

Outgoing Chairman's Speech - Costessey Town Councillor Patrick O'Connor

When as Chairman I was asked to summarise the activities of the Town Council, I also remarked on what a busy year it had been. I feel privileged to have served Costessey as Town Council Chairman for two municipal years. I stood down in May 2018, but whilst elected to do so, I will remain an active volunteer Councillor. Throughout the last few years, whenever we seem to have cleared one hurdle two more pop up. Many of these problems are not of our making, but we have to be pro-active as a group in order to get the best result for our town.

PLANNING AND NEW BUILDING:

Costessey Town Council (CTC) is consulted by South Norfolk Planning Department (SN) when a planning application is made. CTC is not the planning authority and SN make the decision as to whether the application is acceptable and may or may not go ahead. CTC is particularly interested in planning applications as we are very aware of the implications of Costessey being overdeveloped. You will be pleased to know that previous predatory, speculative developments are less likely to be proposed now as the Greater Norwich area has a 5 year land supply. The Council continues to be involved in consultations with various bodies, especially concerning both Health and Education.

Farmland Road: CTC successfully objected to the proposed development off Farmland Road. It must be noted that the Farmland Road Action Group were a tremendous help in getting this rejected and a big "thankyou" is due to it for its financial contribution and to Steve Codman for his research work. There is, however, an appeal pending, and we await further information.

NEW BUILDING:

Queen's Hills: The last houses are being built on Queen's Hills. The proposed shop area is still under discussion. The consortium are now, at last, laying black top on the roadways. The bus lane has not yet opened due to problems with the internal connections and software relaying information to County Hall. We are informed that it will open soon. Costessey Town Council are pressing for an alternative exit from the housing and industrial area as traffic problems continue and worsen.

Lodge Farm: Phase 1 is complete and is now looking quite mature. Building on Phase 2 continues and we are in discussion about a new community facility, sports field and allotments.

Townhouse Road: Building has commenced and some houses have now been occupied. Parishioners will recall that CTC was against this development and, on appeal it was allowed to be built against the wishes of CTC and SN and most of the population of Costessey.

Governance Review: Bawburgh Parish Council has agreed with proposals to re-align parish boundaries at Lodge Farm with the new District Ward boundaries so that the Town of Costessey will now extend as far as New Road. This is in order to simplify the administration of the Lodge Farm Estate.

Cemetery: The Town Council is responsible for the Cemetery at the top of Longwater Lane. We have an ongoing project which is in the early design stages which should provide further burial facilities for coffins, ashes, natural and woodland burial. In the far future, the land at the very back will become a burial area, but in the meantime it is being put to agricultural use and a 15 year crop of Miscanthus (Elephant Grass) is being grown. This is a biofuel, by the way. The driveway was re-surfaced last year.

Greenhills Wood: This is an ongoing project where we are now 2 years in with 3 to go. Felling of the Corsican Pines will continue through the summer and we hope to be able to commence planting of native species in October.

PLAY AREAS:

Breckland Park:

The small children's play area has been refurbished with new swings, roundabout, a pirate ship and picnic table with a games top and bench for parents. New benches have been placed in the park and one near to the older children's play area replaced. Sadly the Parkour area has been vandalised and the skateboard area totally wrecked and the damage is estimated at £4,000. We have asked children as to what they think they would like as replacements.

Longwater Lane:

Repairs and upgrading of equipment continues and much of the fencing along Longwater Lane was replaced with a new pedestrian gate added to the south of the site.

Gunton Lane:

Two commemorative benches have been placed overlooking the river, and three picnic tables have been installed so that we can enjoy that little bit of Costessey. Sadly, within three days of installation, one of the tables was spray painted with graffiti.

Queens Hills:

CTC has agreed to take on the maintenance of the four play areas and linear parks, but still awaits the processing of the paperwork by solicitors.

