

Chairwoman's Report **Annual Town Meeting 2024**

Successfully voted in for a second term on 16th May 2023 and Councillor Jonathan Whittaker voted as Vice-Chairman. We had only five councillors and in need of nine to have a Full Council, so we were actively recruiting for four more in the coming month.

On 21st June we co-opted new councillors Mr Gary Baker, Mr Alex Cooper, Mr Steven Holt, and Mrs Ellie Wilson. In July we had a newly elected Vice-Chairman Councillor Gary Baker.

We were donated two flower bikes from R-evolution which we have placed in the Cemetery and keep stocked with flowering plants.

An S145 grant for £290 was donated to the Isle of Axholme Orchestra in May for rent for their rehearsal room and hire of two concert venues.

The Youth Council for Epworth area attended and contributed to our May Full Council meeting, and they have since formed their own student council meetings at South Axholme Academy.

The Cemetery Lodge has had carpets fitted in the reception area, stairs and two first floor rooms. Approx £750

New horse warning signs were requested by a resident at the double bends before the showground to reduce hazard of fast cars along that stretch of road. It was agreed by North Lincolnshire Council that temporary road signs would be installed.

Epworth Music Day last June was organised by Peter Barnard and volunteers and was a huge success with many visitors attending which benefitted the town's pubs, shops, and cafes. Councillor J Whittaker and Isle Choral Choir were amongst the many acts. The Epworth Ecoists voluntarily cleaned the town prior to the event and then the following day.

I attended the Armed Forces Flag Raising Ceremony in Central Park Scunthorpe on 19th June with many town and ward councillors and the Mayor of North Lincolnshire Councillor Janet Longcake along with Councillor Rob Waltham.

Epworth British Legion invited the Council for the laying up of the Old Standard and Dedication of the New Standard at St Andrew's Church. On 1st July, Councillor Neil Grantham and I, attended the service with Ward Councillor Tim Mitchell, the Mayor of Crowle, the Chairwoman of Belton, and Dame Liz Redfern.

Our grass cutting contract which initially went to Haxey Council has been extended by another 3 years to Haxey. North Lincolnshire Council has been informed of our discontent and our wish to be able to contend for it.

The National Grid have informed us of their big project from North Humber to High Marnham with a Consultation. We and North Lincolnshire Council have voiced our concern that we do not want our area of outstanding beauty to be affected by the route being too close to our town and villages. Underground cables are too costly and so preference is the installation of larger electrical pylons across our countryside, the route has yet to be determined.

The celebrations of The King's Coronation on 6th July were a great event put on by the Council with the High Street and the Market Place adorned with flag bunting. There was a best dressed shop window competition which was judged by Reverend Paul Wilson and won by The Tiny Tea Rooms. Also collages and artwork were provided by South Axholme Academy and displayed at St. Andrew's Church and a music event held at The Thurlow by Marina Mae.

Other commemorations in July were that a tree and plaque were donated by the Epworth WI committee which was placed in the cemetery grounds. Also a bench has been placed in the Cemetery by a grant fund of £250 to Epworth Town Council from North Lincolnshire Council. Two more benches have since been donated by Councillor Grantham of Lindholme Lakes that will also be installed in the Cemetery.

The Shed on The Isle refurbished the Kings Croft Hotel Plaque which is now fixed on the church wall by the kissing gate. A kind gesture given to the community and for which we only gave payment for materials used. We thanked them for their time and skills free of charge. I then went on to visit their workshop twice with biscuits and cake!

Community wardens have been visiting Epworth and fining residents £100 on the spot for lack of proper dog waste bags or for fouling our paths and streets. Councillor Baker found out that they are working to a Public Spaces Protection Order for Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime, and Policing Act 2014. The Council expressed concern at the lack of notices in the town informing the public about this law and possible prosecution in some cases. Our concerns have been sent to North Lincolnshire Council.

