

# TownTalk



## News and views from Bury St Edmunds Town Council

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BURY ST EDMUNDS  
TOWN COUNCIL

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### Chairman's introduction



It is a long time since Bury St Edmunds Town Council produced a Newsletter, mainly to save money. However, a 'Quality' Council is required to publish a newsletter and it is also a way of keeping you up to date on various issues.

Our Town Council achieved quality status in 2005 and will be attempting to renew this in December 2009. TownTalk helps to explain what we do, how we do it, tries to gather your views and supports our website information.

This time, to reduce cost and save paper we have produced TownTalk on-line to organisations and would ask them to pass it on through their networks. It is of course available to everyone and for those who want a hard copy we will still provide one on request.

We hope this approach will meet your needs – however you feel about it, please let us know.

### Christmas all the year round

As we hope for the warmer days of summer, memories of last Christmas may have faded. But the switch on of the town's Christmas lights on 20 November 2008 was a great prelude to the festive season. The Committee responsible for this not

only involved Councillors but had representatives of the County and Borough Councils, Chamber of Commerce and Town Centre Management. The enthusiasm and effort of Steve Peters, the Town Centre Manager, did much to make the evening and Christmas displays successful. Councillors, staff and many others behind the scenes played their part as volunteer stewards, the donors of the trees or as sponsors.



Highlights of that evening included the bands, Newfoundland dogs, Father Christmas arriving on his sleigh, the naughty Elveden Elves, confetti canons. The event, covered by Suffolk Radio and screened live on BBC television, attracted many comments saying how much better the lights were than in previous years.

The Nativity Sculpture was again displayed on the Angel Hill. Since 2007 this beautiful work of art has been held by the Town Council in trust for the people of Bury St Edmunds and is an important part of the Christmas story.

Plans are already being made for Christmas 2009. To maintain

and insure the lights is not an insignificant part of the Town Council's budget – this year £15,000 has been allocated, but we hope that it provides an event that is well-received by grown-ups and children alike.

### Monthly topics

Each month we put on our website [www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk) an article about our services. Written by Councillors and staff, these give a useful insight to various issues and can sometimes unravel myths and mysteries surrounding the activities of the Council. Topics so far have covered:

- Planning and Licensing
- Financial management and internal controls
- Ethical standards
- Quality and service delivery

We will be pleased to know if these topics are of help to you and whether there are any specific areas you might want covered in the future.

### Opening up to you

Not every organisation opens its doors to all-comers; doing so brings with it the risk that you might not always hear what you want. However, it does provide an opportunity to give factual information, to explain what is being done and what is on the horizon and to learn from the experience.

The Town Council held its first 'Open Day' on 25 March 2009. This

was just one of a number of initiatives outlined in the Council's business plan and efforts had been made beforehand to widely publish the event.

Eight Councillors were on hand to answer questions put to them and cover information that was displayed. Many enquiries related to services or issues outside the remit of the Council. The three members of staff were also present (bear in mind that only one of them works full-time) and able to talk people through the sometimes complex issues. A successful event was summed up by a visitor, "I used to pass the window and all the blinds were shut so I thought you were all anonymous and didn't want to speak to us. Coming here today has been an eye-opener – you actually do come across as helpful and approachable."



The theme of education, information and community safety was an ideal way of showing how the Council works in partnership. The presence of West Suffolk College, West Suffolk Radio and the Police Safer Neighbourhood Team exemplified this. We are also grateful to the College and Radio West Suffolk for kindly donating prizes that were won by Mrs Green and Mr Greenwood.

### Allotments – what is happening?

As with many other subjects, the management of allotments is not straightforward and we welcome the chance to explain what is happening. We put some of your questions to Councillors to find out

the reasons that lay behind some of their decisions.

*"If you really cared about allotments why have you let the waiting list grow to 150?"* Council's reply: "In 2006 when we took on the management of the town's allotments we inherited a waiting list of about 30 people. This has since grown for a variety of reasons – the social and health benefits of allotment gardens have become more widely publicised and the level of interest has been raised. The limited land we have for allotments and the length of time that tenants occupy plots means that we have not been able to keep pace with the demand. For some time we have been trying to acquire additional land and we are currently in negotiations on this. However, even if we provide more land, additional allotments will not be available overnight and there will still be a waiting list. But it will be a major step forward."

*"That's all very well but there are some of the tenants who have neglected their plots. Why haven't you told them to quit and given their plots to those on the waiting list?"* Cllr Stefan Oliver, the Town Council's 'champion' for allotments explained, "This is a valid comment. For a variety of reasons we have not previously sorted out neglected plots as we would have liked but the situation is now changing. Our staff now regularly visit the allotments and this has resulted in letters being sent to those who have not maintained their plots – some of them have been able to put forward genuine reasons and will put matters right, others have surrendered their tenancy and some will be on the receiving end of further action. Generally allotment holders take great pride in what they do and I am amazed at how wonderful some of the plots appear – they are real works of

art and can be admired. Unfortunately a few people overstepped their agreements and created an unsightly appearance with debris, etc and we will be taking action to remind them of the requirements."

