

Annual Report to Council December 2020

Due to "Covid" 19 restrictions and Government legislation that has enabled council meetings to be held via electronic means in our case "zoom"; the Annual Town Meeting has not been held this year. This report is to provide a resume of the Town Council events and actions since the last Annual Meeting held in May 2019.

Councillors and staff: following the North Lincolnshire Council decision to reduce the number of councillors on all the Town Councils in North Lincolnshire, the elections (though uncontested in Epworth) saw 8 of the 9 allocated places taken: at the first meeting of the new council in May Cllr Jonathan Whittaker was elected Chairman, Cllr Stewart (MBE) was elected Vice Chairman. As the council has not held an Annual Meeting, these councillors are still in position and (under present legislation) can remain in post until the next Annual Meeting (May) next year. During an extra-ordinary meeting held on May 21st Cllr Mrs. Caroline Finch was co-opted as a new member. June of 2019 saw the employment of an Assistant Clerk who was employed for a year leaving in May 2020. Following a brief period in office Cllr Mr. Finch resigned and Cllr Pauline Garner was duly co-opted during the July meeting and was welcomed onto the Council in August. Since which time there has been no further change in membership.

Public Participation: Members of the public have addressed councillors on issues such as Turbary Road and grant applications and under "Covid" restrictions are still able to join zoom meetings. An employee of the new local paper "The Epworth Times" introduced themselves in July and was welcomed by councillors. A Public Meeting exclusively relating to Turbary Road was held in October, residents voiced their opinions and, following discussion, a maintenance programme was agreed. A new North Lincolnshire Council Town Centre Manager was introduced to the Council in January with plans for a new Street Market, due to Covid 19 these are on hold. January 2020 also saw residents attending with concerns about a planning application (PA/2019/1800); in a Planning Committee meeting held on January 22nd, members resolved to object to the application which North Lincolnshire Council refused in February. The reduced frequency of meetings of the Epworth Rural Day Centre was highlighted as of concern to residents in March, the last meeting held prior to "lockdown" and the introduction of "zoom" meetings. North Lincolnshire Council officers also attended presenting on Neighbourhood Planning and the Local Development Framework. The first digital meeting was held on May 12th 2020 attended by a representative of the new Epworth/Goole Times. A resident attended in June asking the council to support a planning application which though outside the current development was opposite ribbon development that was within the development line. A member of the Rotary Club attended in July providing additional information in support of a grant application.

Finance & Grant funding

The council approved a precept of £69,138.59 in February 2020 an increase of £11,276.86 on the approved figure for the previous year of £57, 861.73. Expenditure has been high during the current financial year, with the half year figure standing at £32, 065.82.

Grants approved financial year 2019 and 2020 to date:

Apr-19	Epworth Old Rectory	£1,000.00
Jul-19	Isle of Axholme Physically Handicapped	£250.00
Aug-19	Epworth & District Agricultural Society	£1,000.00
Sep-19	Epworth Colts	£5,000.00
Sep-19	Christmas Lights	£1,968.00
Sep-19	Epworth British Legion	£1,000.00
Oct-19	Epworth Business Forum	£500.00
Oct-19	Epworth Imperial Hall	£3,975.00

Jan-20	Epworth Music Day (funds carried over for next event)	£1,275.00
Jan-20	Epworth War Memorial Field	£3,000.00
Feb-20	Isle Choral Society	£250.00
Apr-20	C19 Epworth & Belton	£286.80
Jul-20	Epworth & Isle Rotary	£135.00
Sep-20	Epworth Thurlow Preschool	£1,330.00
		£20,969.80

Community Issues: the council continues to check and maintain the play equipment on the Kings Head Croft site (QEII Field) manage the grass cuttings and any necessary tree works, similarly at the Cemetery the council maintained burial ground. Here, following a memorial inspection the council is considering payment for safety works to a few the older memorials in the original section of the burial ground. The Cemetery buildings are monitored and maintained regularly but due to building regulations and the 1880's construction of the building only the ground floor areas are in current use with the Chapel of Rest having been refurbished and painted. The council continues to pay towards re-stoning of the footpath along Turbary Road with contributions from North Lincolnshire Council. Together with a number of volunteers, the council plants and maintains roadside planters at 6 locations around the Town with other locations under consideration, together with the summer hanging baskets the planters contribute to the high marks received in the local Best Kept Village competition, third in the Small Town Category this year. Following receipt of a North Lincolnshire Council "In Bloom" grant, Epworth Town Council has refurbished the walled planting to Manor Court car park and shrub planting around the car park at Kings Head Croft. The Council pays for the watering of baskets in the Town centre whilst the Epworth Businesses contribute towards the cost of the baskets, the Council intends to continue with this in 2021.

One problem that remains unsolved is that of the Ivy Andrew Hall site; despite the formation of a Heritage Committee with input from a local estate agent and work by the town council no agreement was reached and since a letter received in April 2020 explaining that the site was to be sold for educational benefit no further communication or details of a property auction have been received from the Diocese.

Council structure: following the reduction in councillors to 9, the committee structure has been reviewed and a Combined Committee formed (previously Cemetery and Environment) to reduce the clerk and councillors committee workload, meetings are scheduled to take place every 6 weeks. Finance Committee meetings are monthly and Planning Committee meetings called when required. The Council did not hold an Annual Meeting (for the election of a Chairman) in May nor was the Annual Assembly held, instead the Chairman and Vice Chairman elected into office in 2019 are "in post" for the foreseeable future. The Council continues to provide information via facebook and on a web page and Zoom meetings are publicly accessible using the log-in and passwords provided. Administratively the council strives to comply with the "General Data Protection Regulations" and the newer website accessibility regulations which will require a new website, currently under discussion.

In line with all other community groups this year, due to "Covid 19", the Council cancelled events for VE Day and the July "Field Day" but contributed financially to the combined efforts of the Epworth & Belton Good Neighbours with the production and distribution of information leaflets to ensure vulnerable people were able to get help. The Epworth Music Day had to be cancelled but funds will be held over until this successful event can be held again.

The Council wishes residents good health and to stay safe in these challenging times.

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