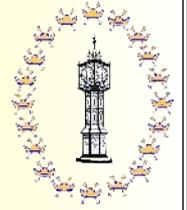


# Downham Market Town Council

## ANNUAL REPORT 2012 ~ 2013



### 2012-2013 Mayor's Report

I wish to start by thanking the Chairmen and the Committees for all the hard work and time that they have devoted to the Town Council over the past year. Without their support and dedication I could not have done my job. There is no "I" in team, and I commend the way that they have supported not only me, but each other in what has been a pretty difficult year. We have not always agreed with everything that one or the other has said or done, but with good team work the end results have largely been successful and agreeable.

When I became Mayor I said that I wanted to bring the Town Council back together, to work more harmoniously and to certainly work for the benefit of the residents and the Town. With a few exceptions, this has, I believe, been achieved and the Council in general appears to be on a smoother path, although there is still much to be done.

Moving on to Council business, I want to thank my Finance Team. This team has, I believe, looked after the finances - not always an easy task - in a most professional way. Our finances are in a much healthier state now than they were two years ago. I know that it has taken much hard work to get to the much more viable position that we are in now. Whilst getting the finances on track the team has had to contend with the extra work thrown up by a complaint about the finances of the Council, which was lodged with the external auditors. Nothing seriously untoward or any illegal practices, - part of the complaint that we had acted unlawfully - was found after many hours of investigation and exacting scrutiny. However, like all audits some comments were made by the auditor that, basically, we could have done things in a different way and made things clearer and easier, there were also some amendments to the Standing Orders that could be made. These comments and recommendations are being studied and appropriate action is being taken. This external audit cost the council £5,250 which it had not budgeted for, and of course is an extra burden on the residents, council tax payers of Downham Market.

This Council is second to none when it comes to putting on Community projects in the Town and these include the Water Festival, which is becoming more and more popular and is self financing and the St. Winnold's Day Parade and Breakfast, when dignitaries come from far and wide. The latter is a very popular spectacle and well supported, especially by the local schools. There is also the Chinese New Year celebrations, St Georges Day, Halloween and many more events that are run by volunteers from both the Council and the community.

The skateboard park is up and running but not without its problems. These are being dealt with and hopefully will be resolved within the next few months. We have a new Boxing Club set up in the old ATC Hut on the Jubilee Centre site. This has taken off well and on the first night there were 22 new members. The organisation has been through the Discovery Centre, King's Lynn.

Coming to the end of the term of office, my wife and I have been proud to represent the Town on official occasions. My wife hasn't been able or well enough to go to all the civic events that we were invited to, but she really has done her best and I am very proud of her as should the Town be. I feel that she has represented the disabled groups extremely well under some trying times and moments. I thank her for her support.

There are so many events that are worthy of mention, not least, the Remembrance Day services and parade, the Christmas Lights and the new feature of the Santa Fun Run and of course the RAF Homecoming Parade and Medal Ceremony that was so successful. What a fantastic day that was. There are so many organisations that contribute to the fabric of this Town that I know I haven't mentioned all of them, but they are not forgotten and are well thought of.

I have to mention that recently Downham Market was listed in a survey in the Times Newspaper coming in the top 30 best places to live in the UK. Downham Market came 22nd and was the only Norfolk Town to be included in that list. This really says a lot for all those who volunteer and work hard to make this Downham Market what it is. It puts to shame all those who made derogatory remarks on the web last year denigrating our Town trying to make out that it was run down and not being looked after by the Council.

We have recently been awarded £38,000 from the community fund by Norfolk County Council to install a lift in the Town Hall. We were helped in our bid by our very able former County Councillor, Shelagh Hutson, who stepped down as our County Councillor in May. She has been a very good friend to Downham Market and has always worked hard for the benefit of the Town. Shelagh has, in my time as a Town Councillor, been to almost every Full Town Council Meeting and has given us great support. So on behalf of the Council I would like to say thank you to her and wish her well in the future because I know that she won't retire.

