



Royston Town Council

Annual Report 2023/2024

15th May 2023 – 20th May 2024



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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 2024.

Statement from the Town Mayor 2024-2025

A message from our new Town Mayor, Councillor John Rees



I feel honoured and humbled as I begin my term as Mayor and I am very much looking forward to the next 12 months, continuing to work with the Town Council for the people of Royston.

My wife and I moved to Royston from a West London suburb 9 years ago when I retired from a stressful job with Transport for London. We chose Royston because of its quiet rural location, yet within easy reach of larger towns and with good rail links to London. Soon after we moved here we found ourselves in a very friendly and easy going environment and I actually got to know my neighbours. It wasn't long before I became aware of the strength of the local community and how precious the town is to its residents. Over the last nine years I have become more and more involved with the local community and was lucky to be elected to the Town Council in 2022.

As your Mayor I look forward to working on your behalf and intend to do my utmost to be even more involved with the community and businesses of Royston. I will have a relevant presence on social media, and I will host a show on Royston Radio 'The Mayor's Notebook' to highlight my Mayoral activity, upcoming events, as well as keeping you updated on the Town Council's activities and decisions.

My chosen charities for this civic year will be:

The Mayor's Community Trust Fund and Home Start – Royston, Buntingford & South Cambs.

I am very excited to begin serving the community of Royston as Mayor.

Councillor John Rees
Mayor of Royston
May 2024

Royston Town Council

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

The Town Council's website is updated regularly providing a useful resource on Royston Town Council's activities, and offering access to information regarding the committees, meetings, minutes, Town Council news and other areas of interest. Some council meetings are now being live streamed via YouTube and the link can be found on the website. 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 Councillors that held office during the year 2023/2024 were:

Mayor: Councillor Lisa Adams

Deputy Mayor: Councillor John Rees

Chairman Finance Committee: Councillor Adam Compton

Chairman Planning Committee: Councillor Elizabeth Beardwell

Chairman General Purpose & Highways Committee: Councillor Mike Harrison

Royston Town West

Cllr Ruth Brown (Liberal Democrats)

Cllr Elizabeth Beardwell (Liberal Democrats)

Cllr Emma Squire-Smith (Liberal Democrats)

Royston Town South

Cllr Mary Antony (Royston Town Party)

Cllr Elizabeth Freeman (Liberal Democrats)

Royston Palace

Cllr Lisa Adams (Royston Town Party)

Cllr Robert Inwood (Royston Town Party)

Cllr Bind Jani (Royston Town Party)

Cllr Lynsey Langdon (Royston Town Party)

Cllr John Rees (Labour till 18th March, then Independent)

Royston Meridian

Cllr Elizabeth Beardwell (Liberal Democrats)

Cllr James Birch (Royston Town Party)

Cllr Adam Compton (Conservative)

Cllr Mike Harrison (Conservative)

Cllr Luke Haugh (Royston Town Party)

Cllr Stephen Lockett (Labour)

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 noticeboard and Town Council website. A calendar detailing the meetings for the coming year is also available on the website. Full Council meetings are now being live-streamed on YouTube and the link is both on the website and our social media platforms.

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 130 applications throughout the year. Final decisions on all applications are made by North Herts Council (NHC).

School Visits

Royston Town Council organised another successful round of visits to local schools during the autumn term of 2023. The schools visited this year were Icknield Walk First School, Roman Way First School, St Mary's Primary School, Tannery Drift First School, Studlands Rise First School and King James Academy. Town, District and County Councillors all took part and the children were well engaged and put forward several ideas which have been taken on board.

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 4 to 5 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. It is scheduled to be deep cleaned before November 2024.

On 12th November 2023 hundreds of people joined the parade from the British Legion to the War Memorial for the Remembrance Day Service.

Royston Town Market

Despite traders being anxious about the economic climate as we entered 2023, it was good to see full markets being the norm in terms of trader numbers.

The vast majority of traders appear to be once again making a commitment to support the market as we move into 2024, although evidence does suggest that footfall may have decreased slightly. This is not surprising and is something that has been evident nationally as indicated by feedback from the National Association of British Market Authorities. We therefore remain optimistic that the market should once again enjoy a successful year.

Royston Museum

Since April 2022 Royston Museum has been owned and managed by the Royston Museum Trust CIO. Royston Town Council continues to provide core funding to the museum.

