

**Mayor's overview of the year 2018-19** – a report by the Mayor Cllr Colin Houghton given to the Annual Town Assembly on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019 picked out the following:-

**Forthcoming Elections** - next Thursday 2nd May will bring an end to a 4-year term. 4 years which has seen just one resignation from Steve Allen, who was replaced by former Deputy Mayor Stewart Bell last year following a co-option. There has been interest in standing for Council, with 21 candidates up for the 13 seats on the Town Council. 4 Councillors are not standing for re-election, Cllrs Brenda Bowler and Jan Buckley-Stevens have served for 4 years, both Anne Thorp and Terry Jennison have served for much longer and both have served the town as Mayor. There are Breckland Council elections too, with 6 candidates standing for the 3 seats in the Swaffham Ward. With Cllr Shirley Matthews standing down after serving more than 20 years as a Breckland Councillor. We thank them all for their service to this town.

**Neighbourhood Plan** - we have our referendum on Election Day too, so we encourage you all to vote at the referendum. If enough votes are secured, then the Plan will earn the same status as Breckland Local Plan, when determining planning applications for the development of the town. We must pay tribute to our willing band of volunteers working alongside Councillors, Staff and Rachel Leggett and her team of experts. It has been a labour of love at times, and a lot of hard work getting a credible document that can be used for the next 20 years - our grateful thanks to all, but especially Rachel who has steered the Steering Group through to the end.

**Events** - the Town Council have been involved in the past year with the re-launch of a Sheep Fair in May, a spectacular visit of the Grenadier Guards Band in June (in conjunction with the RB Legion), a Vintage Car Event and Funday on the Rec, a Dad's Army Day at the Market, the town rising to the occasion with fantastic Poppy Displays all around the town with the Market Cross as a focal point in the Town Centre, and of course the Christmas Lights Switch-on and Christmas Market in December.

**Market** - 4 years ago we were also part of the 800-year celebrations for Swaffham Market. The Market has slowly but steadily had an upturn in the past 12 months. The Auction is as popular as ever. There is a good selection of stalls, always with room for more. We have 10 new market stalls purchased in conjunction with Watton Town Council, following a successful joint grant application. This project is due to launch very soon, and we hope can take our Market onwards and upwards to the next level.

**Twinning** - our twinning partnership with Couhe in France and Hemmoor in Germany reached its 50-year milestone back in September 2018. The Mayor led a contingent from the town to Couhe, and a new twinning charter was signed, after working on a modification to bring the partnership pledge up to date and hopefully to stand the test of time for the next 50 years. The world has changed immeasurably in the past 50 years, and yet the friendships remain strong between the three towns, who celebrate their different cultures and their similarities.

**Watton and Swaffham Focus Group** - continue to meet bi-monthly and this liaison is starting to pay off dividends, with the appointment of Sue Dent our Project Support Officer last June, working across the two towns 18.5 hrs each week in Watton and in Swaffham. Already Sue has brought in grants in excess of her annual salary and has raised the profile of the town in many mediums, promotion is on-going, event organisation is building, and the building blocks are being laid for a solid foundation for the future in both towns. There is so much more to do though...

**Days Field** - was previously up for sale for 18 months or so, it is currently off the market. The Town Council narrowed down their options to a straight sale, a partnership arrangement or to borrow £6 million to build out the site. Each option has different merits and potential benefits to the town, as the Council would like to retain some of the housing to rent in the private sector as an income generator. There was a Public meeting that started to debate some of the complex issues surrounding this potential project. It was then decided by the Council to defer a final decision to the new Council following the elections in May, likely to

be around July 2019. It remains a potential windfall for the town. The Town Council are currently going through a re-application process for outline planning permission for 51 dwellings, this is in order to protect their investment in the site, whichever option is finally chosen to take the project forward.

**Town Centre Project** - the Buttercross has been refurbished, with a lot of the stonework being replaced and the columns have been repaired and repainted. The electrics have been brought up to date, with a power supply to the Buttercross, lit bollards surrounding the Buttercross and lights underneath the dome. Some of the cobbles have been flattened out or repaired, there are now power points for Market traders to plug into, there are two electric car charging points and 6 new street lights. The most controversial issue for this project was a brick built UKPN power supply cabinet, to power all of the electrics and two car park ticket machines for Breckland Council. It was something that was required by UK Power Network and our Town Team have come up with a way of disguising it, by moving some of the display panels to three sides of the structure and removing the triangular boards which are also close to the Buttercross. This work should be completed some time in May or early June.

**Flags and Flag Poles** – another new initiative this year, was to purchase 100 flags and flag poles, a combination of Union Jacks, St. George's Cross and Norfolk Flags were put up around the Town. The Council will be repeating this from 1<sup>st</sup> May through to the end of September this year + ad-hoc days/events.

**Air Quality** – we are still awaiting DEFRA's response to the Air Quality Action Plan prepared by a Steering Group including representatives from Norfolk County Council, Breckland Council and Swaffham Town Council. Some of the proposed actions we hope can be taken forward in the years to come, as we try and address this very serious issue, mainly in Station Street, but in the area from the traffic lights to the mini-roundabout on the A1065 too!

**Network Improvement Strategy** – we have had an interim report; we await a more detailed report. This carries on from the work that was started last year with Norfolk County Council. Swaffham was one of five towns receiving £20,000 to get their strategy completed. The idea being to provide baseline data to support the case for improvements to mitigate and complement the development of the town. The key to the next stage is to get money allocated in order to get some of the improvements implemented.

**Breckland Local Plan** – is almost there, we hope to have a fully adopted plan later this year.

**Swaffham Newsletter** – remains a good source of information, and we are grateful to Iceni Partnership for their commitment to keeping a high standard community newsletter coming through our doors. Grateful too to our willing team of volunteer deliverers who deliver to every door in the Town. There is always room for more volunteers, as we would like to reduce the burden on our current band of volunteers, even if it is to cover for their holidays now and again. If you would like to help, we would like to hear from you.

**Leisure Centre Feasibility Study** – we were invited with other stakeholders to a meeting with the consultants at the start of this process back in February. The brief is to carry out this feasibility study for a dry facility to enhance or replace the current Leisure Centre at Hammonds Academy site. The results of the study are currently awaited, as Breckland have a meeting with the consultants later this week and the final report is expected in mid-May, just after the Local Council elections.

**Any Other Business** – there is of course so much that we could have mentioned in this report, things that are dealt with day to day, and by the Council at every Council or Committee meeting. Not in the least of these in recent months has been dealing with a traveller incursion at the Orford Road Playing Field and the subsequent clear-up operation. There is often issues in need of our attention, to that aim there is a public open forum at every Council meeting of 15 minutes where you can 'have your say' and address the Council.

**Cllr Colin Houghton, Mayor of Swaffham**