

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2013-14

What has the Town Council been doing?

This year we welcomed Sonny Walker as a councillor following the resignation of Richard West, who I would like to thank for his time as a member of the Town Council.

Much of the Town Council's work has again been affected by the impact of savings which North Somerset Council (NSC) is making, and having to decide whether to take on additional responsibilities. The Town Council element of the total Council tax bill is called the Precept. In 2013-14 this rose from £444,261 to £457,606, an increase of 3%. The Town Council has kept it at the same level for 2014-15, which means the total increase in Precept in the last 7 years has been 10%.

One of the most important roles for the Council is financial support for many of the **voluntary groups** in the town. The work of these groups is highly valued and a formal policy is closely followed to ensure careful use of the money allocated for grants. Any organisation wishing to apply for a grant needs to do so by the end of September in time to be considered for the following year's budget.

The Town Council has an annual **Community Award** for people who have given long and exceptional service to Nailsea and I am pleased to congratulate this year's winner, Graham Turner, the recently retired Chief Executive of NSC who has been a great friend to Nailsea over many years. We also have a **Youth Award** to recognise outstanding achievement by young people in the town, and this year it has gone to the Nailsea Army Cadet Force. I would like to publicly thank both winners for the public service they have provided over a long period of time.

It is an unfortunate sign of the times that there has been a major growth in **food banks** across the country. The Nailsea food bank was set up in 2013 and the Council is assisting by providing some storage space for food at the Tithe Barn.

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, as ever, been focused on a wide variety of matters, with the major ones described below under the parish plan headings.

The Future of Nailsea

Many hours of councillors and the Clerk's time has been spent during the last few years discussing proposals by **National Grid** for upgrading and replacing the electricity transmission infrastructure from Hinkley to Seabank. In conjunction with groups along the route the Town Council has campaigned for an underground or undersea solution. Although National Grid have rejected this approach, discussions at national level on government policy for meeting future demands for electricity are on-going. In the meantime, National Grid's proposals for a partial underground route and the removal of one existing line of pylons around Nailsea are generally regarded as improvements. However, the impact of the proposed T-pylons, which are significantly taller than conventional pylons, remains a major concern.

The **2011 census** highlighted a number of issues of major significance for the future of the Town:

- The total population is declining: it is now 15,630, down from 17,230 in 1991 and 16,546 in 2001.
- The population age profile is rapidly shifting toward older age groups, giving concern about the balance of our population. This has an impact on all the facilities and services in the Town.
- The average number of people occupying each home is reducing, meaning that a static number of properties ensures a continued population decline.
- Compared to North Somerset and the South West region Nailsea has an oversupply of 4-bed properties and an undersupply of 1 and 2-bed properties.

NSCs **Core Strategy**, which sets out planning policy until 2026, was challenged in the High Court in 2013 and as a result a further review of the planned housing numbers in the district is taking place. Unfortunately, this review could add significantly to the timescale for the Core Strategy to be

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2013-14

adopted, which in the meantime creates unwelcome uncertainty around potential housing development. The current plan broadly assumes an additional 450 homes for Nailsea. Given the demographic issues in the town the Council's Planning Sub-Committee has worked closely with NSC on a Housing Policy for Nailsea which focuses on the **mix of housing** needed so that the Town continues to be attractive to people of all ages. The demographic challenge facing Nailsea is compounded by the difficulty for younger families in affording suitable properties.

This housing mix policy addresses the need for 1-3 bedroom properties for younger people and families, and 2-3 bed properties for older people wishing to downsize, which would also release existing larger properties for families.

Any further review of the Core Strategy could include consideration of the **green belt**. The Council has, for a number of years, requested that the green belt around the north east boundary of the town be relaxed in order to support the development of the industrial and commercial sites and promote jobs, whilst supporting the extension of the green belt south of the town.

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 and to attend our fortnightly Planning Committee meetings, details of which are on our web-site. The Planning and Environmental Committee has been keen to ensure that new developments and extensions are in keeping with the surrounding area, are an appropriate size and ensure a suitable provision of off-street parking.

We have been working hard to develop our **links with other organisations** which work towards the improvement of the town. This includes the Chamber of Trade and Commerce, the Shopping Centre owners, the police and Nailsea School. With regard to the school, we welcome the new Head Chris Wade, and thank his predecessor David New. We also welcome Charlotte Jarrett as the Crown Glass shopping centre manager and thank her predecessor James Lucas for his many years in the role.

Town Centre

We continue to fight NSC's proposal to impose charges in the Town's **car parks**. The Town Council, the Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Waitrose and the Crown Glass shopping centre owners are convinced that the impact of parking charges on the town's economy is potentially disastrous, and takes no account of Nailsea's role as a retail and employment hub for nearby villages. The Town Council has offered to take over management of the car parks from NSC and invest in improvements and on-going maintenance. NSC has so far refused to negotiate.

Discussions are taking place regarding NSC's intention to take over the **management of the Station Road and Link Road car parks**. The Town Council has successfully operated these car parks through Eurocarparks since 1999. The Town Council is very concerned that the parking regulations, which are primarily in place to ensure the availability of spaces for shoppers, continue to be properly enforced. The future regarding management and parking charges remains uncertain.

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. The monthly **Farmers and Craft Markets** managed by Gina Provis are an important part of the life of the town, and the Council continues to support them financially: the Council obtained grant funding to develop a **Community Market**, which launched in September 2013. We are looking at other opportunities to develop markets with the shopping centre owners.

