



TOWN COUNCIL OF FRINTON AND WALTON

TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2006/07

COUNCILLOR MR JACK ROBERTSON

Introduction

In writing my Report towards the end of my year of being Town Mayor, I reflect not just on that year but on the last four years. Four years ago I was new not only to the Town Council but also to any form of public service (apart from thirteen years as a retained fireman – a bit different, perhaps). It has been, as they say, “a steep learning curve”. It seems that just as I am getting into the swing of it – it is time to hand over to the next Town Mayor.

Conservation Area Character Appraisals

Last year the Town Council was consulted by the District Council on an appraisal of the existing Conservation Areas. The importance of these appraisals cannot be overstated. The Town Council made its views known to the District Council and urged that a Conservation Area Management Plan for Frinton be commissioned. Not only this, but the Town Council was equally anxious to press on with similar plans for the Town's other Conservation Areas. The Town Council had not had an opportunity to budget for the Frinton plan so up to £6000 was pledged from reserves with the District Council providing a similar sum. A public meeting has recently been held and the Plan is now well on way to completion. We hope and trust the remaining parts of the Management Plan will follow next financial year. This has been budgeted as has any follow-up action on Article 4 Directions that a future Council may wish to pursue. I am mindful that Conservation Areas date back to 1967. At that time, some forty years ago, groups of Victorian and early 20th century buildings may not have been highly valued. The Management Plans present a unique opportunity to bring our Conservation Areas up-to-date.

The Gates, Frinton

Network Rail propose to replace the existing manned level crossing gates at Frinton railway station with barriers controlled from Colchester. This is part of Network Rail's “re-signalling” proposals. The people of Frinton-on-Sea, and therefore the Town Council, oppose this proposal. It is opposed on two grounds; firstly safety and secondly to retain the historic railway buildings. The Town Council instantly sought to have the Gates and associated buildings Listed. This is proceeding with English Heritage. The Town Council has also commissioned experts to rebut, on safety grounds, Network Rail's unwanted barriers.

Planning Applications

During the course of the year the Town Council has considered and made recommendations on 351 planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders. Of this number only 17% have been at variance with the decisions of the District Council. This percentage has remained fairly constant for a number of years. The Town Council continues to accept consultations from the District Council right up to the day of our meeting. In a minority of cases this means that Members have very little time to consider an application. This is not ideal but it is surely better than missing the consultation deadline and, possibly, having the application determined by the District

Council without an opinion from the Town Council. The District Council continued its work on the Replacement District Plan and the Town Council has been fully consulted. In particular we have responded to a number of consultations about Omission Sites.

Columbine Centre

Security had been a problem last year with incidents of theft and criminal damage. The key-fob entry system introduced to keep out unwelcome visitors is now working well after a few teething troubles. We are grateful, as always, to our fellow occupants, the Bowls Club, for their understanding and cooperation. The Recreation and Amenities Committee has over a number of meetings looked carefully at the operation of the Columbine Centre. At present the final conclusions are unknown but it is clear to me that we have a fine asset here for the Town offering facilities and a level of service difficult to better elsewhere. But we do need more bookings.

Crime and Disorder

This year the Town Council increased numbers of Police Community Support Officers from six to eight. The publicity we received when we came to renew the contract for PCSOs was, I think, unwarranted and unhelpful. However positive Members felt about the Town Council's funding of PCSOs it would have been irresponsible to merely "rubber stamp" a further period of the contract. Spending some £110,000, about one third of the Town Council's precept requirement, demands careful evaluation. In the event Members' decision was unanimous. The Town Council and the public continue to value PCSOs. The Town Council's Crime and Disorder Working Party meets frequently between Town Council meetings and recommends action required on public order matters. We are grateful for Police representation on the Working Party. At one Working Party meeting the Mosquito sonic device was demonstrated. This commended itself to Members and clarification of "human rights" issues is awaited.

Financial Management

This year the Town Council, once again, swiftly received a clear audit. The Town Council's precept for the year was £337,322 and for the forthcoming year it is £355,653. For the first time I am attaching an Interim Financial Statement to my Report. I am putting this in place now so that if a future Town Council wants to seek Quality Status this will be one bureaucratic hurdle fewer to jump. At this time in the financial year the Statement must be "interim"; the final version will, of course, be available later in the year.