HALLS:

A new cleaning and caretaking contract was awarded to Heritage Cleaning Services and Mike Urry is the new Bar Licensee with 80% of profits given to the Whitwell & Reepham Preservation Society Ltd and the remainder to CTC. In the Costessey Centre, a permanent glazed partition has been installed to replace the folding doors which proved unsuitable. At Breckland Hall free Wi-Fi has been installed and both rooms now have 49" smart TVs. At West Costessey Hall a community fridge seems to be well patronised, but we need volunteers to help run it. At all three of our halls, we have installed new large notice boards, paid for by grants from the previous year.



Fly-tipping costs us money to clear up. We are concerned that charges at Recycling Centres will increase incidents.



Field at the rear of the Cemetery planted with Elephant Grass to deter fly-tipping, traveller incursions and rough sleepers.



New benches at Gunton Lane & Breckland Park.



The Rymarz Gallery chairs were re-covered and a permanent glazed partition has worked well.



The Community Infrastructure Levy and grants help fund new equipment.



We can support groups with small grants.

Outgoing Chairman's Speech continued....

HERITAGE PROJECTS:

CTC is particularly keen to preserve the history of Costessey. We have already accumulated several paintings, photos and pieces of archive materials. Credit is especially due to Cllr Paul Cooper who has produced some very informative DVDs on Costessey. A video camera has been purchased in order to record us for posterity. I must also mention Roy Howard, The Costessey Society, Cllr Tim East and Frances and John Denby who have contributed to the projects.

HIGHWAYS AND THE WESTERN LINK:

CTC is consulted and is active in the schemes for the dualling of the A47 and the completion of the new A1270 NDR from the A1067 through to the A47, which will alleviate the rat running through Costessey. We continue to press for speed cameras in West End.

STAFF AND COUNCILLORS:

I must offer a big thank you to all of the staff at the Council for all of the work they do. Hilary Elias, our Town Clerk is so knowledgeable and efficient and the task of being Chairman has been made so much easier. Nigel Bailey, Deputy Town Clerk, knows so much and so many people and is our expert in getting better deals and grants. Maggie, Emma and Debbie work tirelessly in the office and seem to always be cheerful and helpful in performing their multi-tasking. Barry and Steve our Groundsmen/Handymen keep our playing fields and buildings in great order.

Last, but not least, I must mention our **16 Town Councillors** who give up their time freely to act as your representatives in civic matters. An increase in population will mean we need **19 from May next year**.

Thank you to our four District Councillors, John Amis, Vivienne Bell, Sharon Blundell and Andrew Pond, along with County Councillor Tim East. John, Sharon & Tim are also on the Town Council of course.

Town Councillor Patrick O'Connor



We frequently use this caption so give us call!



We constantly report concerns like this surface water coming from Queen's Hills along Ringland Lane.

Finance Report by the Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer 2017-18

Services to the Community:

Costessey TC provides many local services and owns around 90 acres of open spaces including woodlands, playing fields and parks with play equipment. We provide grit bins, litter bins, dog bins and benches and maintain bus shelters. We are the local Burial Authority and maintain the cemetery in Longwater Lane and the closed churchyard at St Edmund's. We own, maintain and hire out rooms at Breckland Hall, the Owen Barnes Room, the Costessey Centre and West Costessey Hall. We provide substantially more public services and facilities than many surrounding parishes and have nine members of staff, some part-time. Our 16 councillors are unpaid volunteers and do not receive allowances.

Council Income to Pay for Services & Facilities:

Our income is limited and mainly comes from hall & pitch hire, and burial fees. We have reduced the amount we keep of the Parochial Charity's allotment rents in return for help in administering their allotments from 33% to 25%. In general community halls do not cover their costs and our halls are no exception. The shortfall between our income and expenditure is made up by the Precept, the amount collected through Council Tax. This is divided by the tax base (not the number of properties) and is often averaged out and quoted at Band D as a benchmark.

2017-18 Financial Year

This last year has seen the trend for Principal Authorities to try to pass their non-essential services across to Town & Parish Councils. We have successfully fought off Norfolk CC's assumption that our staff (or volunteers) would go to the depot and bring back car loads of grit to distribute amongst our 53 grit bins for use on roads and pavements. However, I suspect that next year they may try and charge us per grit bin filling. South Norfolk have trebled the cost of emptying dog bins and wanted us to take on ownership and maintenance of 226 footway lights. The Town Council also gives grants to support local community groups and organisations, including Dementia cafes, the Royal British Legion, the CAB and Milestone Society for repainting the milestone along Dereham Road. This year we have given £560 to support our community.