***Cllr Robin Pegg (Mayor 2012 - 2013)***

## Community Development Committee

Unfortunately the staffing situation in the early part of 2013 has meant that meetings of the Community Development Committee have had to be suspended for a few months. However there has been plenty of activity during the year.

2012 was an exceedingly busy year with the Jubilee celebrations and the Olympics. With the Olympics particularly we have been anxious to build on the work put in over the year. We are especially keen to see that facilities for disabled sport are developed both for children and adults. The Paralympics showed us all what can be achieved. It is up to us to carry that legacy forward.

One innovation at our meetings has been the Community Workshop when members of the public are invited to discuss with Committee members any ideas or suggestions that they have for improving existing activities. This input is always warmly welcomed.

We were sad when our Events Co-ordinator left us but grateful to her for the hard work she had put in during her short period in that office. During the interim, we have been grateful to those councillors who have volunteered to spend time to fill the gaps.



Skate Park Opening

Once again the Water Festival was a huge success with over 3,000 people attending, there were 20 teams and over 30 stalls and food vendors. This event is run at no cost to community tax payers and often makes a small profit.

In October a "Sporting Heroes Award Evening" was held, with some support from the Events Committee. Also in October the usual Community Fair took place in the Town Hall to help to raise the profile of local organisations and attract new members.

A new £40,000 skatepark was opened at the Jubilee Centre

funded by the Town Council and the Borough Council, WREN & Downham Skaters and Riders. It is well used and thoroughly enjoyed by it's user groups.

In addition, for the local youth, this council has contributed to a new Youth Centre at the Nelson Site of the old Clackclose School, which is linked with the Discovery Centre in King's Lynn. A Youth Club is held regularly and the venue is open during school holidays with a variety of activities.

**Cllr Sheila Nunn**

*(Chairman ~ Community Development Committee)*

---

## Property Committee

The Town Sign, which was originally donated to the Town by the Women's Institute in 1965 has suffered increasingly the ravages of time and, although it has been maintained by two committed volunteers over the last few years, the Town Council concluded it was in need of a replacement. Following an appeal from the Council for donations to top up our replacement fund several local residents responded and quotes for the work were obtained. The contract for the sign's replacement was given to a local woodcarver. The new sign, which is a replica of the original, was installed in mid May. The old sign will go to the Heritage Society as an exhibit.

As previously reported, one of the main expenditures of our committee is the winter maintenance for the car parks (gritting). At the moment it looks like this year's costs will be less than last year. The situation has been helped by the fact that we have changed our contractor from the Highways Department to a local firm which will help us to see a saving this year pro-rata. The condition of the car parks surfaces however are something we must monitor closely, especially the older ones which are coming to the end of their life. Before long they will need money spending on resurfacing them.

The properties owned by the Town Council mostly generate a rental income and thereby reduce the precept payable by our residents. We feel it is now prudent to complete a survey of our properties and their condition and any necessary maintenance be undertaken so that no nasty shocks will pop up for us to deal with in the future.

It was noticed recently that small signs of rust are appearing on the seams on the outside of the Town Clock

tower, on further examination it was found that rust stains are also coming through the protective coating on the inside of the tower. The protective coating on the tower took place when the clock was refurbished during the Town's regeneration eight years ago and has a guarantee of twenty five years. Contact has been made with the contractor who did the work and discussions are ongoing. Car park charging is an ongoing issue in our Town and has been for many years. We did a survey of car park users earlier this year and most users seemed to feel that charging would come in sometime and were resigned to the fact as long as the charges were reasonable. However it was also evident that most people in the Town are proud of the fact that our car parks are free and some feel they would not gain from charging as they would then have to pay to park. No decision has yet been reached by the Council on this matter.

Responding to public demand five grit bins have been purchased and two sited so far this year. The Town Council will continue to increase the number of grit bins as and when funds become available.

The Markets are almost the only ones in the area which are vibrant and viable. Our main Market is full and the Craft and Collectables stalls on the Town Square have a good take up. This market was set up by the Town Council to increase footfall in the area and to provide a way for small traders to set up trading. We did this long before the Government's tsar recommended this action in her report. Downham Market leads again and others follow.

