

Annual Town Meeting 18 April 2017

Report of the Hednesford Town Council

The Annual Report of the Town Council covers the Municipal Year – May 2016 to April 2017

Since the elections in May 2015 your Town Councillors have been George Adamson, Sheila Cartwright, Derek Davis, Brian Gamble, Doris Grice, Bill Hardman, Sue Hardman, Chris Mitchell, Linda Whitehouse and myself Alan Pearson

I was honoured to be elected to serve as Chairman of the Council for the current year and I have been supported by Brian Gamble as Vice-Chairman

To comply with statutory requirements the Annual Meeting of the Town Council this year will be at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 9 May 2017

Members of the public are cordially invited to all Council meetings and, at the commencement, there is always an opportunity for questions and discussion

First of all, it is appropriate to take a moment to reflect on the last 12 months

Due to the sterling efforts of the Friends of Hednesford Park and Cannock Chase Council work continues to carry out improvements to the park. The work to the War Memorial means that this once again takes pride of place in the town

The Town Council was pleased to support the proposals for the creation of all-weather pitches on the site of the former West Cannock No.5 Social Club in Bradbury Lane and now the work is complete this is a valuable addition to the leisure facilities for the town

The Town Council continues to deliver a package of measures that are designed to benefit the local community and to promote Hednesford

As a continuing commitment to the economic wellbeing of Hednesford, each year the Town Council contributes about £25,000 towards the cost of CCTV. Less than £2.00 per year per elector

This ensures that Hednesford still has the only free town centre car parking in the entire district and as well as the economic benefits we should all feel safer due to the cameras deterring crime and anti-social behaviour

Concerns have been expressed that shoppers are having difficulty finding parking spaces on the Co-op car park as these are being taken up by rail commuters

This situation is being addressed and a Car Parking Order is in the course of being approved which will introduce a 4 hour maximum parking limit on some spaces – but all will remain free

The Council was pleased to see the adoption of the station by the Heart of Hednesford Group and is funding the cost of equipment and materials that the volunteers

will need to keep the area spick and span. Residents and traders should also be grateful for all the other projects being undertaken by the Group to improve and enhance the town

The Council is working to increase public pride in our town and the surrounding area which is regarded as the “Gateway to Cannock Chase” - an area of outstanding natural beauty

The heritage of Hednesford is being promoted as much as possible and the Town Council has hosted several talks including one in respect of the “Tunneller’s of World War I” which had to be repeated a number of times due to popular demand. During the next year we intend to have a presentation on the canals of the area and in 2018 there will be special events to commemorate the end of World War 1

The Town Council was grateful to Chap’s for organising the final phase of the memorial which pays tribute to local miners. The dedication ceremony is being held on 22 April and everyone is invited to attend

One of the most important roles of the Town Council is to represent the views of the local community and ensure that these are made known to the District and County Councils and other bodies. For example since the last Town Meeting the Town Council has submitted observations on around 60 planning applications

When commenting on planning applications the Town Council seeks to improve highways and car parking arrangements and for developers to contribute to the provision of other benefits for the people of Hednesford

The Council has also submitted objections to include in the Local Plan land for residential development on sites at West Cannock Farm and land west of Beaudesert Golf Club

In order to enhance this influential planning role during the year the Town Council undertook extensive consultation on a draft Neighbourhood Plan for Hednesford and this is now with the planning authority for consideration. Following a review by an independent Inspector all electors in Hednesford will be given the chance to vote to accept or reject the plan in a referendum to be held in due course

The condition of our local roads and footpaths is a source of concern. We are grateful for the support of our County Councillors, George Adamson and Chris Mitchell, for pressing for highway improvements in the area

Another service no longer being administered by the County Council is Hednesford Library. However, an offer to maintain the service by an NHS Mental Health Trust was accepted by the County Council and the Library is

now being run by a group of hard working volunteers and more are needed

The Town Council needs to keep local people informed

There is information on the web site which has been updated so as to make it more user friendly and provides access to all Council Meeting papers and news about the Neighbourhood Plan. On Twitter we have 720 followers - an increase of 26% from the 570 last year

New residents are still being provided with a “welcome pack” containing a variety of sign posting information to introduce them to Hednesford and let them know what is available on their doorstep

The Town Council remains fully behind initiatives to raise awareness of dementia

The Town Council continues to support various organisations that do so much to promote the area and generate community involvement. Once again funding has been provided to Hednesford in Partnership which aims to coordinate various issues and has been successful in organising events. In particular we are very grateful for all the effort that went in to the Christmas evening in the Town Centre and the Council has expressed appreciation to everyone involved

For your diary please note that this year the Christmas event will be on 1 December. Due to the decision of Cannock Chase Council to withdraw funding for Christmas decorations the Town Council will be meeting

the cost in future and will be working jointly with Heath Hayes and Wimblebury and Norton Canes parish councils in this regard

Let's look at what the Town Council provides for the local community – and remember that these services would not be provided by anyone else

The improvements and extension to the Pye Green Community Centre have been a great success. Regular hirers continue to be attracted along with new users. Each week there are bookings from dance groups, martial arts trainers, zumba, keep fit, slimming organisations, providing activities for all age groups and abilities – we now even have weekly dog training sessions

There are opportunities for young people to train in dance and performance and the weekly mothers and toddler's sessions are very popular

Every weekday evening is fully booked. For the first time we have begun to host regular sessions of the blood transfusion service

The function room with fully licensed bar is regularly booked for private parties such as birthdays, weddings and anniversaries

Now that there is a permanent base for the Town Council, many personal enquiries are being dealt with from callers to the Pye Green Community Centre where the office is open on most weekday mornings

CAB provide an Outreach Advice service on Thursday morning of each week which has assisted many clients during the year

The Town Council funds this vital service at a cost of £5,000 – especially important at a time when funding for CAB is being withdrawn by the County Council

The Centre provides free IT facilities for anyone needing to use a PC or go online

Many statutory and other bodies choose the centre for their public meetings. The meeting rooms continue to be popular with commercial training providers

Small financial contributions have been made to several organisations including local schools, Hednesford St John Ambulance and Katherine House Hospice

In terms of finance, the Town Council has had to increase the precept for the first time in 5 years. This has risen by £7500 to £137,500 and is mainly due to decisions taken by Cannock Chase Council to withdraw Council Tax Grant paid to parish councils and the Town Council agreeing to pay for Christmas lights

The Annual Audit of Accounts was undertaken by an independent firm of private consultants and once again the Council's accounting and financial arrangements have been approved

That concludes the report of the Town Council

Before moving on are there any questions?