

CHARD TOWN COUNCIL

The Guildhall, Fore Street, Chard, Somerset TA20 1PP

Mayor: Councillor Victoria Bates

Chief Executive & Town Clerk: David Bell



Chard Town Council 2024/2025 Annual Town Report





Report From The Mayor, Councillor Victoria Bates

I acknowledge that it's a been yet another challenging year. I won't dwell on the individual issues, however, many aspects are changing, and in the latter part of 2024/25, I am pleased to report that I can see not only upfront changes for the better but also behind the scenes.

Our new Chief Executive & Town Clerk has made significant contributions since starting and he and I would like to thank all staff for upping their corporate game and further developing the services we provide to the community. David will tell you that it is still very much a work in progress, but the green shoots of recovery started in late 2024/25.

Thank you also to fellow councillors who have pulled together to work for the community in what, to me, feels like a very different Council.

A commitment given by David in his opening address to Full Council in January 2025, in the final quarter of 2024/25, was to foster better relationships with our numerous volunteers and their organisations. A commitment that I whole-heartedly support and reflected my own commitment when I became mayor. I wish to thank those organisations for rising to the challenge of working with the Council and playing your part in fostering these new relationships, we wouldn't be Chard without you.

Included in the highlights of my year are the many grant recipients and the great work they do in our community. They are, in no order of priority:

Chard Bowling Club	Chard Horticulture & Craft Show	1 st Chard Scouts
Brave Bold Drama	Chard Reservoir Volunteers	Chard Carnival
Somerset Youth Theatre	Reading Revolutions Project	Town Team
Chard Museum		

This is the highest number of grant recipients in one year. Well done to you all.

Additional highlights of my year were: the ongoing links with Helmstedt, visits to local schools, organisations, charities and celebrating successes with the wider community.

Finally, in a year where so much has been achieved, I can confirm that just over £1000 has been raised for Mayor's Charities.

Mayor of Chard, Councillor Victoria Bates



Report From The Chief Executive & Town Clerk, David Bell

Multiple Town Clerks, changing Proper Officers and changing Responsible Finance Officers, you probably don't need me to tell you it's been a rollercoaster! Add into that mix the ongoing saga of "Rolleygate", what Somerset Council term "devolution", disgruntled staff and councillors and the very definition of a sick building. However, much has been achieved - which is a credit to those who have soldiered on.

In the little over three months I have been in post, I have answered numerous questions such as 'Why', 'What', When and 'How'. For example, why am I here, what am I doing, and how did I get here. The latter was by a full recruitment process. The others are somewhat harder to answer. In the final quarter of 2024/25, I made a statement in public about matters such as stability, openness and accountability. Other matters to note were that my style of leadership (which is what the organisation appeared to need) is about clarity, not control. We, as an organisation at the end of 2024/25 were well on the way to establishing a good level of stability, drawing a line under some past difficulties and providing a platform for the future by installing positive change, supporting staff to understand and undertake their roles and facilitating good debate. It would be remiss of me not to say that I have noticed a change in the public gallery. Public questions are encouraged and, hopefully, answered. Thank you for listening and asking those questions.

We are planning for the future but still dealing with matters from the past. We are breaking new ground, consolidating what is good, focusing down on where improvements are needed and the overall goal is to build a improved Chard Town Council. In so doing we are helping our community to build a better Chard.

Talk Chard up, not down!

Some of the fundamental parts of this revival are likely to include the development of a Council Strategy supporting individual plans and working with other agencies and organisations to identify needs within Chard. One developing project involves collaboration with up to twenty organisations to identify and bid for funding. Add in aspirations to take on non-statutory public facing services and also improving our council and community relationship and we have an ambitious programme emerging.

This is a taster of where we are after three or four months at the end of the 2024/25 financial year. I predict that take-off on some matters is imminent.

Chief Executive & Town Clerk, David Bell



Giving The Young People of Chard A Voice

Chard Town Council is very aware that we need to improve our understanding of young people's views, needs and preferences. We are trying to address this in a number of ways:

- The Youth Council currently comprises students from Holyrood School and meet with Councillors and Officers on a regular basis. One key area this year has been their input to the improvement of safety for our outdoor spaces. We have listened to their feedback. Chard Town Council and the Youth Council are now working closely with Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Abri and Stone Water Housing to improve relationships and understanding.
- Chard Town Council is actively seeking ways to expand positive relationships with young people. For example, supporting the creation of a 'Senior Youth Council' that have voting powers on certain aspects of Council business. We are aspiring to create working groups that include a wider range of ages and representing the diversity of young people.
- Chard Town Council has traditionally financially supported youth provision in Chard, something that is not a statutory requirement of Town Councils. In addition, towards the end of this 2024/2025 financial year, the Youth Club approached Officers in confidence to discuss their difficulties and explore future options for continuing services. These discussions helped prepare information and background for a Full Council meeting to be held in the 2025/2026 financial year.

