



Royston Town Council Annual Report 2020/2021

18th May 2020 – 17th May 2021



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Royston Town Council's Annual Report gives a review of the activities of the Town Council during the Civic year and the financial report for the year ended 31st March 2021.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Council adapted to the restrictions and all premises were made COVID secure. New legislation was introduced which meant that council meetings were held virtually via Zoom. Once the legislation ended, the first face-to-face meeting took place successfully on 10th May 2021.

Statement from the Town Mayor 2021-2022

Councillor Mark Hughes

Mayor of Royston 2021-2022



I am delighted to become Mayor of Royston at such a pivotal time for our Country. With lockdown restrictions easing, it is now time to look forward. Our Town will start to feel more like normal, and Royston will soon start to feel and look more like the place we choose to call home.

Perhaps symbolically, we will soon see the reopening of the Parish Church. Family events such as the kite festival are scheduled to take place this summer; sport whether as a spectator or a participant, will resume and this September our schools will hopefully be able to offer our children an uninterrupted school year.

Some things will be quicker to recover than others. Just as some people will be more resilient than others, we may particularly need to extend support to those who have experienced mental health challenges over the last year.

I intend to give particular attention to the needs of young people in the Town, to ensure that they have the equality of every opportunity to succeed in a safe and secure environment.

As a long-standing businessman in the Town, I want to see us take every opportunity to ensure economic success and I will ensure that we continue to improve our environment, so that we can enjoy our Town to its full potential. I was first elected as Royston's Mayor in 1990. The pre digital World was a very different place, Royston was around half its present size in

terms of population, and its boundaries were much smaller. Sadly, many of the people who made up our community 30 years ago have moved on or are no longer with us. This certainly gives a feel for our own mortality. We are custodians of our Town for such a short time, and I think that we all aspire to leave the Town better, stronger and well placed for the future.

As part of an independent nation, we should reach out to our European friends, to show that we are still good neighbours and through our Town Twinning arrangements I look forward to welcoming them to Royston again soon.

I send my best wishes to our twinning partner towns:

 [Großalmerode, Hessen, Germany](#)

 [La Loupe, Eure-et-Loir, France](#)

 [Villanueva de la Cañada, Comunidad de Madrid, Spain](#)

My consort this year will be my wife, Hazel.

My Mayoral Charities this year will be;

After Umbrage, St John Ambulance, and The Mayor's Community Trust Fund

I look forward to serving the Community of Royston as Mayor.

Mark Hughes

Royston Town Council

There are three tiers of local government in Royston; Town, District and County.

A new website was launched in 2020 which provides a useful resource on Royston Town Council's activities, and offers access to information regarding the committees, meetings, minutes, Town Council news and other areas of interest. Information and links are also available for other Royston organisations and community associations.

www.roystontowncouncil.gov.uk

All Town Councillors serve in a voluntary capacity and are elected for a four year term of office. Councillors are not paid and do not receive any allowances for attending meetings. The Mayor is elected annually in May at the Annual Meeting of the Council. Ten Members serve on each principal committee: Finance, Planning and General Purpose & Highways.

The next Town Council elections will take place on Thursday 5th May 2022.

The Councillors that held office during the year 2020/2021 were:

Mayor: Councillor Rob Inwood

Deputy Mayor: Councillor Mark Hughes

Chairman Finance Committee: Councillor John Davison

Chairman Planning Committee: Councillor Marguerite Phillips

Chairman General Purpose & Highways Committee: Councillor Mike Harrison

Royston Town West

Cllr Ruth Brown (Liberal Democrats)

Cllr John Davison (Conservative)

Cllr Emma Squire-Smith (Liberal Democrats)

Royston Town South

Cllr Tom Perry (Liberal Democrats)

Cllr Carol Stanier (Liberal Democrats)

Royston Palace

Cllr Brian Bylett (Conservative) Co-opted 30th November 2020

Cllr Ian Coll (Conservative)

Cllr Mark Hughes (Conservative)

