

Congleton Town Mayor - Councillor Margaret Gartside



Congleton Town Mayor Councillor Margaret Gartside

It has been a privilege to serve as Congleton Town Mayor during a memorable and historic time for both the country and Congleton.

During this year I have had the honour of opening Congleton's platinum jubilee celebrations including planting 70 cherry trees to commemorate the 70 years of Elizabeth's reign, mourned the passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II, witnessed the Proclamation of King Charles III, and celebrated the Coronation of King Charles III with a picnic and entertainment in Congleton Park.

2022 was a historic year for Congleton and numerous activities were held to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the town gaining its first charter in 1272. These included the Living History exhibition in the Town Hall during July with a model of 1272 Congleton which was visited by local school children and many residents; the Medieval Festival in Congleton Park in August when thousands were entertained by dragons, jousters and birds of prey; and a Medieval Banquet in the Town Hall in September. During the year the town was full of colour, thanks to the many amazing heraldic banners on buildings. A popular addition to our team was the town ale taster, who visited many local hostelries on the Congleton town ale trail.

The town also enjoyed a resumption of community events after two years when such events were absent due to COVID-19. It was a pleasure to see townsfolk and visitors flock to the Food and Drink Festival, Jazz and Blues Festival, Green Fayre, Health and Wellbeing Fayre, Remembrance Sunday and Christmas Lights switch-on.

Congleton played its part in welcoming Ukrainian families fleeing war in their country. We have supported the local group of hosts by sponsoring various events. In parallel, we have supported various local community activities to help cushion the impact of the cost of living crisis on local residents. The cost of living crisis was also the inspiration behind me hosting a very successful Mayor's Strictly High Tea Dance event rather a Mayor's Ball this year.

As Mayor, I have really enjoyed the opportunity to go 'behind the scenes' and meet many people who make Congleton the thriving community that we all love. I have visited schools, care homes and many local groups, allowing me the opportunity to talk to a wide range of Congleton residents. On visits to Daneside Theatre, the Town Hall and other venues around the town, I have been amazed and delighted by the talent of our residents - singers, dancers, musicians, actors and sportspeople! I have seen some truly inspiring performances, made possible by the many teams of people - including those behind the scenes - enabling these events to take place. Thank you

to everyone involved; it is these activities which make Congleton an exciting and vibrant place to live.

When elected as Mayor, I stressed how important it is that we take the climate and nature emergency seriously. During this year I have been delighted to play an active role in the groups and organisations working tirelessly to improve our environment. I have enjoyed planting trees and hedges for the Trees4Congleton group and helped to create a new Bee Garden in Congleton Park. Recently we launched our Biodiversity project to promote and increase biodiversity across 30 green spaces in Congleton. As a long-term member of Congleton in Bloom, it gave me particular pleasure to attend the RHS National in Bloom Award Ceremony in London as the Town Mayor and accept a gold award on behalf of Congleton.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors and the staff at Congleton Town Council for their professionalism and advice throughout the year. Thanks also to my Mayor's Cadet, Kati-Leigh Newson from Congleton Air Cadets for her support at Mayor's Engagements, the Reverend Anne-Marie Naylor from Astbury Church for her support and guidance, and Cllr Rob Moreton, our Deputy Mayor, and his wife Helen for attending events on my behalf during the year. During my year in office I have attended almost 100 events.



Mayor's Cadet Kati-Leigh Newson

As Mayor it is my official duty to chair the Town Council

meetings. It has been good to know that I could rely on the support of Town Councillors, Council staff and the Town Hall catering team to work together and enable the smooth running of official events. It has been noteworthy that despite a mix of political opinions, the Town Councillors have worked cooperatively in the interests of the people of Congleton. I wish the next administration every success. I will continue to serve as Mayor until the next Mayor is appointed on 25 May 2023.