All information can be found on their website www.roystonmuseum.org.uk

Royston Annual May Fayre

In partnership with other organisations and volunteers, the Town Council runs this yearly event in the Priory Memorial Gardens which takes place on the first Bank Holiday in May. It gives local charities and voluntary organisations a chance to fund raise for themselves. Admission to the event is free.

The event was attended by large numbers of people who enjoyed mostly sunny weather and the wide variety of food offered. There was fun for all the family with the Town Band keeping the crowds entertained with their music and regulars such as the miniature railway, the Punch and Judy show and the Novelty Dog Show.

Free attractions, Professor Crump, Topper's Circus skills and Rebels and Rascals' face painting were provided thanks to funding from Royston Town Council. The 2,000 reusable cups, purchased by the council to reduce single use plastic waste, were successfully reused. These cups are available for other Royston organisations to use for their own events and information can be found on the website.

Running alongside the May Fayre was the Historical Car Show which was organised by the Rotary Club and judged by the Town Mayor.



Community Halls

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

The kitchen at Market Hill Rooms was completely refurbished with a new oven and flooring, as well as some new crockery and utensils. WIFI was also recently installed for the benefit of hirers. A new hearing loop was installed in the Heritage Hall and a new PA system is now available.

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 £1,400 was awarded to 5 young people going on to further education. Details and an application form can be downloaded from the Town Council's website.

Mayor's Community Trust Fund

During her term as Royston Town Mayor, Councillor Lisa Adams carried out over 100 engagements. In this time she also hosted a Civic Service, and a Charity Christmas Fayre to raise funds for the Mayor's Community Trust Fund. Along with donations made throughout the year, the total amount raised for 2023-2024 was £1,094.24 split equally between the Trust Fund and her other nominated charity, Pathways to Learning. This year five grants between £250 and £310 were awarded from the Mayor's Community Trust Fund to local charities and organisations.

Community Grants

The Council wishes to encourage, support and promote volunteer organisations, clubs, groups and charities within Royston for the benefit of the Town and therefore set up the Community Grant Scheme. The Grant Scheme is for grants of a value up to £500 and details can be found on the website. The grants awarded in this civic year are listed below:

Organisation	Amount received
Make Lunch	£500.00
NCT - Royston Villages Branch	£395.00
Royston Indian Society	£450.00
Royston Girlguiding	£500.00
R & D Community Transport	£340.00
Royston Swimming Club	£200.00

Green Walk Plantation & Stile Plantation

Two small plantations link the town centre to open countryside and footpaths. These plantations are much-loved nature havens and are used for walking and wildlife spotting.

This year, new hedging was planted to give a more enclosed feeling to part of Stile Plantation and provide more habitat for wildlife. A comprehensive tree survey was carried out and work will be scheduled in outside of the bird nesting season. Clearing cow parsley and planting shade loving wildflowers by a team of enthusiastic volunteers from Johnson Matthey has continued. A nesting bird survey was conducted in spring and a bat survey was also carried out in May.



Climate and Biodiversity Action

The Council declared a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency in June 2022 and since then have been investigating ways to reduce their carbon emissions and increase biodiversity in Royston. 'Reuse or Return' cups continue to be used at the May Fayre in order to reduce the use of single-use plastics at the event. The cups are available for other local organisations on application.

Royston Cave

The total number of visitors to Royston Cave in 2023 rose to 3955, our highest number yet. Most public tours were sold out, and a total of 46 private tours more than doubled the amount taken in the previous year. There was also an increase in the number of overseas visitors, including the USA, Canada, and Australia.

A special Summer Solstice event was held, which included a sunrise session, and these entailed quiet, meditation time within the cave on blankets and cushions and were well received.

In October, Storytime tours focussing on children took place as part of the Royston Arts Festival. These were well attended and enjoyed by all.

Then in December the annual, and ever popular, Cave by Candlelight tours finished a very productive year for the cave.

In August, the official Royston Cave Guidebook was published, and is available to buy from the Royston Museum, Town Hall, and Library for £5.

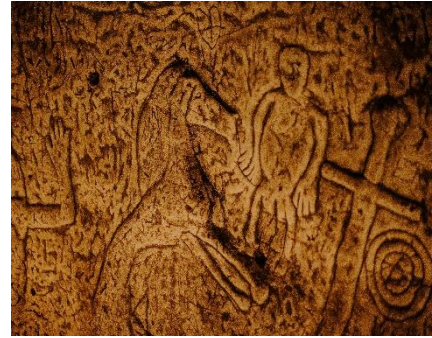
Reports and articles were also published on the cave website and our social media coverage has been maintained and follower levels are rising.