All-Age Support For Our Community

In the latter part of the 2024/2025 financial year we have built strong working relationships with many local groups, councils and clubs. Our objective is to continue to work together to improve the facilities and opportunities that Chard can offer to all members of the Chard community.

A further aspiration is to expand our range of social activities which will assist mental health provision, thus providing support for those effected and their carers

Parks and Open Spaces

Parks in Chard are either owned and run by Chard Town Council or Somerset Council. We are working alongside Somerset Council to ensure our Open Spaces are maintained to a maximum level. However, financial difficulties have created operational challenges for Somerset Council. The parks are important open spaces so we are working hard to resolve challenges. The 2025/2026 financial year will require significant effort to mitigate safety problems, many caused by anti-social behaviour. We have a programme to repair and improve play equipment and continue to reduce a backlog of vegetation and, particularly, tree maintenance. Enjoyment of parks across the whole age range is paramount.



Operations & Amenities - Works

1. Zembard Lane Cemetery Development.

Areas of focus this year have been:

- Stage 2 of the new Cemetery area at Zembard Lane, which has progressed towards completion.
- Headstone Survey work was completed in January, contributing to the safety and management of our historic site.
- A new Peace Garden has been opened up on the western side of the Cemetery, which will create a unique and one-off area for our cemetery in Chard.
- A wildflower area has been established and, planted last spring, is now starting to thrive alongside the additional planting of eight new trees on the western side of the Cemetery.

In the coming year the Grade 1 listed Chapels are scheduled to be re-pointed under the guidance of Historic England.

2. Allotments:

The existing Allotment Terms and Conditions of the lease agreement have been adjusted to reflect better working practices within the allotment set up. In addition, much of the old and dead vegetation in the western hedge boundary has been removed to ensure new growth. Allotment inspections in November and May have proven very worthwhile.

The close working relationship with the Allotment Committee and Chard Town Council grows from strength to strength.

3. Open Spaces – Stringfellow, Upper and Lower Henson, Jocelyn, Wills Mead,

Our Amenities and Operations team are working alongside local organisations to change the feel and look of our open spaces.

- We are working alongside local community groups and primary schools to create a Tree Planting Scheme, which is planned to start in October 2025.
- Work with and support Chard Community Plan to install park and street benches, providing a family orientated community feel.



Operations & Amenities- Project Examples

1. Community Resilience and Flooding:

Many areas across Chard incurred devastating flooding in January 2025, with many of our community adversely affected. This follows on from the numerous incidents since 2021 and before.

Chard Town Council aim to further develop a Community Resilience Plan. With the support of Chard Area Resilience Group, we aim to establish a response plan for bad weather and other incidents and to run a exercise scenario so that all operations personnel involved have a clear understanding of what is needed and how it works.

Since the January 26th events, Chard Town Council is working with agencies such as Somerset Council (including Highways), Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Somerset Rivers Authority, and Wessex Water to establish the causes flooding with a view to mitigating the sources and impacts.

This is not a statutory task for the Town Council, but Councillors and Officers alike feel we need to be actively and strategically involved and promote solutions for Chard.

2. Anti-Social Behaviour

Like so many other areas in Somerset, and nationally, Chard has seen a dramatic increase in littering and drug paraphernalia in our parks, streets and public & civic assets. This is creating a huge challenge for our Amenities Teams who are working alongside Local Authority teams to take on this challenge and make our parks and open spaces more attractive, inviting and safer places to be. Input from our Youth Council and the wider community shaping and facilitating our planning.

Events

Chard Town Council would like to express sincere appreciation to all the community groups who make Chard special.

The Chard Town Crier Competition, Wassail, The Mayor Making parade and ceremony, St. George's Parade, Remembrance Parade, D-Day, Chard Showcase, Chard Helmstedt Civic Reception all contribution to this, to name but a few.

The Guildhall has had the pleasure of hosting another excellent performance by CLOKS, The Chard Horticultural Show, A Buddhist Festival, The Chard Museum Margaret Bondfield Birthday Celebration, The Variety Show for MND and Mayors Charities, Numatics Black Tie Dinner and the spectacle of Wrestling. These events are in addition to our various regular bookings, many of which have used the Guildhall facilities for several years.



Finance Matters

A precept is an allocation of money that helps fulfil Town Council expenditure for the coming year and is requested from and provided via Somerset Council. All local councils set a precept and have a budget.

Our precept covers spending on service delivery within our community. It includes, but is not limited to, services such as cemeteries, our parks & open spaces, toilets (if we take on the future service and maintenance from Somerset Council), community buildings, seats and shelters.

The Council can also take on projects and schemes at a local level for the benefit of parish residents and also provide information services to help residents keep in touch with local community events and support services, including those provided by the voluntary sector.