Cllr Margaret Gartside

Congleton Mayor 2022-2023



Mayor's Civic Parade



Celebrating Plastic Free Award for Congleton

Town Council

During this annual report period the Town Council had 20 Councillors who were elected to represent one of the two wards in the town. Councillors are elected to serve for a period of four years. The Councillors serving from May 2019 until May 2023 were:

East Ward
Duncan Amies (I)
David Brown (C)
Robert Douglas (LD)
George Hayes (C)
Sally-Ann Holland (C)

Robert Moreton (I) - Deputy Mayor *

Denis Murphy (LD) Mark Rogan (I) James Smith (LD) Kay Wesley (WEP)

West Ward

Suzie Akers Smith (I) Dawn Allen (C) Martin Amies (I) Russell Chadwick (I) Paul Duffy (LD) Suzy Firkin (LD)

Margaret Gartside (LD) -Mayor*

Robert Hemsley (LD) Amanda Martin (C) Jean Parry (C)

C = Conservative I = Independent LD = Liberal Democrat WEP = Women's Equality Party

Officers for the period of this annual report were:

- · Chief Officer- David McGifford
- Communities & Marketing Manager and Deputy Chief Officer Jackie MacArthur
- Finance Manager and RFO Serena Van Schepdael
- Streetscape Development Manager- Ruth Burgess
- Town Hall Manager- Mark Worthington
- Administrative Assistants Andrea Morris-Wild & Celeste Smith
- Finance Officer Sue Trow
- · Senior Information Advisor Jessica Thyer
- Marketing & Communications Officer (incl. Mayoral since Nov*)

 Debbie Coxon
- Town Centre & Events Officer- Rachel McCarthy
- Congleton Partnership Co-ordinator- Cathy Dean
- Civic Administration Officer, Linda Minshull (left November 2022)
- Facility Officers Tim Muston, Rowan Nightingale (left June 2022), Pete Forster (retired March 2023)
- Information Advisors Celeste Smith, Linda Fox, Barbara Fynn, Natasha Henson (May 2022)
- Casual Information Advisors Annette Bradley, Jackie Potts
- Streetscape Supervisor Simon Farrall
- Streetscape Operatives- John Acton, Jack Appleton, Chris Banks, James Bibby, Terry Davies, Dave Foster, Mick Pritchard, Rob Serwin, Mark Stubbs, Noel Stubbs, Mike Wild, John Braun & Adrian Bullock (January 2023)
- Casual Paddling Pool Attendants May-September

How is the Town Council Financed?

The majority of the Town Council's funds come from a Precept which is added to the Council Tax levy set by the Principal Authority. In 2022-2023 the Precept was £996,333. The Town Council receives £428,192 from Cheshire East Council which supports the StreetScape service. We also generate income through Town Hall room bookings, Congleton Information Centre sales, grants and sponsorship. (The Financial Information provided is unaudited, our year end was 31st March 2023, the final accounts are currently being prepared. The Unaudited Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) will be available for public viewing by 1st July 2023, and the Notice of Conclusion of Audit will be available by 30th September 2023 in line with Accounting Regulations).



In Bloom	£13,282	1%
Information Centre	£33,566	3%
Capital	£46,779	5%
Grants	£49,417	5%
Civic	£53,440	5%
Town Hall	£88,371	9%
General Admin and Running Costs	£212,163	21%
Community and Environment	£512,926	51%

£1,009,944

What Services does the Town Council Provide:

Congleton Town Council is one of the largest of the 108 town and parish councils in Cheshire East. The Council was founded in 1980 and became fully operational in April 1981. It provides the most local tier of government for Congleton.

It serves the local community by:

- Providing an essential link between town residents and Cheshire East Borough Council to ensure grassroots views are heard and considered
- Encouraging economic development and regeneration of Congleton
- Examining planning and licensing applications and giving opinions to the Borough Council on behalf of residents
- Managing a range of local services and facilities to benefit Congleton including the Town Hall, street cleansing and grounds maintenance services, paddling pool.
- Providing financial support to a variety of community groups and organisations which support the wellbeing of Congleton residents
- Helps safeguard local people through paying for 24/7 monitored CCTV
- Organising and supporting events that encourage the community to enjoy and celebrate being part of the Congleton community.

Congleton Town Council covers an area of 2255 hectares (22.55 sq. km or 8.7 square miles) with a population of 28,482 (figure from the 2021 census).

Since January 2014 the Town Council has delivered Grounds and Cleansing Services for Congleton, via a devolved services agreement with Cheshire East and ANSA. Services covered by StreetScape include grounds maintenance - mowing, hedge cutting, pruning of shrubs etc. and street cleansing functions- emptying more than 200 litter and dog bins each day, removal of fly-tips, litter picking and generally keeping Congleton a safe and tidy place to live.

