

# Downham Market Town Council

## ANNUAL REPORT 2008



### Mayor's Report 2007-2008

I think this year has been an important year for our Town Council. Firstly we have managed, after many years of trying, to take back ownership of our Town Hall. This lovely building, which was originally built with public subscriptions, is now back in the hands of the people of Downham Market. I must praise the efforts of Mick Ford, the Town Hall Working Party and Jean Markwell our Town Clerk who have steered this project through. It has taken some time to sort out but hopefully now we can move forward and make this building become the hub of our community that it should be. For the moment we intend to run it exactly as it has been for at least the first year and we will honour all the bookings that have been made, but, during this time, with full consultations with you the public, who after all now own the building, plans will be developed for the future.



**Mayor John Doyle  
prepares for his final meeting**

We have also purchased the old Fire Station, so that we can convert the site into a car park but we intend to keep the old building as a Heritage Centre and Fire-Fighting Museum. We will have the old 1940's Sandringham fire engine on permanent display along with old fire fighting memorabilia. The Heritage Society will display artefacts from our Town's history there. There has been a delay in the work converting the area to a car park because of a drainage problem on the site but hopefully a way forward has been found and work is progressing.

We are also in the process of purchasing the Howdale Community Centre and six and a half acres of playing fields around it. We are doing this to protect the site from developers and keep this irreplaceable asset for the Town and its people.

The Water Festival is, I hope, now to be an annual event for the Town. It was conceived to highlight the river area of our Town and to give the people of Downham Market a free fun day out. I hope that most people would agree it was a great success and plans are already underway for this year's event.

I was determined in my mayoral year to get the Town to celebrate St George's Day and, as it is also the birthday of William Shakespeare, to combine the two. So various events were held in Downham Market over what was four days and I think we did St

George proud. The highlight for me and I am sure for most people was the fly past of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. To learn after that H R H Prince William was one of the pilots on board was the icing on the cake.

St Winnolds breakfast was in my view enhanced this year by involving our school children; they loved it as did all our guests. I personally hope we can do this every year, it will mean altering the date so that it falls in school term time but I am sure, with goodwill on all sides, that this can be arranged.

Recently a proposal was put to the councillors that the public should be consulted as to their views about the possibility of charging for parking on all of the Town Council's car parks. The point was made that although the car parks are at present free at the point of use, they are in fact paid for by all the residents of

Downham Market and that perhaps it would be reasonable for those who use the car parks to contribute to the cost of providing them. This is an ongoing issue which I hope will be resolved during the coming year.

The Town Council, through its Planning Committee, made representations on your behalf on various planning issues during the year. We are not alone in despairing that schemes are being imposed on local communities by local and national government that are perhaps not in the best interests of those communities.

Last year we entered Anglia in Bloom for the first time and gained a bronze award. I think this is a win win situation in that it involves local people in the community and makes the Town look at its best. Hopefully we can work for a silver award this year.

The Town Council have made representations to the Borough Council about siting more sporting facilities in the Town, especially for the young. The response we always get is that our residents can travel to King's Lynn to access these. For various reasons this seems to us, for some, to be impracticable, so we will continue to press for better sporting facilities for our Town.

## Development Committee

The main purposes of the Development Committee are to incubate ideas for future development of our physical amenities, eg public buildings such as the Town Hall, open spaces and The Town Square. We also suggest ways in which we can promote our lovely market town, the arts and tourism. Examples would be The St Winnolds Fair, Water Festival, and St Georges Day.

We have funded the Outreach Youth Workers together with the Methodist Church. Their remit is to engage with groups of young people in the town and try to gauge what they would like to be developed for young people, particularly those who do not join mainstream groups or sports activities.

This year has seen the transfer of the Town Hall from Borough to Town ownership. This committee funded the Community Audit which attempted to find out just what our residents would like to see in the Town Hall project. We will also now fund the feasibility study which will inform the Town Council just what physical alterations can take place to ensure this important building becomes and remains the hub of social and cultural activity for our town.

Town promotion is an important aspect of our work and we linked with the Chamber of Trade to produce an information sheet that will be continually updated so residents can access information on many activities taking place throughout the town. Eventually one hopes we can have some form of electronic notice board outside



the Town Hall so that it can be updated every week and residents can plan their social activities accordingly.

This committee gestated the idea of a Youth Council and to date Clackclose and Hillcrest Schools have taken the opportunity to begin the process. We hope to engage with the High School students and invite 3 representatives to join the Development Committee where they would have an opportunity to inform the Town Council just what they would like to see developed in the future.

We part funded the recent Sports Audit together with the Borough Council as we feel strongly that more needs to be provided in the short to long term for this developing town.

