

Vice-Chair Report

Annual Town Meeting - Wednesday 12th April 2017

At the public meeting, which we held at the Archbishop Sancroft High School hall, in December 2016; it was decided by the public attending, that they wished for us to seek to keep the car parking in Harleston free at point of use and to form a steering group made up of business owners, residents and the town council to explore avenues to help achieve this ideal.

This steering group was ably led by Councillor John Marjoram with support from Councillors Martin Roberts and Mark Betts. A proposal was put before the Town Council on Wednesday 15th March 2017 to discuss the findings of the steering group and agree any action. The proposition was to approach South Norfolk Council to discuss in principle the possibility of us taking over the responsibility for Harleston's car parks, with no further costs to South Norfolk Council; a cost neutral offer, which is what South Norfolk Council stated they were willing to consider at our public meeting last December. This would also mean that the town council would consider entering into a long-term, low-cost lease of the town's car parks, with full responsibility for their management and maintenance, including any required resurfacing. Furthermore it was proposed that I, as Vice-chair, write to South Norfolk Council to ask for this proposal to be considered. As was reported in the local press, this letter was duly sent on Thursday 16th March 2017. A reply from Councillor John Fuller, leader of South Norfolk Council, was received by myself on Wednesday 29th March 2017, stating that they would get back to us once they have had the chance to consider this proposal.

I believe that an agreement to explore this proposal would be a great opportunity for both South Norfolk Council and our Town Council to play a crucial part in safeguarding and enhancing the economic and social quality of our town and I look forward to discussing this further with South Norfolk Council in the near future. I've lived in Harleston now for nearly 11 years. It's a very special place to live and shop and I want to try my best, as a town councillor and resident, to make sure it stays that way.

I would also like to take this opportunity to state that our leisure facilities are a wonderful hub that bring members of our community together in so many different ways. If you happen to enter our facilities, you will notice the buzz and hive of activities that are on offer for all ages of our community. Our recreation grounds play host to many clubs and we are proud of our association with these organisations. It is also a business of this town and contributes to the economy of Harleston.

Many of you may be wondering why we remain steadfast in our decision to retain ownership of our Leisure facilities. Whilst we place great value on our gym, which after all is a business of this parish, it did not make financial sense to give away the income generating part of our council to South Norfolk Council, to be left with the running and maintenance costs of the building in return. The gym is well placed to produce the income we require in the future to replace the reduction in government grants, which will ultimately end by 2019. We are already expanding our facilities and our ever increasing membership is allowing us to plan ahead in phases, to implement our future strategies to increase revenue even further.

As you can see, we are investing in this social room, which when complete will be a wonderful asset to the community and hopefully be utilised by residents and organisations for many happy occasions in the future. All these measures, of course, will help to negate the need to increase the precept of this parish, keeping our portion of the council tax bill as low as possible. In actual fact, as the Recreation Committee Chair, I am proud to state that current figures showing the membership income of the gym has been summed up for the end of the financial year as approximately £101,000. This not only proves we have a successful community facility but a dedicated, hardworking team running our gym and that is something of which we are all very proud of and bodes well for the future.

Cllr. Frances Bickley – Vice Chair

Redenhall with Harleston Town Council