

Present: Mayor Cllr A Thorp (Chairperson)

Councillors: Mr S Bell, Mr P Darby, Mr C Gunner, Mrs T Jennison, Mrs S Lister, Mrs S Matthews, Mr L Scott, Mrs J Skinner, Mrs P Wade, Mr D Wickerson

Town Clerk: Mr R Bishop
Deputy Town Clerk: Mrs R Noble

Breckland Councillors: Mr F Sharp, Mr I Sherwood
Norfolk County Councillor: Mr P Smyth

Community Speakers: Mrs P Buxton
Ms K Fullilove
Mr S Gregory
Ms C Hill
Mrs H Neale
Mrs S Palmer
Mr C Parsons
Mrs V Scott
Ms T Welham

Public: 21 including the 9 Community Speakers

1. MAYOR'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

1.1. The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Assembly meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1. Cllr G Eves - work commitments.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (for items on the agenda)

3.1. There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN ASSEMBLY HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 24th APRIL 2013

4.1. The Minutes of the Annual Town Assembly meeting held on Wednesday, 24th April 2013 were agreed and signed as a true and accurate record by the Chairman.

5. NEW STRATEGIC STRUCTURE for SWAFFHAM - moving on from 'ASAG' – Cllr Wickerson

"Madam Mayor, fellow Town Councillors, Norfolk County and Breckland Councillors, and distinguished residents of Swaffham – I am indeed honoured to be asked to deliver the Key Note Address at this year's Town Assembly. Considerable experience of attending seminars and conferences during my long business career has taught me that such addressors, if there is such a word, were people of renown, famed for some aspect of their life; political, sporting, entertainment and the like, so not exactly sure how I fit into any of these categories. However, my fee will follow; provided, of course, that there is an appropriate Chart Code Expense in the Council's budget!"

"But back to serious matters and firstly a brief look back at the history. Firstly a personal statement; as many of you present will know, I was previously the Chair of ASAG and as such I made a promise to the Town to work with all our dedicated volunteers, the Icen Partnership, Town Councillors and members of the Town Council staff in order to deliver our 10 year vision for Swaffham. Regrettably due to business commitments I was forced to resign that position before that task was completed."

"It was nearly 5 years ago when we launched Swaffham Town Partnership's (the forerunner of ASAG) Committee Report "Advance Swaffham" to much acclaim and praise, so much so that we were seen as the forerunner in Norfolk in this regard. This was duly recognised by awards from NCC/EDP with first place in their 'Pride in Norfolk' competition and from Actions for Market Towns. Coincidentally I received an email only yesterday from Towns Alive National Awards inviting us to enter their 2014 10th Anniversary competition which will "look back over the last decade to recognise an initiative that has made a demonstrable and ongoing difference in its community, neighbourhood or town in terms of growth of economy, social or environmental benefits". Would Swaffham qualify, I wonder?"

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"A very good question as without doubt some of the original objectives have been met but equally, many remain unaddressed. There are some perfectly rational reasons why after 5 years we are "behind schedule" and again in my opinion, the main factor has been the lack of a professional driving force to motivate and advise our four thematic groups and to provide the required experience in sourcing the necessary external funding to achieve many of these aims. The truth is that strict budgetary limitations have meant that since the departure of our Project Officer, this level of involvement has been sadly missing. Do we need to reconsider the need for such professional input again?"

"So what has happened since? There has been the formation of the Swaffham Business Forum and through that medium a new group was formed, initially known as the "Empty Shops Project" but subsequently expanded to the "Town Regeneration Project" with contributions from the SBF, ASAG, the Icen Partnership and the Town Council. Much work and research has been carried out by members of this Group in an attempt to learn from other market towns how they are faring in today's difficult trading environment; to work with local and national government agencies to put the case for revised planning laws and fairer treatment of business rates to encourage investment in the Town and to ensure that revenue finds its way back to benefit the local community from whence the money originated in the first place.

"A '20/20 Vision' was published by the Business Forum, containing some radical suggestions as to how we view our Town centre. Many of these were justifiably applauded, whilst others were deemed worthy of further consideration and consultation. What the vision did accomplish was to make us look closely at a space which would be the envy of many other towns that would be only too pleased to have such an area as the centrepiece of their community."

