partner organisations, members and staff. The Action Plan will ensure that our resources are targeted in line with our Plan areas. We will be able to monitor our performance against the goals detailed in the plan and to update it with our progress.

The Action Plan lists each specific project. It is a living document, responsive to demand and open to change. There are many influences that BFTC needs to consider including the numerous changes presently facing local government and decisions taken by the Dorset Council. Dependant on the outcome of these influences, the implications could have a major effect on the Employees, Processes and Capital Projects of the Town Council.

Quarterly reports and updates are presented to full Council meetings.

10. Annual Processes (Appendix C)

The Plan has provided an opportunity for the annual processes that are carried out to be listed at Appendix C.

11. Financial Summary and Budget Plan (Appendix D)

The Town Council is in a sound financial position and is currently running a small budget surplus, which is strengthening due to an increase in grants received, good financial management and investments. The budget for 2020/21 is at £801,180 which equates to an increase of 1.11 % on the Band D figure and £2.49 per annum (an increase of 0.04p a week). Any surpluses created will be transferred to the Reserves, which will help to develop new projects.

The Council is not reliant on receiving Government Grants, and no longer receives the Localisation of Council Tax Support Grant from the local authority. In recent years there has been an annual loss of approximately £80,000 since the changes in the council tax base.

The Council has no reliance on sources of income that are beyond its control and therefore services that the Council provides are not under threat of being cut. The Council has taken the view that it needs to be supportive to its community and to respond to cuts that other tiers of local government have implemented, hence the importance and pro-active decision by the Council that it needs to create the operational surplus. This being said, the Council carries out a gradual and detailed review of every item of the expenditure and income, with the view to creating additional capacity to deal with service cuts elsewhere in the public sector.

In recent years the Council has tended to underspend its operational budget, due to a variety of external factors, which it adds to the General Reserve. As the budget is reduced as a result of the efficiency review this underspend will also reduce. The Council has assessed that it needs to keep a minimum of £200,000 (a minimum of 25% of the total budget is required) in its General Reserve for emergency purposes and for sound economic practice as advised by the Governance & Accountability for Local Councils.

The Council holds a number of Earmarked Reserves, which reflect the cost of the corporate projects, namely the restoration of the Corn Exchange complex and s106 monies received for the Persimmon Homes development. Full details of the Reserves can be found in the budget, in the Annual Financial Statements and on the Council's website.

The projects, aims and activities listed in Appendices B and C can only be carried out with appropriate budgeting. The budget summary at Appendix D is a 'live' budget plan to accompany the Town Council Plan throughout its term and was most recently updated after the precept was set for 2021/2022. It is a guide for Councillors and they are not committed to setting the precept as per the predictions due to the numerous external and internal factors that influence projects throughout their lifespan and the unknown figures for the revenue balance to be brought forward for the forthcoming years.

In summary, the Council is in a healthy financial position due to the financial planning and investments that have taken place in recent years. This Plan demonstrates the need to continue to carefully manage its resources, because of its appetite to support the delivery of new and vital opportunities in the town and because it wishes to help its community to deal with the worst impacts of cuts that it will see elsewhere in local government.