

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Town Council

Dunstable has a long civic tradition. Its first charter, granting independent market rights was granted in 1131 and re-affirmed and extended by successive medieval monarchs. A charter of 1864 established the modern Borough Council which was absorbed into the new South Bedfordshire district in 1974. The Town's civic traditions were continued by the District Councillors for the town acting as Charter Trustees who annually elected a Town Mayor from their number. The Town Council (now comprising the Town Mayor and 20 other elected Councillors) was established in April 1985 following a local campaign. The Council is responsible for a variety of services including Parks, Recreation Grounds, Cemetery, Allotments, Community Development, Community Centres, Children's Playschemes, Heritage and Tourist Information Centre and work with young people. The Town Council also plays an active role in the cultural, sporting and social life of Dunstable and organises a full programme of major community events.

The Council's headquarters are in the historic Grove House, originally an 18th century coaching inn the freehold of which the Council acquired from the District Council in 2005. Approximately half of the building is let commercially to the County Council (Register Office and Marriage Room), Citizens Advice Bureau and the office of Dunstable Association of Charities.

Allotments

The Council maintains 245 plots at 6 statutory allotments and provides a trading store at Meadway Allotments which is let at a peppercorn rent to the Dunstable and District Society of Gardeners.

Dunstable Cemetery

The Town Council is responsible for the operation, maintenance and administration of Dunstable Cemetery, based in West Street.

Dunstable Cemetery was established in 1861 and this Council has endeavoured to ensure that the services offered are of the highest standard and the amenities provided are in accord with prevailing social custom and requirements whilst creating an atmosphere of quiet reverence and peace.

The Cemetery is set in 6 hectares of land which is divided into various sections for Church of England, Roman Catholic and non-conformist burials laid out in both the traditional and lawn style, as well as sections reserved for the burial of cremated remains. All graves are excavated by Council staff either by hand or using a mechanical digger.

Grounds maintenance is carried out by Town Council staff but grass cutting is undertaken by outside contract.

The Cemetery has an average of 210 interments each year including interment of ashes and burials. As one of the few local burial authorities which permit the erection of full memorials in its Cemetery, Dunstable attracts burials from a broad section of the community.

The existing Cemetery is nearing completion and the District Council is seeking to compulsorily acquire, on behalf of the Town Council, some adjoining private allotment land to provide additional capacity.

A Book of Remembrance is provided in a specially constructed illuminated cabinet and is displayed open at the corresponding date. Commemorative seats may be purchased on behalf of families and these are installed by Council staff.

Recreation Grounds

The Council has a total of 11 recreation grounds (27 hectares), namely:

Bennett Memorial, Luton Road, Ridgeway Avenue, Downside, Newton, Mentmore Crescent, Markham Crescent, Brewers Hill, Downs Road, Peppercorn Park and Olma Road

incorporating 2 sports pavilions, 13 football pitches, 8 children's equipped play areas, 4 tennis courts and a BMX Track.

Other areas of open space maintained by the Council are located at: Bunhill Close, Beale Street, Staveley Road, Chichester Close, Abbey Mews and Cusworth Walk

Grounds maintenance is carried out by Town Council staff but grass cutting is undertaken by outside contract.

The Council has an established Play Equipment Policy, the objective of which is to achieve and maintain high standards of safety in the children's playgrounds managed by the Town Council.

With the aid of a Heritage Lottery grant, the Council acquired 25 hectares of rare chalk downland known as Blows Downs which is now managed as a local nature reserve by Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust which reports to a management committee administered by the Council.

Town Centre Management

Under a partnership agreement with the District Council, the Town Council manages the Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee, a statutory joint committee of county, district and town councillors plus co-opted advisers from the voluntary and business sectors which guides town centre management activities. The Town Council provides or contributes towards the cost of providing bus shelters, seating, direction signs, public conveniences, hanging baskets, highway planting schemes and entertainment and promotions all designed to improve the vitality and viability of the town centre. The Council has grounds and minor highway maintenance agencies with both District and County Councils.