"Substantial new housing developments are afoot to the south of the Town and when completed will provide a large increase in our town's population with all of the benefits and challenges that will bring to our infrastructure, from the perspective of transport, schooling and other services, the local economy with related employment opportunities and the environment; exactly the four working group headings we identified some 6 years ago."

"A new supermarket is about to open to the north of the Town. What, if any, will be the impact of yet another major retailer located outside of the main Town centre. Time will tell and whilst a recent article seemed to suggest that such Town centre trade in Sheringham has not been adversely impacted by the arrival of a new store under the same banner, we are not Sheringham and therefore any comparison would need to be very carefully drawn."

"The advent of the Localism Bill aimed at providing more autonomy to local communities who might be brave enough to seek Neighbourhood Plan status. An opportunity that Swaffham should grasp?"

"As a Town we are beneficiaries of Section 106 contributions from developers, both residential and commercial and it is behoven on the Councillors, with input following consultation with other agencies, to spend this money wisely to improve our Town for residents, businesses and visitors alike. Should some of this 'windfall' be devoted to achieving some of the aims and objectives of the original 10 Year Vision? My response is yes, but as always how do we as a town go about reaching our goal?"

"With the above in mind, at a recent Town Council meeting I proposed that following the decision of the Icen Partnership to no longer be 'the lead' on ASAG related matters, we establish two separate Working Groups, but with some overlap in their individual remits, both lead by the Town Council, in order to drive forward the future of Swaffham and to ensure that we capitalise on the opportunities that lie ahead."

"The first initiative would be for a 'Town Team' to be formed consisting of three members from the Town council plus two members from each of the Business Forum and the Icen Partnership, with powers to then co-opt others, whose input and expertise would be welcomed on specific issues. The concept was approved by Council, with three dedicated representatives appointed and following discussions with the other two organisations, both agreed to also provide their two respective members. The first meeting of the Town Team will be held next month, however, you may be asking what exactly a Town team is and what is its purpose?"

"The definition contained in Mary Portas's much published and quoted review is as follows:
Town Teams should focus on making high streets accessible, attractive and safe. They would recognise the uniqueness of their own town based on its history, its communities and its aspirations. They would see the high street as a brand which needs nurturing and communicating. Critically they would inspire and engage with the public and get people visiting high streets again."

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"In addition, armed with a shared vision of the future and shaped by the people who will use their high street, the Town Team could have the power to decide the appropriate mix of shops and services for their area. Anything which doesn't meet the agreed plan simply wouldn't be able to go ahead. They would know for example, that too many of one type of shop might blight the street. The feel and future of their towns will be the responsibility of all, rather than at the sole discretion of a planning executive committee."

"Interesting, with reference to the 'overlap' as mentioned above, that the second paragraph contains verbiage that could also be included in the second recommendation to Council, that we should proceed post haste with fully investigating the benefits and risks associated with Swaffham's own Neighborhood Plan. Several Councillors indicated a wish to be part of this Working Group, which will also meet next month for the first time to formulate a way forward with this endeavor. Based on advice received from another local council who has already gone down this path, there are not insubstantial costs involved with this enterprise and as such your Council has taken a decision to allocate £30,000 from the Section 106 derived from the new supermarket development to provide the necessary funding. However, in September last year, the Government announced a new £7.5 million pot of money to help councils support Neighborhood Plans and we will be exploring this additional source of funding."

"With no apologies for repetition, 'What is a Neighbourhood Plan?' In essence it is a vehicle, that after a fairly long and detailed process, which requires full consultation with the town and through formal voting a majority of local residents to approve, will enable Swaffham to have far greater control of planning issues. There is much detail involved here but in principle a Neighbourhood Plan gives communities the power to:

- make a neighbourhood development plan
- make a neighbourhood development order
- make a Community Right to Build order

"If anyone here this evening would like more definition of these objectives, I have copies to hand providing more detail."

"So, back to the heading given to me by our Town Clerk – 'Moving on from ASAG' – I hope that this paper will assure the residents of Swaffham and other interested parties that is the intention of this Council to ensure that all of the excellent and hard work that went into the original 10 year Plan is not pushed to one side but rather encompassed in the "New Strategic Structure for Swaffham" through the two initiatives outlined. We certainly look forward to the challenge, working the other Breckland market towns and to obtaining the widest possible support from, amongst others, Breckland District Council, Norfolk County Council and Westminster. Thank you."

6. COMMUNITY REPORTS:

6.1. Police Report – by a local PC or PCSO.

No police were present at the meeting.