After a long wait the results for the radiocarbon dating were finally issued at the end of the year. All five of the samples were dated to be post discovery (after 1742) which was a little disappointing. We hope for more archaeological techniques to be employed in the cave as part of the National Lottery Heritage Bid, the process of which was started in January 2024. Other considerations for the bid are to replace the internal infrastructure of the cave and focus on conservation of the cave's heritage.

Newsletter subscribers have increased to nearly 600, which has meant that a new platform was needed to continue providing this service free of charge, which has ultimately delayed some newsletter issues.

In preparation for the new public tour season the cave floor was repaired after it became apparent that the wooden frame beneath the decking was starting to rot.

The new season has started well with most tours sold out, showing that the slight increase in admission fees does not seem to have deterred visitor numbers.



Senior Committee Working Party

During the year 2023-24, the Senior Committee Working Party oversaw the annual Silver Sunday event at Royston Town Hall. Older members of the community were invited to a Tea Dance, with cheese and wine served to around 40 attendees.

The Senior Committee also organised the "Memory Lane" event at Royston Town Hall last summer, which saw 67 people come along for a free cream tea, a good natter, plus music and memories from years gone by courtesy of Royston Radio.

The Senior Committee trialled a Warm Hub Coffee Morning for over 65's at the Town Hall in January 2024 with support from Royston Radio and Tesco Extra. Unfortunately, this event was not so well attended with only 11 people dropping in throughout the morning.

Shared Prosperity Fund

The council received funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund to improve the town centre. Much of the street furniture in the town centre, including benches, bollards, railings and hanging basket posts, was painted using this grant.

Annual Town Meeting 2024

The Annual Town meeting was held in the Heritage Hall on 14th March 2024 and was attended by 25 members of the public. Guest speakers included Hertfordshire Police and Royston First BID.

Community Trust Fund Grants were awarded to:

ORGANISATION	PURPOSE OF GRANT	SUM REQUESTED
Royston Arts Society	Towards the cost of hiring the Heritage Hall for the Royston Arts Festival	£310.00
Royston Speak Out Club	Towards the cost of the Royston Speak Out Club's Summer Outing 2024	£250.00
Priory Quilters	Towards the cost of hiring the Market Hill Rooms for the Royston Arts Festival	£250.00
Home Start Royston, Buntingford & South Cambs	For the Home Start Christmas Party at Royston Methodist Church	£210.50
Royston Photographic Society	Towards the cost of hiring the Hardwicke Hall for the Royston Arts Festival	£275.00

Community Service Awards were awarded to:

Blake Close Christmas Lights Team - In recognition of their work from September to December each year creating a Christmas lights display for their switch on event that raises hundreds of pounds for local charities.

