

Council of the Week: Yate Town Council



The Parish of Yate is located in South Gloucestershire – approximately 11 miles from the City of Bristol. The parish has a population of over 22,000 people, represented by 17 councillors.

The council is a forward thinking and progressive council – leading the way in the development of local projects and facilities. It provides a range of sporting facilities – including a bowling green, football pitches, tennis courts (refurbished in 2014), and two skateboard/BMX parks. It has recently taken over the ownership of the entire Yate outdoor sports complex site – a key facility for the area offering a wide range of athletic and track facilities, a hockey all weather pitch and dance studio, which would otherwise have faced closure following the withdrawal of the Unitary Authority from previous lease arrangements.

At the beginning of 2016, the council purchased land at Abbotswood shopping centre – including a paved and grassed area at the front of the shops and some to the rear. This is a huge step as the previously privately owned land had not seen any investment - taking over the ownership is the first step needed to raise the funds required to help develop and regenerate this area which is the heart beat of the local community at Abbotswood.

The council also owns several properties, including a Parish Hall, Poole Court (built in the early 1850's, and originally a grand family home, saved and lovingly restored by Yate Town Council and re-opened in 1990 so 25th anniversary celebrations have recently taken place), Pop Inn Cafe for the over 50's, Yate Heritage Centre and the Armadillo Youth Café and Venue.

The council is very proud of the Armadillo – completed in the spring of 2011 in partnership with South Gloucestershire Council (but Yate Town Council took over full ownership for it in April 2015), it was the realisation of a long held aspiration for the town. The ‘Armadillo’ was the winning choice in a competition to name the cafe - the mammal’s shape being the original inspiration for the cafe’s design by the Bristol based architects Quattro and won the Best Community Building award in the 2011 West of England Local Authority Building Control Building Excellence Awards. The project has been widely praised by visitors – ranging from young people from other areas of the country to HRH The Earl of Wessex. The Armadillo is unique in that it is not a traditional youth club – but more a safe social space for young people of secondary school age to socialise in a safe, welcoming space (although some opportunities for structured activities are provided). The venue includes a cafe, serving food and drinks, pool table, band practice room, as well as an area for discos and bands to play with sound and lighting equipment and a cinema. There is a light art installation on the front of the building and the young people were involved in the choice of garden furniture that was installed in the garden at the rear of the building. In addition to the Armadillo, the council provides a range of other youth services, including a detached youth programme complete with Urbie minibus and youth club nights at various locations across the town.

The provision of open spaces and play areas are another key service which the council provides, with a rolling programme in place to refresh or refurbish all play areas over the coming years. The most recent play area refresh undertaken was at the ‘Witches Hat’ Play Area – and following extensive public consultation sessions with local residents and young people, now includes an entry level skate ramp, climbing equipment, a basket swing, trampoline, witches hat rotating climbing equipment and sand! It has been very well received and heavily used since it was opened at the start of the summer in 2015 and was also highly praised by ROSPA, who said ‘Congratulations on this wonderful new facility and fabulous equipment. Our inspector is especially impressed with the agility trail and rope climber among living trees.’ Projects are also underway to refresh St Mary’s Play Area, and a feasibility study for a possible revamp of the Howard Lewis play area is planned.

A number of local community events are organised and run by the council – some annually, and some to mark special events. A few of the key annual events are the Easter Egg Hunt – held in Kingsgate Park on Easter Monday, last year attracting over 700 children to the free event to follow the trail and ‘hunt’ for their free chocolate egg; an annual community music event – called Yate Rocks! celebrated its 10th anniversary in June 2015 with over 5,000 people attending the event to enjoy live music from local bands and stalls, bouncy castles and fairground rides – a great day out for the whole community, the ever important Remembrance Sunday Parade each November and The Mayor’s Christmas reception – an afternoon tea gathering for community volunteers to thank them for all their hard work throughout the year.

The council works very hard to represent the views and interest of local people – a large proportion of the council’s time is spent representing, lobbying and campaigning for the needs of the community. It often conducts public consultation exercises to gauge a representative public view, and is represented by members on many local organisations and management bodies. The council works in conjunction with the Joint Parishes Consultative Committee on local issues that affect the council and its neighbouring parishes, and liaise with South Gloucestershire Council on all parish matters, including planning applications. It also supports the Yate Community Plan group of volunteers, who oversee local projects like In Bloom and neighbourhood action groups, and a

community worker who is working hard to raise the level of awareness and support for people with Dementia within the community.

Negotiations are also in hand for the council to take ownership of Westerleigh Common, Ridgewood Orchard and Rodford Playing Field. Add to this the aspiration to provide a newly built bespoke community building near to the centre of the parish and working with the Friends of Kingsgate Park to provide a cafe facility in (or near to) the much loved Kingsgate Park, demonstrating that the council is keen to proactively pursue and provide the services and facilities desired by local people.