



LOCUM CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

FULL COUNCIL MEETING (FC2/35)

9th JULY 2024

Cheshire West & Chester have scheduled in essential roof repairs for Neston Town Hall which are due to start at the end of this month. Scaffolding will first be erected around the perimeter of the building and the improvement works will commence in August. Myself, and the Market & Town Hall Manager have been liaising with both CWAC and Qwest/Equans to ensure that the scaffolding and any associated works can be completed, utilising the Market Square for access only, when required whilst being mindful of the weight restrictions, to protect this asset and ensure ongoing safety for the public. The Town Council has been experiencing recurring issues with roof leaks which have been awaiting repair across several financial years. Fortunately, recent confirmation of the roof repairs has come at a good time when the work can mainly be completed during the summer months. It has been estimated that the work will take up to ten weeks, naturally, this is subject to change dependent upon how the weather holds and if further, more involved work is required once the programme of works has commenced.

I have met with both the Project Manager and the Site Manager who conducted a second walkabout inspection of the building on 25th June, following our meeting. The Town Hall basement will be utilised by the builders for their breakout room and an area will be prepared for them by the Council's Caretaker & Market Officer. The Site Manager will hold a set of keys and monitor access and security for the duration of the works.

Policy renewal has continued following the Annual Council meeting and further revised and updated policies will be put before Full Council on 9th July for comment and approval. Three policies which sit under the Community & Environment Committee have been reviewed, including the Community Engagement Policy and the Planning Protocol. HR Committee will also determine two policies which fall under its remit.

Unfortunately, one of our Town Councillors resigned from office week commencing 24th June, leaving us with six vacancies. Thank you for your diligent work, Cllr Edwards; Neston Town Council sends you good wishes for your future endeavours. The administration side of this was put into place later that week, once the democratic team at Cheshire West & Chester Council had been notified. Adverts have also been scheduled to re-advertise the Town Council's other current vacancies following the Annual Meeting in the hope that Neston Town Council can soon co-opt some new councillors. Despite the advertisements and Press Releases, there has been little interest in the vacancies. The item will feature on this month's agenda in the hope that some

last-minute candidates come forward to volunteer. Myself and the team have been working on a visual advertising campaign to showcase the vacancies and use them as a talking point for the Council stall at the Neston Village Fair to help with our recruitment drive.

Neston Town Council's social media presence has been going from strength to strength over the past two months and the Town Council's following is growing daily. We also now have a presence on the CH64 group to share Council issues and keep apprised of local issues and concerns. I held a Social Media Strategy meeting with the team at the end of June where we explored our plans, shared ideas, gathered inspiration from other Councils and investigated scheduling from a central point.

Sadly, Neston Town Hall lost Little Actors from the front office at the Town Hall in June. Their presence is much-missed and we send our best wishes to the group for their summer show and ongoing projects. The group is still utilising the Town Hall for weekly drama sessions. This loss of income will inevitably create a shortfall in the 2024/25 coffers. I attended an online meeting at the beginning of June with CWAC Property Services team and representatives from the Post Office. We explored the best way to safeguard this important service for Neston as the Post Office is now in its second year in the Upper Community Office of Sainsbury's carpark (every Tuesday and Friday). I am in regular contact with Property Services as they progress the Asset Management Agreement updates and our request for updated office rental costs across the whole asset.

Administration, and its many intricacies, does occupy a large proportion of officer time, from agenda preparation, research and implementation, to Valuation Office paperwork to ensure the Town Hall and Market is correctly rated for non-domestic rates. Neston Town Council staff pride themselves on delivering accurate work to a high standard, whilst maintaining our internal systems and controls. Myself and the Mayor of Neston meet on a fortnightly basis to keep up to speed on progress and ongoing work/issues across the organisation. I am pleased to report that all Council laptops have now been fitted with the same encryption software as the PCs in the offices. This means that if any NTC laptop were to be stolen then the encryption would warrant the devices completely useless to any individual outside of the organisation, ensuring the Town Council's data is always safe and secure.

In the background, work has been ongoing to revise and update the job description and role of the Town Council's newest position, which was fulfilled in 2023. This has involved meetings between myself and the Community & Environment Manager. It is hoped that the revisions now reflect a much more accurate representation of how this role is working out, as well as the increased benefits to Neston Town Council.

Neston enjoyed a well-attended and effervescent Ladies Day on 6th June. The Mayor of Neston welcomed the Lord Mayor of Chester, Cllr Razia Daniels, to

the event to showcase and celebrate the town's 210th walk. A great networking opportunity for Neston. This particularly Thursday coincided with D-Day 80, for a beautifully prepared evening service at the Parish Church of St Mary and St Helen. Town Council representation was strong at both of these events and the deputy Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, Robert Davis Esq, was in attendance to undertake a reading. The church service featured the Neston Branch of the Royal British Legion, the Neston Scouts group and representatives from local organisations and services. The church bells rang out for peace at 6.30pm following the service, along with the rest of the UK to mark the momentous anniversary. Congratulations to the Town Council's Administration Assistant for organising and co-ordinating this event.

We now approach the summer recess; as well as some planned annual leave, staff will continue working on some of the many projects which often have to take a back seat during the busy meeting schedule. We look forward to the summer pirate-themed market on 26th July 2024 – once the schools have broken up. I have seen the preparations for this event and it is going to be a fabulous day for our younger visitors to the market and traders alike.

Zoë Dean
Locum Chief Officer
Neston Town Council
4th July 2024