

6	<p>Presentation by Anna Foster - Swan Project followed by Q&A</p> <p>Anna Foster gave a presentation summarising the valuable work of the Swan Project. She outlined how it is run and the support on offer to youngsters accessing the service. The feedback the Project receives highlights how vital the service is and how valued it has become.</p> <p>Anna also explained that the Project receives no statutory funding and it is reliant on fundraising and grants to keep the Project going. She confirmed that funding remains the biggest challenge, that it requires around £85,000 per year to keep the project going.</p> <p>Cllrs were invited to visit the Swan Centre to see for themselves the work that they do.</p>
7	<p>Presentation by Frances Rayner – Downham No Child Go Hungry Scheme followed by Q&A</p> <p>Frances Rayner explained the No Child Goes Hungry scheme and outlined a fundraising event she is organising on the Clock Square. On 30th April and 1st May volunteers will be taking part in a 12 hour (COVID-safe) Spinathon. She encouraged everyone to come along and support the cyclists in raising money to provide food for the No Child Goes Hungry scheme.</p>
8	<p>Local Government Electorate Participation</p> <p>The Mayor reminded attendees that abusive, offensive or improper questions will not be allowed.</p> <p>Q. What is the Council doing to stop the bullying by some veteran traders on the market to the newcomers?</p> <p>A. The Mayor explained that if the Town Council is made aware they will address this as the Council has a zero-tolerance policy on bullying.</p> <p>Q. What is the Council doing to stop the spread of fake news about the Council wanting to close the market?</p> <p>A. The Mayor explained that the Council is doing everything it can to grow and develop the market. It has employed a third-party company to manage its social media and deal with the abuse Cllrs were receiving on line. She added that the Town needs a market, and the market needs the Town and it will take everyone working together to dispel the falsehoods being spread around. Everyone was encouraged to ask questions of the Council via the Facebook page or by email/phone to the Clerk if they hear anything they feel is puzzling. They will get the truthful information without relying on whispers.</p> <p>Q. Are the Council going to implement the car parking as agreed? If we don't you will kill the town especially now there are out of town developments.</p> <p>A. The Mayor explained that the Town Council did vote several years ago to implement paid parking within the town. Due to Covid this has been put on hold. The Council recently allocated members of the Council to sit on the Car Parking Strategy Committee which will reconvene soon, with the aim of taking the agenda forward as agreed at Full Council.</p>

The Mayor advised the meeting that questions have been received from Cllr Doug Lawson by email which are abusive and offensive towards staff and which contain statements he knows, by virtue of his position as a Cllr, to be false. It was clearly his intention to cause distress and anxiety to staff. The Mayor added that this communication will be reported to the Police and for them to investigate whether an offence has occurred under the Section One of the Malicious Communications Act. The Council will therefore not answer the questions this evening.

Q. As a resident of the Town and someone who contributes to the precept I am not particularly pleased to see such an increase this year which seems to be twice that of last year? Looking for value for money I am struggling.

You may say we have free parking but that only really helps people who live out of Town, people who live in Downham mainly walk into the shopping areas.

Clearly it is no secret that there is a staged war ongoing between people who don't live in Downham, some traders, some Council Members and the Town Council. If this has attributed to the increase in precept for all those who live in the Town then those people should be accountable for their actions and the increase in charge to every household here, the majority of whom have no interest in the continued rants and moans of people who should be behaving in a more professional manner.

Can I therefore have a reason for this increase as follows:

1. I note from the budget lines that there is a substantial increase in Town Clock and Town Hall in general - Have the Town Clock and Town Hall been ignored for the last few years so that they have deteriorated to such an extent they suddenly require such large sums invested in them? Please could you identify why the increase is required.

2. Legal expenses. - Is this due to the ongoing hostilities between the above mentioned group of people against the Town Council and the associated battles as seen and read in the public arena? If so please explain why this increase was required and for what reasons.

The precept paying members of the Town are entitled to a reasonable amount of information to understand the detail behind these large increases in expenditure as it is us who are ultimately paying the price.

A.

Town Hall - The Mayor explained that the electrics required urgent repair which left us no choice in the matter. They had been repaired previously, however a survey was carried out and work was found to be required.

Town Clock – The Mayor explained that some years ago the Clock was coated with a special coating designed to protect it long term. However, this coating has failed and upon specialist investigation, there is work that is required to repaint the Clock. She added that the Council has tried to take action against the specialists who provided the coating, however they have now ceased trading.

Legal expenses – The Mayor explained that some of the increase relates to seeking advice from solicitors to protect members of staff from bullying and vexatious complaints. There have been other issues that required legal advice as well.

A Downham Resident

Q. Since the pandemic there has been a reduction in certain childcare services ie. Breakfast Clubs at the school, which is impinging on parents' ability to work. Has the Town Council had any discussions with schools?

A. The Mayor said that education and childcare does not come under the Town Council remit. It is an issue which comes under Norfolk County Council, however the Mayor said she is happy to take the question forward to NCC and asked that the resident emails her direct with details.

Closed 8.26pm