

Annual Town and Parish Council Conference

Notes of a Meeting of Annual Town and Parish Council Conference held at
Cromer Parish Hall on 11 November 2009

Present: As per Appendix A

Apologies: As per Appendix B

Cllr Virginia Gay, Leader of the Council welcomed Parish and Town Councillors to the Annual Conference.

1. Member Champion – Parish and Town Council

Cllr Gloria Lisher has taken on the role as the member champion for parish and town councils. This is a new evolving role which is as a direct result of requests by parish and town councils at the last Annual Conference. The Council is unable to provide an officer to fulfil the liaison role but the member champion will act as a contact point and champion the parish and town council role.

Gloria Lisher asked councillors what they thought could be done to improve relationships between NNDC and themselves. David Spencer, Antingham Parish Council PC questioned whether this meant that District Councillors became redundant in their role. It was hoped that this would be a complementary role and would not duplicate the work of District Councillors.

Norman Burton, Trunch Parish Council stated that it was impossible to see an officer at NNDC unless you had access to a vehicle. Some councillors like to deal with officers face to face and this should be taken into consideration. Gloria Lisher stated that she would be very willing to meet up with councillors in their own area.

It was considered useful for Parish Clerks to be provided with a telephone list, updated annually, of NNDC officer contact details. All contact details of officers are included within the information pack.

Harry Bruford, Bodham Parish Council suggested that in future a microphone was necessary for speakers and a roving mic for questions.

2. **Area Forum Feedback**

Maureen Clarke, Supporting Communities Manager stated that there had been poor attendance at the last round of Area Forum meetings. Future options were being considered such as to continue as last year, reduce the forums, open up invitations, etc.

Aubrey Pobereksy, Corpusty Parish Council was frustrated by the breakdown of Parish Councillors to District Councillors attending the meetings. He was concerned that District Councillors were not listening to Parish Councils and suggested that if a District Councillor was not able to get to a Parish Council meeting that they put together a newsletter to update the Parish Council on what is happening.

Tim Lister Scott, Wood Norton Parish Council stated that their District Councillor attended every meeting and they were able to go back to him with any issues.

Alan Young, Knapton Parish Council stated that many District Councillors were twin hatters which meant that they did not have sufficient time for Parish Councils. He considered that it was important that District Councillors made a point of attending all Parish Council meetings.

Harold Prior, Sheringham Town Council suggested that the District Council should be investigating when is the best time to hold meetings as there were too many clashes.

Maureen Clarke stated that the District Council needed information on what works best for Parish Councils in terms of the Area Forum, what do they want to get from these and who should be invited. Parish Councils would be contacted to gather this information.

John Rampling, Aylmerton Parish Council stated that the disappointing attendance suggests that something is wrong with the format. Many Parish Councils consider this to be a talking shop and would find it more useful to agree some objectives to demonstrate what has been achieved by the Area Forums and what it could achieve.

3. **The Recession**

Robin Smith, Economic and Tourism Development Manager reported on what action the Council had taken to lessen the impact of the recession and circulated a copy of the Council's Action Plan.

In answer to a question about what actions will NNDC be taking when the recovery comes, Robin Smith explained that the Council was in a position to provide strategic support through the Business Forum and the North Norfolk Community Partnership. The Council's Cabinet had agreed to set aside £45,000 for a fighting fund, which will be match funded from the North Norfolk Community Partnership. The key issues which will be delivered in partnership have been derived from the economic summit held in April 2009 together with wide consultation across the district.

David Russell, Sea Palling Parish Council questioned why the Council was not able to deliver its priority of affordable housing. The Council's commitment to this priority was unquestionable but the surrounding economic circumstances were having an effect, although a variety of avenues have been explored. The gap between average earnings and peoples' ability to access private housing is as great as ever and this area was particularly affected by second home ownership. There are not the large volumes of properties in North Norfolk to convert to affordable housing. The Council does have a healthy programme over the next few years of 600 properties but it is dependent on coming out of the recession to start building these properties and in the meantime the Council will continue to do its best to investigate more innovative ideas.

