



TOWN COUNCIL OF FRINTON AND WALTON

TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

COUNCILLOR MR R. J. BUCKE

Introduction

When I took the Chair last year the mood in local government was restrained. As my predecessor, Councillor Terry Allen, rightly observed at the beginning of the Recession “the best service we could perform for our residents would be to make a significant reduction in the amount we required from them in Council Tax”. This was done and the Town Council has worked during this year with a precept reduced by over 11%. Additionally in the forthcoming year the Town Council has pegged its precept at £382,957 – no increase at all. However, I was very pleased that I had inherited a sound budget and adequate reserves, a thoughtful programme of work and supportive colleagues.

Membership

Last summer Councillor Miss Suzie Ashenden resigned, a decision which was received with regret. I believe that she had much to offer the Town Council and I hope that she may return to local government in the future when, perhaps, circumstances permit. A bye-election was demanded and held on 9th July, and Councillor Mrs Vanda Watling was duly elected. I wish her well in her own commitment to Town Council matters.

Naze Crag Walk

At the end of February I called an Extra-Ordinary meeting of the Town Council to consider, urgently, making a grant of £10,000 to the Essex Wildlife Trust for preparatory work necessary for the Crag Walk project. A partnership including the Trust had obtained some £1,200,000 in grants for the capital works but funding was needed by the middle of this month for ecological and archaeological surveys necessary for the planning application to proceed. At the end of a long debate the Town Council unanimously agreed to make the grant. As one councillor put it, the Town Council provided the “golden key” to enable this scheme to start. The thought of it foundering for want of our grant was unthinkable. The Town Council looks forward to the long-awaited work starting.

Conservation Area Management Plans

The last three of the four Plans were finalised and published during the year. In addition to Frinton there now exists Plans for Walton, Gt Holland and Kirby-le-Soken. Effectively, the Town Council has bought improved Conservation Area policy documents to further protect the most historic parts of the Town's settlements. Flowing from these, the Frinton Shopfront Guide has just been published. A similar document for Walton was commissioned during the year.

Towns and Villages

In January works started to replace gas mains in Connaught Avenue, to be followed by ECC refurbishments to street furniture and pavements, lighting and drainage. Replacement of trees with new specimens will create a 'new look', whilst making pavements safer for the future. The complete scheme is now to take 2 years by limiting works to Spring 2010 and 2011. From 2011, we shall be working with TDC and ECC to introduce a licensing scheme for pavement trading in our town centres.

As Mayor, I continue to protest to Network Rail, via the Office of Rail Regulation, that the Frinton crossing barriers continue to pose a health and safety threat to our residents and visitors whenever a 'lock-down' occurs for periods of up to one hour. During such a period, our Emergency Services can only get out of town via unadopted roads and Walton, extending the Health/Fire risk by at least 10 minutes in the event of a 999 call-out.

Having trialled 'Frinton Cinema' with an invited audience in January (watching *Some Like it Hot!*), a further mobile cinema evening will show a film chosen by local residents. I hope that this will be sufficiently successful to encourage regular cinema back into Frinton and the wider community.

Festive lighting is being planned for Walton and Frinton, and we look for financial support from local traders and other funders

Flooding issues in High Street, Walton appear to have been resolved, and the arrival of Tesco into the town, replacing Woolworths, has been welcomed.

Great Holland celebrates the completion of its Parish Plan and Village Design Statement, thanks to the hard work and support of many village residents.

Our Residents Associations and groups work very hard in their own communities, and I meet regularly with their leaders on a 'Working Together' agenda.

Crime and Disorder

During the year the Town Council lost Sgt John Scott from membership of the Crime and Disorder Working Party. Sgt Scott was a keen and effective supporter of what the Town Council was doing, and real progress has been made in Frinton and Walton due to his efforts. The Town Council wishes John a happy and satisfying retirement. The Town Council's investigations into road safety problems in Rochford Way, Frinton-on-Sea have led to the County Council making a traffic Order which, we trust, will help. Realistically, it will not solve all the problems but it is a start. It does seem to me that small-scale works of this kind, with much local consultation, are the way to go in future. So much depends on enforcement. A new speed gun was purchased by the Town Council for use by the PCSOs to check reckless driving. This replaces (or supplements) the second-hand obsolescent camera purchased by the Town Council some years ago. The Working Party has also devoted consideration to clutter on pavements, consumption of alcohol in the streets and, most recently trespass to the former Masonic building by Central Avenue. We continue to seek ways around such problems by working with partner authorities. The employment of eight Police Community Support Officers linked to the Crime and Disorder Working Party continues to be an effective crime prevention measure and, in my view, one of the most worthwhile things the Town Council has done in recent years.

Planning Applications

This year the Town Council has considered and made recommendations on 232 planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders. Of this number only 23% have

been at variance with the decisions of the District Council. The number of planning applications coming before the Town Council is still markedly reduced. We continue to view critically the seemingly endless number of applications for flats in our primary locations, where developers' ambitions are often inconsistent with the views of local residents.

Financial Management

An Interim Financial Statement is attached to my Report. The final version will be available in June. The Town Council's investments are all with the Co-operative Bank. The security of investments is regularly re-assessed (normally twice a year). We can, however, continue to expect to receive little in interest from investments. It does seem to me that the Town Council may be reluctant to increase its precept by very much in the near future. Any small scale capital schemes will therefore have to be funded from our reserves.