The Town Council is the accountable body for Congleton Partnership, and provides substantial grants to Congleton Community Projects, Congleton Partnership and Congleton's Citizen's Advice Bureau as well as running a grant scheme for local groups and organisations.

Congleton Town Council activities revolved around eight key strategic objectives shown on pages 9-11 and taken from the business plan. For the purposes of this report the Town Council had 20 elected members based in two wards. Decisions are made via public committees and ratified at Council. The committees are Town Hall, Assets and Services, Community and Environment, Planning, Finance and Policy and Personnel.

Council Meetings

The Council has a number of committees, the dates for the meetings in 2021/22 were:

- Council: 5/08, 21/10, 10/02, 28/04
- Planning: 17/06, 22/07, 12/08, 9/09, 14/10, 18/11, 16/12, 20/01, 17/02, 17/03, 21/04
- Finance & Policy: 10/06, 29/07, 30/09, 25/11, 27/01, 24/03
- Community and Environment: 3/06, 8/07, 23/09, 11/11, 3/02, 31/03
- Town Hall, Assets and Services: 1/07, 16/09, 4/11, 13/01, 24/02, 7/04
- Personnel Committee: 24/06. 9/12

All agendas and minutes at www.congleton-tc.gov.uk

More on Streetscapes' work

Congleton Town Council carries out maintenance on ornamental and prestige areas, general amenity areas, public footpaths, sporting areas, recreational areas, rough cut and Conservation Areas. The Town Council no longer uses any glyphosate-based weed killer on grassy areas which are official or unofficial play areas, near schools, around trees or around street furniture and is trialing a new product with no



glyphosate for other areas with the aim to reduce pesticide use as much as possible.

During the year the Streetscape service has started to invest in electrical tools rather than using fuel-based equipment. This is all part of the Town Council's Climate Change commitment to reduce its Carbon Footprint.

The Streetscape team has been helping the Congleton Tree Group with advice on planting and checking areas for planting with Cheshire East Council. Congleton Town Council only carries out minor tree work, other tree work is undertaken by a specialist Arboriculture Team at Cheshire East Council.

SCALE:

- 15 Play Areas
- · 200 public litter bins emptied daily
- 138,622 linear miles of Congleton streets kept clear of litter
- 170,963 linear miles of rural streets kept clear of litter
- 120,732 m² of playing fields to maintain
- 179,010 m² of Public Open Space to maintain

2022/23- Grants Allocated

Girl Guiding North West

Total

The Town Council has supported local and voluntary and community groups with approximately £40,000 worth of grants in 2022-2023. Among those assisted were:

Name:		£
Grants given to hirers of the Town Hall	Town Hall Hire	£5,108
Congleton Museum	Notional Rent	£4,500
Congleton Community Projects	Project Support	£16,000
Citizens Advice Bureau	Annual Grant	£5,000
Total		£30,608
Name:		
Congleton Partnership	Congleton inclusive play roundabout	£250
Congleton Harriers	Medical cover: Half Marathon	£750
Congleton Community Projects	Portable toilets: Food & Drink festival	£240
Company Corner	New equipment/lunch/day trip	£300
Congleton Heritage & Antiques Fair	Room hire/ Advertising/Website	£500
Trinity Operatic Society	Sound/Lighting	£1,740
Our Gang	Towards show costs	£750
Congleton Live CIC	Promotional items for Aug22	£750
Beartown Rickshaw CIO	New battery	£870
Congleton Players	Costumes	£250
Congleton Community Credit Union	Promotional material	£500
Old Saw Mill	Cider project	£750
The Green Tree House	Food for new premises	£750
St Peter's Church	Clock service	£264
Congleton Harriers	Medical cover at Cloud 9 Race	£425
Congleton West Ranger Unit	2023 Trip	£750
4th Congleton Rangers	New Rainbow group set up	£440

2023 Trip

£150

£10,429

Some of the memorable achievements of 2022/23 were:

- Creating a plan for increasing Biodiversity across 30 green sites in Congleton
- Taking on the management of the Street sweeper, locating the vehicle in Congleton, so increasing the amount of time it can spend making Congleton cleaner.
- Progressing catering and bar services in the Town Hall with our new commercial partner, Mark's Events
- Supporting Ukrainian families coming to the Congleton area following the outbreak of war in their country through work with the Congleton Area Ukraine Support Network
- Collaborating with community partners to show that Congleton Cares during the cost-of-living crisis
- Taking the lead on a whole host of activities to celebrate 750 years since Congleton received its first charter in 1272.
- Appropriate actions to mourn the death of Queen Elizabeth II and conduct the Proclamation of King Charles III



- Challenging Cheshire East Council on the outcome of the Community Governance, which saw most of the new estates abutting Congleton's settlement zone remain in the rural parishes
- Trialed No Mow May, left swathes of grass long for nature and invested in electrical tools to start replacing the petrol ones.
- Initiated a cheaper Sunday Thursday community rate for the Town Hall resulting in more well-being activities.
- Being awarded Gold at the National Britain in Bloom finals in London.

Progress on the Town Council's Strategic Objectives

SO 1 Ensure growth of the town is matched by adequate services and infrastructure

- Liaising with Cheshire East on S106 and CIL contributions towards infrastructure projects in Congleton
- Continued work on the Neighbourhood Plan to create a community plan for Congleton's future
- Considered and gave feedback on 241 Planning applications
- Formed part of a team bidding for funding for a new well-being centre for Congleton
- Worked with Cheshire East on a Town Centre Vitality Plan for Congleton
- Campaigned for a new Household Waste Recycling Centre for Congleton
- Continued the campaign to see the new houses within the link road within the Congleton Settlement area to be part of the Congleton Parish rather than the rural parishes
- Supported the development of the market quarter.

SO 2 Ensure transport infrastructure is integrated and sustainable

- Planning committee commented on the transport infrastructure on all relevant applications
- Work ongoing on plans to improve walking and cycling routes across Congleton
- Contacted D&G buses when Arriva gave notification of closing the 38 route to ensure the continuation of the service
- Commented on the Local Transport Delivery Plan
- Opened discussions with CEC on suggested list of improvements for public transport.



SO 3 Reduce economic, social and health inequalities within our community

- Signed the Community Safety Charter
- · Considering Equality and Inclusion implications of all Council decisions
- Discuss hate crime and sexual and domestic violence crimes in the regular antisocial behaviour working group meetings held with the Police and Cheshire East Council
- Support the Food and Friendship twice weekly events in the town hall
- · Worked with community partners on the cost of living crisis
- Continued to support My Cheshire Without Abuse with regular Domestic Abuse Clinics in Congleton
- Supported the Social Supermarket in Congleton to find a new home.

SO 4 Ensure that the town centre is fit for 21st century

- Worked with Cheshire East on improving the CCTV coverage in Congleton
- Continued to support and liaise with town traders, putting on town centre events and promoting the town
- Worked with Cheshire East on a Town Centre Vitality Plan for Congleton
- · Helped Congleton shops to set up a Safe Place scheme
- Issued 7 first-floor grants to improve the look of premises in the Town Centre

SO 5 Greater promotion of Congleton as a place to work, live, visit and do business

- Supported the work of Congleton in Bloom winning Gold in the North West competition and runner up in the National In Bloom large town competition
- Welcomed the gift of a statue of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy for the Town Centre
- Produced a new Town Attractions and Events leaflet
- Gained national tv, radio and print media coverage for the 750 charter years events
- Held suitable events to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

SO 6 Congleton Town Council will be sustainable and carbon neutral

- Launched the first of the Biodiversity improvement sites in Stirling Close and started work on the plan to make 30 sites more biodiverse
- Helped organise the Green Fayre in September
- Actions taken to monitor and reduce the carbon footprint of the town council
- Supported the Trees for Congleton Group with the ambitious plans to plant 30,000 trees
- Introduced a low mow regime for the town
- Promoted the Congleton Sustainable Living in Congleton on-line Learning platform.

SO 7 Ensure we effectively communicate with all sections of our community

- Continue to develop the Town Council website it is visited by more than 3,000 unique visitors a month. Update the town noticeboards weekly. Increased the Town Council's Social Media presence. Produce Bear Necessities four times per year and other promotional material
- Worked with the Congleton Partnership to produce a Congleton Cares leaflet in response to the cost of living crisis.

