



# NORTH WALSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

## Town Mayor's Report – 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021

Good evening everyone, and thank you for attending this virtual Annual Town meeting for North Walsham. This meeting is not a regular meeting of the Town Council, but a meeting at which the Town Council, through the Town Mayor, reports to the people of North Walsham and provides an opportunity to ask questions directly to Members of the three Councils Town, District and County which operate within North Walsham.

Due to the COVID pandemic there was no meeting held last year, this report includes the period May 2019 to April 2021. Since the last meeting which was held 2 years ago followed by the local election where new Cllrs Richard Sims, Nicholas Felstead, Mal Gray, Paul Oakes, Nick Clancy, Bob Wright and Paul Heinrich joined the Town Council, in addition later in the following year there was a by-election when Cllrs Elize Wheeler and Nick Clancy resigned and Cllr Helen Gotts and Peter Edge were elected.

In addition, unfortunately during the last 2 years we have said goodbye to Cllrs Richard Harris, Folic Choudhury, Peter Edge, Paul Oakes and Ian Jackson. I would like to take this opportunity to express the Town Council's sincere thanks and gratitude for all that they did whilst they were Cllrs, people often forget that these people gave their services voluntarily and often spent a considerable amount of time selflessly working for the good of the Town. This means the Town Council currently has 5 vacancies, however there is a co-option meeting being held on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021 to try and fill these positions.

It has at times been a tumultuous 2 years with the impact of the substantial gas road works upon the Town which was still ongoing when the pandemic further impacted both access and the footfall in the Town. I am proud to say that as usual the vast majority of the townsfolk were understanding of the restrictions, unfortunately during the first shutdown the Town Council felt it prudent to suspend the Markets until the situation improved, and these were resumed as soon as possible as restrictions relaxed. The current restrictions on access to the Town centre will remain in place until June when it is hoped that all restrictions can be lifted.

If anyone is interested in having a stall at either the Thursday or Sunday Markets then please contact Nigel Clarke through the Town Council Office

Despite the challenges the Grounds staff have continued throughout the pandemic to do an outstanding job looking after our Cemeteries, Churchyard and all of our Parks. Daniel Gilbert the head grounds keeper has managed the challenges thrown at him both with regards to the pandemic and storms where several trees were uprooted and required clearing. On the downside the storage facilities were broken into and a considerable amount of equipment was stolen. These buildings were not really fit for purpose and we have finally completed building a purpose-built equipment compound in which to securely store the equipment and return the bottom Cemetery Chapel to its intended use holding of small services. The ground staff are quite approachable and will happily receive any feedback or suggestions

### **Western Expansion**

Undoubtedly the greatest challenge in the future is the proposed Western Extension of the Town as a Town Council we are taking this issue very seriously, having seen previous developments in the Town and how they have come up short in providing for the Town and its residents. We are determined to do our utmost to ensure that the Town gets the appropriate infrastructure and funding, we are very aware that this must be approached in the correct way and have employed the assistance of consultants to

help guide and advise us to ensure a successful outcome is achieved. We have set up a working group of 4 Councillors and also engaged with local businesses and stake holders we are working closely with the District and County Councillors and are part of the steering group.

It is imperative that the Town's concerns with regards to a bypass and a link road from Cromer Road in to the back of the industrial estate are acted upon, when it is built this will remove the need for HGVs to use Aylsham Road and alleviate the issue of HGVs passing through the Town and striking the railway bridges. In order to facilitate this, we are taking advice from independent consultants in an effort to ensure that we get the best outcome for the Town and have put aside funding to pay for this. £10K 20/21 precept and a further £10K 21/22

#### **Precept:**

This year has increased by 1.96% for a band D property which equates to an increase of £1.99 per annum

£3K for cemetery signs, 20/21

£15K for cemetery road, kerb and markers 21/22

£12.5K Electricity supply to Trackside 21/22

£20K for the Pavilion refurbishment/upkeep 21/22

£5K for War Memorial revitalisation 21/22

£5k Youth projects 21/22 (in addition to the 15K awarded to the Phoenix group for disabled toilets for public use and sensory room from previous years precepts)

£10K Western Expansion consultancy, 20/21 additional 10K for 21/22

£5K Skate Park NWP (In addition to last year's 10K from precept 20/21)

£10K-Grounds Equipment

#### **HAZ an update from Bob.**

North Walsham's unique and historic town centre was recognised by historic England under their High Street Heritage Action Zone scheme. In total this three-year project has a total funding of £3.12m, contributed by Historic England, North Norfolk District Council and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership. The project is made up of two key elements.

The first is building improvement where grants will be made to support the repair and restoration of heritage buildings in the conservation area, these may include shop front improvements or to bring unused business and residential floor space back into use.