*"Why, when times are tough for us all are you increasing the charges?"* Council' reply: "This is one of the questions that needs to be put into context. Our charges for a plot in 2008/09 were £3.31 per square rod, for 2009/10 it will be £3.65. By 2012/13 we intend to make the allotments self-financing. It would be difficult to find comparative forms of recreation that are relatively inexpensive but we do realise that any increase is unwelcome and we have embarked on a process of consultation to find out whether we could provide concessions to those who may be less able to pay."

John Saunders the Town Clerk added, "Allotments will always present issues for Councillors and staff – it seems simple to say, 'just provide an acre of land and you can create 40 plots'. There are lots of other considerations including: How much will it cost to buy and clear the land? Where will the money come from? What about the supply of water, maintaining trees, fences, hedges? How much time and effort is needed to effectively manage a site? Where does this fit with other services of the Council? None of these is insurmountable but by trying to get clarity now and putting our plans into effect I am certain that the future will be fairer and better."

### Why be a Councillor?

We turned the spotlight on Cllr Allan Jones who, on 29 January 2009 was elected as a Town Councillor. He has also been a Member of St Edmundsbury Borough Council since 2003. We asked him the obvious question, "Why, when you already had a busy lifestyle did you want to be a Town Councillor?"

Allan responded, "I enjoy being involved in local government and being able to help the residents of Southgate Ward to deal with their problems. In 2008 I became particularly interested in the future of the Town Council and its changing role. My main interest is serving the everyday needs of the people in my Ward."

Allan has also become a member of the Planning and Licensing Committee. He is one of 17 unpaid Councillors attending a variety of meetings and representing the Council in various local forums amongst which are the Bury in Bloom Committee, Christmas Fayre, Safer Neighbourhood Team Tasking Group and Guildhall Feoffment Trust. Councillors have been able to influence planning, licensing and transport decisions, support issues raised by townspeople and provide financial contributions to Bury in Bloom, Christmas lights and Town Centre Management.

**The Cost of your Council**

It's been another year when the Town Council has not increased its precept. At £13.84 per Band D Council Tax payer it remains amongst the lowest in the area and is substantially below the cost levied in other Suffolk towns.

**Remembrance**

November 2008 was a poignant part of our annual calendar and a time when, as part of our remit, we ensured that the war memorials at Angel Hill and Butter Market were cleaned and presentable.

**Grit and waste bins**

Since 2006 the Town Council has been responsible for 13 grit bins at various places in the town. The adverse winter weather showed that not all of the bins might be in the best locations and we want to hear your suggestions on where you consider they could be sited.

It might be helpful for you to know that Suffolk County Council only supplies grit in the town to bins maintained by the Town Council. Some public car parks have grit bins administered by St Edmundsbury Borough Council and for private areas the onus is on individuals to supply their own.

The criteria for grit bins:

- To treat local trouble spots on minor roads, which otherwise would not be treated;
- Be at generally hazardous areas, hills, junctions on minor roads which are lower priority routes for gritting;
- Only named volunteers spreading grit from Town Council bins can be insured through the County Council's insurance;
- Requests to replenish Town Council bins must be made by e-mail, telephone or in writing to the Town Council

Our review of grit bins should mean that we are better prepared for the next bout of severe weather but we need to hear from you if you can suggest a priority location or if you wish to be named for insurance purposes as a volunteer 'spreader'.

The Town Council has also provided a number of waste bins in the town and ensures that these are regularly emptied. If you have any questions on these then we will be pleased to hear from you.



**Bite-size chunks**

- Cllr Mrs Pat Warby to be Mayor of St Edmundsbury - congratulations.

- The Boundary Committee's results should be announced in July 2009.
- Don't forget that the Official Town Guide contains useful information and a map and is free from the Town Council's offices and other outlets in the town.
- Plans are being made to commemorate St Edmund's Day 2009 by making awards to townspeople nominated for their contribution to the community. See [www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk) for more details nearer the time.

**How to make contact**

All Town Councillors can be contacted via the below telephone numbers (dial 01284 before the number shown), by e-mail and some have mobile or business telephone numbers as shown on [www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.burystedmunds.suffolk.gov.uk). The website also shows how members of staff can be contacted.

- <sup>1</sup> Roy Bebbington 706981
- <sup>2</sup> Keith Bird 763689
- <sup>3</sup> Hung Chow Chung 761120 (known as Patrick Chung)
- <sup>4</sup> Robert (Bob) Cockle 756249
- <sup>5</sup> James Dinsdale\* 07940 53626
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Farmer 768777
- <sup>7</sup> Allan Jones 756415
- <sup>8</sup> Allen Lloyd\* 07904 209419
- <sup>9</sup> Edward Lockwood 706198
- <sup>10</sup> Michele Lockwood 706198
- <sup>11</sup> Stefan Oliver 706172
- <sup>12</sup> Richard Rout 767494
- <sup>13</sup> Paul Simner 768202
- <sup>14</sup> Clive Springett 753120
- <sup>15</sup> Patricia Warby 704138
- <sup>16</sup> Kevin Waterson 764804

- 1, 14 and 15: Moreton Hall ward
- 2 and 5: Westgate ward
- 3 and 16: Minden ward
- 4 and 10: St Olaves ward
- 6 and 12: Abbeygate ward
- 7 and 8: Southgate ward
- 9: Northgate ward
- 11: Eastgate ward
- 13: Risbygate ward