6.2. Breckland Council – Cllr Shirley Matthews, Cllr Frank Sharpe & Cllr Ian Sherwood.

6.2.1. Cllr Sherwood congratulated Swaffham on how well they had done and thanked the Town Council for what they had achieved and gave a brief mention of Breckland achievements over the past year.

6.2.2. Cllr Sharpe gave the following report:

"The 9th May 2014 is the closing date for the WW1 Heritage Fund grant applications.

"The biggest planning application in Breckland District Council's 40 year history has received outline planning permission; the Thetford Sustainable Urban Extension incorporated the building of 5000 houses, 22.5ha of employment land, local centres, 3 primary schools, playing fields and other infrastructure.

"Capita is continuing to progress the issues and options document for the local plan. Consultation is expected in the autumn. Several pieces of new evidence are being worked on and include strategic housing market assessment, strategic housing land availability assessment and a retail assessment.

"The Local Government Boundary Review - The Boundary Committee published its draft recommendation on 21st January 2014. Breckland Council currently has 54 Councillors the commission recommended that 49 councillors should serve the district in future together with a reduction in the wards of 27 instead of 36. The final recommendation will be published at the end of July and will come into effect next year."

6.3. Norfolk County Council – Cllr Paul Smyth.

"The significant countywide Norfolk County Council projects have been:

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1. The Budget: the previous three-year savings target was £140M and the Council is now implementing a current three-year savings target of £189M. This is a hard task and there may be more to follow, possibly £22M in 2015-2017. It is still too early to see impacts of cuts so let me know if and when they are detected.
2. Incinerator: Norfolk County Council has terminated the contract. The cost of doing so is to be resolved but may be some £30M. One reason for uncertainty is the variation in banking and hedging costs which change daily, for example, £4M-£12M over a twelve-month period. Norfolk County Council will need to look at where to shoulder the burden and what alternatives to the incinerator might exist.
3. Change to a Committee System of Governance (CSG). Norfolk County Council voted in May 2013 in principle and passed the resolution in November to adopt a CSG. This is a busy process; the CSG will provide 85 committee seats and be voted on at Norfolk County Council's AGM on 27th May 2014. Once adopted, a CSG can be modified but not replaced, i.e. by a Cabinet, for five years.

"The main local projects have been:

1. In September a new Flexi-bus service was introduced to over twenty villages to the North of Swaffham, plus a Pentney to Narborough shuttle that links to the X1 bus route. The service has received good feedback so please make use of it.
2. The Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) is recruiting and hoping to return Swaffham to its establishment of twelve fire fighters about now.
3. Road works in Town had mixed results. The Cley Road work was done well but the Town centre project caused problems. Lessons have been learnt and will be applied.
4. An Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was set up between Norfolk County Council and Breckland Council to facilitate Section 106 arrangements as Breckland were the owners of land sold for development.

"In summary of my year, I have been learning the ropes at Norfolk County Council, understanding the landscape and being Chair since December 2013 of the cross-party steering group overseeing the CSG process. My main Norfolk County Council Oversight & Scrutiny Panel engagement is with the NFRS and Norfolk Records Office (NRO) panels, plus the CSG Steering Group. I have spoken with the Principal Archivist at the NRO with reference to the Town's 800th Market anniversary.

"I have had visits to or meetings with the Town Clerk and Norfolk County Council Highways Engineer, the NFRS, Library, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Food Bank, Communities Centre, Campingland Surgery, Icen Care House, Green Britain Centre, Swaffham Regeneration Group, and the Police. A visit to the Nicholas Hamond Academy included a talk to Sixth Formers. I opened a fete in Narborough. I have had articles published in the Swaffham Newsletter, the Carers Agency Partnership and Norfolk County Council's Trusted Trader Scheme.

"I have responded to constituents' enquiries and problems with success, although I have had one failure whereby I tried to get Norfolk County Council to include Beech Close in the winter road gritting plan but did not succeed. I will try again.

"I still need to listen and learn so please say hello and arrange a meeting with me if wanted."

6.4. Icen Partnership – Mrs Pam Buxton.

"Apologies from Don Saunders. It has been a good year building on the successful activities already being sustained and introducing a number of new ones. I'm not going to list all of them but have picked out some which I think indicate the variety of work Icen does.

"We have promoted and been involved with the Swaffham Music Festival and Carnival and the Walking & Cycling Festival.

