

Bury St Edmunds Town Council Annual Report 2009



18 – 19 Guildhall Street, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 1QD

(01284 725111 * info@burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk & www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk

If you require this in an alternative format please contact us.

Chairman's introduction



**Councillor David Nettleton
Chairman**

Although I've been away from the town council for only two years, it was immediately obvious on my recent return how much better and more efficient everything seemed. Credit for this must go to everyone involved but I must thank my predecessors as Chairman, Richard Rout and Roy Bebbington, and Councillors and members of staff who have been doing their best during those years.

The decision to commission the Suffolk Association of Local Council (SALC) to conduct a wide-ranging review of all the council's activities marked the start of the revival in fortunes. In the previous year Shona Bendix of SALC and the review team correctly analysed the deficiencies in the way the town council operated and made recommendations as how to improve all aspects of our work. This past year has seen the

implementation of the review. In particular, the staffing structure was adjusted and we are now served by an excellent team of three officers, John Saunders, Sue Hindry and Paula Gladwell.

The past is behind us and there is no time to dwell on it. We need to focus all our attention on the future development of the council's role in serving the people of Bury St Edmunds.

Being a 'voice' of the people is a function of a good town council and has few cost implications. However, if we are to widen the scope of the service provided to the community, the financial realities need to be faced by all of us. Town and parish councils don't receive government grants so any expansion would need to be funded by the local taxpayers.

At present, the council manages allotments and maintains two of the Town's war memorials, gives financial backing to Bury In Bloom, Christmas lights and Town Centre Management. If we are to do more, your support is vital as you will be paying for it. Any changes contemplated by Council will involve consulting the people of Bury St Edmunds – we would not wish to swim

against the tide of public opinion.

So, 2009/2010 will be a challenging and interesting year for us all, a year in which we will strive to move forward, to be better and extend our services. We will keep you informed and in return I hope that you will take time to read this report and our newsletters, visit our website and attend our meetings if you wish. Moving forwards together will ensure that you have a Town Council in which you can have confidence. Thank you.

David Nettleton
(Risbygate Ward)



**Coat of Arms of
Bury St Edmunds
Town Council**

Last year, month by month

Starting in May 2008, it was a time when Council continued its implementation of the peer review which led to reshaping the staffing and direction of the Town Council.

May was also the time of the Annual Meeting of the Town Council at which Cllr Richard Rout was elected Chairman for the year and changes in Councillors serving on Committees and being representatives on various bodies.

The Council received its internal audit in June. The Town Council's first Official Guide and Map was published, being free to those who wanted a copy. Council supported the town's Special Licensing Policy.

In July election of a Councillor for Westgate Ward took place. Council was consulted on potential local government changes and made clear its support of a West Suffolk unitary council.

While August proved a quieter month for meetings, the various service requirements remained, for example consultation on planning and licensing applications.

September saw the arrival of two new part-time members of staff – John Saunders and Paula Gladwell, to support the third member Sue Hindry.

October was a time of creating many new policies and putting in place the Council's business plan and new website initiatives.

November was the month when all the hard work in preparing for

Christmas was demonstrated by a magnificent display of lights and the switch-on event. This showed how well the Town Council and its partner organisations work together. The town's nativity sculpture was again displayed on the Angel Hill. The Chairman represented the Council at wreath-laying services to commemorate those who gave their lives for the Country.



It was the month when budget preparations began in earnest.

The decision in December was that the Council's precept should not increase and in fact a marginal decrease occurred.

Considerable additional information was by now being included on the Town Council's website to provide details of our services and updates of events. This saw the first of our monthly topics aimed at explaining in depth specific subjects.

Adverse weather in January highlighted the need for improvement in the provision of grit bins, a matter that will be resolved as a result of public consultation.

February's window display featured Suffolk's Healthy Ambitions campaign. The display is changed each month to reflect a community theme or local event.



In March the Town Council opened its offices to the townspeople with Councillors and staff providing information and answering questions. The occasion was shared with Radio West Suffolk, the Safer Neighbourhood Team and West Suffolk College – organisations that exemplified the theme of communication, education and safety.

Having listened to allotment holders concerns about the decision to serve notices to quit on tenants who were not residents of the town, Council reconsidered its decision and withdrew the notices in April. It was also the time that allotment holders were reminded of the need to cultivate their plots and not to let them appear as below:



And so, the Town Council's year came to an end. As a new year begins fresh thoughts and ideas lay ahead, a new Chairman is appointed and faces change on Committees. The cycle begins again but the year ahead promises to be different.

Why do you need lots of staff?

