

NORTH WALSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Meeting held at the Community Centre on 1 April 2014

PRESENT

Town Mayor:	Mrs J Belson
Town Councillors:	
Mr B Hester	Mr E Seward
Mr C Peck	Mr A Thirtle
Mr D Robertson	Mr D Turner
Mrs R A Rose	Mrs B West
County Councillor:	Mr J Timewell
District Councillors:	Mrs V Gay
	Mrs A Moore
	Mr N Lloyd
Guest speakers:	
Mrs S Thomson	North Walsham First Responders
Mr M Ling	North Walsham Community Archive Group

19 members of the public

The meeting commenced at 19:40

10948 WELCOME

The Town Mayor welcomed those in attendance to the meeting, and apologised for the technical issues that had delayed the start.

10949 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Town Cllrs. G Bull, R Sims, V Uprichard and B Wexler, District Cllr P Moore, and Inspector K Brooks.

10950 MINUTES

The minutes of the Town Meeting held on 2 April 2013 were approved as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

10951 TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT

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:

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- 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

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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 Marricks 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

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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.

10952 **POLICE**

Unfortunately Inspector Brooks of North Walsham Police was unable to attend the meeting to report on the last year, and had sent her apologies to the Town Mayor.

10953 **COUNTY COUNCILLORS' REPORT**

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. We were both elected at different times in 2013.

The County Council can best be described as going through interesting times. The local news for the last day has been dominated by the proposed waste incinerator project at Kings Lynn. Council Officers are now recommending that the authority does not proceed with the project and this recommendation will be debated and decided upon at Council meetings on April 7th. Today's Eastern Daily press headline says '£35m up in smoke and a cost to council tax payers in Norfolk of £91 on every bill'. It was a project that was started by the then Conservative administration with good intentions. The Council was running out of landfill sites for refuse and an incinerator that could handle non recyclable waste and run at a profit was seen as the way forward. A site was purchased in Kings Lynn in 2008 and a contract formally awarded to Cory Wheelbrator to build and operate an incinerator in March 2012. Government financial support was forthcoming and planning permission was given by the Council in June 2012.. However, concern was already mounting. A public referendum in Kings Lynn in 2011 on the incinerator issue resulted in 70,000 votes and 92% rejecting the incinerator. Opposition party Cllrs at County Hall were also questioning the value of the project and it extended to a small number of Conservative County Cllrs from Kings Lynn as well as local Conservative MPs and the District Council for the area. The County Council administration however was determined to proceed with the project. In the Autumn of 2012 the Government Minister (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) decided to call in the planning approval because of the level of public concern and a public inquiry in front of a Government appointed Planning Inspector started in February 2013 and finished in May. A report was submitted by the Inspector in September and the Secretary of State was expected to rule on the Inspectors report in January 2014. This has not happened and is still awaited. In the meantime cheaper alternatives to disposing of Norfolk's non recyclable waste have begun to emerge. There are more incinerators elsewhere to take Norfolk's waste and it could be cheaper to ship the waste to Holland for them to incinerate. Also in late 2013 the Government withdrew its financial support due to the emergence of these alternatives. Hence the Council finds itself in a position of a project whose financial viability is open to question and which could lead to some £20m in compensation to the company that was awarded

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the contract if it is cancelled . It is not a story that is good for the County Council's reputation. It is perhaps not surprising that the Council's Chief Environment Officer that headed up the project has since left the Council's employment for a position elsewhere.

The other challenge that the Council is facing is change. In the May 2013 Council elections after some 16 years the Conservative Party no longer ran the Council. Instead no political group had control. Currently there are 40 Conservative Cllrs, 14 Labour, 14 UKIP, 10 Lib Dems, 4 Greens and 2 Independents. The Cabinet which takes many executive decisions comprises 6 Labour Cllrs and 3 Lib Dem Cllrs. They are supported by all party groups apart from the Conservatives. This wide natured coalition came together with the aim of making the Council more open and transparent in its decision making process after what had happened with the incinerator project. It is to be proposed that the Council disposes with the Cabinet system of governance and has a Committee system beginning in the summer. This comes before the Council's members in late April to determine.

Senior Officers are also changing. A new Chief Executive takes up the post in August. After reports by Government Inspectors that the Councils Children's Services Dept was inadequate in key areas there has been a new Director since the Autumn (Sheila Lock) and a largely new management team. Extra funding to support children in need of care has been found and the aim of the Council is that every school in Norfolk should be a good school. Too many schools in the County are mediocre or average and the performance of children in our schools is not, for example, as good as the inner London borough of Lambeth. None of our schools in North Walsham are in special measures but the drive to improve has to continue.

The Council faces financial challenges. Government support has been reduced by £140million over the last three and for the next three years further savings have to be found of around £180 million. Half of these savings will come from improved efficiencies in the way the Council operates. Hard choices will have to be made on services and it has to be done against a continually rising costs for adult social care. Council tax could be increased but currently the majority of councillors do not favour this. As Liberal Democrats local North Walsham Cllrs would like to see a more flexible approach to this matter.