"The weekly Work Club attracts clients from Dereham, Thetford, Norwich & King's Lynn as well as those from Swaffham seeking employment. We are already talking to the DWP about having the ability for clients to sign-on. New legislation means that those on Job Seekers Allowance can be made to sign-on every day which, as you know, is very costly in travel.

"We have employed a Social Inclusion Worker who has not only worked tirelessly to help integrate the migrant workers into the community but has undertaken CAB training so she can now assist on Monday CAB sessions.

"Sally will be reporting on the Icen Youth Service, something we are very proud of.

"Through the leadership of Icen, working with Age UK, the Alzheimer's Society and other organisations, Swaffham has become a Dementia Friendly Community aiming to inform and to support.

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We purchased the Swaffham Newsletter early this year and Jonathan has been editing it very successfully. I proof-read, which some of you know is something I enjoy!

“We maintain the Assembly Rooms and the Community Centre and are proud of these buildings and what they have achieved. Thank you for listening.”

6.5. Swaffham in Bloom – Cllr Paul Darby.

“Following on from Swaffham's success with our entry in to Swaffham in Bloom last year, plans are well under way for this years entry with high hopes for a Gold Award! This year we will be highlighting the extensive works co-ordinated by Swaffham Town Council, including the Shambles and Church Walk refurbishments, horticultural works in and around the Community Centre and the regeneration of the orchard and allotments at Tumbler Hill.

“The portfolio needs to be completed by 30th June 2014. This is to be coordinated by Jonathan at Icen Partnership, with the judges arriving on Thursday 15th July. Ideally we will need two 'pushes' to maximise our chances of success; a Town Spring-Clean is to be arranged in late May or early June so that we have photographs for the portfolio and then some more in July before judgement day.

“Anglia in Bloom is all about improving your environment, no effort is too small and to impress the judges as much effort that is possible needs to be put in, so encourage your friends and neighbours to help Swaffham go for gold.”

6.6. Swaffham Museum – Chairman of Swaffham Museum, Steve Gregory.

Steve Gregory gave a brief overview of the activities within the Museum over the past year.

6.7. Swaffham Business Forum – Chairman Chris Parsons.

Chris Parsons stated this would be his last report as Chairman of the Business Forum, as his term of office had reached an end. He outlined many initiatives and activities of the Business Forum over the past year not in the least of these is with the help of volunteers putting up the Christmas Lights.

6.8. Swaffham & District Tourism Association – Chairman Vanessa Scott.

“Swaffham & District Tourism Association was formed 26 years ago by Linda Hickey and was chaired for many years by her husband Martin. They ran a bed & breakfast in Sporle.

“The association for many years produced a brochure which many are familiar with and of which 15,000 were printed annually and distributed across Norfolk. This cost of producing the brochure to STA was £5000 per year and it was self financing but was very labour intensive!

“The main promotional vehicle for the association is the website www.aroundswaffham.co.uk which continues to be ranked number one on google for Swaffham searches. The website was commissioned with a CP (control panel) to enable it to be fully editable thereby reducing maintenance costs and keeping the site relevant. There is an events page that members can submit their events on, as many as possible throughout the year, all helping seo. The site features testimonials from well known personalities such as Tim Kinnaird (runner-up in Master chef and local patisserie maker), Stephen Fry, Celia Imrie, Stella Rimington, Dr Pixie McKenna, BBC foreign correspondent Jonathan Charles and the Rt Hon Gillian Shepherd whom the association has liaised with to get great endorsements. The site features 57 links many reciprocal such as the most recent with the village of Foulton as these links are again valuable to our web presence.

“Current average hits per month are 200,000 but most importantly the average visits are 5,000 with page views doubling in the past year to 23,000 which provides evidence that people are staying on the site.

“Membership is £35 per annum which includes a detailed listing on the site with up to 5 images and links to the business' website. It also includes unlimited posting of events on the site which can be submitted by the business themselves and is not reliant on a member of the admin team. Membership also includes a discounted listing on the county's number 1 tourism site www.visitnorfolk.co.uk and also previously on the Brecks Partnership website.

