



NORTH WALSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Town Mayor's Report - 3 April 2018

Good evening everyone and thank you for attending the Annual Town Meeting for North Walsham 2018. As you may, or may not know, this is not a meeting of the Town Council, but rather the meeting at which the Town Council, through the Town Mayor, myself, reports to you and at which you get an opportunity to ask questions directly to Members of the three Councils Town, District and County which operate within North Walsham.

Since the meeting last year two new Councillors have joined the Town Council Cllr Elaine Addison and Cllr Ray Mooney. Both represent the West Ward.

During the last 12 months the Woodville Park Play Area was opened. This is for all children and is completely DDA compliant. North Walsham Play worked very hard with the Town Council to raise the money to establish this play area and are continuing to work to raise the funds for replacement of play equipment in the Memorial Park. The fund raising is going very well and my understanding is that, they are about two thirds towards the target of £90,000. I would like to thank North Walsham Play for the hard work that they continue to do in their fund-raising efforts.

As you may all probably be aware in June last year the Information Office opened at Bubby's Little Shop, in King's Arms Loke. Since then Cllr Barry Hester, on behalf of the Town Council, has negotiated with the Rev Paul Cubitt a Lease of the Sadler's Room at Vicarage Street for the Information Office to be relocated along with the North Walsham Heritage Group. The new Information Office and Heritage Centre will open on 16th April, and will be known as the Mi Centre, being M for Museum and i for information. It is early days but one of the items on display is the North Walsham Fire Engine which was bought by the church wardens around 1725. The Information Office will provide information about events in North Walsham and surrounding areas, and the loan of memorabilia for the museum is always welcome. There have been a few false starts on the Heritage Centre, but hopefully now it will begin to thrive.

A hot topic for a couple of years has been JD Wetherspoon. The Town Council has no control over this, but it understands that a planning application will soon be submitted, and the right of way issues have been addressed.

Hopefully once the planning process is completed, works can commence towards the opening of the JD Wetherspoon establishment. I am sure that the District Council will provide any information as and when available about these premises.

The North Walsham Town Strategy was carried out during the summer of 2017 when questionnaires were distributed to each household in North Walsham to obtain recommendations and comments from the public. The purpose of this was to shape the Town for the future and to develop a strategic proposal for inclusion in the new Local Plan being prepared by the District Council. We had just over 300 questionnaires returned.

Following this several workshops were held with key stakeholders, which dealt with specific topics. Housing, Environment, Economy, Education, Community, Transport and Infrastructure.

From these workshops further input was gathered and a Report is being written which will be submitted to the District Council in the autumn.

It is still planned to hold a General Public Forum for further input.

“Men in Sheds” or “Men’s Sheds” as it is known globally, has now formed in North Walsham and it is hoped that this will be a huge success. This is supported by the Town Council and the group already has several members and have now found premises at the rear of the White Swan Public House, Church Street. I would like to thank the landlord, Cllr Peter Edge, for his kind gesture of giving them rent free premises. They welcome new members and will answer any questions of those interested in joining. If you are interested please contact the Town Council Office who will be able to give you contact details.

Over the last four years the Royal British Legion along with a volunteer WW1 Committee, supported by the Town Council, have arranged several events in memory of the First World War. This year is no exception and to commemorate Armistice, working together with the Twinning Committee of Friesenreid, representatives from Germany will be visiting to attend a Civic Dinner at the Atrium on Friday 12 October, which will be based on a 1914 menu, followed by the annual event on Saturday 13 October at the Atrium. The event will also recognise 100 years of the RAF. Further information can be obtained by contacting the Town Council Office.

Both the Town Council and Regenerate North Walsham CIC are working closely together towards the purchase of the St Nicholas Court Precinct from Crown Estates and it is now close to completion. Once done this will enable the trip hazards, sunken drains, and broken slabs to be repaired, and long term, bring it back into active use. The purchase of the precinct and repairs will be through grant funding and monies from the Town Council.

As you will all be aware from the newspaper articles and leaflets which have been put through doors, the Vattenfall Wind Farm is a large wind farm to be situated off the North Norfolk coast. This wind farm will be supplying to approximately 1.3 m homes with up to 1.8GW of energy. We have a representative Mrs S Falch-Lovesey from Vattenfall who will be giving a presentation this evening on the project and will be able to answer any questions that you wish to raise concerning it.

