



TOWN COUNCIL OF FRINTON AND WALTON

TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2005/06

COUNCILLOR MRS IRIS JOHNSON

Introduction

Twelve months is a very short time for any Town Mayor to initiate projects of their own and see them through to completion. It is, however, equally satisfying to bring some of my predecessors' work to fruition. Schemes started over the last year will, in most cases, require the stewardship of the next Town Mayor. I wondered how much detail I should include in my report. There are so many events that I have attended during the year. Should all of the grants to local organisations be listed? Just for once should the public have a list of all the other local bodies on which councillors are invited to serve? In the event I have mentioned only the civic highlights of the year but I feel it might assist the public to know how councillors spend their time. They probably don't understand the commitment entailed in becoming a councillor.

Affordable Housing

One of the things I wanted to do during my term of office was to make a start on the provision of affordable housing, ideally for rent as well as for sale, in the Town. The Town Council alone may not embark on housing schemes so our partner in this was the Rural Housing Trust. The Trust has built houses in many towns and parishes in Essex and the rest of the country. They say they build "village homes for village people" and that is truly what they do. They build affordable housing for young people who want to stay in the community in which they grew up. Pilot surveys of need were carried out by the Town Council in Great Holland and Kirby-le-Soken. The results were not encouraging. We listen to what local people have to say and have no wish to foist something on them that they do not want. However, I do not believe that we can abandon affordable housing. It may be that with more information and a clearer understanding of the Rural Housing Trust's work a scheme will be better received.

Crime and Disorder

During the first year with our Police Community Support Officers reported crime in the Town's area fell by 17%. Elsewhere, crime figures seem to climb inexorably year on year. The value of our investment is obvious. Other councils in the peninsula and beyond have also made this observation and many of them have now followed our lead and recruited their own PCSOs. We have six at present with two more promised by the Police Authority by this summer. It is easy now to take PCSOs for granted. But I would ask Members to cast their minds back two years, before PCSOs, and reflect on the improvement we have achieved. The Town Council mounted a robust opposition to some of the most unwelcome applications for licences under the new Licensing law. Our success was patchy. However, when the new hours came into operation the PCSOs worked extended shifts and the worst excesses were avoided. The Dome Hawk "state of the art" surveillance camera, purchased during the year, is in constant use in various locations in all communities within the Town's area. This almost unbelievably versatile camera has already been a great aid to our PCSOs and the Police. The Crime and Disorder Working Party, chaired by Councillor R. H. Caddick, continues to meet with Police representatives every month. The Town Council's success in combating nuisance crime is largely attributable to the efforts of Councillor Caddick.

Seafront Shelters

The Town Council's restoration of the Edwardian seafront shelters caught the public imagination, locals and visitors, to an extent which none of us anticipated. This heritage project has been astonishingly popular. The first of the oldest shelters to be restored was that opposite The Crescent in Frinton-on-Sea followed in Walton-on-the-Naze by the one opposite Standley Road. The very large shelter opposite the Kino in Walton is next. Although to some measure we are dependent on grant aid, we hope to restore the two remaining early shelters in Frinton this year. Tendring District Council has agreed to transfer the shelters to the Town Council and only the legal formalities remain. It is clear to me that the Town's heritage is valued by all Members and because of this our Heritage budget has been extended and will be available for projects other than seafront shelters.

Columbine Centre

I am very pleased to record the success of the Recreation and Amenities Committee's bid for grant from the "Awards for All" fund supported by Arts Council England, Community Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund, New Opportunities Fund and Sport England. This grant has enabled the Columbine Centre to purchase stage extensions, microphones and visual aids. These have already had good use from the theatre groups and learning classes using the Columbine. Security has been a problem with incidents of theft and criminal damage. We have introduced, a key-fob entry system to make unwanted entrance in the evenings more difficult. On the downside, it is regrettable to record the demise of the cinema at the Columbine Centre. I think we must have tried everything to make this facility attractive. In the end we had to conclude that there were simply not enough cinemagoers to make it worth carrying on.