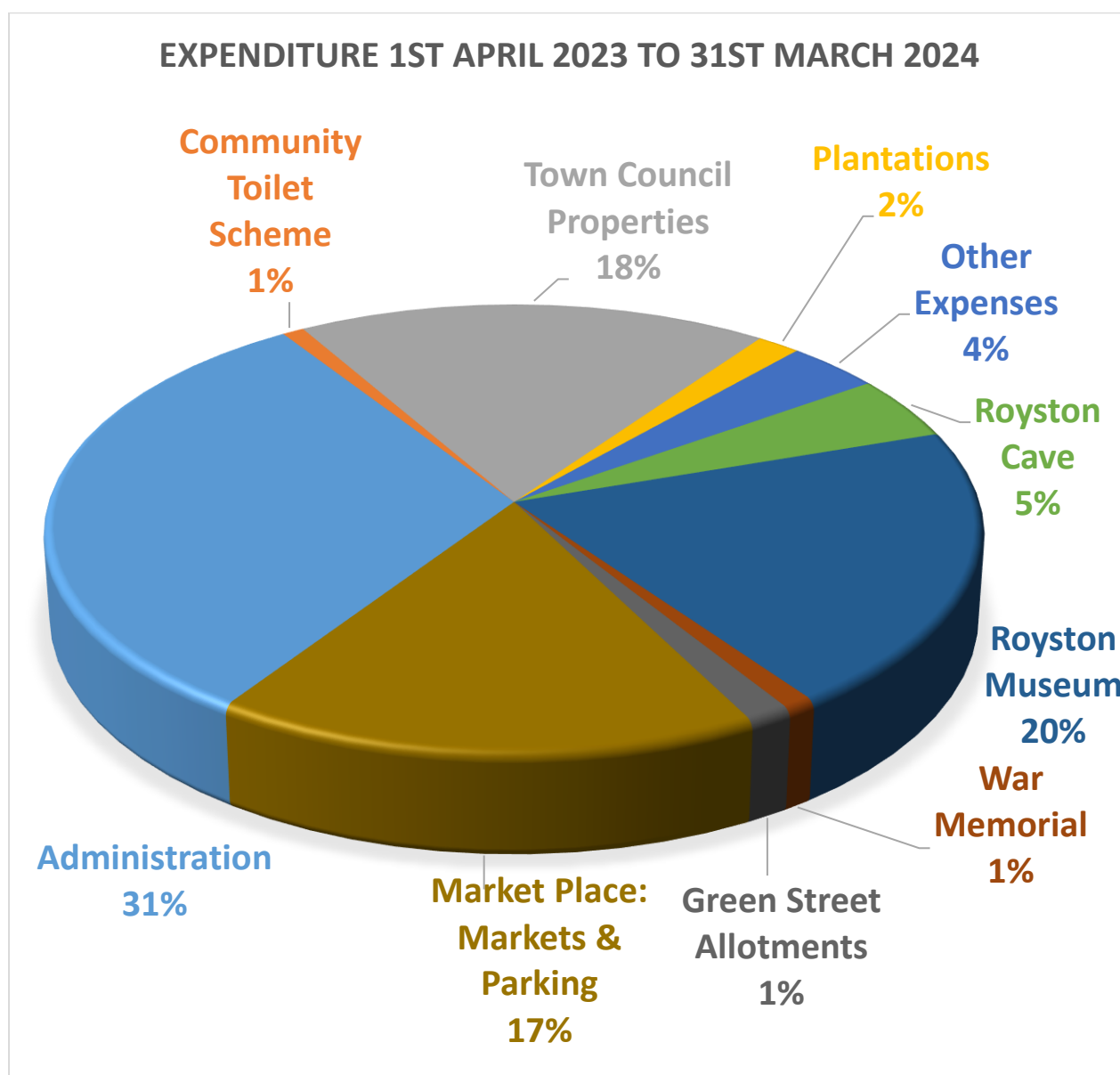
Caroll Young - In recognition of her long standing commitment to the Royston May Fayre where she has organised the Novelty Dog Show for the last 8 years, raising money for local animal charities.

Ray Munden - In recognition of his continuing work for the people of Royston, and in particular the hard work that Ray has provided in organising the Historical Car Show on behalf of the Rotary Club for the May Fayre since 2010.

