



TOWN COUNCIL OF FRINTON AND WALTON

TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

COUNCILLOR MR TERRY ALLEN

Introduction

I believe that the Town Council exists to get things done. This may be obvious but it is, nevertheless, a truth which is lost on some of my colleagues elsewhere. The Council Chamber is not a place to pointlessly debate esoteric subjects through half the night. It is a place to make decisions and order action on matters that directly affect local people. Our budget this year and in the recent past reflects this. I am content for the Town Council to be judged on its work this year.

2007 Elections

Last year's Town Council Elections, unusually, saw most seats challenged. Some members of the old Council did not stand for re-election. Others did stand and were defeated. Those members who did not rejoin us were:-

D J Aldrich
Mrs J B Brierley
R H Caddick
J K Evans MBE
Mrs A M Hockridge
M Page
J Robertson

All of them, in their different ways, have served the Town well, some of them for very many years. New Councillors are:-

Mrs L Allen
Miss S Ashenden
D H G Evans
B J Johnson
D J Lines
Miss K Maynard
D Watson

They have now settled in and are making a full contribution to the work of the Town Council. Alarming, two of the new Councillors, Brian Johnson and Denzil Watson were taken seriously ill during the year. Fortunately, both are tenacious and resilient men who have fought back to recovery. We trust that this will continue and full recoveries made very soon.

Town Council Meetings

A full programme of meetings awaited new (and old) Councillors. The Town Council meets every three weeks. That's eighteen Thursdays a year, plus the Annual Meeting. The Crime and Disorder Working Party also meets every three weeks. The Recreation and Amenities Committee meets every six weeks. We get an occasional Thursday off but it is best generally to acknowledge that "Thursday night is Town Council night"

Conservation Area Management Plans

Following the District Council's appraisal of Conservation Areas the Town Council jointly with the District Council commissioned the preparation of Conservation Area Management Plans for the Town. The first part, for Frinton, has been completed and adopted by the District Council as part of its planning policy. Flowing from the Management Plan the Town Council is embarking on Article 4 Directions for some parts of the Town. This will mean that some development that had not previously required planning permission will in future require permission. We are also producing a shop front design guide for Connaught Avenue. Not directly linked to the Management Plan is the likelihood that a Highways scheme, part funded by the Town Council, to enhance the street scene will be completed next year. It also appears that, at last, we have persuaded the Highways Department to do something about the clutter on the pavements. If these go ahead as planned much of the bygone elegance of Connaught Avenue will be restored. Work on the Management Plans for Walton, Great Holland and Kirby-le-Soken is proceeding. If the outcomes require extra expenditure in those areas there is adequate provision in the Town Council's Three Year Programme.

Crime and Disorder



Town Mayor and PCSOs with new equipment.
Photo courtesy of Frinton and Walton Gazette.

Although it seems much longer it was only five years ago, at the Annual Town Meeting in Great Holland Village Hall, that a resident asked: "When are we going to get our Wardens?" This question fell to me to answer. The Town Council had long been concerned about anti-social behaviour and was considering employing its own "wardens" to police the Town. At about the same time the Government announced its Police Community

Support Officer initiative. The following autumn we held our local ballot that resulted in a clear mandate to recruit PCSOs. To start with there were six; since last year we have eight. The Town continues to lead the county, if not the country, in its use of PCSOs. Most recently the Town appeared in the national press for providing its PCSOs with night vision binoculars – "so the PCSOs can see the toe-rags before the toe-rags see them". They also now have a radar device and a digital camera. A spin-off from the recruitment of PCSOs has been a very beneficial two-way exchange between the Town Council and the local Police. Over the intervening five years there has been a perceptible reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour in the Town's area. For those interested in statistics, there has been a reduction in crime in this area of 18.7% over the last year alone. We shall keep up the pressure and we shall prevail.

Walton Market



Walton Market reopens

With only a few weeks notice we learned that the company managing Walton Market was to cease operating the Market and it would therefore finish at the end of September. The Town Council decided to step in, acquire the remainder of the lease (to September 2009) and run the Market itself. This was done and the Market has been saved – for the time being at least. Local people value the Market and during the forthcoming summer months we

hope to make it increasingly attractive to visitors as well.

The Gates, Frinton

Network Rail's proposals to replace the existing manned level crossing gates at Frinton railway station with barriers are well known. The Town Council had grave doubts about the safety of the proposals. Accordingly, it commissioned its own report from TMS Consultancy – leading consultants in traffic safety management. The detailed report said, effectively, that the proposals for the crossing and the road layout were less safe than existing. Network Rail and the Office of Railway Regulation were unmoved. In common with other objectors, I am far from sure that those opposed to the barriers are being given a fair hearing. Minds may already be made up. We fight on. Our attempt to have the Gates and associated buildings "Listed" as buildings of historic interest failed even though I believe we put up a good case. In this attempt I am grateful for the help of so many residents with local knowledge.

