



TOWN COUNCIL
OF FRINTON AND WALTON

TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT
2020/2021

COUNCILLOR FIONA ROBERTSON

Introduction



I feel honoured and privileged to have continued to serve the area this year as the Town Mayor. The last 12 months have been very different due to the COVID-19 virus and periods of Lockdown imposed by central government. This has meant that Town Council operations have not operated as they normally would with periods of closure for many services. I have still managed to attend events during the year though sometimes this has been virtual attendance using remote access technology or lone attendance adhering to the COVID-19 guidelines such as laying a wreath on Remembrance Sunday. The Town Council thanks very much indeed all the people who have continued organising such events in accordance with virus safety regulations.

I would also like to thank all those people who supported the fundraising activities that generated additional money for the Mayor's Charity. This has enabled donations to be made to organisations such as Walton Foodbank who provide a vital service to local residents.

The onset of the COVID-19 virus at the start of the year led to the Town Council taking the unprecedented decision to suspend all meetings and close most services from March 2020 until the July 2020. The Town Council continued to operate in this period under a scheme of delegation agreed by the Council. The Town Council resumed formal meetings in July 2020 using ZOOM technology to hold virtual meetings, which continued for the rest of the year.

The first Lockdown was followed by further Lockdowns in November and December lasting through the early months of 2021. The initial Lockdown meant the Town Council had to agree a revised budget in July 2020 with budget cuts imposed to match the loss of income caused by council facilities being closed.

However, throughout these periods of restrictions, the Town Council has continued to provide services to its citizens where this was allowed. We kept open services such as toilets, playgrounds, Walton market, beach huts, gardens and allotments. We also ensured that office staff attended the Town Council office to keep business running smoothly and answer the many telephone queries from the public, who much appreciated talking to a human being rather than an answering machine.

Town Council Facilities and Services

The Town Council provides a variety of facilities and services for the local population including ones this year that were driven by the COVID-19 pandemic as follows:

1. Vaccination Centre

The Town Council signed a contract with the NHS starting on 4th January 2021 to use the Columbine Centre as a vaccination hub for administering the COVID-19 jabs. The Town Council recognised that the vaccination of the population was a national priority and so made the decision that using the Columbine Centre for this purpose was the right thing to do even though this meant that regular users were inconvenienced.

2. Emergency Helpline

During the first Lockdown there was a real fear that some residents would struggle to obtain food supplies and prescriptions. Consequently, the Town Council joined with the local churches and organisations such as Frinton Rotary to provide a telephone helpline and delivery service to residents who were unable to get out to buy food and get prescriptions. The Town Council provided some of the funding, some delivery staff and manned the helpline every Thursday. This service was a great success helping 156 vulnerable people and making 291 deliveries by the end of June 2020, during the first Lockdown period.

3. The Spinney



The Town Council completed a significant project of renovation works to the Spinney, in April 2019. These works have greatly enhanced this valued natural amenity, located at one of the prime entrances to Frinton, adjacent to the train station. During the year this attractive garden has been well maintained and received many positive comments. This year there has been the planting of some new plants and some minor repair work required where items were damaged.

4. Land at Church Road, Walton



A piece of land was purchased on 19th February 2020 opposite the train station at Walton-on-the-Naze at Church Road. This land has been transformed into an attractive garden similar to the Spinney. The works to landscape this area and plant new flowers and bushes have been largely undertaken by councilors Ann and David Oxley who deserve great credit for the attractive nature of the garden that has been created.

5. Great Holland Playground



A new playground was constructed at Great Holland and officially opened in February 2019. The playground continues to be well used by local children.

During this year there have been some minor repairs effected following the regular inspections by the Town Council's qualified playground inspector.

6. The Council House



The Town Council took freehold ownership of the Council House building on 11th June 2018. The building was refurbished between August and October 2019 with improvements made to the building, e.g. to ensure that access is in line with the requirements of disabled citizens. The newly refurbished Town Council Office was officially opened on 11th November 2019. It has received much positive comment from members of the public, councillors and staff.

