

Chairman's Report to the Annual Meeting of the Town of Costessey, 19th April 2022

I would like to welcome everyone to the annual Town Meeting, the first to happen in person since May 2019. After the 2019 meeting was cancelled due to COVID, last year's meeting was able to take place remotely, as did the annual meeting of the Town Council.

At that meeting, I was re-elected as Chair of the Council for 2021-2022, and my primary focus as Chair has been to look at the way that the Council works, so that it is able to take better decisions more efficiently, in order to better serve the people of Costessey. I believe that the changes that have been made so far have been positive, but they are still a work in progress. These changes have included setting up a separate Planning Committee, delegating some tasks to committees or to officers rather than requiring the whole council to consider routine decisions, and implementing a monthly timetable for meetings to spread the load on officers and councillors. The government's recent 'Levelling Up' white paper includes a framework by which local councils such as Costessey might (if we wish) take on greater responsibilities, but we will not be able to take advantage of these opportunities to take control of our own destiny if we do not have the systems in place to deal with the workload this creates.

Shortly before the first COVID lockdown in 2020, the Council had decided to begin live streaming full Council meetings, which meant that we were slightly ahead of events as councils moved to meeting virtually. At the end of last year, the Council decided to invest in the proper facilities to allow our full Council and Committee meetings to be live streamed and for members of the public to attend virtually. Although still a work in progress, this project is generally going well.

Over the past year there has been significant progress on a number of projects that the Council has been working on for a long time. We have finally taken ownership of Queen's Hills Community Centre, and are working on the transfer of play parks and other areas from South Norfolk District Council. Negotiations regarding amenity land and a new community facility on The Hampdens are continuing. The Council has made a large investment, some of which was funded by Community Infrastructure Levy or Section 106 payments by developers, into play equipment at Poethlyn Drive on Queen's Hills and Breckland Park. Improvements are also under way to our cemetery on Longwater Lane. We are beginning to develop a detailed plan for the management of the River Tud and surrounding County Wildlife Sites at Gunton Lane. This will be a major project, but gives us the opportunity to protect and improve a much loved and heavily used open space.

The Council has also been addressing the challenges that we are all facing due to current events. We resolved to facilitate the operation of a credit union in Costessey, and negotiations are ongoing. We are still looking in to the possibility of operating a Post Office on Queen's Hills. Looking forward, I believe that the primary focus of the Town Council should be on protecting the well-being of our residents, at a time when there is a cost of living crisis, increased fuel costs, and COVID has still not gone away, even if our government is doing it's best to pretend that it has. The international situation is still uncertain, and I note that some residents who are able to have offered up space in their homes to refugees from the war in

Ukraine. These people have already begun to arrive, and I hope that Costessey will continue to welcome refugees from conflict.

I could not finish this report without discussing one of the most significant changes at the Council that will be occurring shortly. Our Town Clerk, Hilary Elias, will be retiring at the end of next month, after spending nearly twelve years at the Council. She has supported the Council through many large changes and has provided exemplary service to our community. On a personal note, I know I could not have done the role of Chairman over the past eighteen months without her advice and support. We have appointed Stacey Kent as our new Town Clerk, and we look forward to working with her into the future.