It's a question often asked of John Saunders who took up appointment as Town Clerk in September 2008. Often those asking the question do not understand what the Town Council does and make assumptions that it is a big organisation with different departments based in a large building. As John explains, "Last year was particularly difficult because the new structure meant that Sue Hindry was acting Town Clerk for over five months and was the only member of staff at the Council. She alone juggled the different demands – arranging and clerking meetings, keeping the finances in order, coping with the various services. All this was testament to her ability and she did an excellent job in keeping day to day life going."

Some relief came in September 2008 when the restructuring took effect and John was appointed Town Clerk to work three days each week, supported by Paula Gladwell as administration assistant working 4 hours per day. But the work of the Town Council was something quite new to them and Sue was not only required to take on her new role of Assistant Town Clerk/ Responsible Financial Officer but to ensure that not too many clangers were dropped by John and Paula.

Lots of changes have occurred – members of staff have been busy carrying out Council's requirements, tackling new areas of work and policy and of course dealing with the needs of auditors, allotment holders, callers and others. John continues, "Every day the job brings something new and it will need the full year before we

settle into the cycle of what has to be done – having never previously been a Clerk I am still on that steep learning curve. All I can promise is that we will give our best – yes, mistakes will sometimes occur but we will always try to get it right, apologise when it's wrong and learn from experience."

Perhaps the greatest change has been the desire to be more accessible and provide information although John and the staff would wish this to be even better. "When I came here the blinds were kept closed and we were somewhat remote. The great shame is that with few staff we cannot provide a fully accessible public service – often the one person on duty cannot deal with callers at the door because he/she is on the phone or out of the office. So it is essential that we make our information available via the notice boards, website and events and respond to people face to face when we can."

So, the brief answer to the beginning question is, "As we only have three staff we cannot guarantee to always be available when you call or need us but we do hope that you will receive information or assistance within the quickest possible time."

Town Councillors in the community

It is often overlooked that Town Councillors are unpaid and they do not receive expenses. They work hard to represent the views of the community and they serve in many different partnerships to ensure the town's best interests. Some examples of

the groups Councillors are part of are:

- Bury In Bloom Committee
- Cattle Market Impact Strategy Management Group
- Christmas Fayre Working Group
- Greene King Tenants' Association
- Guildhall Feoffment Trust
- Safer Neighbourhood Team Tasking Groups
- Suffolk Association of Local Councils
- West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership

You said, we did

In 2008 Council introduced its policy for dealing with compliments, suggestions and complaints. We regularly publish details of these on our website but more importantly we use your feedback to review and develop our services, so please do make your feelings known.

You said, "May I take this opportunity firstly to thank you for letting last night's public forum overrun. I feel that all the allotment holders felt that they had their say. I'm sure that allowing the forum to overrun is not a regular occurrence and I appreciated your patience and professionalism in what must have been an uncomfortable experience at times. Secondly, and I'm sure that I speak on behalf of all the allotment holders at the meeting, to thank you for your sympathetic approach and rescinding your decision of the existing allotment holders who live outside Bury St Edmunds. Hopefully we can all move forward on a more positive footing."

You said, "I couldn't hear everything that was said at the meeting because I cannot hear properly."

We explained, We are grateful to you for raising this as an issue. Unfortunately there are limitations with our present premises and we try to enable people to be in the best positions where they can follow what is being said. We recently tried to acquire a loop system but were unsuccessful. It is one of a number of improvements that we would hope to bring when we move to new premises.

You said, "Thank you for the papers. I am just about to do my report for the next committee meeting so the timing was perfect. The Open Day was a very good idea. It is important to offer these opportunities, and the displays were well presented. I reckon that the Unitary Authority deliberations emphasise the need for a healthy Town Council ready to develop new roles as may be required at short notice."

You said, "The Committee were grateful to the Bury St Edmunds Town Council for setting up this scope for potential future collaboration."

Our comment, We recognize the importance of strengthening our partnerships."

In relation to a planning application considered by the Planning and Licensing Committee *you said, "Many thanks for your prompt attention, it is much appreciated. Please pass also on my thanks to your committee members for their immediate attention."*

You said, "I write from Italy and take the liberty to apply to you as I am interested in studying

civic heraldry and sphragistics, and presently I improve studies concerning coats of arms and seals of Northern European cities and towns," and requested details regarding the Town Council's Coat of Arms. We sent a lengthy response

You said, "I wish to thank you so much for your kind message which will be of great assistance to my research."

Our Service Standards

In 2008 we introduced Service Standards to show our commitment to meeting the needs and expectations of those using our services. So how did we do against our performance targets?