**Cllr John Doyle**

*(Chairman ~ Property Committee)*

## **Planning and Environmental Committee**

This year has been a very trying year for the Planning and Environment Committee. From the start of the year we were informed that changes would take place in planning legislation but we had no notice of the form it would take.

We have attended, as individuals and a group, many discussions and lectures to try to understand the new regulations.

During the last year we have met twenty times and deliberated on sixty-six planning applications passing forty-eight, refusing to approve twelve, deferring six, with one being won at appeal by the applicant.

We also met with a potential developer who put ideas forward for their development in our Town and we gave our views in response.

We, as a Committee, will continue to serve Downham Market as best we can to achieve enhancement of the Town by looking at every planning application's merits and failings and also the needs of the Town and its environment. To help us to achieve this we need the residents to feed us your views and

thoughts. This can be done in different ways, by attending meetings and expressing your views or by letter or e-mail to the Town Clerk marked for the attention of The Planning Committee .

A continuous process of monitoring of grit bins, dog bins, and litter bins for the requirements of the Town are carried out and where needed the appropriate licences acquired so that the bin can be installed.

One of the problems in Downham Market is the dumping in the droves, lanes, streams, dykes and ditches of garden surplus such as fern cuttings, unwanted plants, tree trimmings and grass cuttings including some rubbish and litter. This causes the ratepayer the extra expense of approximately £70.00 to £80.00 a time to clear up.

There is a Norfolk County Council Waste collecting and recycling self delivery unit operating off the A1122 at Crimplasham on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays, 52 weeks a year.

***Cllr Frank Daymond***

*(Chairman ~ Planning Committee)*

## **Environmental Sub Committee**

As a Sub Committee of the Planning Committee, we are an active group of Town Councillors. Our remit is quite varied including this year the successful lobbying of Norfolk Green for an increased usage of the Bus Pass to lessen the pressure on the 9.25am bus from Downham Market.

We also successfully held a meeting between local residents, developers and the owners of The Grange Care Home when concerns were expressed about the removal of some large trees.

Day-to-day we are involved with the Town Council staff in reporting potholes, litter and dog fouling, as well as ensuring that bridleways are passable and solving any other problems that are notified to us or that we come across personally.

Another of our links is with the Downham In Bloom Committee and Community Payback.

Thanks to residents that have reported problems for Community Payback to be involved with.

Although we do have the Community Payback teams in Town on a regular basis, as we share them with the

whole of Norfolk and Suffolk, there is quite a backlog of tasks for them to complete.

In April the Payback teams were enlisted to transfer the daffodils taken up by the Borough Council from Cannon Square for the future Amiens project (where the area being completely re-vamped with money from the EU). These bulbs have been planted around the Town so that next year there should be a really good show.

Hopefully by continuing to work together we will keep our small Town a welcoming, clean and pleasant place to live.

I am asked by Members of the Environmental sub Committee to appeal for volunteers from the townspeople to help with keeping the Town clean and tidy as well as other forms of assistance as and when required. All volunteers should pass their names and contact details to the Town Council Office to be registered on a help list. All volunteers will be covered by the Town Council insurance.

***Cllr Pam Sharp***

*(Chairman ~ Environmental Sub Committee)*

---

## **Town Hall Committee**

I have been Chairman of the Town Hall Committee for the past year. Within that time we have carried out some improvements including repairing the roof and replacing the guttering all around the building. The Main Hall has been redecorated. An application for a grant to install a lift has been successful and this will allow the less able access to the Assembly Room area. When we are doing this work we will also modernise the toilets on that floor and create a more accessible disabled toilet. The lift will be capable of taking 5 people so wheel chair users and carers will have no problems.

We have worked very hard to keep the costs down but

have had no option but to increase the charges of the Town Hall Hire by 3% from the 1st April 2013.

The cinema attendance figures are rising steadily thanks to our dedicated group of volunteers.

Another group of volunteers that should be mentioned is the team that runs the Coffee Mornings on behalf of the Town Hall and any monies raised goes towards improvements in the Town Hall. Their contribution very welcome - Thank you.