“The dissolved Brecks Partnership offered vital promotion and awareness for STA; its principal aims were to promote the understanding, awareness and enjoyment of the Brecks unique landscape, built environment, wildlife and its historic qualities. The partnership was also key players in the Brecks Food & Drink Festival in and around Swaffham. In an effort to keep the momentum going for the area going, Neil Featherstone the former partnership manager and myself have been working with Countrywide Publications to put together a new Brecks Explorer which will feature information that would have been in the Swaffham leaflet such as

the Food Festival in September. We are grateful to have the support of the museum contributing editorial and ads for the publication alongside Swaffham Tourism Association.

“Visit Norfolk offers strategic marketing of the whole county and works in partnership to create an umbrella brand. It provides an impression that excites people about Norfolk offering ideas to appeal to everyone all year round. With the ex EDP editor Pete Waters as the brand manager we have never been in a better place to achieve the aims of Visit Norfolk and we in the Swaffham/Brecks need to take part in that process. Membership gives STA website, newsletter to businesses, newsletters to consumers, promoting to group travel trade such as Thursford and the highly successful Houghton re-visited last year. Campaigns include Facebook, pay per click and posters in London rail stations; Google remarketing, a retained London PR specialist. STA member College farm was recently featured in the Sunday Mirror Best Farm Stays as a result of the retained journalist. Last week I showed a Sainsbury magazine journalist around Swaffham Saturday Market, Impsons and also Scotts Field Pork at Oxborough. Via VN we also receive industry intelligence via the Larking Gowen business confidence monitor, market research, networking events and are able to participate in promotional films.

“Finally it is worth noting that the biggest challenge to STA is paying to play within VN; STA pays to represent the whole of the Brecklands as the District Council does not deem tourism to be a key economic driver. Against this are the findings in the last Volume and Value survey conducted by Visit England where the Brecks achieved 383,000 stay trips (£55million), 4,004,000 day trips (£121 million) contributing £213 million and supporting 4,500 tourism jobs. By contrast in the same survey the Broads achieved £124 million supporting 2,500 jobs and the Norfolk Coast £184 million supporting 3750 jobs.”

6.9. SCALGA – Chairman Roger Trowel.

No representative from SCALGA was present at the meeting and no prior written report had been received.

6.10. ESCAPE Project & Friends of Swaffham Orchard – Katy Fullilove and Karen Bek

“Family Action’s ESCAPE Project has gone from strength to strength over this last year, with new participants joining and some great achievements. ESCAPE began as an ecotherapy project based at Tumbler Hill allotments, primarily aimed at encouraging people with mental health problems and learning difficulties to get involved in outdoor activities and learn new skills. Since October 2012, the project has been funded by Norfolk County Council’s Living Well in the Community Fund, which aims primarily to promote independence. The project expanded its activities from day-to-day sessions for people of all ages and backgrounds at the community allotments on Tumbler Hill and regular ‘Meet and Eat’ sessions (opportunities for participants to get together and cook produce from the allotments) to helping older people and people with disabilities to make their own gardens more accessible, which has proved popular, and has been both challenging and rewarding for those involved. Although many of the organisational tasks within the project are carried out by staff, the running of it has been made possible by the time, energy and dedication of a committed group of volunteers, so a big thank you goes to all of them. On top of their input in gardens and on the allotments, towards the end of last year, service users and volunteers put together a seasonal recipe book of their favourite dishes, interspersed with photographs and comments from the project. It is hoped that this will help to raise funds for ESCAPE as well as raising the profile of the project. The project’s current funding stream is due to come to an end in July this year, so we are currently making funding applications and attempting to make the project more sustainable; any suggestions of potential funding options would be very welcome!

“On a more positive note, Family Action has managed to secure funding from the Heritage Lottery for a new project, Friends of Swaffham Orchard, which began in January of this year. This project is running from Swaefas Swale, the community orchard off Orford Road Playing Field, and three large polytunnels on allotments at Tumbler Hill. The project will compliment ESCAPE and make use of its existing resource base, including volunteers, tools and community support, to maintain and develop the sites.

