

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2011-12

What has the Town Council been doing?

The four year **elections** took place in May 2011. Cllrs Brian Millward, Bob Coleman and Gordon Holt decided not to stand and Cllr Anne Kemp subsequently resigned due to pressure of work as a District Councillor. I would like to thank them all for their contribution to the work of the council. We welcomed Saeeda Jameel, Anne Tonkin, Neil Middleton and Richard West as councillors during the year. At the time of writing we have a vacancy following the resignation of Robin Bell, who I would also like to thank for his time as a councillor.

Much of the Town Council's work this year has been affected by the impact of the recession, government cutbacks and the **savings** which North Somerset Council is making to its budget. The leader of North Somerset Council, Cllr Nigel Ashton has said, "having to make savings of more than £47m by 2015 will mean the council will look, feel and operate very differently in the future." The Town Council has a major challenge to address in deciding whether to fill gaps in services created by district council cutbacks and additional charges. The areas affected by these changes are as diverse as youth services, grounds maintenance and dog bin emptying, car parks and Nailsea in Bloom. The Council decided this year to take over responsibility as from 2012-13 for £33,940 of grounds maintenance and play area costs for which North Somerset has been charging residents through **Special Expenses**. This is a cost transfer and does not mean an increase in council tax.

Localism is a new word for an old idea, namely the involvement of community groups in managing local services. The impact of the 2011 Localism Act (which gives additional powers to town and parish councils under certain circumstances), and cut backs at North Somerset Council have direct and long term impacts on the role of town and parish councils as the first tier of local government.

Nailsea has a wealth of **volunteer activity**, a situation that the town should take pride in. However, voluntary activity without resources, especially funding, can be very fragile, and the town council sees a key part of its role as supporting voluntary activity through grant funding. This year we introduced a new system for assessing **grant requests**. The purpose is to categorise requests so that decisions can be made fairly and clearly. The work of the organisations requesting grants is important, but resources are limited and difficult decisions have to be made.

The Town Council has an annual **Community Award** for people who have given long and exceptional service to the community and I am pleased to congratulate this year's winners, Chris and Lin Baker who have worked tirelessly for Nailsea Disability Initiative since setting it up in 2003.

The start of the year was dominated by the final activities to complete the restoration and extension of the **Tithe Barn** in May 2011. The official opening on 18 June was a great community event and I must congratulate all those involved in the project, especially the Tithe Barn Trust and its Chairman, David Francis. The feedback from residents about the Barn has been very positive: this was reflected in the Barn receiving the Royal Institute of British Architects south west People's Choice award, voted for by members of the public. In addition to having such a beautiful asset for the town, there will be a reduced cost to taxpayers as the Tithe Barn will cover its running costs from hiring whereas Church House never did.

The Parish Plan sets out the priorities for the Town Council in the following areas: the future of Nailsea, green belt land, town centre, heritage, open spaces (amenity space and public rights of way), leisure facilities and community safety. During this year the Council has been focused on a wide variety of matters, with the major ones described below under the parish plan headings.

The Future of Nailsea

The Planning sub-committee has been working very hard on responding to **North Somerset Council's Core Strategy**, which sets out planning policies until 2026. This includes the sites being considered for potential development. The Core Strategy assumes some small scale additions to housing for Nailsea, but the Town Council is more concerned by the mix of housing, so that the town

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2011-12

continues to be attractive to people of all ages. The demographic challenge facing Nailsea is the consequence of an ageing population and the pressures on younger families to afford suitable properties. The Town Council had a lease on land at Whitesfield Road, which it surrendered in order for Alliance Housing (formerly NS Housing) to develop **affordable housing**.

Following the final version of the Core Strategy the Council will consider whether to pursue developing a **Neighbourhood Plan**, which must be approved in a referendum by residents. We are entering a period of great change, and much of the influence that local councils have on planning will depend on how the new **National Planning Policy Framework** operates in practice.