Financial Management

The Town Council received a clear audit as usual, this year. The value of our three-year rolling programme is also now apparent and, looking back, it is cheering to see that we have done most of what we said we would do and a bit more besides. The three-year programme was established by Councillor John Evans only a short time ago and now I wonder how we ever managed without it. The Town Council's precept for the year was £306,577 and for the forthcoming year it is £337,322.

Bus Shelters, Notice Boards and Public Seats

It has been a good year for our street furniture. An adequate sum was budgeted last year to restore our rather sad bus shelters. All those that needed full restoration – and that was most of them – have been dealt with. On-going maintenance and repair continues, of course, but it is hoped that the need for expenditure on this year's scale will not occur again. We can now be proud of our bus shelters!

It is a similar story with notice boards. The last notice board in our programme of renewal was erected in Kirby Cross last year. All of our notice boards are now either new or in presentable, repaired condition. The seemingly never-ending task of keeping our public seats in good repair continues. Delays are the result of not being able to find contractors interested in doing these small jobs. The granite monolith on Frinton's greensward has also been repaired and tidied.

War Memorials

As anticipated in the last annual report, the Town Council has provided a new stone in the Great Holland war memorial to commemorate the fallen of the Second World War. The work was so well executed that the new stone is almost indistinguishable from original stones, some eighty years old. Minor work has also taken place to improve the appearance of the war memorial at Kirby-le-Soken. Last year, the then Town Mayor, Councillor Mark Cossens, provided additional granite slabs for the Kirby memorial at his own expense. No doubt modesty forbade that he record this in his report. I am pleased to correct that omission now.

Trafalgar Day

The Town Council met on 20 October 2005, the evening before the 200th anniversary of the British fleet's decisive victory over the combined fleets of France and Spain off Cape Trafalgar. To mark this occasion the Town Council made a grant of £1250 towards the purchase of a racing dinghy by Walton Sea Cadets. The Walton Sea Cadets are amongst the finest in the land and I can think of no more worthy – or value for money – way for the Town Council to have commemorated the Battle of Trafalgar. The presentation concluded with three hearty cheers for the Royal Navy.

Website

Our website, hosted free of charge by the Essex County Council, has been completely overhauled and improved during the year. Although some of us were sceptical at first, I think that all Councillors and staff acknowledge the value of a website – so much more immediate and accessible than a newsletter. The frequently changing “Hot Topics” page illustrates, quite surprisingly sometimes, the range of Town Council work. The photographs in my report are taken from the website. The new web address is: www.essexinfo.net/frinton-and-walton-town-council

Planning Applications

During the course of the year the Town Council has considered and made recommendations on 316 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 fairly constant for a number of years. We have had some success with our representations on the Replacement District Plan but the main debate on this is likely to take place next year.

Conservation Area Character Appraisals

The Town Council was consulted by the District Council on an appraisal of the existing Conservation Areas. Careful consideration spread over two or three meetings. The Town Council concluded by recommending action in respect of the Frinton Conservation Area. Members believed that the boundary of the Conservation Area should be extended to coincide with the Frinton Ward. Further, that more individual buildings be identified as having “special interest”. Finally, the Town Council sought the imposition of an Article 4 Direction to give additional protection from unwelcome development.

Kirby Against Secure Homes (KASH)

The Town Council carried a unanimous decision to make grant of £7050.00 to Kirby Against Secure Homes to assist local people in their planning struggle against unneighbourly development in the form of secure homes in the residential area of Kirby-le-Soken.

Conclusion

It has been a busy year that has flown by. It would not be truthful to say that it has not also been a wearing one. Like most in public office I also have a job and a home to run. I have a role at the District Council, too. But as I said at the start of my report, a year hardly seems long enough and I must leave much for the next Town Mayor to carry through. The load has been lightened – and made enjoyable – by my fellow Councillors who have supported me in a most positive way. I am also grateful to the staff at the Council House and the Columbine Centre for their advice and assistance. I am especially grateful to the Deputy Town Mayor, Councillor Jack Robertson, for his support, particularly on those occasions when I could not be in two places at once.

Councillor Mrs. I. Johnson
Town Mayor
13th April 2006