7. Toilets for Frinton and Walton



The Town Council did not support the closure by Tendring District Council of toilets in our town centres. Consequently, The Town Council took action and managed to rent the Old Way, Frinton toilet from Tendring District Council. This toilet was comprehensively refurbished as it had deteriorated considerably during the period that it had been shut. It re-opened to the public on 26th March 2019. Over 100 people applied for the job of part-time toilet attendant. The two selected candidates have done a wonderful job of keeping this toilet facility in pristine condition during the year, even adding features such as creating a small garden with flowers at the front of the building.

As Tendring Council shut the toilets at Mill Lane, Walton-on-the-Naze, the Town Council has continued to explore alternatives for the provision of toilets at other nearby locations. Unfortunately, no suitable premises have been identified yet but The Town Council will continue to look for a suitable alternative.

8. Post Office

The Triangle Shopping Centre Post Office closed in November 2020. In order to preserve this vital local facility, the Town Council applied to take on the responsibility of running the Post Office. The Town Council also managed to negotiate that a temporary Post Office which would be provided at the Triangle Shopping Centre until the new Post Office opened. The Town Council agreed that this new facility would be located in their office at the Triangle Shopping Centre.

9. Crime and Disorder

The Town Council has continued to work with our local police force in keeping crime and particularly anti-social behaviour to a minimum in our area. The funding of six PCSO's and the regular Crime and Disorder meetings with the Police, which are held at the Council House, are vital in this respect. One example of the usefulness of these meetings was the pressure councillors applied to the police attendees to ensure that the local By Laws are enforced by the PCSOs. This year the Town Council have received many complaints about people flouting COVID-19 rules. This was particularly so in the summer when our area was inundated with more visitors than usual. The Town Council worked closely with the Police to systematically tackle all these matters. The Town Council are convinced that in these days of Police service cuts, our local PCSO's are invaluable and so a new two-year PCSO contract starting on 1st April 2021 was agreed with the Police. We will continue to work with local Police to ensure that our area remains a safe, low crime area to live in and visit.

10. Bus and Seafront Shelters



The Town Council continues to maintain eight seafront shelters. During the year all seafront shelters were regularly cleaned and where necessary repaired by local building contractors. These shelters continue to be blighted by petty vandalism but any damage incurred is repaired as soon as possible. The Mosquito security device installed in August 2018 in the Clock Tower beachfront shelter appears to have been successful in reducing vandalism at this

location. Earlier in the year the Town Council appointed a contractor to carry out the refurbishment of the eighteen bus shelters that it is responsible for during 2020/21 period. This work was successfully completed. The Town Council is committed to ensuring that its' bus and seafront shelters are maintained to a high standard for visitors and local residents.

11. Beach Huts



The Town Council's two beach huts in Frinton remain popular for the school holiday weeks, less so outside of those times. Hirers are always very complimentary on the location, condition and size of the huts.

12. The Columbine Centre



This has been a difficult year for the Columbine Centre with long periods where it has been closed and staff were furloughed. The loss of income has been significant with forecast income £56,667 lower than original budget, a reduction of 70%. This led to the Town Council drawing up an emergency Lockdown budget and subsequently instigating various budget cuts. One of these was to make redundant the part-time Promotions Officer based at Walton Information Centre and reduce the advertising budget to zero. Promotion activity has been taken on by the Assistant Facilities Manager who used a direct sales approach, regularly telephoning potential new hirers. This telephone campaign produced some initial success with 5 new regular hirers attracted to the Columbine Centre in the summer. However, the subsequent Lockdowns and the use of the Columbine as a vaccination centre mean it is not clear how many of our regular customers will return when the Centre gets back to normal operation hopefully as soon as possible next year. The Town Council is committed to encouraging local clubs and community groups to use the Columbine Centre, especially the well-equipped theatre and the purpose-built Walton Indoor Bowls Club. This year the Bowls Club have hardly used this facility which has significantly affected income.



However, there has been some positive news with one of our regular Columbine Centre users winning an award for continuing to organise exercise classes whenever this was allowed. Congratulations to Vivienne Quenau who was presented with her Essex Activity Hero Award by the Town Mayor Mrs F Robertson at the Columbine Centre.

A number of improvements to the Columbine Centre have been carried out during the year including roof repairs, better signage, replacement of faulty lights and planting new flowers outside. In addition, the Columbine Centre has benefited from investment by the NHS in a superfast broadband connection and other items such as new chairs which were required for the operation of the vaccination centre and are a legacy benefit of this initiative. In April 2019 a new staff structure was put in place for staff at the Columbine Centre. This meant the creation of a new role, the Senior Facilities Operative, who became responsible overall for the Columbine Centre site. Staff at the Columbine Centre also took on additional duties including managing toilets, Walton market supervision, and the regular inspection of defibrillators and playgrounds. The new staff structure is working well.

