

North Walsham Town Council
5 April 2016

**Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held at North Walsham Community Centre
on 5 April 2016**

PRESENT

Town Mayor:	Cllr B West
Town Councillors:	
East Ward:	Cllr R Sims Cllr D Turner
North Ward:	Cllr B Hester Cllr G Bull Cllr A Thirtle
West Ward:	Cllr A Canham Cllr J Melville
County Councillors:	Cllr E Seward
District Councillors:	Cllr V Gay Cllr N Lloyd Cllr E Seward Cllr V Uprichard
Guest speakers:	
Mrs Hazel Marshal	Kikambala Aid Trust
Mr Matthew Smith	North Walsham Play

29 members of the public

The meeting commenced at 19:30

1 **WELCOME**

The Town Mayor welcomed those in attendance to the meeting.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Town Cllrs A Fryer, M Seward, S Stuckey and E Wheeler, District Cllrs A and P Moore and Inspector J Burke (North Walsham Police) In addition, PC Gwynn had confirmed that no other officers were able to attend, but should there be any questions they should be passed to him for a response. Town Cllrs Choudhury and Witte were absent.

3 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Town Meeting held on 7 April 2015 were approved as a true record to be signed by the Town Mayor. District Cllr Uprichard raised a query in relation to the Memorial Park Project (pg 8). The Town Mayor advised that the trees wilfully destroyed shortly after planting had not been replaced, and that the Council had not been approached by project members.

4 **TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT**

North Walsham has continued to evolve since the last Town Meeting, on 7 April last year.

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The election in May last year, and subsequent filling of vacancies by co-option, brought new blood onto the Council. We still have vacancies that need to be filled, so if you are interested in seeing first-hand how local government works please consider putting yourself forward for consideration. Parish and Town Councils, rightly or wrongly, often have a reputation for being old fuddy-duddies who are out of touch with important parts of the community. Wouldn't it be a boon, then, if some of the town's younger generation came forward?

The big story continues to be the ongoing saga of J D Wetherspoon. We are a little further forward now than at this time last year. Following unsuccessful efforts to acquire the former surgery on Northfield Road as a community hub to house a number of local organisations (including the Council, North Norfolk Community Transport, the CAB and others) in one place, the District Council turned its attention to other potential sites. It is currently in negotiation with Norfolk Property Services (a wing of Norfolk County Council) about a new site for the Council – much closer to the town centre than Northfield Road. We expect to move during the course of this year, subject to satisfactory agreements and the completion of necessary work.

Our markets continue to be a success. As things stand, the Thursday market has no available pitches, although we are looking to expand into the newly paved area at the top of Market Street. Unfortunately, the precinct is not an option at this time due to the state of the footway – the Council would be neglecting its duty of care under health and safety legislation in running an event where accidents are quite clearly waiting to happen. But this is an issue that could be resolved over the coming year. The Sunday markets continue to raise funds for local charities – at 50% of the pitch fee of £20. We have started a three-month trial of markets on the second Sunday of each month (running from April to June). And we are looking at other, more specialised markets, fairs and events. Please submit any views or ideas to either the Town Clerk or Market Manager.

The Council voted in January to increase its Council Tax precept by 42.6%. In percentage terms this is a large increase. Unfortunately, this large number is overshadowing the actual increase of £19.87 per household per year, which equates to £1.66 a month. The primary reasons for the increase are

- A partnership project with the Norfolk Community Foundation to upgrade the Council's street-lighting assets to LED operation. We received confirmation in March that we had successfully bid for a grant £14,974 towards the total cost of a project that in the longer term will reduce the Council's energy usage and therefore costs.
- The need (following a thorough health & safety and security review) for new, more secure storage for maintenance equipment and materials used by Council grounds staff.
- Essential upgrades to the Council's IT system.
- Essential repair/renovation work on the Market Cross, which the Council be discussing with Historic England.

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- A third successful bid to the Norfolk County Council Parish Partnership Scheme (for 2016/17), which is designed to enable small highways improvements such as speed warning signs. Those of you driving along Happisburgh and Acorn Roads will have seen the first two signs in operation; this bid will bring a third sign, providing greater coverage and quicker evidence of hotspots to pass on to the police.
- Although it has yet to make a decision about this, as we await a forthcoming series of meetings with the District Council on its Local Plan, the Council felt it prudent to set aside funds to support the production of a Neighbourhood Plan. Our aim is to have as much influence as we can over the Local Plan, which would mean a Neighbourhood Plan could more easily work alongside this document and support what we as a community want to see in the town. The Council will consider the wider views of local groups and residents before committing to this path and the expense (and risk) it entails.