- 96% of telephone messages received a response before the end of the next working day (*our target was 95%*)
- 100% of requests for an appointment were met within 5 working (*our target was 98%*)
- 90% of written correspondence was acknowledged within 3 working days (*our target was 95%*). *Part-time working created difficulties in responding but all correspondence was acknowledged or finalised within 10 working days)*
- 97% of individual public queries considered by the Town Council were advised of the outcome within 7 working days of the decision (*our target was 95%*)

- 100% compliance where requests under the Freedom of Information legislation were received (*our target was 100%*)
- 100% of agendas of public meetings were displayed 3 or more days before the meeting (*our target was 100%*)
- 100% of requests for minutes of public meetings were met within 3 working days (*our target was 95%*)
- 100% of allotment plots were let or in the process of being let (*our target was 98%*)
- We undertook to deal with 95% of complaints received within prescribed time limits but none were received.

How to contact us

All Town Councillors can be contacted via the telephone numbers shown below their photographs (dial 01284 before the number shown if the number does not relate to a mobile phone). They can also be reached by e-mail and some have additional mobile or business telephone numbers as shown on www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk. The website also gives details of the members of staff and how they can be contacted.



Town Council's offices in Guildhall Street

Your Councillors



Cllr Roy Bebbington
Moreton Hall Ward
706981



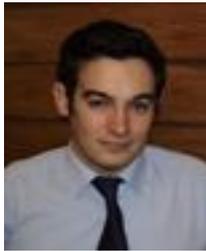
Cllr Keith Bird
Westgate Ward
763689



Cllr Patrick Chung
Minden Ward
7 61120



Cllr Bob Cockle
St Olaves Ward
756249



Cllr James Dinsdale
Westgate Ward
07940 536269



Cllr Paul Farmer
Abbeygate Ward
768777



Cllr Allan Jones
Southgate Ward
756415



Cllr Allen Lloyd
Southgate Ward
756415



Cllr Edward Lockwood
Northgate Ward
706198

No image available
Cllr Mrs Michele Lockwood
St Olaves Ward
706198



Cllr Stefan Oliver
Eastgate Ward
706172



Cllr Richard Rout
Abbeygate Ward
767494



Cllr Paul Simner
Risbygate Ward
768202



Cllr Clive Springett
Moreton Hall Ward
753120



Cllr Mrs P Warby
Moreton Hall Ward
704138



Cllr Kevin Waterson
Minden Ward
764804

Explaining the financial position

The chart illustrates key areas of Council's income and expenditure, indicating the position at 31 March for the years 2008 and 2009:

| | Year ended 31 March | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| | 2008 | 2009 |
| Annual Precept | £185,186 | £188,320 |
| Total other receipts | £32,407 | £29,632 |
| Staff costs | £112,563 | £83,916 |
| Loan interest/Capital repayments | £0 | £0 |
| Total other payments | £142,907 | £102,594 |
| Balances carried forward | £36,843 | £68,285 |
| Total Cash & Investments | £36,702 | £89,858 |
| Total Fixed Assets | £101,247 | £97,664 |
| Total Borrowings | £0 | £0 |

Where our money comes from

The balance held at the end of the financial year which ended on 31 March 2009 of £68,285 (our reserves) shows an increase largely attributable to restructuring.

The annual precept is income raised solely through the payment of council tax by people who are resident in Bury St Edmunds which is collected on our behalf by the Borough Council. For the financial year 2008/09 this represented £13.84 per Band D council tax payer.

The majority of other receipts in the financial year which ended on 31 March 2009 include £19,725 donations to Christmas lights and £5,637 from allotments rents.

Council's fixed assets are recorded in a register. The reduced value at the end of the financial year which ended on 31 March 2009 is the result of the sale of a litter collection bin and the removal of a number of smaller value items.

How the money is spent

The staff costs for the financial year which ended on 31 March 2009 include £1,597 on training and £1,470 on recruitment advertising for a Town Clerk and Administration Assistant.

Total other payments include £5,789 election costs, £25,000 rent, £8,547 business rates, £5,198 insurance, £2,570 audit fees/costs, £2,740 electricity, £1,604 cleaning, £4,661 computer maintenance and phones, £2,008 allotments maintenance and water, £1,990 litter bin emptying, £2109 subscription to the Suffolk Association of Local Councils, £1265 professional fees in connection with the Peer Review action plan, £15,000 on Christmas lights and £3,000 donation to Bury In Bloom.

Some examples of savings and efficiencies achieved during the year include:

- New staffing structure £28,647
- Review of the cleaning contract £612 per year
- Review of the trade waste contract £80 per year
- New contract for the photocopier £160 per year
- Electronic distribution of agendas, minutes, the TownTalk Newsletter (to external bodies) has achieved efficiency gains and saved an estimated £250 costs of hard-copy production and postage
- Review of the fire alarm contract £500 per year
- Purchase of postage stamps in advance of a price increase £12