13. Defibrillators



The Town Council has installed six defibrillators located at Frinton seafront toilets; Pavey's Estate Agent Connaught Avenue; The Naze, Walton; Great Holland Village Hall; 'The Ship' at Kirby-le-Soken and at the pharmacy, Kirby Cross. Various community groups helped fund these useful community assets. As stated above these assets are regularly inspected. They have been used on several occasions.

14. Notice Boards and Public Seats

Notice Boards are part of the Town Council's communication system with all Town Council agendas published on each Notice Board prior to each meeting. A new Notice Board was erected during the year close to the Columbine Centre bringing the total number of Notice Boards to seven.

The Town Council was responsible for 147 sponsored public seats; most of them being more than 25 years old. A report approved this year by the Town Council on 16th July recommended the refurbishment of some seats and that where seats are more than 25 years old, they should be removed or transferred to Tendring DC. During the latter part of the year this agreed approach began to be implemented reducing the number of seats that the Town Council has.

15. Allotments

The Town Council manages 3 allotment sites at Kirby-le-Soken, Wittonwood Road and Waltham Way. The Town Council has agreed to hand back the Kirby-le-Soken site, which it rents, to the land-owner from 1st October 2021. This is because there is less demand nowadays for allotment sites and they are costly to maintain. The other two allotment sites are owned by the Town Council and they will continue as allotment facilities offered to interested parties. A lot of work was done this year to form a Gardening Association at Wittonwood Road allotment but this is not complete as more allotment holders are required to run it. We have short waiting lists so if you would like to be considered for a plot then just enquire at the Town Council offices.

16. Walton Market

The market has remained open this year on every Thursday and on most Bank holidays, even during the Lockdown periods for essential supplies. Regular promotional events are run to encourage customers to attend the market. It has been particularly busy during the summer months this year when many visitors came to Walton. The financial performance of the market has been better this year due to prudent reductions in expenditure and the promotional efforts of the Assistant Facilities Manager which has meant new stall-holders have been attracted to the market.

Planning

During the course of the year the Town Council has considered 253 planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders. Out of the decisions made during that time by Tendring District Council 24 have been known to be at variance. The Town Council also considered producing its own Neighbourhood Plan during the year but decided to defer this matter for consideration in the next operating period.

Financial Management

The Town Council received a clear audit again this year though auditors did note the low level of Town Council reserves. However, the programme of larger projects that have been undertaken in the last few years is now complete and reserves are being gradually replenished. The precept for this forthcoming year is set at £622,413.

Policies

During the last few years, the Town Council has approved 21 new, modern policies. This year a further 2 policies covering complaints handling and vexatious complaints were approved by the Town Council and added to the Key Governance folder that is issued to all Town Councillors. The policies are also available to all staff and any member of the public who wishes to see them.

Staffing

I would like to thank our staff for their work on your behalf during the past year. What is most impressive is how flexible staff are and how they are willing to work over and above their normal duties. For example, the Toilet Attendants gardening at the Columbine Centre.

The Council House staff deal with many questions and queries from our residents on a variety of matters not just Town Council issues. They are invariably helpful and friendly whatever enquiry a member of the public makes. The Council House office at the Triangle Shopping Centre is open from 9 am to 1 pm Monday to Friday.

Website

A new Town Council website was developed and went live at the start of this year as Essex County Council withdrew their hosting of the previous website. The new website is up to date with minutes and agendas uploaded regularly. The website address is: www.fwtc.co.uk.

Conclusion



It has been a difficult and unusual year with much work done in line with the COVID-19 regulations and coping with periods of Lockdown. Despite these unprecedented circumstances the Town Council has continued to operate effectively e.g. holding meetings using ZOOM technology.

I would also like to thank Cllr. Mrs. Ann Oxley, my Deputy Mayor this year, for her steadfast support and commitment to all that is good in our area. I thank all Members too for their excellent community work in our respective wards in Frinton, Walton, Great Holland and Kirby.

Councillor Mrs Fiona Robertson
Town Mayor