The Council has two ornamental gardens within the Town Centre: Grove House Gardens (an historic park in a conservation area) and Priory Gardens (a Scheduled Ancient Monument covering much of the site of Dunstable Priory) (5 hectares). The Town Council also maintains flower beds and shrub beds in High Street North and High Street South, as well as roundabouts at Bull Pond Lane, Brewers Hill Road and St Mary's Gate. Hanging baskets, barrier planters and bedding plants are supplied under contract.

Promotions

Dunstable Town Council has been involved with the organisation and promotion of its own programme of annual and community events since its conception in 1985.

In addition to 'in-house' promotions, the Council actively seeks opportunities to promote events and activities in partnership with outside agencies, organisations and authorities all at varying levels, in its ongoing commitment to offering a balanced and complementary programme of events and activities aimed at all sections of the community. The current programme includes the Town Carnival, two day Folk and Dance Festival, Teddy Bears' picnic, Sunday afternoon band concerts, lunchtime recitals, Kite Festival on Dunstable Downs, Charity Fireworks, Christmas Tree Carols and Torchlight Procession and town centre entertainments.

Community Development

The Council's policy is as follows:

To provide opportunities for members of the Dunstable community to participate in local community development by:

- a) identifying needs, highlighting gaps in provision and seeking to improve provision in partnership with the community and other agencies
- b) overcoming barriers to community participation and empowering individuals through the introduction of initiatives for developing local confidence, skills and abilities.

This is achieved in a number of ways with current initiatives including:

- i) an Older People's Healthy Living Project supporting isolated vulnerable older people in partnership with the Salvation Army and a local older people's charity
- ii) supporting provision in areas of high deprivation
- iii) crime reduction projects
- iv) supporting community activity and the formation of new community groups
- v) provision of grants to voluntary organisations and community groups.

In addition, the Council manages Downside Community Centre, the Mayfield Centre (a family support centre on the Downside housing estate) a comprehensive Summer Playscheme and After School Club activities, The Place Youth Drop-In Centre/Information Services and outreach work with young people. The premises of The Place and adjoining outbuildings are held under a 99 year lease from the District Council at a peppercorn rent.

Following a Best Value Review the Council's major multi-purpose function facility, the Peter Newton Pavilion, is now leased to the Bedfordshire Football Association. The Council holds in Trust the Dunstable Young People's Centre which is managed on its behalf by the Luton and Bedfordshire Youth Association.

Civic Events

Dunstable has a proud civic tradition which the Council seeks to maintain. The Town Mayor attends up to 250 engagements a year and is supported by a Civic Administration Officer and a chauffeur-driven limousine under an outside contract. The Council annually organises the traditional Mayor making ceremony as part of the Annual Council Meeting, a civic service, Remembrance Celebrations as well as a variety of charity fundraising events.

Priory House

In 2005 the Council opened the Priory House heritage and information centre in a Grade II* listed building containing an original 12th century fan vaulted ceiling, originally the hospitium of Dunstable Priory. With the aid of a £1.1M grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the centre now includes a temporary exhibition gallery, a permanent exhibition "The Story of Dunstable", facilities for the local history society, interpretation of the Priory, a networked tourist information centre, gift shop and the Rose Garden Tea Room (operated under a private franchise agreement). Priory House is the focus for a wide range of heritage inspired events including lectures, courses, demonstrations and events such as the highly popular annual Tudor Festival.

Partnerships

The Town Council is a full partner in the South Bedfordshire Local Strategic Partnership and under a partnership agreement with the County Council the local managers of the Library service and the Dunstable Downs national nature reserve exercise their delegated functions in consultation with the Town Council. The Town Council has been a full partner with South Bedfordshire District Council in helping to deliver the Grove Theatre, an exciting new 760 seat multi-purpose theatre with banqueting facilities and 6 supporting bars and restaurants. Work is underway and the Theatre is due to open in Spring 2007.

The Town Clerk is also secretary to the Dunstable Liaison Forum which seeks to co-ordinate the views of all tiers of local government on key strategic issues. In recent years the Forum has co-ordinated major local campaigns on transportation issues and the Government's Growth Agenda.