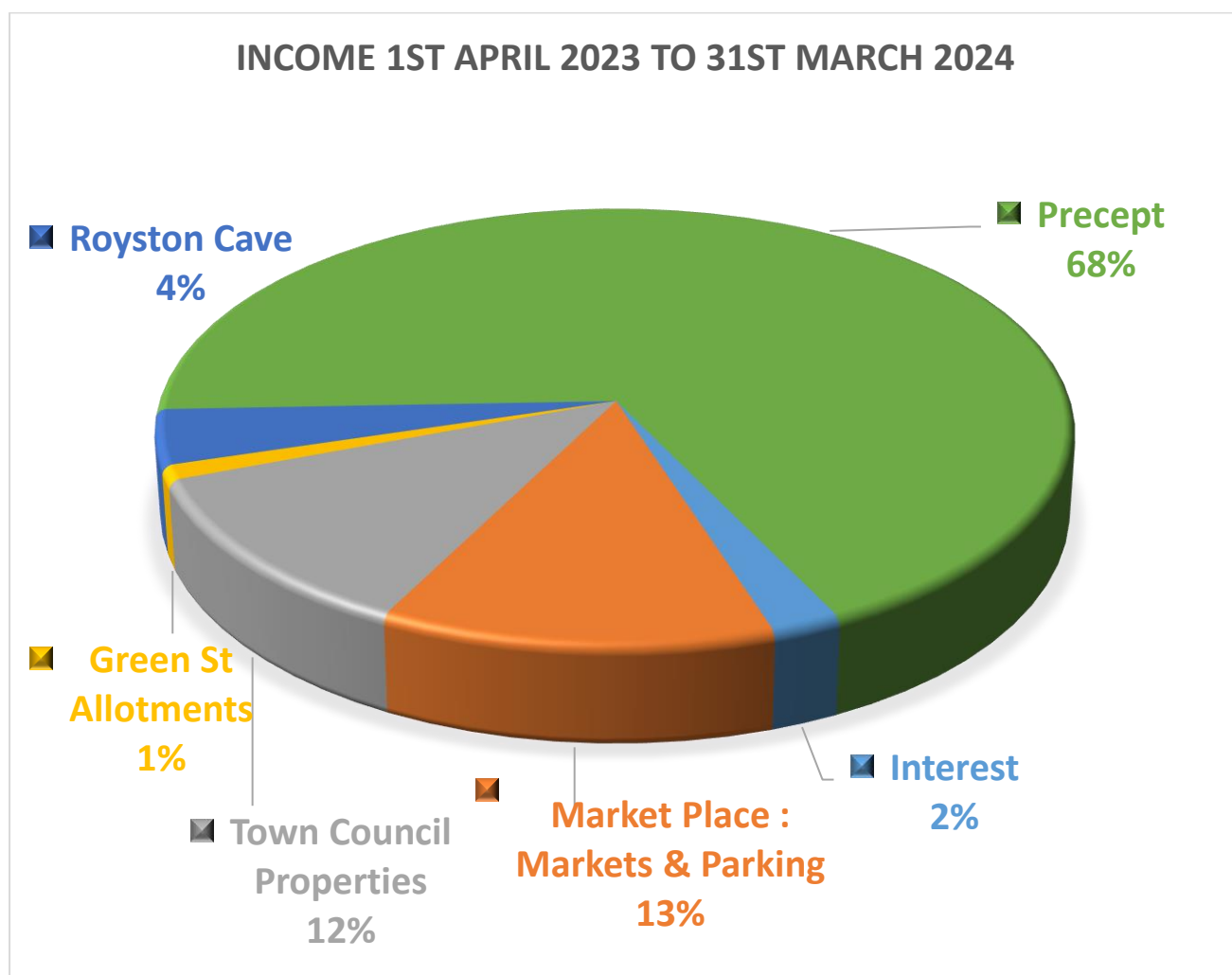
Royston Town Council Finances 2023-2024

<u>EXPENDITURE 2023-2024</u>	Budget	Actual
Administration/Democracy	151,339	155,722
Royston Museum & Art Gallery	100,000	100,737
Town Council Properties	133,797	90,933
Green Walk & Stile Plantation	21,329	8,377
Other Expenses (Civic, May Fayre, Christmas Lights etc.)	23,083	18,217
Royston Cave	22,568	22,723
Green St Allotments	7,205	6,842
Melbourn St War Memorial	4,405	4,640
Community Toilet scheme	4,089	4,192
Market Place - Markets and Parking	85,339	84,734
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	553,154	497,117

N.B. This does not include expenditure from reserves or earmarked funds



<u>INCOME</u>	Budget	Actual
Interest	2,500	12,921
Market Place - markets/parking	60,000	73,053
Town Council Properties	52,599	68,321
Green St Allotments	5,900	6,210
Royston Cave	14,000	23,685
Precept	398,155	398,155
TOTAL INCOME	533,154	582,345



Royston Town Council Finances 2024-2025

The Royston Town Council part of the Council Tax for 2024-2025 is £59.22 per Band D household.

Royston Town Council Budget & Precept 2024-2025

Expenditure

Admin/Democracy	167,822
Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery	104,665
Royston Town Hall	55,886
Priory Centre Rooms	29,784
Market Hill Rooms	31,986
Green Walk and Stile Plantations	21,985
Other Expenses	27,171
Royston Cave	23,697
Green St Allotments	7,851
Royston War Memorial	4,878
30 Kneesworth St	1,343
Public conveniences	4,299
Markets and Parking (Market Hill/Angel Pavement)	88,487
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	569,854

Income

Interest	7,500
Royston Town Hall	18,000
Priory Centre Rooms	2,000
Market Hill Rooms	13,000
Green St Allotments	6,235
30 Kneesworth St	20,269
Royston Cave	20,000
Markets and Parking (Market Hill/Angel Pavement)	67,000
TOTAL INCOME	154,004
Net Expenditure	415,850

Precept	404,099
CTRS Grant	11,751
	415,850