The Councillors and the Clerk have attended various courses throughout the year to keep updated and well informed in their roles.

Public Sector Audit report stated that the accounts and governance of the council has been maintained to a high standard, thanks to our Clerk Gary Johnson.

The Chapel of Rest has had new curtains fitted to improve the acoustics and heating as we are having more meetings being held in there. Provided and fitted by Utopia at a cost of £2,060.

The Millea Group project in partnership with Holmes & Gardens on Belton Road have had their large mixed development rejected by both Epworth Town Council and North Lincolnshire Planning. We are waiting a further application which is taking into consideration the concerns of the residents, including Epworth Town Council and North Lincolnshire Council objections.

Our defibrillator was finally installed in the telephone kiosk on 31st July following its refurbishment making the Market Place look better and helping towards possibly saving the lives of residents in an emergency. This was part funded by a North Lincolnshire Council grant of £2,000. The Clerk will be organising training free of charge with the Heartbeat Trust for up to 50 including shopkeepers, councillors, and residents.

The new Community Hub for which work commenced in July has caused parking issues for pool, gym users and residents. Arrangements have improved with the school car parking available during holidays and site workers using the tennis courts for parking their vehicles. The benefits of The Hub will be to have council and health facilities closer to home and accessible for residents and supporting rural communities.

Epworth Town Council has not registered or adopted Turbary Road, and not responsible for its upkeep for use by motor vehicles, however it is still classed as a footpath and this is maintained by North Lincolnshire Council.

The inaugural opening of the Epworth Parkrun on 29th July was attended by myself and Councillors Jonathan & Ros Whittaker following a donation of a S137 grant of £1,176.50 that was given by the town council. This has helped attract many more visitors to the town and improving health and fitness for all ages.

I attended the Haxey Halifax Memorial Dedication Service on 22nd September 2023. It was to have a memorial dedicated in honour and recognition of a Lancaster Bomber PB565 and Halifax EB184 plus other serious fatal crashes of local airmen who lost their lives in The Isle. This memorial is placed at Haxey Pinfold which was made by students at North Lindsey College.

A S144 Grant of £550 was given to The Epworth & District Agricultural Society towards having a marquee for the Epworth Show. I was invited and attended as a representative of Epworth Town Council.

Our groundsman Steve Quantrill helped us to win joint first in the 'Best Kept Cemetery' last year and we were also Highly Commended for 'Best Kept Small Town' competition. Councillor Wilson and I attended the presentation evening to receive the awards. Steve retired at the end of March 2024 and is now replaced by local Paul Haywood who has regularly helped with watering our planters, putting up our hanging baskets and cutting hedges etc.

The Chairwoman and Vice-Chairman attended the two minutes silence in the Market Place on 11th November alongside the Epworth British Legion and a short remembrance prayer was given by Reverend Paul Wilson. Also, I attended and laid a wreath on behalf of the town at St. Andrews Church Remembrance Sunday Memorial Service.

A S145 grant of £2,352 was given to help towards the cost of putting on a Music Day event again in Epworth on 22nd June, 2024. I have been asked to help as a steward and for Epworth Ecoists to litter pick the town.

The Chairwoman offered to have the Epworth Town Council pendant refurbished to its former glory to match the chain of office that was being made and which I was donating to the Council. This has since been presented and given as my legacy to the Council at the meeting held in April of this year.

A working group of Epworth town councillors have reviewed and amended the Standing Orders, so they are updated and relevant. Another working group are looking to have a 3-year vision and action plan. We are at the start of creating this plan for Epworth and need ideas, suggestions and observations from residents and businesses on what you want for the town.

Councillor Steve Holt liaises and feeds back to the Clerk of the maintenance of our public paths and if not cut back we can then go to the contractor via the Haxey Council clerk with images to help get things done in a timely manner.