David Russell questioned how much the Council had in reserves and why was this not used to build housing for rent. The Council does have money from the sale of Council houses, some of which is being put back through Housing Associations to build houses, together with government funding. When the Council undertook the housing stock transfer it had a contractual position where it shared in the sale of right to buy which has been committed for use for housing initiatives in the future. One of the main problems is that the Council can not access a level of funding for this area as it is not a growth area so does not receive regional allocations. The Council has £9m which it uses as an investment in order to keep Council Tax levels low. Although it could put more capital in, it is a fine balance, which is why the Council has been working to access more funding.

Mr T Papworth, Felmingham Parish Council stated that one of the things that this area has is agriculture and producer of food, so he was somewhat disappointed that it has been presumed that agriculture will decline and with that employment. He considered that agriculture production will increase and there was scope for young people to get involved. There was agreement to this statement and the Council had recently set up the Agricultural Round Table. This district has 7,500 small businesses which has been the saving of North Norfolk during this

recession as there has not been a big bang of employment losses. The effects on tourism from the recession have been minimal and one of the key issues was that North Norfolk was marketed well.

4. **Community Voices, Community Decisions**

Kate Sullivan, Community Liaison Officer reported that the Council had launched a pilot called “Branching out in Your Community” with two councils coming forward to take part, Ashmanhaugh Parish Council and Holt Town Council.

Neil Sharpe, Ashmanhaugh Parish Council gave an insight into work that had been carried out to increase the number of people coming forward to stand for election.

The Council was looking to put together a Working Group to shape the long term strategy for taking the pilot forward.

Mr N Gant, Sheringham Town Council questioned how long will it be before non-elected quangos take over from Town Council and how is the Council engaging with communities. It was explained that other organisations can be of benefit as they can access funding which is not available to the Parish/Town Council. The ideal mix is the two together rather than superseding Parish/Town Councils.

Margaret Foster, North Walsham Town Council stated that her Council had received quality status but when was the District Council going to engage with the Town Council and devolve some powers down to it. One of longer term aims of the Council is to engage more robustly with Parish Councils to address gaps in the past and move forward. Tracy Bayfield, Blakeney and High Kelling Parish Council added that several meetings had taken place with the District Council which had been a waste of time. Philip Burton stated that the District Council had not lost sight of this and the Council was moving the process forward to have one single community engagement strategy, within which would be how does it relate with Parish and Town Councils and what are the issues it wants to take forward. There were a number of specific ideas which were discussed but one size does not fit all. Philip Burton apologised that nothing further had happened and gave a commitment to make progress in this area.

5. **Local Government Review**

Sheila Oxtoby, Deputy Chief Executive stated that there was still a wish that new unitaries would be in place by 1 April 2010 but the proposals for Norfolk are not yet known. The Boundary Committee has been

given leave to appeal against the judgement but the outcome of their appeal in October 2009 was still awaited. The delays have caused problems for the District Council in planning ahead.

6. **Open Forum and Feedback**

Ted Gadsden, North Walsham Town Council stated that the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Partnerships were unelected and unaccountable with no statutory responsibilities and are usurping the functions of Parish Councils. Kate Sullivan commented that this continues to be an issue which exercises people but the new community engagement strategy will aim to address some of these issues and the Council is very keen to find a way forward.

John Rampling, Aylmerton Parish Council stated that there was a lack of education skills in this area which was below other areas. He wanted to receive an assurance that Merchants Place would continue to be funded. The Council was working with the Trustees to try to ensure its viability for the future.

Barbara McGoun, District Councillor stated that Parish Councils claim that they are not listened to in terms of planning applications. She suggested it would be useful for Parish Councillors to participate in role play in order to understand the problems that are often encountered. If there is sufficient interest this can be taken forward.



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