

Watton Town Council

Town Meeting

Tuesday 20th April, 2021

I was first elected as Chairman of Watton Town Council in May 2019.

There was no Town Meeting in 2020, because of Covid-19 and most of us were not very familiar with using Zoom at that time. Therefore, this Town Meeting covers two years.

Council voted in May 2020, that I should remain as Chairman and Town Mayor until May 2021.

2019 was an uncontested Town Council election, with five Councillors co-opted, following the election. Since then, there have been two resignations and two more Councillors have been co-opted. We have also had one very recent resignation.

We received a new Community Shed, via a Grant from Breckland District Council, which is sited at the Allotments. This came with litter picking equipment, which is available for groups to make use of.

We have continued to put poppies on lampposts, in November, in honour of Remembrance day, which is always very popular.

We held several events during 2019; Open gardens and yard sales; Antiques Fair; Fireworks display with funfare; Festive Market.

In 2020, we had intended to hold a big VE 75 event, in partnership with the Sports Centre, but this, together with a Heritage day event and all the other usual annual events, had to be cancelled, as did the Wayland Show and the Carnival, due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Our Events and Projects Support Officer Sue, puts a lot of effort into promoting Council run events and we are hopeful that some events can safely take place this year.

During the first Covid-19 pandemic, we worked with some great volunteers, to help people who were 'shielding', to do their shopping and collect prescriptions where necessary. This involved a good amount of partnership working. At that time, we managed to keep the Market running, although it was temporarily moved to Middle Street, to allow for more efficient social distancing. As the Butchers and Bakers stayed open during this period, those living close to the centre of town could do their weeks shopping, without having to travel far.

Unfortunately the pandemic also curtailed plans we were working on, in partnership with the Benjamin Foundation, to provide youth services and to facilitate mother and baby, toddlers and Young Carers sessions, using the Charlotte Harvey Youth and Community building as a base. The plan was to lease the building to the Benjamin

Foundation and to that end we had a contract drawn up and both parties were ready to sign. Sadly, because of Covid-19, this all fell through.

The Town Council had granted £8,000 to the Benjamin Foundation help get these services up and running. This money was returned to the Council and was subsequently given to The Charlotte Harvey Trust, to allow them to form a dedicated committee to provide child and youth facilities, which have now commenced, some of which is in partnership with the Benjamin Foundation.

I am a fan of partnership working, in fact since becoming a Councillor, I have become involved with quite a few Charities and Trusts in Watton. As most of you will be aware, WTC is the sole Trustee of the Charlotte Harvey Trust and I Chair the meetings, but this is part of being Council Chairman, I am honorary President of the Watton Society, again, this goes with the Council Chairmanship.

The Council makes an effort to have a representative for each of these bodies. I am the Council representative for The Chamber of Commerce, The Twinning Association, The Patient Participation Group (PPG) at Watton Medical Practice (I am now Chairman of this group). Watton Relief in Need, SNAP meetings, Loch Neaton committee (Vice Chairman). This is in addition to being a member of the various Council committees, Finance, Neighbourhood Plan, Cemetery working group, to name but a few. These all involve separate meetings outside of Council meetings.

I have attended many many events during my two year Chairmanship, in fact apart from the odd one or two which have clashed, I have attended every event that I have been invited to. Sadly there has not been the opportunity for this during most of 2020 and thus far in 2021. Zoom meetings have continued for most organisations.

We are still working on the Neighbourhood Plan and hope to see it through to completion over the coming year. From working on this, a group of people agreed to look into the flooding issue in Watton. This has now become the Watton and Saham Flood 'stand alone' group, Chaired by Liz Witcher, who, whilst still working with the Neighbourhood Plan committee, work with various other organisations, to deal with all related issues. Please see the four page pull out in the Wayland Chamber of Commerce Directory.

Necessary work has been carried out within Wayland Hall/Museum for Watton, a new boiler has been installed and new furniture has been acquired for the Council Chamber, we are all looking forward to returning to 'real time' meetings, when it is safe to do so.

We are looking to make the Town Council more sustainable in its workings and to be Climate Change aware.

It was my pleasure to open a new playpark for small children at Bridle Road, which was financed by 'Pocket Park' monies.

The Council have employed a gardener to look after the Jubilee garden near Tesco.

New gazebos, bike racks and trees have been provided by Breckland District Council, which are useful and help to brighten the town. We would like to see the

Market grow and the gazebos help to draw more people, since they don't have to bring their own and erect it on site.

The Mayors charities for 2019-2021 are Loch Neaton and The Men's Shed, both worthy charities. It has been difficult to raise as much as would have been the case had it not been for Covid-19, as events which could have made a big difference to the coffers, had to be cancelled. The total amount, which will be split evenly between the two charities, amounts to the sum of £5700.

Watton Town Council have continued working successfully, albeit remotely via virtual meetings, during the Covid pandemic.