

North Walsham Town Council
February 23rd 2021 Meeting
Report North Walsham Liberal Democrat County & District
Councillors

Council Tax

North County Council, the Police Authority and North Norfolk District Council are in the process of setting Council Tax precepts and their budgets for the coming financial year commencing in April 2021. For the average Band D Council Tax payer there is a rise in the County Council precept of £56.43p and for the Police Authority a rise of £14.94p. North Norfolk District Council will not be increasing the Council Tax that it charges residents for the services it provides.

The Government expects Councils to increase Council Tax to help maintain services and address deficits in its finances. North Norfolk District Council is able to freeze what it charges for Council Tax as it has a budget surplus for the next financial year and does not wish to add to the burden of householders at this difficult time. The District Council's services are being maintained, there is no increase in parking charges and the Council's financial support for the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone project remains.

COVID

The District Council continues to provide support to vaccination and testing arrangements in North Norfolk. In North Walsham the New Rd and Vicarage St car parks have been made available for users going the Community Centre for a vaccination and the Vicarage St car park for a testing unit two days a week. We also continue to provide advice to businesses on social distancing arrangements as well pay out Government grants to eligible businesses who cannot trade (wholly or partly) due to the pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic over £80 million pounds has been paid out to some 4,500 local businesses.

Cedar House/New Rd site

This District Council owned site in the town centre has been empty since the Autumn of 2016 when the last tenants left to make way for the JD Wetherspools pub chain to buy and open a pub on the site. Various challenges to the sale taking place subsequently arose. In March last year the District Council, following further negotiations with Wetherspools, reaffirmed it's decision to sell the site to them. The terms for the site being sold to them were improved so that Wetherspools had a shorter period to actually build and open a pub before the Council would have the option to buy the site back. No further progress has been made on the sale as Wetherspools have had to put on hold such purchases due to the difficult trading conditions being experienced by pubs as a result of the Covid pandemic. They have recently told the Council that their interest in coming to North Walsham remains but until their trading outlook becomes clearer they cannot make a decision.

The Council is facing a situation where the Cedar House and the New Rd site has been vacant for some four and a half years and this cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. It is a blight on our town centre and urgent repairs are going to have to be carried out on Cedar House. Also whether Wetherspools will eventually be able to buy the site remains an unknown quantity. Consequently, the Council is now examining what other viable options could exist for this site if Wetherspools interest is no longer a practical way forward.