Cllr Robert Inwood (Independent)

Cllr Iain Leggett (Conservative)

Royston Meridian

Cllr Elizabeth Beardwell (Liberal Democrats) Elected 6th May 2021

Cllr Mike Harrison (Conservative)

Cllr Marguerite Phillips (Conservative)

Cllr F John Smith (Conservative)

Cllr Philip Smith (Conservative)

Cllr Vera Swallow (Conservative) Resigned 7th September 2020

Full Council meetings and principal committee meetings are open to all members of the public and the press. At the beginning of each meeting time is set aside to allow members of the public to make representation to the various committees about items on the agenda. Copies of the agendas are posted on the Town Hall notice-board and Town Council web-site. A calendar detailing the meetings for the coming year is also available on the web site.

The Town Council's Planning Committee is asked to respond as a consultee and makes recommendations on the planning applications for Royston. The Committee commented on over 100 applications throughout the year. Final decisions on all applications are made by North Herts District Council (NHDC).

School Visits

School visits were unable to take place due to continuing COVID 19 restrictions. These are seen as an important annual event, engaging with the community, and involving Town, District and County Councillors. It is hoped that these visits can be undertaken in 2022.

Green Street Allotments

The allotment site in Royston is owned and managed by the Town Council. There are no vacant plots at the moment, if you are interested in obtaining a plot contact the Town Council by email enquiries@roystontowncouncil.gov.uk or call 01763 245484 to be added to the waiting list, it is approximately 3 to 4 years wait for a plot. You must be a Royston resident to rent an allotment.

Royston War Memorial

Royston War Memorial in Melbourn Street was erected in 1922 in memory of the Servicemen of the town killed in the First World War. Later it was extended to include those who were killed during the Second World War. It is now a listed monument and was extensively repaired and refurbished by the Town Council in 2018.

A much smaller Remembrance Day Service was held there this year due to the pandemic however the service was live-streamed for members of the public.

Royston Town Market

Fortunately, Royston market has been able to continue to operate throughout the year and it is clear from the increase in footfall on both Wednesdays and Saturdays that significant numbers of local people have re-evaluated their shopping habits.

The fresh, high quality produce available on the market has appealed to new shoppers with a number of traders having to adapt their working practices to accommodate an increase in business. This has included taking on additional staff resources and importantly making home deliveries, which although initially designed for people who were self-isolating, and therefore unable to attend the market, still continue as an option for residents. Many customers have reported feeling much safer shopping outdoors at the market.

With the return of non-essential traders from 14th April 2021 the number of pitches in use continue to expand. The market has been a real asset to Royston throughout this challenging year and it has been pleasing to see so much goodwill and support from Roystonians who have understood the importance of the Mayors message to 'think local and shop local'.



We've been busy for the last few months getting ready to welcome our volunteers back. We've been able to have a limited number of volunteers in the museum at one time and have had some really positive chats about events and exhibitions over the next few years. It's been lovely hearing how positive we are at the museum.

While we've been closed we've been sharing more of our collections online. Our photos of Royston pantomimes from previous years got a lot of people talking and sharing their memories. Lots of talk about family members who brought a smile to faces in their panto roles. We've been chatting to museums across the UK and the world over on Twitter and sharing collections and ideas. The museum community is truly a wonderful one to be a part of and if you're online, please do join us.

We're working on new displays in the museum including one about Royston Cave. We're looking forward to working closely with the Cave and offering a more rounded way to explore Royston's heritage.

We're continuing to work towards reopening and will be taking our time to make sure we do this safely for our volunteers, staff and visitors. Our priority at the moment is working with our volunteers to help them feel safe to come back to the museum and get back involved with all the exciting things coming up.

Royston Annual May Fayre

Unfortunately the May Fayre had to be cancelled due to the uncertainty as to whether the Government roadmap out of lockdown restrictions would go as planned. Hopefully, the event can return on 2nd May 2022.