***Cllr Dave Sharman***

*(Chairman ~ Town Hall Committee)*

## Finance Committee

Two years ago when I was asked if I would take over as Financial Chairman, (which I must admit took me by surprise); I soon found out that there was a need for change. During this time a dark cloud hung over the Town Council. Some Councillors have been pulling in different directions, but we are all entitled to our own opinions. This, in effect, has spoilt two hard working Mayors' years and a loss of one employee. For what reason? A person pursued financial clarity against this Council. The Council has now been vindicated. In the first year we had to carry out an extra internal audit, at a cost of £1,700 - all the procedures were found to be satisfactory. In the second year the questions continued and again we had to defend our procedures with external auditors who are appointed by the Audit Commission - a Government Body. The cost of this was £5,250. This is a cost that is incurred which we are unable to negotiate. Again the Council has been vindicated.

I do wonder to what good this lost revenue could have been put had we not been forced to carry out these unnecessary audits. I believe the Town should offer their thanks to the two Mayors involved and the Town Clerk who have been put under this unnecessary stress and pressure.

During this time my Financial Committee continued to assemble a budget that would add no further cost to Downham Market residents. We have been looking particularly at how we in Downham Market arrive at our precept and what part it contributes to the Council Tax we eventually pay. We work on 6.4% of the total

budget. We are currently in discussions with the Borough Council regarding the Special Expenses that they charge Downham Market.

The Town Hall costs over £60,000 per annum. This is a community building, Grade 2 listed, which has ongoing costs related to it.

Car parks give free parking to visitors and traders of the Town, but obviously need maintenance. This is a cost to residents only.

We have a Council Office which the staff and Councillors use to carry out daily business and meetings. This building also houses the Registry Office which is a valuable asset to this Town.

The Mind Building and Paradise Garage, the Jubilee Community Centre, the Old Fire Station building which includes a car park.

The Town Sign which has just been replaced with the costs being borne in part by the generosity of the businesses and residents of the Town.

The War Memorial requires general maintenance, the Town Clock, The Town Square, the very popular markets are all run by the Town Council. We supply litter bins and fit them where required, communal seating, street lighting, and just recently grit bins. All this is funded from the 6.4% budget.

**Cllr Charlie Pyatt**  
(Chairman ~ Finance Committee)

ACCOUNTS SUMMARY 2012 - 2013		
General Expenditure	Committee Expenditure	Income
Administration.....£135482	Property/Car /Parks.....£48343	Administration.....£8028
Audit/Professional Fees.....£5471	Community Development inc	Insurance.....£1618
Additional Audit Fees.....£5250	Skateboard Park .....£53976	Property.....£12937
Insurance.....£6892	Planning & Environmental..£10214	Morrisons.....£15210
Loan Repayments.....£42730	Markets.....£3812	Grants/Section137.....£1063
Cllr Expenses.....£601	Town Hall.....£93281	Rents.....£30304
Transport.....£1048	Jubilee Community Centre...£5000	Interest.....£845
Burial Board.....£10583		Precept.....£302951
Grants/Donations.....£3330		Community Development inc
Section 137.....£3460		Skateboard Park.....£49372
Earmarked Reserves.....-£12157		Planning.....£1658
		Markets.....£39396
		Town Hall.....£39094
<b>TOTAL.....£202690</b>	<b>TOTAL.....£214626</b>	<b>TOTAL.....£502476</b>

Section 137 - Under Section 137 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1972, local authorities are allowed to spend a limited amount on activities they were not otherwise empowered to do, but which they considered to be in the interests of their area or its inhabitants, and which would produce a benefit commensurate with the expenditure involved.

This is a report of the work of Downham Market Town Council throughout the Council year  
from May 2012 to April 2013

**Downham Market Town Council, 15 Paradise Road, Downham Market, PE38 9HS**

**Tel: 01366 387770**

**E-mail: [info@downhammarkettc.co.uk](mailto:info@downhammarkettc.co.uk)**

**Website: [www.downhammarkettowncouncil.org.uk](http://www.downhammarkettowncouncil.org.uk)**

**Office Hours: 10am to 1pm on weekdays**