“It will focus on conserving heritage varieties, native flora and fauna and teaching traditional skills, which will involve educational workshops on site and elsewhere. We have already pruned all of the apple and pear trees, brought two of the three derelict polytunnels back into use, installed a gravity-fed irrigation system, erected a new shed, set up two bee hives, and have started off lots of seedlings for the coming year. Upcoming workshops include building a cob oven, scything, beekeeping, preserving, herbal remedies and willow weaving; all skills which we hope will enrich the participants, the local environment and the project generally. We have been given permission to sell plants, produce and craft items from the projects, provided that any funds raised go straight back into their running. This has provided service users and volunteers with a new sense of purpose and a focus, and gives us the hope that our projects can eventually become more self-sustaining. We will be selling at local markets this year, as well as to local cafes and restaurants, so do look out for us and support us when you can. We also hope to be able to raise some of the plants for the town’s displays. If you would like more information on Family Action’s community projects,

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please contact Katy Fullilove (katy.fullilove@family-action.org.uk) or Karen Bek (Karen.bek@family-action.org.uk) on 01760 720302.”

6.11. Nicolas Hamond Academy – Cheryl Hill Principle & Trudy Welham Assistant Principal.

Cheryl Hill and Trudy Welham gave a very upbeat report from the Nicholas Hamond Academy, as substantial progress had been made and they were looking ahead with confidence for the future.

6.12. Churches Together – Helen Neale.

“Since last year’s assembly, we held a series of five Lent Talks based on the last eight chapters of St. Luke’s gospel. The talks were held in the Methodist Rooms during the weeks leading up to Easter and were extremely well supported. These were followed by a frugal lunch on each Friday during Lent. A total of £238 was donated to Christian Aid from the frugal lunches.

“Our annual Good Friday witness began in the Parish church, processing to the Buttercross and terminating at the Methodist Church for the final part of the service and for hot cross buns and coffee was well attended.

“An Open Evening was held on 8th May when the speaker was Rev Tim Lawes who gave a most interesting talk about life in Sweden.

“Christian Aid Coordinators, Rev John and Anne Handley, stepped down after a very successful three years and this responsibility is being taken over by Rod and Sue Goodwin of the Baptist Church. A total of £1,955 was raised during the 12 months to May 2013 thanks to the unceasing efforts of John and Anne.

“We were very sorry to say goodbye to Rev Manny Pillay of the Methodist Church in August when he returned to South Africa because of family commitments. Rev Daphne Lloyd is now the Minister at the Methodist Church.

“Refurbishment of the Town Cemetery Chapel was completed and a short service to mark the occasion was held in the chapel on 4th October and a few services have already been held there.

“Heather Nunn from the organisation Christians against Poverty (CAP) came to one of our meetings and told us of plans to open a Debt Centre to cover the mid Norfolk area. This project is being progressed at present.

“The Annual Town Carol Concert was held on 19th December 2013 in the Assembly Rooms. A poetry competition was held and the winning entries were read at the Concert. The concert was extremely well attended and refreshments served afterwards proved to be very popular. A total of £289 was collected and donated to the Swaffham & District Mental Health Association at the Merle Boddy Centre.

“The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was marked by a service which was held in the Parish Church on Sunday 19th January followed by a 30 minutes service in each of the other churches during the following week.

“The last of our annual events to round off the year, was the Women’s World Day of Prayer which, despite the title, welcomes men and children. This had been prepared by the Christian Women of Egypt and was a truly ecumenical and colourful event.

“Finally, the weekly Foodbank Distribution Centre staffed by volunteers from the four churches, is striving to become more accessible and has proven itself to be of tremendous benefit to a number of families & individuals with a few success stories under its belt.

“In closing, we would like to reiterate the invitation to come and join us at any of our events – all are welcome.”

6.13. Youth Development – a report by Youth Worker Sally Palmer.

Sally Palmer gave a brief report regarding Youth work she had carried out in Swaffham over the past year based at the Community Centre, employed for 10 hours each week by Icen Partnership. The various groups were all thriving, there is always room for more volunteers, although DBS checks are essential.

7. SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL REPORTS

7.1. Mayor’s Annual Report & overview of the year –Town Mayor Cllr Anne Thorp.

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"The newest Co-opted Councillor who joined the Council in December 2013 is Cllr Les Scott, following the resignation of Cllr Matthew Edwards. There exists a casual vacancy at the present time with no by-election being called following the recent resignation of Cllr Christine Staines; the Council are now free to co-opt at their next meeting on 14th May. Candidates to write introducing themselves and give the reason why they wish to join the Council.

"The third year of our gritting volunteers has been a rest year, as it was SNOW FREE. We tried our best to re-launch the scheme under the banner of a VOLUNTEER TASK FORCE, with the aim of putting together volunteers that could carry out various other tasks throughout the year, not just during the Winter months. Unfortunately we have not had a good response to date, so we may have to revert back to just our gritting team unless things change dramatically during the remainder of this year. We will again hold a meeting in the Autumn for gritting volunteers to try and encourage them back.

