

## **CTC Chairman's Report to the Annual Town Assembly 2021**

First, I would like to state that it has been an honour and a privilege to serve as the Chairman of Costessey Town Council for the past seven months. I would like to say a word of thanks to the two other people who have filled this role since the last Town Assembly, Sharon Blundell and Terry Laidlaw have both made valuable contributions as Chairman. I'm sure they would also agree with me that a Chairman cannot do their job alone, and the support we have all received from John Amis as Vice Chairman has been invaluable.

We have been fortunate over the past two years to have retained all of our excellent officers, whose competence and dedication have proven essential to the smooth running of this council. The decision to bring the cleaning and caretaking of our halls in-house a year ago means that Maurice has joined our team. We have also recently taken a decision to advertise for a part-time Minutes Secretary.

In attempting to write this report, it became apparent very quickly that the main focus is going to be the ongoing pandemic, its challenges for this council and the community that we represent, and how the council is dealing with those challenges. We were more fortunate than many councils, in that we had already begun to livestream our meetings. After gaining the ability to hold meetings remotely, our first remote council meeting took place via Zoom in May 2020. In common with other councils, we found that there are challenges to holding effective remote meetings, but these have largely been overcome, and the increased levels of public interest and participation are a welcome side-effect. At the time of writing, and subject to an ongoing legal action, it is likely that the council will have no choice but to return to in-person meetings after the 6th May. This will in itself present considerable difficulties if it is to be done safely, and in a manner that inspires confidence from members, officers, and the public.

Aside from the obvious changes to how the council takes decisions, the pandemic saw our community centres closed for much of the past thirteen months, with restrictions on the activities that could take place in them for the rest of the time. Breckland Hall was used for much of the first lockdown as a base from which South Norfolk District Council could store and distribute food parcels to those shielding or isolating. The Costessey Centre was used for storage by a charity making scrubs for the NHS. More recently, both Breckland Hall and Queen's Hills Community Centre have been used as centres for Asymptomatic COVID Testing. Towards the end of last year, the council donated to two projects put forward by councillors, one providing food parcels and the other children's Christmas presents, for families experiencing hardship over the festive season.

There are however other things to report. At the last Town Assembly in 2019, the transfer of street lights from South Norfolk District Council was still ongoing. This has

now happened, the program of replacement for those at the end of their useful life has occurred, and the new, energy efficient LED lights are working well. The program to fell a large quantity of Corsican Pine at Greenhills Woods, optimistically planted as a cash crop by the Forestry Commission, and now mature and at risk of becoming dangerous, is complete. Thanks to the organisation of our volunteer tree warden Pauline Williamson, and the efforts of staff and volunteers, over 1,000 new trees, all native deciduous species, have been planted to replace those trees that were removed.

Work is ongoing to replace and improve the play equipment at Breckland Park, and to begin the planning of a sensory garden area for Queen's Hills. On the subject of Queen's Hills, the negotiations for various councils to take over different areas from the consortium of developers are ongoing, but hopefully heading towards a positive conclusion. In a similar vein, the building of a community centre promised by developers on Lodge Farm should be progressing over the next year. It is a matter of some regret for the council that only the community centre has been offered for us to manage, with the allotments, playing fields, and other public facilities being given to an external management company. Work is progressing on the extension to the cemetery on Longwater Lane, in order that everything is in place in good time to avoid any capacity issues.

The two day fete in 2019 went very well, organised as usual by Gary Blundell. Obviously it was not possible to hold a fete last year, and in January, as the country went into a third lockdown, we took the decision that it would not be possible to hold a fete in 2021. We hope that it will be possible to hold an event in 2022, as the attendance figures and comments show how much this event is valued by the people of Costessey.

Before I finish, I would like to make a special mention of County Councillor Tim East. A faithful servant of Costessey at various levels for 36 years, he is standing down at the elections next week, although he remains a Town Councillor. Whichever of the candidates succeeds him, they will have a hard act to follow.

So, to conclude, it has been a busy and unusual two years for the council. We have managed to cope with the complexities of dealing with a pandemic, the like of which the world had not seen for a century. This will impact on the people of Costessey for many years to come. The Council must work over the coming years to do it's best for all of the people of Costessey, addressing those challenges that we all face and working to enhance the environment in which we live, for the benefit of all of our community.