Budgens and Booze

Last year Budgens applied under the Licensing Act 2003 to extend the hours during which they could sell alcohol. The Town Council and residents opposed this and the Town Council engaged legal expertise to object to the application. The Town Council did not succeed. Under the new legislation it does seem to me that almost any application will be approved with little prospect of the licence ever being revoked. This may suit those who sell alcohol and those who like to be inebriated for as many as possible of the 24 hours in a day, but it can also be miserable for those who live nearby.

Planning Applications

During the course of the year the Town Council has considered and made recommendations on 343 planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders. Of this number only 22% have been at variance with the decisions of the District Council. This percentage has remained fairly constant for a number of years but now the gap shows signs of widening. This may require the Town Council's attention during the forthcoming year.

Columbine Centre

For any of us, paying off the mortgage is a time for celebration. So it is with the Columbine Centre. During the year the last payment was made on the last of three loans used to buy the Columbine Centre. Additionally, we negotiated an appreciably lower Business Rate and a modest increase only in ground rent payable to the District Council. In a full year this will, of course, result in very substantially reduced spending on the Centre. We have cut expenditure; but we still need income from more bookings and more organisations using the Columbine Centre's facilities.

Financial Management

This year the Town Council, once again, had its accounts swiftly approved. Since then it has carried out a review of its internal audit procedures, as all local authorities have been instructed to do. The Town Council's precept for the year was £ 355,653 and for the forthcoming year it is £431,563. The recommendations for extra expenditure were contained in the Estimates Working Party's report to Town Council last autumn. An Interim Financial Statement is attached to my Report. The final version will be available in June. Unlike other tiers of local government town and parish councils do not receive any Government grant or a slice of the Business Rate. All of our income (apart from a small amount from our trading activity) must come from Council Tax.

Allotments

The nature of allotments seems to be changing. They were conceived nearly a century ago to help the working man feed his (large) family. In more recent times they have become more of a hobby. Times may change again. But at present we have short waiting lists for all three of our allotments. Many applicants are now content to have only half sized plots. By halving some of the plots we are obviously able to accommodate more of the applicants on the waiting lists.

Seafront Shelters



We did it well and we did it quickly. In less than three years we have restored ten of the Town's historic seafront shelters – five during this year. The earliest must now be about a century old, remnants of gentler times. I readily acknowledge the generous financial assistance from the Essex County Council's Community Initiatives Fund and from Tendring District Council. Without their help we could not have done the job so quickly. Only one remains. This is the rather odd and decidedly dilapidated structure opposite the Cedars in Frinton. The roof suggests that this may be the earliest seafront shelter. In time we want to replace it but the cost is daunting.

Bus Shelters



We lost two shelters last year. One, opposite Pedlars Wood in Walton, has been replaced, to the acclaim of local bus users. The other, near to the railway bridge in Kirby Cross, has a replacement on order. We are grateful for a County Council grant to help with this one. All of the Town Council's bus shelters have been brought up to a good standard in recent years. They do, however, have a hard life and we must keep on top of maintenance.

Greens, Commons, Trees and Seats

During the year repairs were carried out to the play equipment on the Green at Great Holland. Following the felling of the large poplar tree on the Green at Kirby-le-Soken the nice old three-sided seat was returned and a silver birch planted in the middle to replace the poplar. The two-yearly survey of the Town Council's trees has just been completed and the necessary replanting and surgery will take place over the coming year. We are also undertaking, for the first time, a census of our public seats. When this is finalised, in the next few weeks, we can make a systematic start on repairs.

War Memorials



Rarely a year goes by when the Town Council does not incur expenditure on war memorials. This year has been no exception. The base of the main war memorial at Walton was breaking up. With grant aid from County and District Councils we have replaced the plinth and it is now probably better than new. At the same time we had the RAF memorial professionally cleaned. That, too, must now look better than at any time since it was erected. Whatever the Town Council's other priorities, we shall not neglect these monuments.

Conclusion

I took over the Office of Town Mayor from Jack Robertson. Although new to local government Jack had boundless enthusiasm and left a full programme of work for the new Town Council and me. I am grateful for the support that I have had from all councillors, regardless of political persuasion, and for the assistance of the staff at the Council House and the Columbine Centre. I am especially appreciative of the help I have had throughout the year from the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Robert Bucke. We have a full programme of work and a realistic budget. We have a good reputation. We must all, councillors and officers, get down to it and deliver the service that is expected of us.

Councillor Mr E. T. Allen
Town Mayor
18th March 2008