Community Halls & Royston Picture Palace

The Town Council provides public halls which can be hired, namely the Town Hall and Market Hill Rooms. Our two community halls are hired out to various local organisations, community groups and privately to members of the public for children's parties, fitness classes and social events such as quizzes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the halls were closed for the majority of the Civic year 2020-2021. They were able to reopen to the public between September and November 2020, then briefly in December before another lockdown forced closure.

In January 2021, the Town Hall was opened up for the Royston Health Centre to carry out their COVID-19 vaccination clinics. The caretakers and cleaners have worked throughout to ensure that the halls remain COVID secure. On May 17th the halls were able to reopen to hirers as well as continuing to host the vaccination clinics.

The Town Hall is used as a state-of-the-art digital cinema on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays throughout the year by Royston Picture Palace, who aim to show a wide and diverse programme of films and special events to suit all audiences and ages in our local communities. The cinema is wheelchair accessible, and a range of drinks and refreshments are available at every screening. Ticket and refreshment prices are kept low for the benefit of all. The cinema is run by a wonderful team of paid employees and volunteers to whom we are very grateful – without them, the show could literally not go on.

Royston Picture Palace has been closed for the majority of the 14 months to May 2021 due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Now reopened once again, social distancing measures remain in place and will continue to be so, in line with government guidance.

The Leete Charity Trust

The Town Council is the sole Trustee of this charity. The charity provides grants towards further education for students who live, or attend a school, in Royston. The grants are made from the interest earned on the Trust's investments. During the last year, a total of £2,265 was awarded to 6 young people going on to further education.

Details and an application form can be downloaded from the Town Council's website.

Green Walk Plantation & Stile Plantation

Two small plantations link the town centre to open countryside and footpaths. These plantations are a hidden secret of the town and are used for walking and wildlife spotting. The Town Council is currently investing in a programme of cutting and planting which will ensure that these precious green spaces continue to be available for all to enjoy for many years to come.

Covered Bike Shelter

Royston Town Council is pleased to announce that a bike shelter with capacity for 20 cycles has been installed in the Market Place carpark. This was funded by S106 contributions from developers that were allocated for sustainable transport. We hope that by lowering the barriers to cycling in our town we can further our ambitions to become a Sustainable Travel Town and reduce traffic congestion and air pollution for our residents.

Royston Cave Annual Report 20/21

Royston Cave closed its doors in March 2020 to safeguard our staff and visitors against the outbreak of COVID-19. It remained closed throughout the year. In light of these events, we looked to new strategies for engagement.

Foremost, Royston Cave's website was improved to make information more accessible. A 'Conservation' section was added to inform visitors about the current challenges facing the cave; an 'About' section was introduced to make details about our operation and governance more transparent; and a research facility was created to make research of Royston Cave easier.

In June 2020, an online archive was established to collate news, research and resources about Royston Cave. Articles about the cave and its themes are regularly added as it aims to become a comprehensive database of information that can be easily searched, read and referenced by everyone. Since its creation, there have been 563 views across 9 articles.

The highly anticipated 3D, 360 degree digital replica of Royston Cave was launched. The Virtual Experience had originally been designed for use at Royston Museum but, due to the pandemic, was successfully deployed online instead. It was free to access for everyone between 21st August and 4th October 2020. In its first week of launch, over 1000 visitors explored Royston Cave virtually. It was subsequently deployed periodically for free general access throughout the remainder of the year. In total, 2541 people visited from across the globe. It received commendation from members of the public, heritage sites and notable academics.

In January 2021, the self-guided Virtual Experience was succeeded by the launch of guided virtual tours. These were presented live by the Cave Manager and utilised The Virtual Experience software. 50 individuals and 10 households attended across 12 tours, including 2 private tours. Going forward, these virtual tours will work in tandem with physical tours. Professional photography was commissioned in October 2020 to be used in new marketing strategies, as well as providing an up-to-date photographic record of the cave. This photography also forms the basis of our new professional Image Service which was launched in March 2021 and provides licensed access to high-quality imagery of Royston Cave for commercial and non-commercial use.