We also part funded last years Music Festival on the Howdale and many young people have expressed their thanks to the Council for listening to what they wanted. This

year they hope to have a "Battle of the DJ's" in the Town Hall helped by Kerry Heffernan our interim Community Development /and Events Officer.

I trust the foregoing gives a flavour of the work of this important committee and should our readers have a view to express or an idea they would like considered please feel free to contact any member of this committee.

Committee Members for the current year are: The Mayor J Leach, Deputy Mayor J Doyle, Cllrs S Blyth, W Clark, M Ford (Chair), J Groom, R Keats, P Roberts, S Nunn, P Sharp and S Teverson.

[Mick Ford \(Chairman 2007-08\)](#)

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## Planning and Environmental

The past year has again seen many applications for use of the "spare spaces" around Downham Market. Not only on the outer fringes but nearer to the Town centre. The Planning Committee has tried to ensure that open spaces, where-ever possible, are retained. The Committee has also looked carefully at and tried to ensure, sadly not usually successfully, that parking facilities are available in all developments,. Although the Central Government legislation indicates that people in towns don't need cars there is no doubt that a rural town such as Downham Market does not have the public transport infrastructure to fulfil the needs of all the residents. Efforts to keep the Borough Council aware of the special needs of Downham Market sometimes show a glimmer of light when they agree with our recommendations for planning applications but this only happens through the efforts of Town Councillors and members of the public attending and speaking at the Borough's Development Control Board meetings.

A careful eye has also been kept on the appearance of the Town and efforts have been

made to reduce litter – though support of litter scattering members of the public would be appreciated – surely we don't want at town of litter bins!

With Downham in Bloom being a part of Anglia in Bloom the environmental work of the Committee is moving forward by ensuring that the appearances of the open spaces and entrances to the Town are enhanced by seasonal floral displays.

The planning and environmental sectors of the Committee have been working hand in hand to ensure that the Willows Park is not lost to the urbanisation which developers are trying to bring to the south of Railway Road. This is an ongoing consideration not only in this part of the Town but elsewhere within the boundaries. It is hoped that the Town Design Statement adopted by the Town Council during the year and now circulated to many designers and planners will help to ensure that Downham Market retains as much of it "special" feel as possible.

[John K Fox \(Chairman 2007-08\)](#)

# Finance and General Purposes Committee

## Financial Report 2007/8

This year was always going to be a challenging one for the Council's finances. We were expecting three big projects to start to have an effect at some time during the year but we did not know when so we had to make an allowance for each one in addition to the normal running costs of the Town. We knew what most of the expenses were going to be but some were an unknown quantity which is pretty much the usual situation.

After some tough negotiating with the various committee chairmen we arrived at a precept requirement of £205,600 which was a 3.33% increase on the previous year. This was felt to be acceptable particularly as the number of new houses occupied during the previous year meant that the actual cash increase in the Town Council's part of the Council Tax bill was only a few pence per week.

The first of the projects was the purchase of the Old Fire Station site from Norfolk County Council and this was eventually completed, somewhat later than anticipated. We had already raised a loan from the Public Works Loan Board for this and the money is in our account earning good interest. The work to develop the new car park is progressing slowly but surely and when completed the conversion of the old building to the new Heritage Centre will begin. The site has been paid for and several staged payments for the various works have been made.

The transfer of the Town Hall from the Borough Council to the Town Council took much longer than expected but was finally completed on the 1st April just before the end of the financial year. To begin with there will be no significant change or financial implication for the Town other than a reduction in the Special Expense figure charged by the Borough and corresponding increase in the Town's element of Council Tax.

The intention has always been that under Town Council ownership the Town Hall would more than cover its running costs and we are confident that this is happening.

The purchase of the Howdale Community Centre and the playing field seemed to have stalled and then suddenly it was all systems go towards the end of the year. The paperwork is now virtually completed and the first of the four payments is due to be made early in the new financial year. This will secure the future of the whole site and will be an important Town asset.

The other running costs of the Town went pretty much to plan and virtually everything that the committees wanted to do during the year was achieved, generally within budget. Staff and general administration costs have risen slightly less than was anticipated and represent good value. The work done by the Council in running the Town has increased tremendously during the last three or four years and anyone coming back after an absence of five years or more would not believe how much more paperwork there is. Much of the work is generated by higher authorities requiring much more information but also the Town is responsible for more now than at any time since the last reorganisation in 1974.

As this is my last report after my two year stint as chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee I would like to pay tribute to the committee members and the Town Clerk, Jean Markwell and Deputy Town Clerk, Sara Porter in particular and the other members of staff for the help and guidance they have all given me in looking after the Town's finances. I believe that we are well placed to meet the challenges that are ahead.

