

NEEDHAM MARKET TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Report 2022/23

Governance & Finance Committee

2022/23 saw the first full year management of the Town Council under the new operational and meeting structure it introduced in 2021/22.

The past year consolidated several positive outcomes, not least all Town Council and Town Council Committee meetings (apart from those occasional meetings or parts of meetings that must be held in Camera due to Disclosure Regulations) take place in the evening and are open to public attendance. Members of public are now attending Council and Committee meetings and an opportunity for comment or questions is included in the meetings format.

The Council's structure is:

Full Town Council – meets bimonthly and is principally to debate high-level issues and make fundamentally important resolutions. Its format includes reports being received from the respective Committee Chairpersons. Its Annual meeting is when the Council Chairperson/Town Mayor is appointed for the year ahead and Councillors are appointed to external bodies (e.g. to the Community Centre Management Committee).

Governance & Finance Committee – meets quarterly and has delegated powers over administration and decision making for most of the Council's financial responsibilities as well as its governance, which is concerned mainly with Regulatory obligations, risk management and Council policy. It also receives reports from the Council's Employment Committee, meetings of which are not held in the public domain. The Committee can act to provide or impose a scrutiny function over business and decisions undertaken by the Council's other Committees. Its scrutiny role would typically involve a report to full Council when high-level resolution is required/appropriate.

Community & Assets Committee – meets bimonthly and has delegated powers over a broad range of Council business including the Council's physical assets, such as street furniture, public realm areas of the town either owned by the Council or managed by the Council and supporting the town's Library. It also oversees the Council's communication functions (Newsletter, Website and Social Media), the making of grants/donations and the organisation of civic events (Annual Remembrance and Civic Services). In recent years, there has been a gradual introduction of broader areas of social and community issues into the remit of local councils. These include but are not confined to: Community Health and Wellbeing; Access and Inclusion; Crime Prevention (focussed on fear of crime and anti-social behaviour), Consultation and Engagement, and Climate Emergency.

Planning Committee – meets on a 4-weekly cycle and has delegated powers over the Council's limited role as a consultee of the Planning Authority (Mid Suffolk District Council). The consultations on Planning Applications received from the Planning Authority allow the Town Council to submit its comment on applications. In the main each submission is bound to a recommendation the application should be approved or refused. A neutral submission is possible but rare. The Committee also manages the Council's strategic planning responsibilities. A fundamental step forward in that role coincided with the adoption of the Needham Market Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan, inclusive of its formal policies, now sits alongside the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Authority's Local Plan (although the current Local Plan is substantially outdated, and an up-to-date document has suffered numerous delays and is currently being held at the External Examination stage). The three elements together provide weight to the Planning Authority in its decision making. Evidence (in particular the failed Appeal against Refusal of Planning Approval for a new homes development off Barking Road – March 2023) suggests the Neighbourhood Plan is a key tool towards giving the local community power in how, where and when the town should be further developed.

Brian Annis
Governance & Finance Committee Chairperson

Community and Assets Committee

The Committee met bimonthly throughout the year and continues to meet its obligations in managing the town's physical assets and public realm areas. In terms of communication functions, the monthly newsletter continues to be produced and delivered for free to all homes in Needham Market and we set up a new Facebook page which has proved very successful. Additionally, we have a new website. We hope that these three methods of communication along with the noticeboards around town ensure that we communicate with as many people as possible in a way which is accessible to them. A great amount of work goes on in the background towards meeting these obligations and the committee is grateful to our Town Clerk and other employees who manage this on our behalf daily.

The Civic Events responsibilities of this committee have been somewhat busier than normal this year. In addition to the usual Remembrance and Civic Services, we led the organisation of several events for all ages for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the King's Coronation. We are incredibly grateful to the volunteers who joined us and put in a lot of hard work to make these events so successful. In September, when Queen Elizabeth II died, we played our part to ensure that civic protocol was followed and that the event was marked in Needham Market in the appropriate way.

In terms of recreation provision in town for younger people, there has been a lot of change over the last year and there is more to come. In partnership with the Skate Park Committee, the new MUGA (multi use games area) was installed on Crowley Park. The committee thank all those involved in raising funds and project managing to get this in place. The

Town Council is now working to replace the younger children's play area which had been where the MUGA is. Designs and quotes have been commissioned and funding bids have been submitted. In the meantime, the children's play area in

School Steet, next to the Community Centre is being reinstated and is scheduled to be in place at some point in June.

The Mix has been providing outreach activities for young people in Needham Market for some time and over the last year we have worked in partnership with them and the Cricket Club to extend the Pavilion on Crowley Park so that the Mix have a permanent base for their provision for our young people. The Mix Hut, as it is now known, is open two evenings a week for drop ins as well as for holiday activities. It is hoped that provision can increase in time and The Mix Hut are on the lookout to recruit volunteers to enable this to happen.