I would like to thank all my staff, who work hard to ensure that the accounts are up to the correct standard for the accountant and auditors. Also the grounds staff are extremely versatile and save the Council thousands of pounds in call-out fees through their skills. Their contribution is much appreciated.

2018-19

We do put money aside into earmarked reserves to pay for large one-off projects and unexpected expenditure. Last year's surplus is saved so it can be put to good use in future. Our major projects in the pipeline (for many years to come) are the removal of the Corsican Pine trees and replanting at Greenhills Woods; the cemetery extension at Longwater Lane to include natural burials; the replacement of the skatepark area, which has been vandalised to a point where it is not cost-effective to keep repairing the equipment, plus a list of other projects on our 4-year plan. Our costs for rates, utilities, staffing, hall maintenance, licences and the like continue to rise. In fact our budgeted revenue expenditure has risen by £27,797 (4.84%), while our budgeted revenue income has only risen by £375 (0.27%).

In addition to the precept demand we make to cover the annual shortfall between income and expenditure, we receive an ever-dwindling Precept Support Grant. This goes back to 2013-14 but we have actually lost £52,838 in income over the last 5 years as the grant has reduced, and we know that from 2019-20 there will be no further support grant at all.

Although our tax base has increased with the larger number of houses being built, this does not cover the increased costs and loss of the Precept Support Grant, so we had to raise the Band D tax rate by £2.23 (1.99%) for 2018-19. This equates to 4p per week.

Hilary Elias, Town Clerk

Congratulations!

A combined 100 years volunteer service!



Town Councillors Tim East, John Amis & Reg Piesse

Hats off to these three gentlemen who have given up hours of their own time for the good of our community. Tim is the Media Centre for Costessey, never far away from the National & Local news. John is the man on the ground, out and about all over Costessey keeping an eye on the sites we manage and reporting back on progress by developers. Reg lives 50 metres from the office and is on standby and can be with us in under 5 minutes to sign cheques. He will also deliver a service at our Cemetery for Assisted Burials. There's no doubt that they all represent and serve our community.

BIG THANKS

Thank you so much to the resident of Sunny Grove who kindly donated a projector screen which we will install at Breckland Hall. Last year we installed a 49inch TV screen in both rooms suitable for presentations to a small group, but the three metre wide screen to be situated in Breckland Hall will help with larger audiences if you have a projector. It was a lovely gesture of good will.

We have also installed additional outside lighting and a defibrillator. The stage will be re-painted and deaf loop systems installed.



Above is the Village shop, Stables and Blacksmiths workshop in 1920. Below are pictures from Costessey Mill & Cottages in 1950 with a recent picture during the heat wave.



We fund two Youth Clubs

Youth Services were one of the early cuts made by Norfolk County Council in 2011. Fortunately we had the foresight to step in immediately and pay qualified Youth Workers to provide a weekly term-time provision.

Meeting on alternate Monday evenings either at The Costessey Centre, Longwater Lane or West Costessey Hall at Queen's Hills, both clubs welcome new members and volunteers. Just ring or text Kerry Johnson on 07887 950002 and she'll tell you more.



This picture is from 2012 when Students painted the Parkour equipment at Breckland Park. Ormiston Victory Academy Art Teacher, Mr Wilson (in the white t-shirt) and Vice Principal Mrs Le-Fur recently arranged for students to meet Town Councillors to discuss improvements. Miss Harrison & Mrs Lawson arranged the same at Costessey Junior School for the younger children. We will build on their ideas and have identified some new equipment like a zip wire we hope to bring to the very popular Breckland Park. We endeavour to consult our residents when necessary and the comments help inform our elected Town Councillors.

A selection of 'Then & Now' pictures will be available on our new website Gallery soon