The second is improvements to public spaces in the Market Place and the lokes that lead into it. North Norfolk District Council have appointed specialist consultants who are leading research and engagement with the community to identify the issues that need resolving and to come up with a solution or solutions that meet with widespread approval. Expect to read more about this in the next few months, and please do get involved with this. The market place is actually quite difficult to find for visitors and one of the objectives is to much improve the lokes that lead from the car parks into the centre, to make the town more welcoming and to entice visitors to visit our shops, pubs and restaurants. In addition, the Market Place and surrounding streets will be made more pedestrian friendly, by improving footways, providing more seating and planting of various kinds.

Alongside the physical works, is another separately funded project, the cultural programme. Led by a group of local people this will feature a range of drama, music, art and other things, with a strong focus on community engagement to create produce and deliver these. This will kick off later in this year and will run in parallel with the High Street action zone project

## **Parks.**

### **Memorial Park**

The ECO gym in the memorial park courtesy of North Walsham Play was opened in the summer of 2019 along with additional Eco friendly LED down-lighters along the footpath. Consultation about replacing the 1949 By-laws was carried out these have now been updated and submitted for approval by the Secretary of State. There has been a wild meadow area by the Tennis courts created. In collaboration with NNDC, 100 new trees have recently been planted in the Memorial park. The D&A committee under the Chair of Cllr Murphy has designed and submitted a bid using Section 106 money currently held by district to revitalise the War Memorial Garden. Section 106 funds are contributions from developers, this is required under their planning approval. In addition, I would like to express our thanks to Nick Hindle for the very speedy and much appreciated work he carried out on the memorial stone for HRH the Duke of Edinburgh which was placed in the War Memorial Garden.

### **Woodville Park**

The swing that was in a poor state of repair has been replaced as well as all of the boundary fencing.

### **Trackside Park**

Funding has been secured for the proposed Skate Park I'm sure Matt Smith will cover this in greater detail. Additional environmentally friendly recycled benches have been installed and the dog area continues to be well utilised.

### **Spa Common**

This is planned to be a wild meadow with nature walk and is currently under development.

### **Fiskes Wood**

This area of woodland was bequeathed in March 2019 to the town by the Fiske family and will be managed by our grounds team

## **General Town issues and Improvements**

Despite the challenges we have faced recently we have continued to listen to the concerns and issues raised by the residents of North Walsham. We have worked very closely with the North Walsham Good Neighbourhood Scheme helping them with grants, printing and delivery of leaflets throughout the pandemic. They have done an enormous amount of work and good in the Town and are to be commended.

One of the few positives that we managed to achieve whilst the gas works were being undertaken in the Town was to get the Drinking Fountain by the Market Cross reconnected whilst the pavement was dug up and it's now working again, a new bus shelter has been installed on the Lyngate Road and benches ordered to replace 3 of the benches on Yarmouth Road that are aging. In the middle of 2019, we started the litter picking groups on Sundays, this went down very well with volunteers and considerable amounts of litter were removed from our hedges, verges and roads. Unfortunately, this couldn't continue last year due to the pandemic but we hope to restart in June as long as restrictions permit.

Our Town Council website has been completely revamped and is compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and this is now the one stop place for all Council Documents and information. It now includes a new events calendar which events will be able to be added to by e-mailing the council.

We applied to the Local Council Award scheme run by National Associations of Local Council and have been awarded the foundation and quality award which demonstrates the Council meets at least the

minimum requirement for operating lawfully and according to standard practice. I would like to thank all the staff and councillors for their input and assistance in achieving this award, and we are currently aiming to secure the quality Gold award.

The Mayors Charity Fund has assisted in providing additional funding to provide a Defibrillator located on the outside porch of the Blue Bell PH, I would like to pass on the Council's thanks for allowing it to be sited there. Any money remaining in the fund will be donated to the Phoenix youth charity at the end of this Mayoral year.

One of the last items delivered under the Market Town Initiative were new town maps and heritage panels provided in the car parks and at the station, these are proving popular with residents and visitors.

As always, a Town is only as good as its residents and volunteers and I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to:

#### **North Walsham in Bloom**

I would like to express the Council's thanks to North Walsham in Bloom for the outstanding work they do in keeping our Town flower beds, planters and boxes so magnificently tended and colourful, a real credit to the Town they should be rightly proud of their efforts.

**Wayne Beauchamp** – For all his efforts in producing the Town Guide in particular for giving his time free in producing the current 2021 guide, which has already been delivered to households within the Town an amazing effort especially considering the impact of COVID.

**Matt Smith** – For his tireless efforts to help us improve our play parks under his North Walsham Play Charity including the new Skate Park.

I would also like to thank all the Council staff for their hard work during the year that despite working from home they have still ensured that all queries and issues have been dealt with speedily, professionally and satisfactorily. I am sure you will agree they have worked hard to raise the Town Council's profile.

Lastly, I would like to thank the current Councillors for their team spirit and continued support and efforts throughout the year. I am sure they will agree that it is not an individual that is important but working together regardless of their own opinions is what matters and has made such a success over the past years.