Open Spaces

The Town Council regards the preservation and enhancement of green spaces in and around the Town as a high priority. This year we have conducted a risk assessment, with particular reference to trees, on land owned or leased by the Town Council. The Council employs Mandy Langham as our **Town Orderly** to pick up litter, and feedback from residents continues to be positive about the

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2013-14

benefits. Mandy's work also supports the superb efforts of the volunteers who plant flowers around the town, with financial help from the Council.

Leisure Facilities

The **allotment** waiting list has reduced but remains over two years even though we now have more than 200 plots. Additional allotments have been created by reducing the size of some of the larger existing ones as they become available, and we continue to look for a new site, preferably in the eastern part of the town.

The **Tithe Barn** goes from strength to strength. The Tithe Barn Trust has changed its legal status and a Partnership Agreement with the Town Council is in place to promote shared objectives for the community use of the Barn. The Trust has developed a very impressive programme of events and activities, including visits by local schools, and has even more ambitious plans for the future. The Barn has become an important venue for the area, not just the town, and in particular there are regular musical events featuring internationally renowned performers.

We have obtained a wedding licence and the first wedding ceremony at the Barn will be in 2014. The **business plan** when the Barn opened in 2011 was that it would break-even in 3 years and I am pleased to say we have met that target. This means that there is no tax payer subsidy for the operation or the on-going maintenance of the Barn.

The **Skate Park** has been a long-standing success in the town but it is in need of new investment. There is a group of interested parties, including young people, looking at the options and the costs.

Heritage

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 much of the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), English Heritage has the final say in what can happen, and their primary concern is the protection of the archaeological remains.

After many years of negotiations we have agreed a scheme with English Heritage which fulfils the requirement to protect the remaining archaeology, whilst also creating a public open space. SAM consent has been obtained and a planning application has been submitted. Although we have had a professional cost estimate it will not be known if the scheme is affordable until tenders have been obtained. However, assuming that this work is completed we will be conducting a public consultation on future uses of the site as an open space celebrating the history of the town. Further information will be on the Town Council's web-site in due course.

Community Safety

This encompasses a number of areas from road and pedestrian safety to anti-social behaviour. The Council works closely with the police, Nailsea Youth House, the Shopping Centre owners, Churches and community groups to assist in dealing with these issues. A comprehensive analysis of the costs and benefits of **CCTV** has been on-going but no suitable and affordable alternatives are currently available. The Town Council is supportive of the police initiative to implement a Shop Watch system to deter and detect shop lifters.

The severe weather conditions in recent years have highlighted the need for better preparation and North Somerset Council is promoting a **Community Resilience** programme. This is something the Town Council has been actively considering but would require a significant commitment from a large group of volunteers.

Nailsea Town Council Annual Report 2013-14

Promoting Disability Equality

The Town Council has a continuous process for trying to understand and respond to the needs of people with disabilities. The accessible path at **Backwell Lake** which was partly funded by the Town Council has benefited people with and without disabilities, and has made this important resource available throughout the year.

Access to **public rights of way** is being improved by a programme of replacing stiles with kissing gates. Our **Rights of Way** working party has been looking at a number of issues concerning the maintenance and development of rights of way for all people. As part of this it has been working with the Rotary Club of Nailsea and Backwell which has developed an accessible route in the town for people who are less able or in wheelchairs. This will be publicised in the near future. It remains an aspiration to create an off-road route for pedestrians and cyclists from North Drove to Clevedon.

We are very fortunate to have a group of councillors dedicated to doing their utmost to make the best decisions possible for our town. In addition to the full Town Council there are committees dealing with particular aspects of Council business i.e. Finance and General Purposes (chairman David Packham), Leisure Facilities (Jane Holt), Planning and Environmental (James Tonkin) and Policy (Anita Heapey). The Council's Vice-Chairman is David Packham. 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 (Farmers' Market Manager), Pennee Paige (Events Coordinator), Mandy Langham (Town Orderly) and Pete Charman (Caretaker). Finally, we said good-bye to our Caretaker Frank Taylor and welcomed Mark Denham as his replacement.

How has the Council spent your money?

The total expenditure budget of the Council in the year was £469,506 compared to income of £513,984, which included the precept of £457,606. The surplus was put into reserves. The major items of revenue expenditure are:

Staff, office and administration costs: £156,670 (33.4% of the total budget) - this includes: office staff, caretakers, handyman, Town Orderly and Farmers' Market Manager, office costs and web-site.

Grants: £51,453 (11%)

Leisure and open spaces: £129,333 (27.5%) - this includes: youth services, 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: £29,100 (6.2%)

Legal and banking: £31,050 (6.6%) - legal and professional fees, banking costs, loans and audit.

Car parks and CCTV: £44,900 (9.6%)

Other: £27,000 (5.8%) - includes Glassworks and contingency.

The Town Council's budgeted expenditure is higher than the Precept because of income generated from some of its activities, such as hiring the Tithe Barn, allotments, grazing on its land at Gaulacre and market canopy hire. All the Town Council's financial transactions are now published on our web-site.

The diverse activities of the Town Council require many hours of councillors' time and it is worth noting that they do **not** receive any allowances for their work.

Cllr Clare Hunt, Town Council Chair

April 2014