NNDC has agreed in principal to cover all reasonable costs associated with a move imposed on the Council by the sale of the New Road offices. But we felt it was prudent to ensure there was cover for unexpected costs that could arise from this. Relocating our offices is – contrary to the comments made by some – not quite as simple a task as it seems. For example, the CCTV system requires a considerable amount of work re-wiring the base unit and re-aligning the various communication nodes around the town so that the cameras send to a new location.

It is important to know that we could have sought a larger precept, as other projects were on the table. Some have been set aside for now. Others will be funded from Council reserves, which means that the increase is kept to a minimum. And as we have said previously, the Council could have declined to increase the precept, but then we would not have been able to support projects which we see as vital to the town and community.

The footway in St Nicholas Court precinct remains an unsightly problem. There have been discussions between Norfolk County Council and NNDC to seek a way forward, but these have yet to produce any results. And the complex legal position on ownership and liability means that it would be potentially very expensive for any one organisation to carry out any remedial work. We all agree, though, that the precinct should be a priority.

Last year, then Mayor Richard Sims reported that NNDC was in the process of completing a compulsory purchase on the 4/4a Market Street site. We can now see the final outcome of that process in the paved area and view of the Church Tower from Market Street. It does however also provide a view of the eyesore of the precinct footway!

We have made significant progress on our Woodville Park project, with the arrival of Matt Smith (more from him later) to drive the fundraising effort to much higher levels than we originally thought possible. Matt is in the process of establishing a charity, and the original view of improving the play area on a single park has developed into a project with a much broader focus on play in all three of the Council's parks. Woodville is just the first piece in a much bigger puzzle.

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I would like to thank the grounds staff for continuing to do an admirable job looking after the Cemetery, Churchyard and Parks. And now also siting our SAM2 speed warning signs. This is not always an easy job, as they are often outside in poor weather. They are more visible now – please do feel free to approach them if you see them around our sites; they are happy to get feedback on what they are doing, even advice on hedge trimming. Or just to say hello. They are an important cog in the machine that is your Town Council.

The Christmas Lights Group continues to produce the goods, and Great Yarmouth College should receive some credit for the work its students have produced – lighting displays and the entrance tunnel for the new Grotto among them. The Group's work has seen attendance over the last couple of years increase dramatically. The Council is particularly grateful for the time these volunteers give freely through the year (not just for the few weeks either side of the big day) 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. Similarly, the Fun Day Committee works very hard to organise the annual event in the War Memorial Park, and is again working alongside Arts North Norfolk on some very interesting plans. Who would have thought that dancers and rugby players would work together ?

I personally and on behalf of the town would like to thank all the volunteers from North Walsham in Bloom for providing the bright, cheerful displays around the town and for their continued hard work throughout the year.

Finally, some dates for your diaries

- North Walsham Festival – 19-26 June
- Civic Service – Sunday 19 June
- Fun Day – Sunday 26 June
- Fun Fair – Wed/Sun 27-30 July
- Circus Tyanna – Wed/Sun 10-14 August
- Markets – every Thursday and the final Sunday of each month except December
STOP PRESS: don't forget the three-month trial of additional markets on the 2nd Sunday of each month, starting on 10 April
- Christmas market – Sunday 18 December (100% of stall fees to annual Town Mayor's charity)

On behalf of Members of the Town, District and County Council, may I thank you all for attending this evening and move onto further reports, before turning the meeting over to you to address any queries you have to us as your representatives.

5 **REPORTS**

(a) **Police**

Unfortunately, Inspector Burke of North Walsham Police was on shift and therefore unable to attend the meeting to report on the last year in person.

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(b) **COUNTY COUNCILLORS**

Cllr Eric Seward reported on behalf of North Walsham's County Councillors.

