



# NORTH WALSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

## Town Mayor's Report - 1 April 2014

Since the last Town Meeting, we have seen a change of Town Clerk, with Margaret Foster retiring after some 17 years in the role to be replaced by Nick Clancy, previously a career Civil Servant based in Westminster. Julie Shields joined the team as Assistant Clerk – Finance, replacing Jo Burton, having previously worked at Paston Sixth Form College.

I will now outline the Town Council's activities for the past year:

- As you will have seen when Council Tax bills arrived a couple of weeks ago, the Town Council has found it necessary to raise its share of the amount collected by the District Council for 2014/15. This was done very reluctantly, but the Council hopes you will understand and support its reasons for doing so. There are three primary reasons for the increase:
  - Provision of a CCTV service in the Town;
  - Highways improvements, including new speed signage and a height restriction sign for the approach to Cromer Road Bridge; and
  - Town Centre improvements.

The Town Council does not itself have the funds to carry out these important tasks. In order to support these additional costs, the Town Council has successfully applied for a County Council partnership grant to fund 50% of the road sign costs. In addition to this, the Town Council will also be receiving a support grant from the District Council. Together this means the rise has been kept to a minimum. Of course, the Town Council could have said “no” to any increase in Council Tax, but then we would not have been able to support these projects which we see as vital to the town and community.

- Supported by donations from the North Walsham Rotary Club, the North Walsham and District Lions Club, the Lodge of Unanimity and Mr Matthew Williams of Matthew Williams Digger Hire, the Town Council has purchased two defibrillators – one of which has been installed in St Nicholas Court outside Aroma, with the second to be installed soon at Coral Bookmakers on Market Place. I am very grateful for the willingness of local organisations and businesses to support this scheme. These emergency first aid devices are now available in several key locations, and we will be producing a map showing the locations of all devices in North Walsham. This has also been an important project for personal reasons, and I am proud to have seen it completed.
- An application was submitted to the County Council Parish Partnership scheme for enhanced speed signs around the town and a height restriction sign on the approach to Cromer Road Bridge. I am very pleased to announce that this bid has been successful, with the partnership fund providing 50% of the cost and the Town Council the remaining 50%. I look forward to this essential project being completed very soon.
- I am sure you have been following the press reports on the provision of CCTV cameras in the town. Following the District Councils decision to end the service and decommission the cameras, the Town Council – together with Sheringham, Fakenham, Cromer and Wells – explored the possibility of taking over the service. The police obviously find the CCTV service

very helpful in crime investigations and have been supportive of the efforts to continue to provide it. Although Cromer and Wells subsequently withdrew from the process, the remaining three towns have pressed ahead and have agreed, in principal, to an offer from the District Council to take on the equipment. Negotiations are progressing, but unfortunately I am unable to say more at this time. I hope next year my successor can report a successful conclusion that benefits the community going forward.

- The District Council announced recently that it is withdrawing all of its recycling bins, and extending the range of recyclable waste it will collect through the kerbside refuse collection scheme. This unfortunately impacts on the town, which claims recycling credits from bins located in, for example, Sainsbury's car park. To counter this loss of income, the Town Council is now working with Sainsbury's to investigate ways to claim the available credits from the new recycling bins which will soon be installed in Sainsbury's car park.
- The planning application from Hopkins Homes for development of the former HL Foods site in Norwich Road was permitted by the District Council. This was despite the objections of the Town Council on the grounds that no funding was being provided for the additional infrastructure requirements the development would bring.
- The Town Council is only responsible for one of North Walsham's car parks, on Midland Road. Regular checks are carried out to try and ensure any potential issues are recognised and dealt with. The other car parks – on Mundesley Road, New Road and Vicarage Road – are owned by the District Council and any complaints about these should be addressed to them at Cromer (although any complaints made through our officers will be passed on to the relevant department on your behalf).
- Responsibility for the common land at St Nicholas Court precinct continues to be an issue in the town. After the previous landowner went into liquidation, ownership fell by default to the Crown Estate through a fairly obscure law which dates back to medieval times. However, the law of escheat means they only hold the deeds; they do not have any responsibility for maintenance or upkeep, nor do they hold any liability in relation to it. As you can see, this creates a very real issue because there is no legal owner on whom the District Council can serve an order to repair the paving and drain covers, and the Town Council would become legally liable for the land if it took any remedial action. Given this apparent stalemate, the Town Council is now seeking discussions with businesses in the precinct with a view to relaunching a traders' association to manage the land.
- I am sure many of you will recall the recent planning application to build a new supermarket and fuel outlet at the former Marrick Wire Ropes site in the town. Although the town could have benefitted from the competition derived from a second garage, the application ultimately failed because it was felt the adverse effects on business in the town centre outweighed any benefits the development might bring. Also, a recent study showed that North Walsham was already at (or even slightly above) the average supermarket floor space capacity for a town of its size. This application highlighted some of the many juggling acts the Town Council faces in discharging its planning responsibilities.
- The County Council has set aside funds for a study on whether the plot of land adjacent to the Post Office might be turned into a bus interchange. The Town Council is awaiting the outcome of this study, but has agreed in principle to some improvements to the town centre. Among improvements being considered are pavement widening, a change to the angle at which cars park, and a change to bus drop-off and boarding points – all of which the Council believes will improve the appearance of the town centre and improve the flow of visitors and shoppers through it.

- The Town Council has recently been supporting the Bittern Line Partnership in its efforts to persuade Abellio Greater Anglia to delay the departure of the last train from Norwich, at least on a Friday and Saturday night. This would allow residents along the Bittern Line to enjoy nights out in Norwich without leaving events early. Norman Lamb MP has also lent his support to this by writing to the key players, the rail company itself and Network Rail.
- I would like to thank the grounds staff for continuing to do an admirable job looking after the Cemetery, Churchyard and Parks. This is not always an easy job, and they deserve support and respect for what they do.
- Thanks to the Christmas Lights Group for their work through the year to ensure that the town is prepared and lit for Christmas, and to the local businesses who continue to support their work in whatever way they are able. Thanks also to the Fun Day Committee for continuing to organise the annual event in the War Memorial Park. As always, both the Christmas Lights Switch-On and the Fun Day were well attended last year and I hope they continue to be as successful.
- Finally Some dates for your diaries
  - 100 Years of North Walsham Festival – Sat/Mon 7-9 June
  - Civic Service – Sunday 8 June
  - Fun Day – Sunday 29 June
  - Fun Fair – Wed/Sun 23-27 July