



TOWN COUNCIL OF FRINTON AND WALTON

TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

COUNCILLOR MARK A. COSSENS

Introduction

The desperate state of the nation's economy continues to dictate the actions of local authorities everywhere and the Town Council cannot isolate itself from this. As a result the Town Council has to think very carefully before embarking on any new revenue project which is likely to require recurring commitments, year on year, to finance. This Council, however, will continue to be innovative in its approach. In addition, Councillors are ever mindful of the impact of Council Tax precept on local Tax payers. Accordingly, our Council Tax requirement for next is the same as the current year - £401,544.

Membership

Councillor J. W. L. Gatward resigned at the end of the last municipal year and in June 2012 Jack Robertson was elected to fill the vacancy in Homelands Ward. Councillor Robertson has served quite recently on the Town Council and was Town Mayor from 2006 to 2007. Welcome back!

HM The Queen's Diamond Jubilee



The Diamond Jubilee, an almost unique event, was celebrated in various ways about the Town. The Town Council continued its tradition of providing each young schoolchild in the Town's area with a commemorative mug. It was a pleasure to give out the vast majority of these at the various assemblies I attended with perhaps, the highlight being the rendition of "Lord of hope and glory" at Frinton. I would also like to thank all those Councillors who helped make the beacon lighting such a success.

Finance

In 2009 the Town Council cut its precept by 14%. Since then there has only been one increase in precept – but it is still lower than in 2008. To maintain this low rate the Council has adapted the budget on many fronts. Some staff redundancies have been made. Times are hard and the Town Council is doing its bit not to contribute to the staggering increases in domestic utility bills. However, during the year a worrying development took place. Changes to the Housing Benefits system have effectively reduced the number of residents paying Council Tax. A Government grant has, for the forthcoming year at least, restored the situation. In future if this grant is withdrawn either by the Government or the District Council (which administers payment of the grant) or if the Town Council wishes to increase its precept, then it seems like the remaining tax payers will face a potential 15% increase.

Crime and Disorder

Amid ongoing concerns about where the Town's PCSOs are to be based we continue to have them based in Walton. It is all too easy to take them for granted. They have been with us now for eight years and they have made a great difference to the Town. But it has been done gradually, almost imperceptibly. Just cast your mind back to the levels of vandalism and anti-social behaviour that existed in, say, 2003. In my view the recruitment of PCSOs has been one of the best things this Council has done in recent years. We must be watchful and be prepared, if needs be, to vigorously fight to retain our eight officers.

The Crime and Disorder Working Party meets on a regular basis. Some time has been devoted to trying to get Town representation on the Tendring Local Highways Panel. We seem to now be making good progress on this although we are not there yet. The usual problems of speeding cars and selfish car parking do not go away.

It would be impossible to overstate the value that the Working Party places on the attendance of Sgt Pete Gerard at our meetings. The advice and co-operation instantly obtained in this partnership has gone a long way to keeping the Town Council's area one of the safest places in the country in which to live.

Highways

The Town Council continues to play an active role in reporting Highway issues to the County Council, with pot holes and inconsiderate parking continuing to be residents main causes of concern.

Several Town Councillors as well as valued local residents have had speed gun training and can be frequently spotted by highway users in the area, if you haven't seen them you were probably travelling too fast!

Planning Applications

This year the Town Council (during the period 9 March 2012 to 11 April 2013) has considered and made recommendations on 212 planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders. Of this number only 21% have been at variance with the decisions of the District Council. The Town Council has considered the Local Development Framework in detail and has commented to the District Council. In particular we intend to fight any attempts to build on the green wedges that give our town and villages their unique identities.

Columbine Centre

Three members of the catering staff were made redundant and, shortly after that, the Manager also left because of redundancy. I can reflect that 10 years ago there were 13 or 14 employees at the Columbine Centre. Most were only part-time. Now there are only two employees there. The changes at the Centre are part of the changing times in which we live and the Town Council must look afresh at what local people expect in future from this building. Notwithstanding the changes, bookings are at a healthy level.

Festive Lights

Festive lights were once again funded by the Town Council in both Frinton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze bringing some festive cheer to a very gloomy winter.

Walton Market

It has been another active year for the market. In addition to the weekly market the car park area was set out for an ice skating rink one winter's weekend. Although not as many local people took advantage of this as the Council would have wished, all those that did seems to have a good time. At the end of this municipal year the Town Council is poised to make a major effort to increase the range of goods offered on the market. The Town Council re-established the market and made it popular. But it could be developed to encourage more people to shop in the towns High Street. As a Council, we want it to boast a wide range of traders attending regularly. All being well a start will be made on this in the near future.

Beach Huts

The Town Council's two beach huts in a prime location at Frinton-on-Sea remain popular for the school summer holiday weeks with other weeks now being hired by those that see the huts as a way to enjoy our beautiful coastline during inclement weather including the recent very wintry Easter break.

Town Council Property



Through the careful management of this Council the bus shelters, seafront shelters, notice boards and public seats are all in good condition.

Town Council Offices

Since the closure of the Tendring District Council offices in October, the Town Council's Administrative staff continue to assist residents in not only Town Council enquiries but those of the District Council in particularly holding a supply of recycling boxes and redirecting residents as to where they can now pay or get advice on their Council Tax bills.

Conclusion



I am grateful for the support that I have received from all councillors, regardless of political persuasion. I am also grateful to the staff at the Council House, the Columbine Centre and the market for their assistance. It has not been a happy or an easy year for the Council's staff. Debilitating illness, hospitalisation and bereavements have beset key employees. The loyalty, stoicism and hard work of all of the Council's employees has never been more apparent. I am also especially mindful of the unstinting support I have had from the Deputy Town Mayor, Cllr Mrs Iris Johnson even though she has had many other demands on her time.