North Somerset Council has cut all direct funding for 'open access' **youth services**, focusing on 'at-risk' families and young people. The Nailsea Youth Network, comprising a number of organisations (including the Town Council) interested in youth activity is looking at how to maintain and develop activities for young people. The Council has contracted with a third party to provide youth workers for a six month period whilst the Network considers the longer term future.

National Grid's preferred route for additional pylons as part of the Hinkley to Seabank link is to the west of Nailsea, but this proposal affects all residents, not just those near the route. The Town Council has worked closely with the Nailsea Action Against Pylons Group (which includes Wraxall and Failand Parish Council) and Dr Liam Fox to oppose National Grid's flawed consultation process, and to work in conjunction with groups along the entire route to lobby at national level for the planning of extra electricity capacity to focus on underground and undersea options.

Major progress has been made in the more than two years that this campaign has been running. National Grid has now conceded that the undersea option is technically feasible and that the underground option is nothing like as costly as they first claimed.

The review of **planning applications** is one of the most important aspects of the Town Council's work. It makes recommendations but the final decision is made by North Somerset Council. Residents are welcome to make comments on any application. This year we have introduced a system where applications are viewed electronically, saving the costs of having paper copies.

Green Belt land

The Town Council supports most of the goals of North Somerset's Core Strategy, but has consistently opposed North Somerset Council's refusal to discuss adjustments and extensions to the Green Belt, and continues to do so. We were invited by the Planning Inspector to make comments at his hearing into the Core Strategy, with particular reference to the green belt. The Inspector's final report unfortunately did not support our aim of having a review of green belt.

Town Centre

The Town Council is keen to support the development of the retail and commercial activities of businesses in the Town being only too aware of how difficult trading conditions are. Despite the recession the shopping centre owners continue to attract new businesses: the decisions by Wetherspoons and WH Smith to come to Nailsea are positive signs. The Christmas events organised in the shopping centre were an excellent addition to festivities in the town. The monthly **Farmers and Craft Markets** continue to be an important part of the life of the town, and the Council continues to support them financially.

North Somerset Council has again raised the issue of **car parking charges** in Nailsea. The Town Council, with the Chamber of Trade, the shopping centre owners and Waitrose has strongly opposed any charging. We have asked North Somerset to open negotiations regarding the Town Council taking control of the car parks, which are badly in need of improvement and on-going maintenance.

Heritage

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2011-12

The Parish Plan consultation highlighted the former **Glassworks site** as our biggest 'grotspot'. Various plans for development have been put forward over the years but all have foundered due to the constraints of the site and related costs. As a scheduled ancient monument, English Heritage has the final say in what can happen, and their primary concern is the protection of the archaeological remains. The Town Council has made improvement of the site one of its major priorities: we are developing a landscaping scheme which we believe is acceptable to English Heritage. We plan to publicise a proposed scheme shortly, but inevitably cost will be the biggest consideration.

Open Spaces

The Council has a strong commitment to the preservation and enhancement of open spaces. A feasibility study on the potential future uses for the land on Engine Lane known as **Gaulacre** is being undertaken and consultation with various interested groups has taken place. I am pleased that an oak tree was planted in Millennium Park to commemorate the **Queen's Diamond Jubilee**. The Council employs a **Town Orderly** to pick up litter, and feedback from residents continues to be positive about the benefits. The work of the Orderly also supports the superb efforts of the volunteers who plant flowers around the town, with financial help from the Council.

We have asked North Somerset Council to initiate a consultation on implementing Dog Control Orders in some areas. This would require dogs to be kept on leads in these areas, with the objective of reducing the incidence of dog mess not being picked up. We are disappointed that the Dog Control Orders consultation proposed by North Somerset Council has not taken place.

Leisure Facilities

Self-management of **allotments** has been considered this year but it has been decided not to ballot allotment tenants about this: however, it will be considered again if additional allotment sites are created at Gaulacre. The Council owns the **Grove Playing Field** and has been working with the Nailsea Playing Fields Association and the sports clubs to consider the long term future of the site.

The national cycle route known as the Festival Way runs from Bristol to Nailsea. In conjunction with Sustrans the council has been considering the installation of a '**portrait bench**' in Millennium Park, which would commemorate three people of historical significance in the town.