Website

One of the first important decisions the Town Council made this year was to put details and photographs of Anti-Social Behaviour Order offenders on the website. It was not a decision lightly taken. Our decision featured in local and national newspapers and in local government magazines. The reaction of the media, I thought, was cautiously neutral. As it transpired, very little criticism was received. Following our display of ASBOs the number of visits to our website more than doubled. I believe that our decision was the right one.

Allotments



When I joined the Town Council four years ago there were vacancies on all three of our allotment sites. Since then, concerted efforts have been made by the Town Council to let all plots. It is now pleasing to see that there are short waiting lists at all of the allotment sites. I think that this is an ideal position. The Recreation and Amenities Committee has also brought an additional sizeable area of land into cultivation at the Kirby-le-Soken

allotment. The Committee is very much “hands on” and makes an annual tour of inspection of allotments to the benefit of the Town Council and tenants alike.

Seafront Shelters



This was the Town Council’s third year of restoration of the Edwardian seafront shelters in Frinton and Walton. The large shelter opposite the Kino in Walton was completed early this year. A 50% grant was obtained from the Essex County Council’s “Community Initiatives Fund” to restore two shelters in Frinton, one opposite Oxford Road and the other, now nearing completion, opposite Garden Court. As previously, our public has been

enthusiastic about the restorations. In the case of the Garden Court shelter, rescue work was just in time. The rot was very much worse than anticipated and any further delay might have meant that the structure was beyond repair. A second 50% grant from the “Community Initiatives Fund” has been obtained plus £1000 from the District Council to restore six more shelters. Tenders are awaited for five of these. The one outstanding is being architecturally reappraised before a decision is made on the extent of the restoration. The Heritage budget has been increased for next year and it is the Town Council’s intention that these buildings will in future be maintained in good order. The Town Council is grateful to the County Council and the District Council for their generous help with this work.

Bus Shelters



It has not been a good year for our bus shelters. The Town Council went into the new financial year with all of its bus shelters in a good state of repair. It took us two years to get there. First on our routine programme of maintenance this year was the large old shelter on the way up to the Naze. However, from then all of the Town Council’s expenditure has necessarily been devoted to vandal repairs. The small budget for bus shelters was exhausted and exceeded only

six months into the year. Some £1500 has been spent repairing criminal damage – and we have by no means kept abreast of the problem. Additionally one shelter has been blown away and destroyed and another is suffering from “heave”. Both the vandal and Mother Nature have conspired against our bus shelters.

Greens and Commons



Most years routine maintenance of the Town Council's Common Land and Village Greens continues and is not worthy of special report. However, during the last year there has been a certain amount of activity at Great Holland Village Green in particular. A new surfaced path was installed to ease push-chair access to the children's play area. This was jointly funded by all three local authorities – Town, District and County. However, it was soon found that the new path also made access from the Green onto the busy main roads all too easy for young bike riding children. Improved barriers were needed and they were installed very quickly by the Town Council.

A new litter-bin was installed on the Town Hard at Walton and a scruffy little corner of Village Green in Kirby-le-Soken has been tidied up. On the main Green in Kirby-le-Soken, at no small expense, we felled a large but rotten poplar tree. On reflection, I'm very glad this was done before the high winds of 18 January!

Speeding

Town Councillors, particularly those from the Town's smaller communities, have been concerned about traffic speeding along the main roads. To reduce this we asked the Highways Department if a gated entrance might be installed on the approach to Kirby Cross from Thorpe-le-Soken. This was readily agreed and the gates provided. This was later backed-up with a vehicle activated sign (VAS). We all use this route frequently and have noticed the improvement this has made. Highways have also agreed our request for VASs through Kirby-le-Soken and Great Holland. Thanks to County Highways.

Conclusion

Every year is a busy one for the Town Council. This, surely, is the way it should be. My year has been packed with variety – pro-active Town Council initiatives and reacting in a David and Goliath way to the unwelcome proposals of monopolies and developers who seek to violate our way of life. In all of this I have had the unstinting support of all of my fellow councillors and the benefit of their longer experience – thank you. Thanks also to the staff at the Council House and the Columbine Centre for their advice and assistance. I have especially valued the support of the Deputy Town Mayor, Cllr Terry Allen, during the year. Newcomer that I am to local government, over the last year I have formed the unshakable opinion that the English parish or town council is the best expression of democratic government anywhere in the world. Long may it thrive!

Jack Robertson
Town Mayor
18th March 2007