Two councillor roles became vacant at the end of 2023 one because of work commitments, Councillor Alex Cooper resigned. The second was due to Councillor Don Stewart MBE having severe illness and sadly passed away in December. He had contributed his time and efforts to Epworth Town Council for over 40 years serving as Chairman and Vice-Chairman on more than one occasion as well as chairman of several of the Council's committees. His knowledge and experience are sadly missed.

In December a S145 grant was given to the Epworth Business Forum to pay £780 towards the road closures for the Christmas Market.

January 2024 the Full Council set a precept of £81,859 for the financial year 2024 / 2025 and agreed to accept a grant of £1,476 from NLC. This is an increase of 7.5% due to inflation costs. The precept for previous year 2023 / 2024 was £76,176.

Also, in January the Chairwoman attended the Epworth Rotary Group's free afternoon tea event for the elderly at The Thurlow. I helped by assisting and transporting some of the residents to this. Everyone had great fun with magic tricks from David Hand and songs by Marina Mae.

We welcomed MP Nick Fletcher and ward councillor Tim Mitchell to our January meeting. Nick is to be a candidate for Doncaster East & Isle of Axholme in the upcoming elections and has been working very hard getting to know everyone and be involved in our community. I also met him in The Sheds on the Isle 6th April with ward councillor Tim Mitchell and Councillor Julie Reed, Carole Johnson from HWRA (Humber and Wolds Rural Action) as like us he is a keen supporter and spoke with everyone there.

In February we recruited a part time assistant (6hrs), Clare Boyall, to help the Clerk. Together they will manage the business of the Council at Cemetery Lodge.

The Clerk is looking to have quotes to improve a camera monitoring system in the QEII Field upper playground to try and reduce and prevent vandalism.

Another project with the kind donation of financial help from Councillor Grantham is to replace / update the beacon and to reinstall the metal basket so as it can be lowered and raised to make loading easier and safer. The Clerk has informed North Lincolnshire Council that we have shown interest in us adopting and moving the original beacon and we have applied for planning permission for it to be installed in the grounds of Maw's Mill. The landowner is happy for it be used there on his land. We are hoping to be able to light the beacon for D-Day 80th Celebrations on 6th June.

Also, in February, Councillor Graham Milnes, a local to Epworth for over 30 years was co-opted onto the Council and I wish him well in his new role.

Councillor Ros Whittaker attends the meeting of the Dementia Steering Group and reports back on the good work and support they provide to the community. One of these is 'Just Sing' which is held on 1st & 3rd Thursdays of the month and I visited 7th March.

On 8th March I attended the Mayor of North Lincolnshire's Civic Charity Dinner at Normanby Hall with Councillor Janet Longcake and Councillor Rob Waltham MBE Leader of the North Lincs Council, MP for Scunthorpe Holly Mumby-Croft and other N Lincs mayors and chairmen and chairwomen. Money was raised for Macmillan Cancer support group and Bosom Family Support.

Another great year of ETC activities and support for the town and community including all the grants given to help these.

We are now working and planning the D-Day 80th Celebrations for 6th June and enjoying the community spirit that goes along with it.

A big thank you goes to our Clerk Gary Johnson and Vice-Chairman Gary Baker for their valued support they have continually given me, including councillors and ward councillors. Also thank you to our employees, Cleaner Mary Addlesee, Groundsmen Steve Quantrill and Paul Haywood, and Administrative Assistant Clare Boyall. Lastly to the Epworth Christmas Lights Committee we are very grateful for their continued help with putting up the bunting, poppies etc.

Councillor Caroline Finch
Chairwoman
Epworth Town Council

16th April 2024

ADDENDUM

It was pointed out that The Millea Group project in partnership with Holmes & Gardens on Belton Road for a large mixed development had not been rejected by both Epworth Town Council and North Lincolnshire Council Planning. Epworth Town Council had objected to it, but then the planning application was withdrawn by The Millea Group, therefore it did not go before Planning at North Lincolnshire Council.