The Norfolk County Cllrs for North Walsham are Eric Seward North Walsham East and John Timewell North Walsham West. No single political group was responsible for running the County Council, with 42 Conservative Councillors and 42 "other" Councillors. There had been some successes over the last 12 months:

- The Worsted recycling centre opening hours had remained at 7 days per week, and not reduced to the proposed 3, although opening hours had been reduced by an hour a day on weekdays.
- A proposal to remove street lighting from Norwich Road was dropped and replaced by plans to introduce lower cost LED lamps.
- Some 34% of the units on Scottow Enterprise Park had now been let, and the area was attracting more enquiries. It provided employment opportunities for the people of North Walsham.
- Norfolk County Council Education Support Service having been classified by Ofsted as ineffective in 2013 was now classified as effective and advising other authorities on their work.
- For the third year running, the Town Council has been successful in bidding for funds from the Parish Partnership Scheme for small highways projects
- Verge cutting would remain unchanged this year, at five cuts.

(c) **DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT**

Cllr Virginia Gay reported on behalf of North Walsham's District Councillors.

There was no startling news to report. The District Council's share of Council Tax had not been increased, and there had been no increase since 2010. This, however, meant that some things would not be done and other costs may be transferred elsewhere. And central government continued to work towards ending the local government support grant.

The Electoral Commission was reviewing ward boundaries for North Norfolk. Anyone was able to make a submission to this review, and it was important to ensure that market towns were properly represented.

NNDC continued to share its Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer with Great Yarmouth Council, under what is at present a temporary arrangement. There would be further talks following the Great Yarmouth election in May 2016 on whether this should become permanent, with proposals due to be submitted to NNDC members in June.

NNDC was closely involved in the discussions on devolution and the creation of a single elected leader for East Anglia. Concerns about how this would work had been raised.

6 **OPEN FORUM**

The following questions were raised:

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- (i) What can be done about the state of the Council Offices?
The Town Council expected to vacate the building shortly, with JD Wetherspoon taking vacant possession of the site. The Council will raise this with NNDC, which is responsible for the state/appearance of the building.
- (ii) How had the work to 4/4a Market Street been funded?
The project had been funded by NNDC, initially on a fixed price basis although subsequent problems relating to cabling and the availability of York stone meant that an element of hourly rate had been added. District Councillor Lloyd would seek clarification from the officer responsible for the project.
- (iii) Why had there been such an enormous increase (42%) in the town's council tax? Should it not be cancelled and reset at the cost of living? The Council is very arrogant and blasé about this and has not asked local people what they think.
Councils are legally obliged to set a precept to cover their costs. Residents have been asked over a lengthy period of time what they would like to see in the town, and there were three open precept meetings at which various projects and other items of expenditure were approved. The Council is taking forward those considered to be most important to the people of the town, but to do so it needs to be able to pay for them. In pounds and pence, the increase is £1.66 a month, which the Council does not consider to be excessive; but this is skewed due to the Council's history of setting low precepts. The large percentage increase actually reflects a small increase to a comparatively low amount.
- (iv) Councils were obliged to give residents 9 days' notice of town meetings. Why had this not been done? And why was the Council website not up to date, as it was required to be?
The meeting had been advertised at various locations around the town for three weeks. Work to improve the website had been under, and was moving forward quicker now with the appointment of a new member of staff with a specific remit to do this. Minutes and notices of meetings were now being posted.
- (v) Will the Council review its decision to keep the gates of the War Memorial Park open? Residents along New Road whose properties back onto the park are regularly disturbed by noise and drug taking, and the police are regularly involved although rarely find anyone.
The decision to keep the park open was made in response to demand from residents, and owners of neighbouring properties were asked for their views before a decision was made. The number of complaints about disturbances has substantially reduced since the decision was taken to keep the gates open, and the police have not raised any concerns with the Council. The gates on Farman Avenue were now kept locked as "access only" for maintenance vehicles and Poppies Nursery staff. All the double gates now had one side permanently locked to prevent cars from accessing the park. The Council will, however, review the decision to keep the gates open, and this will be placed on the agenda for the next Council meeting (to be held on Tuesday 26 April 2016).