"The third Brecks Food & Drink Festival took place in September last year, again this was a great occasion that brought thousands of people to the Town. Our Traditional Saturday Market, and the Farmers Market all formed part of an exciting weekend.

"The Town Council were then presented with taking over the Farmers Market, as the previous organiser gave just three weeks notice after the Food Festival. The Council took it on for three months, then another three months, now for at least the next year. The number of traders is building up as licences are being put in place. It is hoped to eventually establish a regular Market with 20+ stalls. We currently have 13 licensed traders.

"The Business Forum in their third year continue with their work in the town. They re-established the Christmas Lights in Swaffham as a spectacle for the festive season, by putting up the lights with their volunteers. The Town Council under the guise of the Market Committee (Working Group) took on the 'Christmas Light Switch-On' event and it was a fantastic event for the Town at the beginning of December, something they hope to repeat later this year too!

"The new Tesco store in Castle Acre Road is due to open to the public in the first week of June. Yesterday the building was handed over officially to Tesco from the developer Millngate Ltd. The next five weeks will now see the store fully fitted out and stocked by Tesco themselves.

"Behind the scenes the Council were heavily involved with the Business Forum & ASAG in negotiating with Tesco & Millngate planning obligations to benefit the town. £225,000 is available for community improvements under a strict Section 106 criteria. An early release of £18,000 allowed the Town Council to collaborate with Norfolk County Council in a £26,000 scheme to improve 'The Shambles'; although strictly speaking the money doesn't become available until the store opens in June.

"The 335 home development at the former Redland is being developed by Ben Bailey Homes and Taylor Wimpey (who have 90 of the houses). The construction of a roundabout marked the start of building work on site, and the houses are now rapidly being constructed adding a new dimension to the Town. The Town Council have agreed to take on three small play areas on the site, also the street lighting within the site.

"The Abel Homes development have their 250 home development also in Brandon Road, for which they have outline planning permission. The first stage of the development is going through its detailed planning at the present time and subject to permission being granted building will start in the Autumn. This is located between the Redland site and the Town. The Town Council have agreed a Section 106 commuted sum to take on the three play areas, large open space and an area of biodiversity on the site.

"The £45,000 received from the Norfolk Community Foundation for the Cemetery Chapel refurbishment and modernisation project has been put to good use. Local contractors Evergreen Builders carried out the work throughout the months of July, August and September 2013. With the building officially opened by the Deputy Mayor Cllr Shirley Matthews at a Service conducted by the Churches Together led by Revd John Handley. The building is now used for its original purpose, it has the supply of water and electricity for the first time and has a disabled toilet. All bookings are to be taken at the Town Hall.

"The Swaffham Newsletter has benefitted from the expertise of the previous Editor Ellen Blake for two and a half years. Ellen has now passed on the batten to Icen Partnership and Jonathan Read now Edits the newsletter. Our grateful thanks to Ellen who went back to teaching in December. Well done to Icen for the smooth changeover, almost Formula 1 style. Our team of volunteers deliver to every door in the Town, so thank you Ellen and to each and every volunteer. We still need more volunteers though, so if you know of anyone who may be able to help us, please put your name forward at the Town Hall.

“The Town Clerk has been on Twitter since July 2011 @SwaffhamClerk currently has almost 1,400 followers and the addition of @SwaffhamMarket in 2012 now has 850 followers. Social media gives instant communication with a number of people at the same time. Both Twitter feeds also links instantly to the Town Council website homepage, for those who don't want to engage with Twitter.

“The Town Council played their part in a series of improvement projects based at the Churchyard at the beginning of the year. Norfolk County Council re-surfaced the main stretch of footway through the Churchyard, the Town Council funded the remaining area down to the Church doors and joining up with the main stretch. The PCC funded the removal of three trees and planting of four trees, plus the creation of a car park. There are moves to restore the gates to the Churchyard, so watch this space.

“There is lots going on behind the scenes, as planning applications for two more wind turbines, a solar farm and 55 houses in New Sporle Road find their way through the system. The Town Council also plan to put in an application to develop the former allotments at Days Field, to enable further capital investment back into the Town.”

7.2. 2013-14 Accounts & 2014-15 Budget – Town Clerk Richard Bishop.