On more local North Walsham issues local County Cllrs are pleased as the Mayor has reported to have helped the Town Council to successfully bid in its first attempt for matched funding for local traffic calming measures. Local highway issues of allsorts are a common complaint to Councillors. The reductions in the mobile library service to outlying villages are being reviewed to see if they could generate some income and thus enable a better service to be provided. Flooding is also an issue in parts of the Town .It is a long drawn out process to arrive at decisions on carrying out remedial works and more planning and consultation is earmarked to take place in the next financial year. Hopefully by 2015 work which can be quite modest to improve drainage systems and thus reduce the danger of flooding to residential properties can be found. In the meantime we just have to hope that sudden bursts of rain do not cause flooding. The proposal to charge household users to deposit waste at the Worsted waste collection site has attracted criticism. It is not due to come into operation until April 2016 and could be subject to change. It is a charge which Cllr Seward opposes.

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For the first time for a good many years local County Cllrs because of the political composition of the Council now have some leverage over what happens at County Hall, and we want to use this for the benefit of North Walsham. It will not be easy but we will seek to do our best.

10954 **DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORT**

Cllr Ann Moore reported on behalf of North Walsham's District Councillors.

We were very lucky in North Walsham that we only suffered minor damage from the winds accompanying the storm surge, but I should like to register our appreciation of the work put in by our officers in this emergency.

Since July, I have been the Leader of the Lib-Dem Group, leader of the opposition at the District Council. It is difficult to do as much for the people of the District, and in particular North Walsham, as would want to when you are in opposition, but I and the other councillors have done our best and have got things done.

It was due to our intervention and support of the Town Council that the District gave up its idea of charging for the Midland Road car park. We North Walsham Members at the District have long supported free parking in North Walsham and in our alternative budget called for the abolition of the evening charge and a holistic study of all car parking in the District.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is chaired by an opposition Member. Currently that is my husband Peter Moore, and it was through his chairmanship that we were able to allow the Towns to speak at this committee when they ran into difficulties with the current administration over CCTV. Later I made proper funding for CCTV one of the planks in my alternative Budget and I now understand sufficient funding has been secured.

The action initiated by us, when we were in power, on 4 Market Street is finally reaching its end. The site owner has not appealed the s79 notice he has been served and in due course we shall, hopefully, be able to demolish the building and clear the site, giving glimpses of the church through the churchyard. Other derelict sites in the town are also being dealt with by the Council's Enforcement Board.

North Walsham Members opposed the planning permission on the HL Food site, but despite there being no affordable housing and no s106 Agreement on contributions to services like education and highways, it was pushed through.

All Members have done casework supporting local people, but this is confidential so cannot be reported. We have supported the Town Council and private persons, and called in planning applications so that they can speak to them in Development Committee, and make sure the Committee have the chance to look at the site. We know how important it is for you to have your say.

We shall continue to do our best for the Town and represent you.

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10954 **OPEN FORUM**

Mr Lane from Manor Road asked that the Town Council look into better signage for bridges. In particular, he would like to see Imperial AND metric measurements on any height signs on the approach to Cromer Road Bridge.

10955 **FIRST RESPONDERS**

The Town Mayor introduced Sarah Thompson from the North Walsham Community First Responders.

The First Responders concept had been started by an American doctor, who had developed the 'chain of survival' – early recognition of symptoms->contacting the emergency services quickly->starting CPR as soon as possible->early defibrillation->getting the victim to hospital and into coronary care as soon as possible. The UK Ambulance Service had looked at how to implement this, and the Community First Responders system was developed as a result.

Community First Responders are trained by the Ambulance Service to attend life-threatening call, and help to stabilise people as soon as possible. In many cases they will arrive on the scene first, usually within 3-4 minutes, and would hand over to the emergency services when they arrive.

Community First Responders were able to maintain airways, provide oxygen, carry defibrillators, control bleeding, and take observations for reporting to the ambulance crew. In addition to suspected coronary matters, they would be sent to calls relating to breathing difficulties, asthma attacks, strokes, haemorrhaging, etc.

It was not always possible for an ambulance to arrive within 8 minutes in rural areas like North Walsham, so the Community First Responders provided that initial service. There are currently four active volunteers in North Walsham, so it was not always possible to provide 24/7 cover.

Training takes place over two intensive weekends. The process of becoming a Community First Responder also included undergoing CRB checks, and they had to adhere to strict rules. Community First Responders drive under normal road rules only, not under blue lights. The service relies completely on donations and their own fundraising activities. They always welcome new people to find out more or to join.

Mrs Thompson thanked the meeting for their time.

10956 **NORTH WALSHAM & DISTRICT COMMUNITY ARCHIVE GROUP**

The Town Mayor introduced Mike Ling to speak about the Group's activities.

The North Walsham & District Community Archive Group had been formed several years ago. The town had changed a great deal over the years, and the Group did not want to lose the history. It had created a website, that now had over 600 photographs on line. In the last six weeks, it had launched a Facebook group, and many of these photographs had appeared there. A number of new photographs had come forward as a direct result of the Facebook group.

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Mr Ling made an open plea for the North Walsham community not to throw away old photographs, as the Archive Group would love to save these and other artefacts for future generations.

The Archive Group would be holding an exhibition at the Atrium in August, and a smaller exhibition later in the year in conjunction with the British Legion to commemorate the First World War.

A small exhibition of photographs from the Archive had been set up in the hall, and Mr Ling indicated that he would be happy to discuss them and the Archive Group's activities following the meeting.

The Town Mayor thanked Mrs Thompson and Mr Ling for their informative presentations, and thanked Councillors and members of the public for attending.

The meeting closed at 20:20