Our markets continue to be a success, thanks to our Market Manager Nigel Clarke, and our loyal stall holders. The improving weather is, as always, increasing the market footfall. At the moment the Thursday market has no available pitches although we are looking to expand into the newly paved area at the top of Market Street and the precinct when repaired. 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.

It is public knowledge that last year there were some serious problems and issues with our Cemeteries. The Town Council unreservedly apologise for the distress that this caused. The Town Council have written and spoken to numerous individuals to allay their concerns and have again expressed their apologies. The Town Council have now revised their Cemetery Regulations and they are available online, or a copy can be obtained from the Town Council Office. They are also on display at both cemeteries.

The annual precept, unfortunately, has again had to be raised and this year the increase is 18%. While this sounds like a lot the actual increase is just over a £1 a month for the average household.

This year it includes;

£2000 – Parish Partnership – The Parish Partnership is a scheme where Norfolk County Council match fund the parish. This year the money is being used for road signage on Aylsham Road as requested by the residents.

£10000 – War Memorial Park Play Area – This is a contribution to the project mentioned earlier, of North Walsham Play, to raise funds for the replacement of play equipment at the Memorial Park.

£10000 – Historical Repairs – The Town Council hold the responsibility for the Market Cross. It is in need of repair and unfortunately has to be completed by a Conservation Builder. This sum is a best guess at the current time.

£5000 – Bus Interchange Reserve – Last year the Town Council agreed to put money aside for the much-needed Bus Interchange. This is an annual commitment. Without tempting fate, I hope that our County Councillors can give you some good news on this later.

£10000 – Spa Common – Last year the Town Council commissioned a report on the land that it owns at Spa Common as it was known to be contaminated, due to its previous use. The Report suggested a minimum requirement of 8 inches of clean topsoil over the whole area. This will be completed and will then allow the area to be brought back into public use.

£20000 – Grass Verge Mower – You should have already noticed that many of the Grass Verges around town are now getting cut on a more regular basis. This is putting pressure on the equipment we hold, and as it is hoped that we will soon be taking on the District Council contract alongside the County Council contract, that we already have. It is imperative that we have the means and equipment to undertake the task.

£25000 – Head Groundsman – As well as needing the equipment outlined above, we also need extra staff for the tasks that we are continuously picking up. We currently have three ground staff, and it has been agreed to augment them with a Head Groundsman.

£20000 – Cemetery Lodge Repairs – The Lodge on Mundesley Road is owned by the Town Council. It is in desperate need of some repairs both internally and externally and we have to complete these by law as compliant landlords.

£5000 – Youth Hub – Some time ago there was a call for a Youth Hub to be located somewhere within North Walsham to allow a congregation point, WiFi and phone charging area. This is still at a very early stage.

£10000 – Town Council Storage Compound – For some time now our grounds team have had a number of vehicles, such as mowers, a tractor, a flatbed truck and trailer etc. These are currently stored across the town and it has been agreed to set up a central secure compound which ultimately will increase efficiency and be beneficial to the tasks that the team provides.

I would like to thank all of the grounds staff for continuing to do an admirable job looking after our Cemeteries, Churchyard and all of our Parks. This is not always an easy job, as they are often outside in bad weather. Please do feel free to approach them and say hello if you see them around our sites. They are happy to get feedback on what they are doing. They are an important cog in the machine that is your Town Council.

I would also like to thank Julie Shields who is currently our Acting Town Clerk and who has done a commendable job of running the office along with further thanks to Tina Foster our Deputy Town Clerk and Fiona Collett Assistant to Town Clerk who have diligently assisted since the resignation of our previous Clerk, Nick Clancy.

They are all working hard to ensure that any concerns, problems or information required or raised by residents are dealt with speedily, professionally and satisfactorily.

One last group to thank, are the current Councillors. They have continued to support the Town and myself, through what has been a difficult year.

Finally, some dates for your diaries

- Children's Day and North Walsham Play car boot – Monday 7 May 2018 (bank holiday)
- Civic Service – Sunday 17 June 2018

- Fun Day – Thursday 21 – Sunday 24 June 2018
- Fun Fair – Tuesday 31 July – Sunday 4 August 2018
- Cinema Event – Saturday 11 August 2018
- 3rd Annual Westover Vets Charity Dog Show – Sunday 19 August 2018
- Titchfest – Wednesday 12 September – 16 September 2018

- Markets – every Thursday and the final Sunday of each month except December
- Christmas market – Sunday 23 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 coming this evening and we will now move onto further reports, before turning the meeting over to you, the public to address any queries you have to us as your representatives.