The budget this year is the third of a four year financial strategy agreed by the Finance & G.P. Committee back in October 2011. The budget is slightly ahead of schedule due to a second year of receiving the Council Tax Support Grant of £34,668 received from Breckland Council in this financial year. The situation is therefore the same as if there had been no localisation of the Council Tax system. The Town Council actually agreed their budget this year believing that there would be no Council Tax Support Grant.

The budget this year has increased the Precept by approximately 3%; but the year end accounts to 31st March 2014 have just confirmed that the Council have fully replenished their Reserves as they have reached their targets one year ahead of schedule. The purpose has been not only to replenish depleted revenue reserves, but also to prepare for the taking on of certain public services from principal authorities at Breckland and County respectively.

The preparation of the annual budget is always contentious, but like everything else it is all about opinions. The 13 Councillors don't always agree with each other or the Town Clerk; and hard decisions have to be taken. We all have a common interest of wanting to do what is best for the townsfolk of Swaffham, as always we have to plan for that unforeseen expense.

The Town Council are planning for the time in 2015/16 (this time next year) when the Council Tax will pay for the Public Toilets, Play areas and Open Spaces. The Market is an important asset to the Town (800 years old in 2015), as this income cannot be taken for granted, we have to look after this so that our share of the Council Tax is reduced.

The Budget is presented in a similar format to previous years with just a few minor changes. With the former Capital Projects Cost Centre now split into two new centres of Un-earmarked and Earmarked Capital Reserves, and the Asset Maintenance Fund replaced by Earmarked Revenue Reserves. It is hoped that these changes to Cost Centres address the clarity of where these funds are held, although this will be taken a step further very soon as these will relate to Bank accounts where appropriate.

The Council Tax payer in Swaffham at Band D last year paid a total of £1,544.25 this was shared out as follows:

£1,145.07 County Council
£69.05 Breckland Council
£200.79 Police
£129.36 Swaffham Town Council

The money raised by the £129.36 was £268,005 which the Town Council then use for their expenditure. This sum of money is called the Council Precept. For 2014-15 next year the budget has made an increase of £8,045 which will give the Town Council £276,050 which will mean at Band D the Council Tax will go up by £3.31 to £129.36 taking into account the new Council Tax base of 2080.65. The increase of £3.31 per year is just 6p per week, Swaffham Town Council do their best to provide value for money for the services provided.

There is of course concern regarding the fact that Swaffham has the second highest Band D rate in Breckland and certainly in the top ten in Norfolk. However, throughout the Country Swaffham is not in the top 100 Parish & Town Councils.

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It has been a difficult time this past five years, but now the Council are in the healthiest state they have been in for the life of at least two Councils. The prospect for the year ahead is good too, providing expected income holds up from our Market in particular, so that the current Council can leave office next May in the knowledge that the Reserves deficit is now a thing of the past. It does not mean that the purse strings will be loosened or that the Council has money to fritter away, because the Council are taking on more services locally which will all cost money.

In years to come the money that the Council generates in income will become even more important, as we seek to reduce the burden to the Council Tax payer and always as a minimum give value for money.

SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2013/14

The Income & Expenditure accounts for the audited accounts at year ending 31st March 2014 are as follows:

INCOME	DETAILS	EXPENSES
1,045	Bank Interest	0
268,005	Precept	0
0	Un-earmarked Capital Reserves	6,013
4,387	Earmarked Capital Reserves	84,478
0	Earmarked Revenue Reserves	608
10,544	Town Hall	22,723
34,752	Administration & Misc.	125,500
36,105	Market	18,666
0	Northwell Pool	660
0	Youth Forum	0
6,157	Allotments	7,147
8	Toilets & TIC	28,299
16,867	Cemetery & Churchyard	19,685
220	Open Spaces	22,158
28,563	Amenities & Agency	45,831
650	Recreation Ground	8,956
407,303	TOTAL	390,725

The accounts will be presented to the Full Council Finance meeting on 21st May 2014. Copies of the end of year accounts are available on request at the Town Hall.

8. OPEN SESSION – including correspondence received and any questions from the floor

8.1. No correspondence had been received and there were no questions from the floor.

9. MAYOR to close the meeting at the end of the Open Session

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and expressed her gratitude to those who had given a report and stated what a lovely town Swaffham is.

Meeting closed at 8.50pm

Mayor.....