Over the year there have been several social and community issues brought to our attention. Our remit can sometimes limit the powers of the Town Council but we have responded as best we can even if all we could do was signpost people to the best organisation to help. In response to public concern about speeding, Speed Indicator Devices will soon be in place on the main roads into Town. We are in the process of considering CCTV for the High Street.

This year saw the beginning of the Needham Market Climate Awareness Group sub-committee. The group consists of some Town Councillors and members of the public who have worked to focus on a climate issues and what actions can be taken locally to address these. Monthly updates in the newsletter keep everyone up to date with actions and progress. This group remains open to members of the public to join.

Thank you to everyone who has played a part this year.

Amanda Reardon

Community and Assets Committee Chairperson

Planning Committee

Needham Market T C Planning Committee has an important role in addressing planning matters which may have an impact upon the whole town and importantly upon the Conservation Area. The District Council have a duty to refer to NMTC all planning applications, applications for Listed Building Consent, applications related to works to protected trees and trees within the Conservation Area, naming of streets, and proposed advertising or trading notices sited on buildings. There are a considerable number of Grade II listed buildings within the Conservation Area and a few Grade II* listed buildings as well. Whilst any significant alteration to a building may need planning permission, a listed building also needs Listed Building Consent. In addition to this, some alterations to the appearance of many buildings within the Conservation Area may need approval and certainly can be improved by advice from the a Local Planning Authority (LPA) officer or member of their conservation team. Many of the listed building are timber framed structures dating back up to 600 years and, due to the continuing and developing use of the market town, the front elevations of many of these building have been 'modernised' over the years by ambitious Georgian and Victorian occupants; the town thus represents a living and continuing history of domestic architecture and this living history may be continued by encouraging well designed buildings including 21st century designs. Housing developments outside the Conservation Area are also where good design should be encouraged showing consideration for local building designs and neighbours

interests. The Planning Committee have sat at 4 weekly intervals during the past year amounting to 13 committee meetings. There are currently 11 members of the committee and it has been chaired by Martin O'Shea with Martin Ost as deputy-chair. All committee members may comment on the applications and where there is no clear view upon an application the matter is generally taken to a vote. When an application is of a complex or specifically legal nature the committee can refer the matter to a planning consultant who is engaged by the Council to advise on such matters. There is a dead-line where our comments must be sent to the LPA, when this is before the next committee meeting the committee deal with it by email or an unprogrammed meeting. In the past year the committee have been consulted and commented upon approximately:- 36 planning applications including applications for listed building consent when incorporated within the overall application 2 requests for street naming 6 applications solely for listed building consent 8 applications for works to protected trees or trees within the conservation area. 1 planning appeal undertaken by way of public enquiry Most applications involve one or a few buildings but there have been a few involving higher numbers including in one case 279 residential units. Whilst the LPA must ask NMTC for comments and sometimes refer to these when making decisions they do not necessarily have to include them as part of any conditions to a planning approval. The committee would encourage greater involvement and communication with the LPA in the future as NMTC have more understanding of local issues and how developments may be designed for the benefit of all parties. One recent appeal against the refusal of an application for the 279 residential units was a good example of the Town Council inviting local residents to get involved in the enquiry with positive results for the town. However the Planning Committee cannot be complacent as it is likely that there will be more and better constructed applications in the coming year. We look forward to the coming year and all the varied and demanding matters we will have to deal with. NM Neighbourhood Plan This Plan now being in place is proving to be effective in commenting on most applications. It proved particularly effective with regard to the public enquiry for the Appeal against the refusal for the 279 residential units where the existence of the Neighbourhood Plan was referred to a number of times by both the Planning Inspector and also consultants and the public. The LPA are in the process of drafting their Local Plan and within the coming few months it will be necessary for NMTC to draft out suggested revision to the Neighbourhood Plan and likely taking the LPA Local Plan into account. Planning legislation is always a topical subject and the Government have made various announcements regarding the 'urgent' need for additional housing throughout England. Whilst our N'hood Plan states that the town needs no further housing developments for a number of years the pressure is likely to increase for the provision of further housing regardless. With this in mind it is quite possible that some future housing development will receive approval albeit thru an Appeal and this needs to be taken into account in the N'hood Plan review. Existing traffic thru the town is increasing and with further developments this can only get worse, this too will need to be seriously addressed. In order to spend the time necessary to attend to revisions to the Plan properly, a member of the Planning Committee should be allocated with the specific task of leading in the N'hood Plan Review.

Martin O'Shea
Planning Committee Chairperson