In April 2021, new visitor access resources were introduced including an Access Statement, Visual Story and Sensory Map. These resources will ensure that Royston Cave is more welcoming to anyone who finds visiting attractions more difficult. Later that month, a new Environmental Policy was introduced, to solidify our commitment to reducing the impact that our operations have on the environment, and maintenance was done to the cave's visitor entrance.

Our increased activity online this past year has seen our digital engagement increase dramatically, with a 43% increase in our social media following.

We are currently preparing for a number of upcoming projects, notably vital maintenance to the access steps, the delayed launch of the permanent cave exhibition at Royston Museum and a project with the Hertfordshire Geological Society to study the chalk bedrock in which

Royston Cave sits. The report will outline the age and fossil content of the chalk and provide a better understanding of Royston’s geological history. For more information, visit roystoncave.co.uk.

Annual Town Meeting 2021

The Annual Town meeting was held virtually via Zoom on 11th March 2021 and was attended by 30 members of the public. Community Trust Fund Grants were awarded to:

ORGANISATION	PURPOSE OF GRANT	AMOUNT AWARDED
National Childbirth Trust	To establish a breast feeding drop in support group in Royston.	£500.00
Royston and District Community Transport	Contribution towards the running costs of the wheelchair accessible vehicles.	£500.00
Royston Arts Society	To assist with the cost of hiring the Heritage Hall for the annual autumn art exhibition which forms part of the Royston Arts Festival.	£265.00
Royston Photographic Society	To assist with the cost of hiring the Town Hall for the Royston Arts Festival Exhibition.	£250.00
Royston Rockets BMX Racing Club	For a technology upgrade.	£500.00
Royston Twinning Association	To fund the costs of twinning civic receptions	£250.00

The Town Mayor, Councillor Rob Inwood, presented Community Service Awards to:

Brian Norwood – in recognition of his many years of dedication to the Royston Methodist Church and the wider community of Royston.

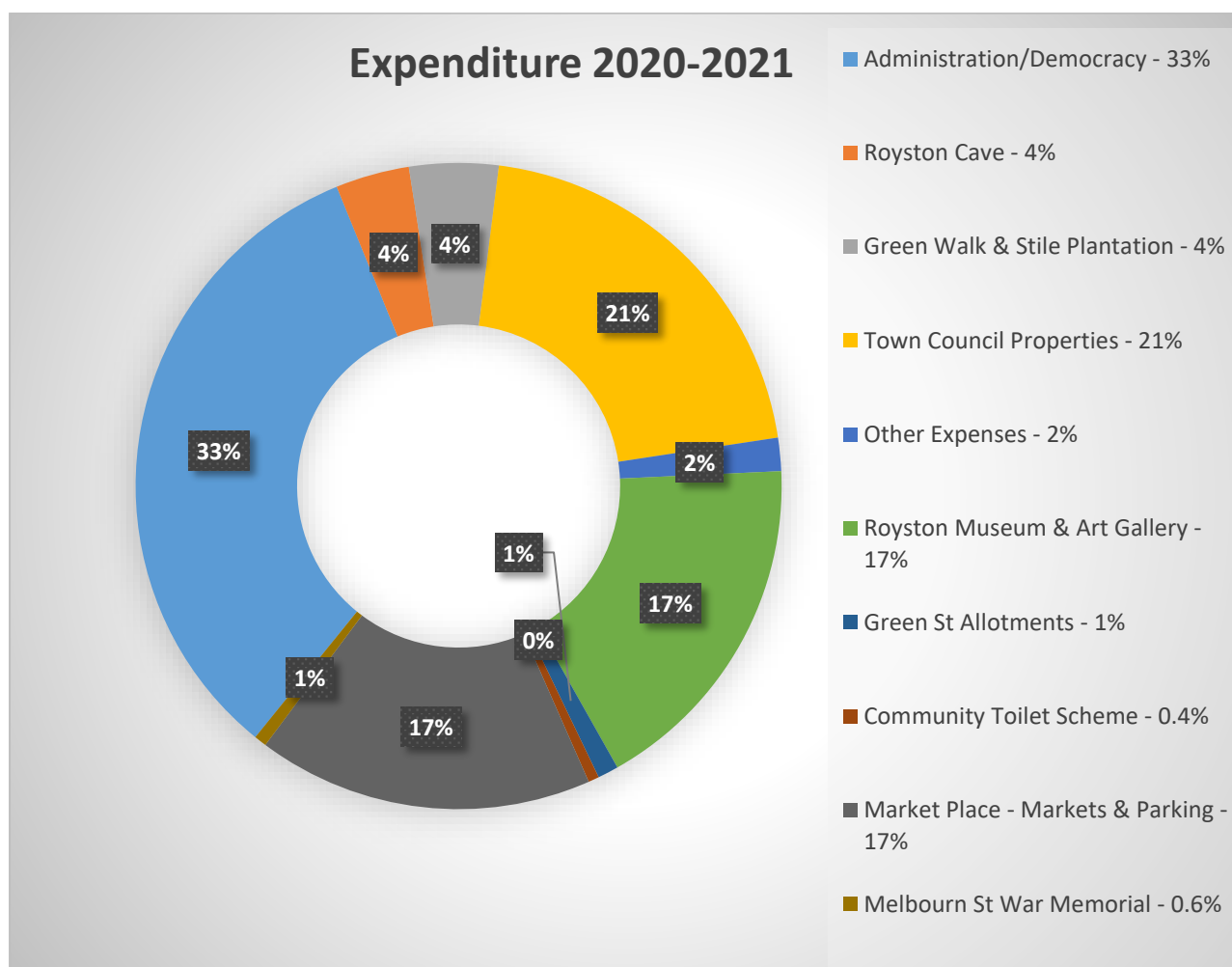
Andy & Viv Williams – in recognition of their immeasurable contribution to our local community for the past 20 years beginning with setting up and running the Open House Project and later the Royston Foodbank.