The council's policy remains that it wants to see a new leisure facility built in the north of the district.

Community Safety

This encompasses a number of areas from road and pedestrian safety to anti-social behaviour. The Council works closely with the police, Youth House, the Town Centre owners, Churches and community groups to assist in dealing with these issues.

As part of our review of all expenditure, a comprehensive analysis of the costs and benefits of **CCTV** was undertaken. Unfortunately, most of the cost is for line rental to transmit the camera images to the control centre in Weston super Mare, and we are looking at ways of reducing these.

Promoting Disability Equality

The Town Council has a continuous process for trying to understand and respond to the needs of people with disabilities. The council has taken a close interest in Backwell Access Group's project to create an accessible path at **Backwell Lake**. This will benefit people with and without disabilities, making this important resource available to all throughout the year. Access to **public rights of way** is being improved by a programme of replacing stiles with kissing gates.

Our **web-site** was re-launched this year with improvements for people with visual impairment. The **Tithe Barn** is an accessible building on a single level and includes a digital hearing loop system.

In addition to the full Town Council there are committees dealing with council business i.e. Finance and General Purposes (chairman David Packham), Leisure Facilities (Val Smith), Planning and

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2011-12

Environmental (James Tonkin), Policy (Anita Heappey) and Tithe Barn Management (Liz Frappell). The Council's Vice-Chairman is Clare Hunt. I would like to thank these councillors for their efforts. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Town Council, Ian Morrell (Town Clerk), Sue Walker (Assistant Town Clerk), Liz Fey (Finance Officer), Gina Provis (Markets' Manager), Mandy Langham (Town Orderly) and our caretakers Pete Bell and Pete Charman.

How has the Council spent your money?

The Town Council element of the total Council tax bill is called the Precept. In 2011-12 Nailsea Town Council had a precept of £399,762. This represents £63.08 for a band D property. The Council's precept has increased 1.4% in total since 2007-08. In addition to the precept the Council generates income from some of its activities, such as hiring the Tithe Barn, allotments, grazing on its land at Gaulacre and market canopy hire. I would like to point out that Town Councillors do **not** receive any allowances for the work they do.

The total expenditure budget of the Council in the year was £392,061 (down 3% on the previous year). The major items of revenue expenditure are:

Staff, office and administration costs: £161,267 (41% of the total budget) - this includes: office staff, caretakers, handyman, Town Orderly and Markets' Manager, office costs and web-site.

Grants: £53,341 (14%) - the Council has implemented clearer criteria for assessing applications and awarding grants so as to ensure greater accountability and focus on getting the greatest benefit from the grants awarded.

Leisure and open spaces: £57,200 (15%) - this includes: maintenance and improvement of sports fields, public rights of way, woodlands, open spaces, Nailsea in Bloom, planting and watering, Garden of Rest, bus shelters, litter and dog bins, allotments, play equipment, Farmers and Craft markets, Christmas lights and street lighting.

Property maintenance and insurance: £40,600 (10%)

Legal and banking: £25,750 (7%) - legal and professional fees, banking costs, loans and audit.

Car parks and CCTV: £26,503 (7%)

Other: £3,800 (1%)

Contribution to reserves: £23,600 (6%) - the Council put money aside in the expectation of taking over financial responsibility for expenditure cut from North Somerset Council's budget.

The total budget for the Tithe Barn restoration and extension was £1.2m. This includes a Heritage Development Officer on a part-time two year contract. The Heritage Lottery Fund granted £500,000 and the remainder of the funds has been made up of grants and fund-raising by the Tithe Barn Trust, who I would like to congratulate for their outstanding efforts, including a donation of £33,000. Holy Trinity Church generously donated £50,000. The Town Council's financial commitment was a £150,000 loan, the £320,000 proceeds of selling Church House and £72,220 from reserves. I am very pleased to report that the project has come in £48,000 under budget, at a total cost of £1,152,000.

Cllr Rod Lees, Town Council Chairman

April 2012