The precept is divided by the taxbase which is the number of households in the area that are eligible to pay Council Tax.

The resulting figure is then multiplied by a proportion relative to Band D of Council Tax in the property banding. This leads to a larger Council tax bill for bigger properties. Equally, a smaller home is given a banding further up the scale, which results in a smaller Council tax bill.

The precept data for 2024/2025 and the precept agreed at Full Council in January 2025 for 2025/2026 are shown below.

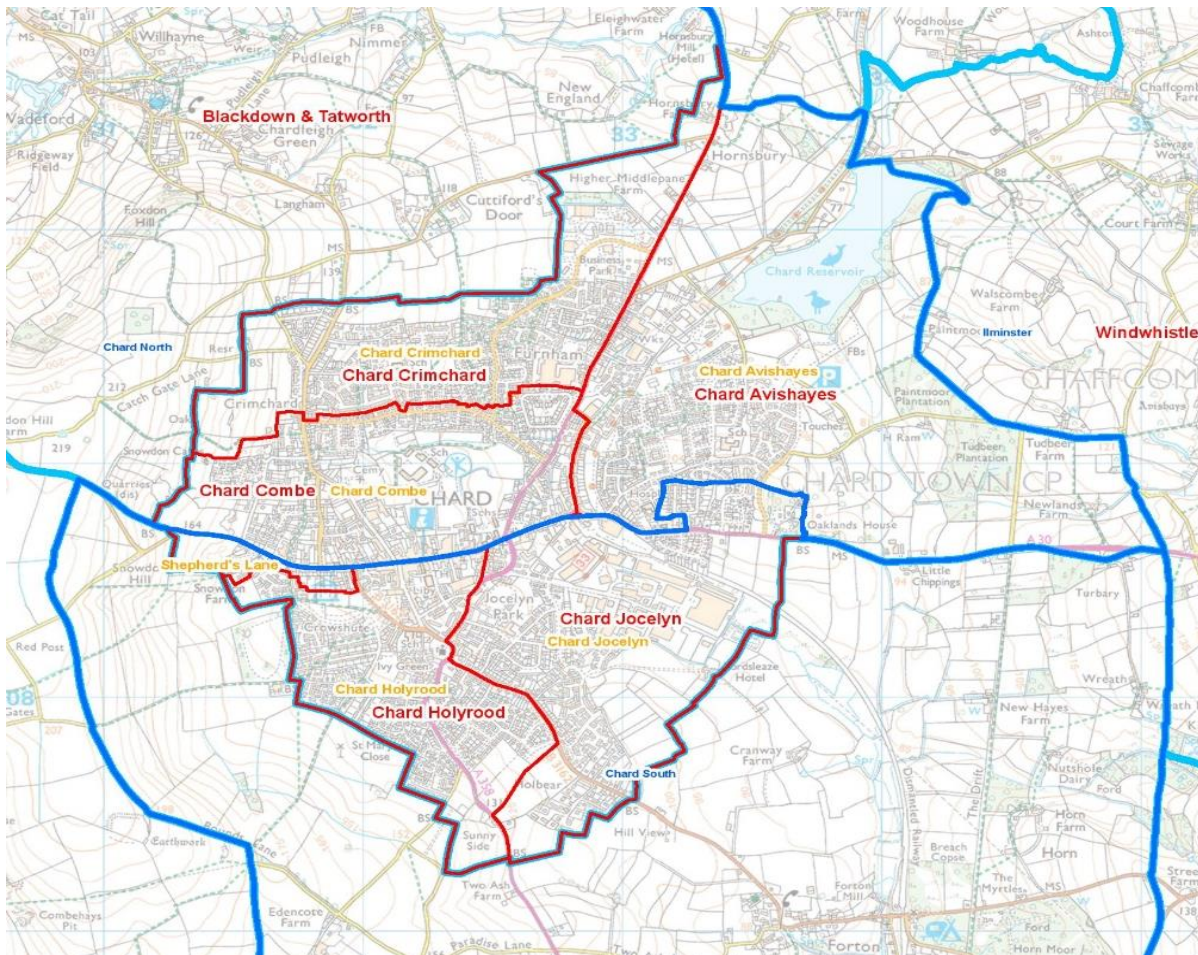
	2024/25	2025/26	Difference	Difference %
Tax Base	4,582.00	4,660.44	78.44	1.71%
Precept	1,151,765.00	1,185,000.00	33,235.00	2.89%
Band D Precept	251.37	254.27	2.90	1.15%



Ward Boundary Map

Chard Town Council has 15 Councillors representing six wards of Chard. The map below includes the boundaries of each ward:

Councillor details are available on our website.



Contacting Chard Town Council

Website - <https://chard.gov.uk/>

Telephone: 01460 239567

Email: chardtowncouncil@chard.gov.uk

Visit: The Guildhall, Fore Street, Chard, Somerset TA20 1PP