Mike Lawrence – in recognition of his hard work and continuing support for the Royston & District Museum.

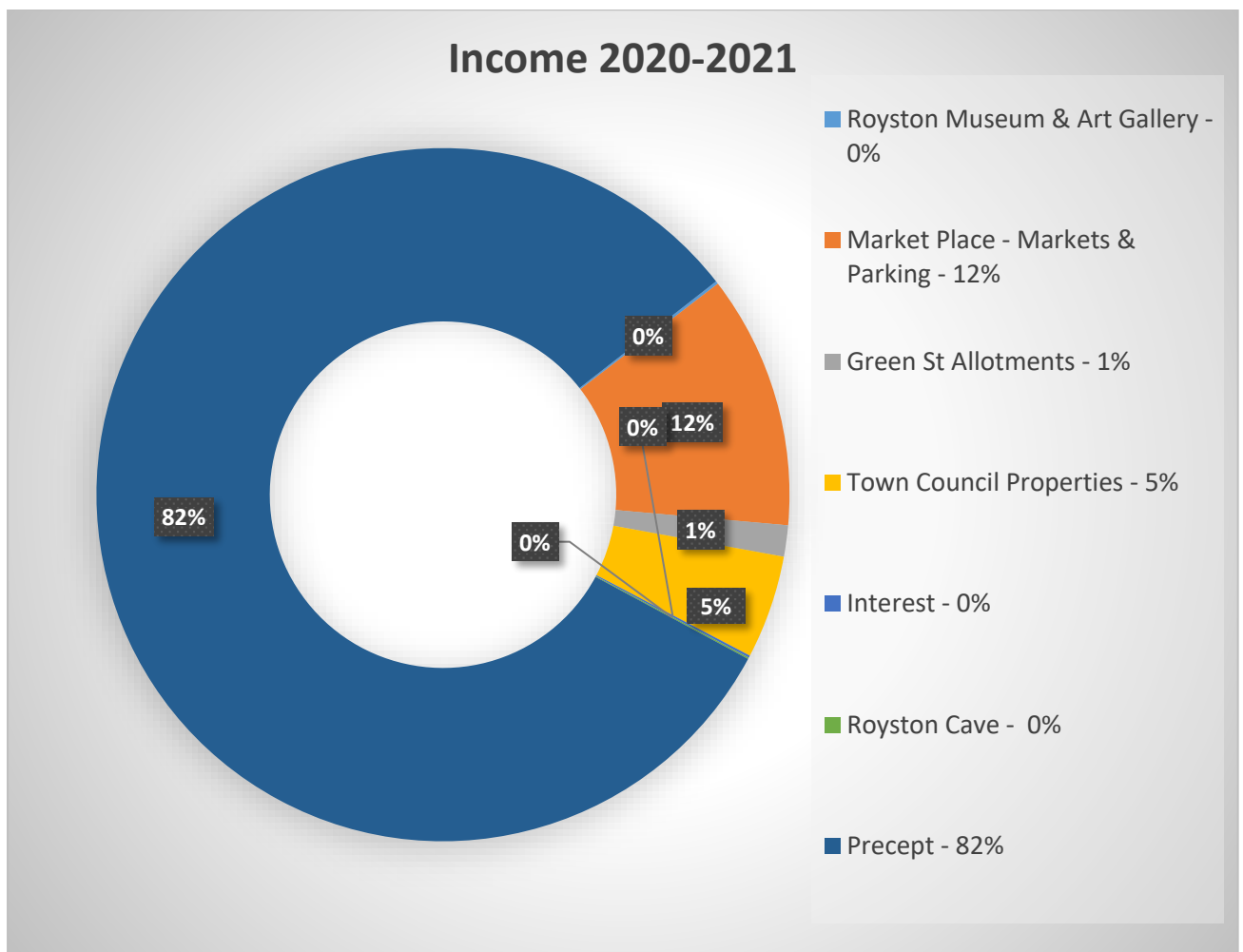
Royston Town Council Finances 2020-2021

EXPENDITURE

	Budget	Actual
Administration/Democracy	117,443	122,935
Royston Museum & Art Gallery	100,819	65,385
Town Council Properties	97,628	76,754
Green Walk & Stile Plantation	18,039	16,624
Other Expenses (Civic, May Fayre, Christmas Lights etc.)	35,385	6,190
Royston Cave	19,224	13,753
Green St Allotments	4,409	3,878
Melbourn St War Memorial	2,864	2,322
Community Toilet scheme	5,084	2,003
Market Place - Markets and Parking	67,200	62,612
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	468,095	372,456



<u>INCOME</u>	Budget	Actual
Interest	1500	424
Market Place - markets/parking	60,000	47,745
Royston Museum & Art Gallery	1000	542
Town Council Properties	58,965	19,459
Green St Allotments	5,399	5,876
Royston Cave	12,000	268
Precept	329,231	329,231
TOTAL INCOME	468,095	403,545



Royston Town Council Finances 2021-2022

The Royston Town Council part of the Council Tax for 2021-2022 is £50.90 per Band D household.

Royston Town Council Budget & Precept 2021-2022

Expenditure

Administration/Democracy	129,571
Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery	91,666
Royston Town Hall	59,613
Priory Centre Rooms	14,508
Market Hill Rooms	20,294
Green Walk and Stile Plantations	19,080
Other Expenses	15,543
Royston Cave	20,032
Green St Allotments	4,465
Royston War Memorial	2,423
30 Kneesworth Street	1,036
Public conveniences	2,913
Markets and Parking	70,734
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	451,878

Income

Interest	300
Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery	750
Royston Town Hall	15,000
Priory Centre Rooms	500
Market Hill Rooms	7,500
Green St Allotments	5,600
30 Kneesworth Street	15,580
Royston Cave	10,000
Markets and Parking	54,000
TOTAL INCOME	109,230

Precept	331,469
CTRS Grant	11,179
	342,648