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- (vi) Mrs E Weekley had written to Councillors (individually) and Town Clerk in July last year but had received no response. This was unprofessional and arrogant.
No Councillors had received individual communication from Mrs Weekley, who declined to respond to a query on the subject of the letter – the Clerk had received two, and both had been responded to.
- (vii) Mr R White had written to the Council in July 2015 asking three questions in relation to the removal of bus routes from the town centre, and had received a reply. He asked the Council again if it had instigated the removal of bus stops, and what it did when it found out they had been moved.
The Council had not sought the removal of bus stops from the town centre, and had no powers to intervene in the affairs of private business.
- (viii) The Community Award needed to given a higher profile, and recipients should be rewarded.
Cllr Sims reported that he had restarted the award during his term in office (2014-15), and had personally donated the awards for the first five years. It was hoped that the press would be present for presentations, and the Council would submit details to local free press following the presentations.
- (ix) There is no end of brown field sites in North Walsham, yet the football club was being kicked off its ground. Why?
The site in question has long been identified in the NNDC Local Plan as housing development land, but no developer has come forward until now. The ground is owned by Bruce Rossi, who had committed a different location to the club which it was happy to move to and which gave it the security it required to seek further investment in facilities from the FA and others. No planning application for the proposed development had been submitted at this time, but the Town Council would be consulted when it was and would be seeking appropriate investment in the town's infrastructure through Section 106 agreements.
- (x) The new and proposed developments in the town put a lot of pressure on school places and doctors' surgeries. Why was no money given towards these? Why did the District Council not introduce the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in place of negotiated s.106 funding?
District Councillors were aware of the increasing pressures on essential services in the town. There was still some room in the schools, although the Manor Road school was nearly full. There had been a particular issue with the Hopkins Homes development on Norwich Road, where local District Councillors were united in opposition to an agreement that the company should not pay s.16 contributions as it would make the development unviable. Unfortunately voting had been along party lines. Persimmon Homes had stated that it would make the required contributions, including affordable homes on the development. CIL monies would go straight to the District Council and would not be tied to the place in the way that s.106 was. So there was no guarantee that CIL money would be spent on infrastructure in North Walsham; it would depend on the priorities of the District Council.

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- (xi) Why was the Council blocking a website promoting the town which was being worked on by Arts North Norfolk volunteers?
The Council works closely with Joe Ballard, Director of ANN. But this is the first we have heard of a new website or any accusations that it was being blocked by the Council. The Council would seek a report from Mr Ballard.
- (xii) The bus stop situation on New Road is a problem for pedestrians and drivers. What can be done about this? The crossing outside Roy's seemed to confuse many people; should it be changed?
There had been considerable discussion about the suitability of a bus interchange opposite Roy's, and Highways had agreed this to be the most suitable option. But the owners of the site were not prepared to sell. The centre of town had been rejected on safety grounds. This left the current arrangement on New Road and Yarmouth Road, which was unsafe. The Council would investigate whether the stop on New Road was permanent. The issue will be placed on the agenda for the next Council meeting (to be held on Tuesday 26 April 2016). The crossing at Roy's was a Puffin-type, which Highways' assessments showed to be the most appropriate.

7 **PRESENTATIONS**

(a) *Hazell Marshall – Kikambala Aid Trust*

Mrs Marshall had taught at the Manor Road school for a time, and subsequently became a Head Teacher elsewhere. When she retired, she had taken a holiday to Kenya, and discovered various small shanty towns. She had discovered that these had no water, electricity or sanitation. Water was available for two hours twice a week, while electricity supply was dependent on a suitable transformer. She had decided with her husband to do something manageable to help. A registered charity had been set up, with Mr and Mrs Marshall as UK trustees, and another in Kenya to oversee projects, and initially had focussed on getting wells dug so that water was easily available. Once the programme was established, they had focused on power supply. Wells had been established in around 12 villages. Once finished, these were handed over to the local community to manage and maintain. The charity had now started work on small sanitation projects which like the wells were communal.

To date it was estimated that the charity had raised about £70,000. All money donated went directly to charity projects, with the Marshalls covering all administration costs. Working with the local people was a very humbling experience, and had opened their eyes to a wider vision of what is necessary in the world today.

(b) *Matthew Smith – North Walsham Play*

Mr Smith works at a complex needs school in Sheringham, and supported ten other complex needs school across the county. With a 19-month old son, he had started visiting the town's parks, and felt they weren't where they could be in terms of provision of facilities. Following discussions with the Town Council, he was now establishing a charity – North Walsham Play – to support raising funds for facilities at the War Memorial Park, Trackside and Woodville. The project at Woodville was the first, and was well on the way to raising the funds needed to install a new fully accessible and well-equipped play area. It was hoped that, by attending meetings such as this, he would be able to attract interest from local businesses who may wish to

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support the project, as equipment that was easily accessible to disabled children came at a cost. There had been online and personal consultation on what local people would like to see in the parks, and this would be continuing as the projects progressed.

All the speakers were thanked for their time.

8

CLOSE

The Town Mayor once again thanked everyone for attending, and closed the meeting at 21:25