Colin T Sampson (*Chairman F & G P Committee*)



### **Current DOWNHAM MARKET TOWN COUNCILLORS and the WARDS they represent**

Stephen W. Blyth .....	378478	East	Mrs Sheila M. Nunn .....	383243	South
William A. Clark .....	382457	North	Charlie Pyatt .....	388023	East
John W. Doyle (Deputy Mayor)	382386	South	Mrs Gill S. S. Purslow .....	388208	East
Mick G. Ford .....	385622	North	Jeffrey J. Reed .....	388986	Old Town
John K. Fox .....	382963	North	Mrs Patricia A. Roberts .....	382947	South
Peter E Freeman .....	383669	South	Colin T. Sampson .....	388003	South
Stephen F. Geary .....	382262	East	Mrs Pam B. Sharp .....	387770	North
Jenny Groom .....	383963	Old Town	Tony D. Stacey .....	383120	Old Town
Mrs Rosanne Keates ...	01760 337460	East	Mrs Val F. Starling .....	387170	Old Town
R. John Leach (Mayor).....	377517	Old Town	Stephen C. Teverson .....	385117	North

## Car Parks and Highways



What did the Car Parks and Highways Committee achieve in 2007? It's difficult to be specific about our achievements because there are so many aspects of parking and highways matters that are not under our control or not wholly so.

One thing we are looking at is charging for car parking on the town car parks and we are starting a process of consultation to make sure that this is acceptable to our traders and townspeople. We believe that despite our history of free parking, it is becoming so difficult and so expensive to monitor our car parks so that everyone, especially shoppers, have a fair deal that the only sensible way to do this is to charge those parking their cars. This will at least provide an income to run and maintain our car parks. Just to give you an idea; let's say that we have a car park with 100 spaces. Let's assume that this is half full, Monday to Saturday between the hours of 9am and 4pm – 7 hours a day. And let's charge 50p per hour. That makes £175 per day or £1,050 per week or £54,600 per year – a sum not to be sneezed at and which could not only pay to run and maintain our car parks but which would also put back a substantial sum into the town budget to set against your council tax. Of course, we could base our sums on any figure as nothing has been decided. It could be as little as 20p or the sum could vary but it is safe to say that any charge would be far less than in King's Lynn. Remember too that we will have around 650 parking spaces and not just 100 as in the example I have given. This is on the pessimistic side as far as use is concerned and gives us the option to adjust parking charges, to give concessions where they are needed and to provide a parking infrastructure best suited to the needs of the town.

Pay parking is controversial and we have a way to go yet. What about the look of our car parks and places in the town where cars are parked without thought for the environment or the needs of those other people who use our streets: pedestrians, the disabled, children and all those who care about the appearance of our town? Well we are trying to get other improvements: cars were parking on the grass in Church Road – we used to have an attractive roadside at the top of the rise with flower beds and grass. However, as a start, we have persuaded the Borough who own the land

to put in a posts to prevent this and thereby make the whole roadside more attractive discouraging what is, after all, illegal parking.

Cannon Square as one of the main entrances to the town has a number of attractive listed buildings and could provide a splendid welcome to visitors. The trouble is that there is no landscaping or parking discipline and the result is an untidy muddle which is far from welcoming. We are looking at Cannon Square together with the Borough Council and Norfolk County Council Highways and attempting a redesign with hard landscaping, trees and shrubs and properly marked out parking. We are not quite there yet but watch this space!

The Hollies Car Park has long been in need of a face lift and with this in mind we hope to soften the existing bollards with attractive planters. We want to make a small recycling compound behind the Health Centre and move the existing bottle and can banks. We want to replace the ugly and unhygienic bus shelter with an attractive modern one, we want to put a prominent sign at each entrance announcing that it is "The Hollies Car Park" and we are looking at the landscaping of the Bridge Street end to give the main entrance to the car park a softer and more attractive appearance. In the longer term we have other plans but they must wait for another time.

In brief there are other things we have been looking at. We fought and won the battle for more on street parking and now we are entering the lists to have the quite inappropriate taxi bays outside Barclays Bank removed to a site where they do not take up town centre parking places or disrupt the flow of traffic. We are developing the new car park on the site of the Old Fire Station and hope to have that in action by the summer of 2008. We are considering CCTV surveillance of the town centre and any trouble hot spots to help the police keep order in the town.

So you can see that whilst we do not always have the power to go it alone we do have the sympathy and help of the police, the Borough and the County in making the improvements we so badly need. We may move slowly – we have to – but usually we get there in the end.

Tony Stacey (*Chairman 2007-08*)

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15 Paradise Road, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 9HS ☎(01366) 387770

*Deputy Clerk:* Mrs Sara Porter ~ *Administrator:* Mrs Kate Martin

*Receptionist/Trainee administrator:* Mrs Joanna Jones

*Community Development Officer:* Mrs Emma van Deventer

*Events Coordinator & Interim CDO:* Mrs Kerry Heffernan

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