

Mayor's Year End Report - 2016

The last eleven months as the Town Mayor have been a privilege and a great honour for me and I have enjoyed the role immensely. I've been invited to a wide variety of groups, activities and presentations and it is wonderful to see how hard individuals work for this community.

After six years in rented accommodation it is pleasing to see the transformation of the old sorting office at the back of the Post Office. When we purchased this building it was in a very poor state and I'm thankful of the vision, forethought and hard work that has meant this council now has a new home to be proud of. I, with a couple of other councillors and volunteers have helped a little but I have to acknowledge the work and commitment of Dave Townes and Bob Charlesworth. They have worked tirelessly towards this new building that we can call the Town Hall – a community hall for the people of Eastwood. It is my belief that we have saved well over £250k on this refurbishment as quotes were attained from professionals which were well out of the reach of this council. It is not to be underestimated the work and commitment that has proved vital in the outcome. Well done to all concerned!

During the refurbishment of the front counter of the Post Office the new postmaster reneged on his commitment when told that he wouldn't be able to sell alcohol on the premises due to a covenant on the building. The estimated closure of two weeks whilst works were carried out could have caused a delay in the Post Office counters reopening for our local residents. We took immediate action and contacted Head Office in London and asked that they make finding a replacement a top priority. I invited a Mr Sree Balachandran who is the Issues and Resolutions Lead for the Post Office to come to our open evening planned for the night of the lights switch on and meet the public. The event was well attended by local residents and both Dave and Bob must have shown over 200 people the ongoing progress of the refurb work during that same evening. Mr Sree Balachandran was meeting and greeting residents and got a general feeling of our community and the importance of the Eastwood Post Office. I believe he pulled out all the stops and although the original two week closure turned into over three weeks, the new counter did open prior to Christmas and was a relief to all concerned. It is nice to know the friendly staff at the Post Office have retained their jobs too!

In my capacity as County Councillor for Eastwood I was approached by the Registrar who asked if I knew of a venue that might house the register office facility since the closure of Durban House was imminent. Wanting to keep this worthwhile facility in the town I invited them to visit the work in progress and immediately they were keen to join us and rent some floor space. It felt good to secure this service and from May they will be using one of the rear offices of the building.

As a member of the crime panel at County Hall I was also approached by the Police. The flat above the Post Office is at present empty and available for hire. The police station is up for sale and therefore I was aware that we might lose the police presence in Eastwood. I was delighted by their approach and again suggested they visit the building and see if they thought it was a viable prospect. Indeed, they were delighted and it has since been rubber stamped and I'm pleased to say that they will be doing their own refurbishment which will save the Council money and secure their future in the town.

Since Eastwood was first twinned with Szolnok each year the Mayor is invited to the Goulash Festival and again I felt privileged to attend on behalf of our town. The festival was extremely enjoyable, we were treated like royalty and the festival was recorded which gave me the opportunity to speak on live TV. It is my aim to re-establish our connection with our twinned partners and make it work for the town of Eastwood so I look forward to returning their gesture at a later date.

I'm delighted to say that the Skatepark after five long years is finally being constructed and the opening is shortly to take place. Rhianne Lounds and Beth Lee have worked hard to achieve the Skatepark being a part of Eastwood and its future use will be an indictment of their commitment to the youth of Eastwood.

The extra care housing planned for the rear of the library should be completed by November this year otherwise plans will have to be re-submitted for approval for it to proceed. This will be a plus for the town and the delay has meant the eyesore on the old Walker Street school site has been increasingly evident as a part of the town.

The newly formed Shop Watch is a new group of which I am chair. Together with Eastwood Neighbourhood Watch it means we can continue to work alongside the police which I feel is important for the town. The decreasing number of police in the town means they are stretched to capacity so any help or support the individual can offer has to be a positive.

During this last year Howard Jones, our accountant has joined our staff. He is a welcome addition to the council and we as councillors have the peace of mind in knowing that the accounts, which are a public document are completed with the utmost precision.

I was delighted to be able to hand out an Easter egg to all attendees at the Eastwood Youth club. They were kindly donated to me from an anonymous source and were well received.

I would like to thank Father Berry for the use of this hall. We have hosted our council meetings here over the last six years. He has been very accommodating and we appreciate his continued support.

Finally, I would like to thank our office staff Chris, Debbie, Lynn and Howard and my colleagues on the council.