SO 8 Ensure a high standard of operational quality and asset management

- · Worked on medium and long term maintenance needs for the Town Hall
- · Appointed a new commercial partner, Mark's Events, for the Town Hall
- · Reviewed investment strategies
- New procedures were introduced to ensure smooth running of the Paddling Pool



Working Groups 2022-23

The Town Council had eight working groups operating in 2022-23 to help develop its work. Working groups are generally proposed by a Town Council Committee when there is a specific subject that would benefit from more in-depth work than can be carried out via a committee.

Each working group has it's own terms of reference. The Working Groups are not decision-making bodies and return their findings to the committee from which they originated. Unlike committees, working groups are not open to the press or public unless specifically invited. Their minutes, membership and actions can be seen on the Town Council's Website A brief summary of the active Working Groups during the 2022-23 year can be seen below.

750 Working Group

This group was formed in 2021 and has delegated responsibility for organising the CTC-led event for the 750-year charter celebrations – Beating the Bounds, Platinum Jubilee Party, Living History Event, Medieval Festival, Medieval Banquet, Beer Festival (delayed until 2023) and Ale Trail.

Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group

This group also includes the Police, Cheshire East Council and Bromley Farm Community Centre – was set up to monitor, address and reduce antisocial behaviour and its underlying causes in Congleton. It also considers Hate Crime, Domestic Abuse and Traffic issues. This Working Group reports to the Community and Environment Committee.

Congleton Green Working Group

This group also includes a few members of the Congleton Sustainability Group. It was established following the Town Council's Climate Change Emergency pledge in September 2019. It is working on a priority list for reducing the carbon footprint of Congleton Town Council activities, based on a baseline data spreadsheet of activities. It is also considering the Nature Emergency and ways to increase biodiversity in Congleton. The group reports to Community and Environment Committee.

Congleton in Bloom Working Group

This is a long-standing Working Group that was set up in 2011 when the previous In Bloom volunteer group wished to retire after 13 successful years. It is made up of councillors, officers and volunteers. The Congleton in Bloom group works alongside many community and youth groups in Congleton, as well as businesses to help make Congleton an attractive, cleaner and greener town. It also coordinates activities around the annual In Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood competitions. It reports to the Community and Environment Committee.

Congleton Town Centre Regeneration Working Group

This group explores and where possible implements or works with partners to implement improvements to the town centre. The remit includes physical and social changes. The group will work collaboratively with East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce, Landlords, Developers, Cheshire East Council and other interested and vested partners with the aim of future-proofing the Town Centre and to ensure that it can continue to service the needs of our growing town. The working group reports to Finance and Policy Committee.

Health and Wellbeing Working Group

This Working Group lobbies for adequate Primary Health Care facilities that relate to the growth of the town and to develop and promote initiatives or events relating to improving physical and mental health within Congleton. During COVID-19 it was not possible to work with the NHS on actions other than COVID-19 and this group will now re-establish. It reports to Community and Environment Committee.

Integrated Transport Working Group

This group has been considering the Local Transport Development Plan, ways to improve public transport in Congleton, infrastructure needs to make walking and cycling around Congleton safer. Most of the projects rely on large amounts of funding from CEC or central government. Unfortunately CEC was not able to attract any of the national funding for improved buses or levelling up. The group reports to the Community and Environment Committee.

White Ribbon Working Group

This group promotes White Ribbon values and behaviours to end male violence against women. The Town Council received White Ribbon accreditation in November 2019. The White Ribbon charity works with men and boys to challenge those male cultures that lead to harassment, abuse and violence. Congleton Town Council wishes to end all harassment, abuse and violence. The group reports to the Community and Environment Committee.



Climate Change Emergency and Nature Emergency

Congleton Town Council declared a Climate Change Emergency in September 2019. It pledged to reduce the carbon footprint of the Town Council's activities and operations to net zero by 2025. The Town Council is also considering the nature emergency with plans in place to improve the biodiversity of 30 green spaces in Congleton, support the planting of 30,000 trees by Trees for Congleton group and introduce a low mow mowing regime to reduce the frequency of grass cutting in some areas.

