

Introduction

I am grateful to my predecessor, Councillor Mrs. Jan King, for handing over to me during my year of office as Town Mayor a sound administration and a full programme of work. There were no changes in the Membership of the Council during the year or amongst our administrative staff. Councillor John Evans, however, is undergoing a spell of convalescence following an operation. I miss John's sound advice and wide experience of local government and wish him well and back with us very soon.



Photograph kindly provided by
Councillor N W Turner

Crime and Disorder

One of my first acts when I came into office last year was to sign the agreement with the Essex Police Authority for the recruitment of six Police Community Support Officers for the Town's area. The rest, as they say, is history. Six officers were appointed later on in the year and have since been active in all of the communities within the Town's area. There has been a very obvious reduction in anti-social behaviour and criminal damage since the appointment of our six officers. Fortnightly meetings are held at the Council House between Town Councillors representing all of the Town's areas and the Police and the PCSOs. In this way, the Town Council is able to assist the Police in identifying trouble spots and directing the PCSOs to those areas. In judging the effectiveness of the PCSOs a good performance indicator has been the decline in the submission of our incident report forms. Prior to the PCSOs the Town Council was receiving perhaps three or four of these resident notifications of anti-social behaviour each week. Now that the PCSOs have made their presence felt, the flow of incident report forms has virtually dried up to nothing. The news of our PCSOs success has spread well beyond the Town's boundaries and I am informed by our office that enquiries are being received from other councils about the recruitment and operation of our arrangement. Indeed, so successful have they been that the Town Council is at present in negotiation with the Police Authority with a view to recruiting an additional two officers during the forthcoming year. The fact that we are now getting the better of crime and disorder is largely due to the efforts of Councillor Roy Caddick and the Crime and Disorder Working Party. I know that Councillor Caddick spends a great deal of time seeking the views of local residents, monitoring new legislation and negotiating with the Police.

Replacement District Plan

In July last year we were notified by the District Council that they were about to start work on their replacement District Plan. The Town Council was invited to study the Plan and make comment to the District Council. The District Plan is designed to last for many years before being revised again and the Town Council therefore thought it important to take the trouble to ensure, as far as possible, that the new District Plan reflected the needs of the people of Frinton and Walton. The District Plan is, after all, the framework within which all planning applications are judged. There is a presumption that if a planning application complies with the constraints of the District Plan, it will receive approval. In the event, the Town Council employed professional advice and met twice to consider the District Plan within a limited time scale. As a result the Town Council submitted comment on forty-eight of the policies within the Draft Plan. I hope that the District Council saw our comments as a positive attempt to preserve what is best in the Town and to encourage future development of the type we need.

Planning Applications

During the course of the year the Town Council has considered and made recommendations on 323 planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders. Of this number only 20% have been at variance with the decisions of the District Council. This percentage has remained constant for a number of years. During the year the Town Council has found it necessary to consider applications received between the despatch of the Agenda and the day of the meeting. I believe that few of us find this entirely satisfactory but it is the lesser of two evils. Failure to consider these late applications might well result in their being determined by the District Council before the Town Council has had an opportunity to consider them.

Columbine Centre

The work that the Recreation and Amenities Committee is devoting to the Columbine Centre has borne fruit during the year. I have been particularly pleased by the almost total transformation of the secondary function room on the first floor. This was a somewhat underused bar area. Vastly improved lighting, new tables and redecoration have now made this one of the most popular centres for adult learning in the District. A similar transformation has taken place on the ground floor in the foyer. I hope that here the new tables and furniture and décor generally will encourage those who come to the Columbine to stay a while longer and socialise in this now

very welcoming area. In our cinema the sound system and video presenter had both worn out and needed to be replaced. The positive side of this is that both the sound and the quality of a film are now markedly improved.

Financial Management

Once again it is pleasing to record that the Town Council received a clear audit for the year 2003/2004 under continually more demanding accounting requirements. The audit report was again received quickly and without supplementary questions or adverse comment. This continues to be reassuring to Members of the Town Council that their financial management is good and that their internal audit arrangements are respected by the Government's auditors. The Town Council's precept for the year was £306,191 and for the forthcoming year it is £306,577. This will have the effect of producing a slightly lower council tax requirement for the Town Council in the forthcoming year.

Website

For over a year work had been proceeding with the Essex County Council on the provision of a website for the Town Council. This is now operational and has been installed at no cost to the Town Council. Amongst other things it includes the calendar of meetings, recent minutes and the agendas of forthcoming Town Council meetings together with a full list of planning applications. It is not a flashy website; it is intended to be useful. The web address is:

www.essexonline.gov.uk/frintonwالتontc .

War Memorials

The Town Council restored the "Conquest" memorial in the Memorial Gardens at Walton-on-the-Naze. Once again, the Town Council acknowledges with gratitude a grant from the Royal British Legion and matched funding from Tending District Council. Minor works were also carried out to the war memorial in Kirby-le-Soken. I believe that whatever else a Town Council does or does not do it must maintain its war memorials in good order. An adequate amount is budgeted for the forthcoming year to attend to work on the Great Holland war memorial.

Bus Shelters

The Town Council has taken over another bus shelter from the Essex County Council the one in Kirby Cross near the junction with Halstead Road. This adoption has meant that the Town Council is now responsible for all of the bus shelters in the Town other than those carrying advertising. On a limited budget the Council has restored four bus shelters during the year, all of which had suffered criminal damage. Fantastic though it may seem one of the shelters under repair was actually damaged overnight while the contractor was working on it! A substantial sum has been provided for bus shelters next year and it is hoped that most if not all will be fully restored in twelve months' time.

Tree Survey

For some time Members have been concerned that not all is well with our trees. The Recreation and Amenities Committee commissioned a survey of trees in the Council's care and ownership. Sadly, the survey revealed that nearly half of our trees were either dead or dying. We have started working slowly but surely on replacing the dead trees and attending to those that are overgrown.

Seafront Shelters

The fate of the seafront shelters in Frinton and Walton has been questioned for some time. Local residents have restored and maintained the shelter at the foot of the zigzag path in Frinton. As a result of this uncertainty the Town Council entered into negotiations with the District Council to take over eleven of the shelters. That is all of the shelters except those which incorporate public lavatories. The arrangements will doubtless be completed in the forthcoming year. In anticipation of this the Council has provided a budget to restore, first of all, the most historic shelters. These are fine pieces of seaside architecture, relics from an earlier time, and deserve our protection.

Conclusion

Many of the Town Council's ideas began to be acted upon during my year as Town Mayor. It was a busy year and a satisfying one. The Town Council has taken a positive lead in the community and acknowledges the support received from the community which is now taking increased responsibility for its future well-being. I readily acknowledge with gratitude the support during the year of all of my fellow Town Councillors and the staff at the Council House and the Columbine Centre. I am especially grateful to the Deputy Town Mayor, Councillor Mrs. Iris Johnson, for her help and kind advice at all times.

Mark Cossens
Town Mayor
31 March 2005

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