Columbine Centre

It is pleasing to report that the Columbine Centre continues to be a popular venue. The income generated from bookings has helped to reduce the precept requirement. During the course of the year the Town Council has extended the licensing hours on Saturday nights to 01.00am the following day. A vending machine has been installed in the foyer. The Walton & District Bowls Club have excellent facilities within The Columbine Centre, and we wish them continued success in their provision of much valued sport facilities in Walton.

Walton Market

The Market continues to be popular but it is impossible to predict how the Recession will affect it during the forthcoming year. I hope that there will be even more stalls and many more customers seeking bargains locally. The good news is that the cost of running it has gone down. The Town Council has secured a dramatic decrease in the business rates. We have also negotiated the rent down. We have reduced refuse collection charges. However, the market costs this year should not be taken as a pointer for next year. We have had some refunds which will not be repeated in 2010/11.

Vehicle Activated Signs

The three Vehicle Activated Signs promised by the County Council were all installed during the year – in Freituna Road, Frinton-on-Sea, Elm Tree Avenue, Frinton-on-Sea and on the main road between Frinton and Walton. They are all working well and it is hoped that they will deter speeding and save lives. One speed related death in our town is one too many.

Beach Huts

The Town Council's two new beach huts in Frinton were available for booking from last summer. They have been so popular that those who booked last year have, in the main, made reservations for this year. Predictably, we have found that we really need more. The Town Council has asked the District Council to make more plots available. We await the decision.

Seafront Shelters

The Cedars shelter was demolished during the year. It was very dilapidated and quite close to the edge of the cliff. The Town Council had planned to build a similar shelter a little further inland. However, the likely cost of £40,000 - £50,000 when viewed against the backdrop of the present economic conditions led the Town Council to defer any action to rebuild. The shelters still attract a certain amount of vandalism. I believe that our policy of almost instant repair has reduced this.

Bus Shelters

The Town Council has done well on a tiny budget. The reason for this is – grants. The badly damaged, asbestos roofed shelter in Elm Tree Avenue, Frinton was replaced during the summer. This one was a night time meeting place for undesirables and a nuisance for local people. On the other hand it was well used during the day. The Town Council's compromise was a new shelter with no seats and no room for motorbikes. This has worked well. Grant was given towards this from District Councillors Mrs Anne Hockridge and Mrs I. Johnson. Gt Holland residents sought a new shelter near an existing bus stop. This was agreed and the greater part of the cost met by the County Council. The shortfall was covered by District Councillor Mark Cossens and me (in my District role). New maintenance grants were made available by the County Council from July. The Town Council has used this almost to its maximum and has claimed over £1700 from County for maintenance of various shelters. The Town Council has been obliged to use too much of its money for graffiti and poster removal.

Public Seats

The Town Council has got the better of public seat maintenance. We have our survey of seats in our ownership and we have been working through that. Now when asked if a seat is one of the Town Council's we can ask "Is it in good condition?" If the answer is "Yes" then the chances are, it belongs to the Town Council. By and large all of our seats have now been brought up to a good standard.

Allotments

Demand continues to be strong for plots on all three of the Town Council's allotment sites. Enthusiasm amongst allotment holders is high with most plots being well cultivated. During the year one new plot has been created at Wittonwood Road. This was quickly brought up to a very high standard by the new tenant. A large derelict site at Kirby-le-Soken has been restored and divided into four smaller plots. These are being allocated now. On the downside, some expenses are being incurred which should be unnecessary. If these cannot be contained then they must, later, be reflected in increased rentals.

Youth Visits and Mayoral Invitations

I have greatly enjoyed regular visits to our local youth groups to witness their weekly activities, and it is remarkable what is constantly being achieved by volunteers with limited resources. We thank them all for their excellent work in creating ongoing opportunities for our young people to enjoy themselves gainfully within our locality during their developing years. We know that these will pay rich rewards.

I have also been privileged, with my wife Margaret as Consort, to attend many civic functions within this and the wider Tendring community, and I am so grateful for these invitations and welcomes everywhere we go. In particular, I could not fail to mention the 109th birthday of Kirby le Soken resident Ethel Wood. Also the launch of the James Stevens no.14 motorised Walton Lifeboat last September, renovated over many years by a committed and dedicated team of volunteers and specialists, and which now forms an additional feature of our rich local heritage.

The Council Chamber

We do not have, and never will have, an ancient council chamber like some of our neighbours. But we can make the best of what we have without spending too much. A start was made on this, in a number of ways, by the last Town Mayor. More recently, the District Council has had to make some repairs to the building. The Town Council has used that opportunity to carry out a mild redecoration. I think it is an improvement. Ideally, I would also like to see better accommodation for the public. This would be expensive and must wait for another day.

Conclusion

I have said before that whatever the Town Council does, it does well. Having had a year in the Chair I am even more sure that this is so. The reason for this is, I believe, that we are a small authority and every Member does his or her bit. So often we cannot delegate to officers (we haven't many of them), we have to roll our sleeves up and do a sizeable part of the job ourselves. In this I have been grateful for the support that I have received from all councillors, regardless of political persuasion (or, indeed, no political persuasion) during the year. I am also grateful for the assistance of the staff at the Council House, the Columbine Centre and the market. Councillor Denzil Watson, the Deputy Town Mayor has my sincere thanks for his help throughout the year, especially on those occasions when I have not found it possible to be in two places at the same time. Lastly, my thanks to my wife Margaret who has supported

me during this most enjoyable year and has accompanied me at so many civic events.

Councillor Mr R. J. Bucke
Town Mayor
31st March 2010