A baseline report was carried out to establish the Carbon Footprint of the town council in 2018-2019. This was based on the Town Council's purchasing and energy bills. The figures for the five years until 2023 can be seen in the bar chart below. The estimated carbon footprint of the Town Council activities in 2018-19 was 227 tonnes. This reduced to 171 tonnes during Covid. In 2022-23 the total figure was 229 tonnes – although further work is being done as in many cases the estimate is based on finance which is misleading due to inflation. For example in 2018/19 we spent £9388 on vehicle fuel giving a carbon footprint of 22 tonnes. In 2022 – 2023 after optimising routes we spent £19,000 on vehicle fuel with a carbon footprint of 47 tonnes. The carbon footprint trackers in the vans for the past year gave a combined reading of 17 tonnes of carbon emissions.

There is a similar story for plants and other items where prices have greatly increased.

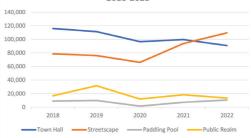
The Town Council remains committed to reducing its carbon footprint wherever possible. A report was commissioned to decarbonise the Town Hall and some changes have already been implemented.

The Council vehicles are on a renewal leases waiting for suitable electric vehicles to be available. More funds have been spent on changing planting schemes to sustainable beds and purchasing electric tools – which long term will be better but has resulted in an initial increase in carbon footprint.

The environmental impact of all decisions is considered as well as the financial and equality impact.

The Town Council will continue its journey to effectively monitor and reduce its carbon footprint.

2018-2023



Key Priorities for 2023/24

- Introduce active measures to support the Town Council's Climate Change Emergency and nature emergency pledges to reduce the Town Council's carbon footprint and to increase biodiversity in our town
- Organise local events to celebrate the King's Coronation and other Civic events
- Form a strong team with councillors elected in May 2023 and develop and approve a Business Plan for 2023-2027
- Work with health providers to ensure the physical and mental health of residents can be treated locally
- Continue to develop the Streetscape Services and generate income to help off-set costs and maintain the high level of service that the town expects
- Make sure that the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan is fit for purpose and one that local people will want to support at Referendum
- Improve the marketing of the town as a great place to live, work, visit and do business
- Develop a new fit-for-purpose website to include bookings and the Information Centre.
- Increase revenue from the Town Hall to offset Town Hall costs
- Obtain Gold in the National Britain in Bloom competitions
- Support the Regeneration of the Town Centre



Some Key Dates to look forward to in 2023!

25 May Annual Council Meeting & Mayor Making, Congleton Town Hall, 7pm

27 May Congleton Paddling Pool Opens

11 June Food and Drink Festival, Congleton Town Centre, 10.30am - 4.30pm 2 July Congleton Town Mayor's Civic Parade & Service, St Peter's Church, 3pm

9 July Congleton Lions Duck Race, Congleton Park, 2pm

22 July Congleton Pride Day & Evening, Town Centre & Town Hall

15 August Play Day, Congleton Town Centre, 11am-2pm

26-27 August Jazz and Blues Festival, venues across the town centre

2 September Congleton Horticultural Society Show, Town Hall

8-17 September Congleton Heritage & Antiques Festival

30 September Congleton Green Fayre, Town Centre, 10am-4pm

1 October Congleton Harriers Annual Half Marathon
 6-8 October Beer & Gin Festival, Congleton Town Hall
 21-29 October Halloween Trail, Congleton Town Centre

4 November Congleton Rotary Bonfire Night, Congleton Park
 12 November Remembrance Parade, Congleton Cenotaph

24 November Christmas Lights Switch-On, Town Centre

25 November Rotary Tree of Light & Life Switch-On, Community Garden, Lawton

Street

Regular Events

Congleton Makers Market last Saturday of every month, 10am -4pm

Congleton Repair Café last Saturday of every month, Old Saw Mill, 10am -2pm

Congleton Market every Tuesday and Saturday, 9am -3.30pm

Congleton Museum Walks first Sunday of every month, 2pm

Congleton In Bloom Town Tidies first Saturday of every month, 10am-12pm

Congleton Town Council

Congleton Town Hall, High Street, Congleton, Cheshire info@congleton-tc.gov.uk ~ www.congleton-tc.gov.uk

