



Nantwich Town Council Talk of the Town

Transfer of Services

Special Edition



LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR JOHN LEWIS WRITES...

Dear Resident,

It is now about four months since the May elections – a period of innovation and progress focusing on the potential changes for the Town as Cheshire East Council (CEC) is advocating asset transfer and planning for the future. This leaflet will attempt to explain briefly the suggestions and the implications for the residents of Nantwich. Your views are essential on articles covering aspects such as the transfer of assets from CEC.

The Town Council will concentrate on the historic values and character of the Town coupled with value for money. One such essential aspect is the control of town building plans to ensure that tourist attractions are maintained. There is also the fundamental question of the costs involved and how they are to be covered by increases in local Town taxes, hopefully balanced by reductions in CEC central borough taxes.

Please pass on your views on the issues in order that we may represent residents ideas for the future and influence CEC strategy. Your Councillors, both Town and CEC, include several new members. They bring their refreshing new views and work experiences that are valued. Contact your local representative either personally or perhaps through a Town society / group to which you belong. Views are valued in order that we represent residents and organisations ideas on the Town's future.

As a Conservative controlled Town Council, value for money is one of our top priorities. We want to be sure the council tax you pay is spent carefully, for the benefit of the town. Your Council tax bill is made up of four parts. This year the average Nantwich tax payer paid £1216 to CEC, £150 to the police, £66 to the Fire Service and £29 to the Town Council.

Part of the money paid to CEC goes to run services in the town like public toilets, Civic Hall, the Gables, the market and allotments. These services are discretionary (i.e., they do not have to be provided in law) and Cheshire East Councillors do not want to continue funding them. They want to hand them over to the Town Council. The additional running costs would be about £1 a week for a Band D household. In theory, there should be a corresponding fall in Cheshire East Council tax, however, CEC are not guaranteeing that and neither can the Town Council. What we can guarantee is that these services can continue to be run by the Town Council for the benefit of the town. Other alternatives may be that they are sold to commercial operators, developers, or closed altogether.

The exact list of assets to be transferred is not final and the exact date of transfer may be subject to negotiation, although we are working to 1st April 2012, so any changes to Council tax would be in 2012/13. The Town Council think we should take this step to manage services locally and hopefully, be more effective, efficient and responsive to residents needs. Your views will be very welcome and you are encouraged to write to the Council and contact your local councillor over the next few weeks.

***Councillor John Lewis
Leader of the Town Council***



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS FOR NANTWICH..

Currently, Cheshire East Council (CEC) is the major Council in this area, and provides all the main services. Nantwich Town Council contribute to some of them and gives community grants, but does not manage services in the town.

CEC own and operate a range of public services and examples are given below. From 1st April 2012, CEC are offering to give the Town Council a “free transfer” of those buildings pictured. In addition, they are proposing to transfer all town allotments and Brookfield Hall (Town Council offices). They are also asking the Town Council to fund street entertainment, Christmas illuminations, hanging baskets and planters.



Civic Hall



Gables



Market Hall

Town Councillors have thought hard about this and discussed it very carefully. They have accepted the proposal “in principle”. They have concluded that we should be going ahead with the transfer, provided the terms are acceptable. That means accurate costs, buildings in reasonable condition and no hidden surprises. There are three reasons why Town Councillors feel the town should accept a transfer.

- First, if services like the Civic Hall and Market are managed locally, they will be run in a way which is more responsive to the needs and wishes of local people. Because it is big and performs so many functions, Cheshire East Council can sometimes seem out of touch and bureaucratic whereas local councillors are more in touch with local needs. It may also be that the facilities can be run more efficiently. It is not always true that “small is beautiful” but sometimes, with fewer managers and lower overheads, a smaller organisation can operate more economically. The Town Council certainly believes that the cost of managing these services will not be more than it is currently.
- Second, Cheshire East Councillors are determined that local people should pay for the local services they use. So if the services continue to be operated by Cheshire East, it is quite possible that the town will pay an extra local council tax. Councils can impose extra tax on particular localities and that is what some Cheshire East councillors propose.
- Third, can we be sure these services will continue? Cheshire East have already closed two public toilets in the town, without consultation or discussion. Many Cheshire East councillors take the view that if they are not legally required to provide a service, then they should not do so.

Could Nantwich Market be sold off to a commercial operator with no real interest in Nantwich?

Could the Civic Hall be closed or become something like a bingo hall or night club?

Some Cheshire East councillors have suggested that if the Town Council does not take over these facilities they may be lost to the town. Nantwich Town Councillors do not want that to happen.



OUTCOMES...

If the Town Council take over these facilities, the staff are entitled to transfer too, in their existing jobs. So, for example, the staff of the Civic Hall would transfer on their present terms and conditions of service. It would be a big change for the Town Council, which currently operates with a Town Clerk and a part-time assistant. It would also be a big change for the staff who manage these services on a day-to-day basis, because they would move from a very big organisation (Cheshire East) to a much smaller one. Additional Town Council staff may also be needed.

In a way, it sounds too good to be true. Transfer of valuable assets at no cost! Local control of services! Safeguarding of jobs and facilities used by residents! However, there is an important point to remember. Except for the market, all these facilities require financial support. It costs money to provide public toilets. The Gables is presently largely run as a social centre. Allotments require a small contribution. The Civic Hall, because it operates partly as a community hall, with discounted rates for local groups and societies, requires a subsidy. So there is no getting away from the fact that the Town Council tax would rise. However, against that, Cheshire East will no longer be supporting these facilities. Town Councillors believe that we must remember the value of these buildings and services to the town. As a tourist town, could we manage without public toilets? As a market town, where would we be without a market? If the Civic Hall ceased to operate, wouldn't this be a major loss to the community?



Allotments



Nantwich in Bloom



Street Entertainment

LOCAL TAXATION...

There are two types of local tax raised – the Town tax known as the precept currently about £30 per year and the Cheshire East Council (CEC) tax £1200 for band D properties. The unknown is the effect on these tax rates if assets are transferred to the Town Council to manage. These assets are not mandatory and if taken over by the Town will be for the overall benefit of town residents. The running costs are not precisely known and the initial cost to band D residents is anticipated to be about £1 per week. In theory there should be a corresponding fall in the CEC tax. However at the moment CEC is not guaranteeing such a fall and our expectation of no overall change to local taxes is doubtful. Managing these services will increase the Town precept tax but we may not see a fall in CEC's tax.

The Town Council think we should take this step to manage services locally and, hopefully, be more effective, efficient and responsive to residents needs. It is possible that there may be some exceptions to the list of assets identified for transfer. Your views will be very welcome and you are encouraged to write to the Council and contact your local councillor over the next few weeks. **VALUE FOR MONEY** is our priority.



Christmas lights



Brookfield Hall



Town Council offices



In Bloom basket



EXCITING TIMES AHEAD FOR NANTWICH...



Councillor David Marren, Leader of the transfer group, writes...

Back in 2006, the then Labour government made clear its commitment to town and parish councils. It recognised that Town Councils like Nantwich can play an important role in involving local people in the way their communities are run.

The current governments 'Big Society' initiative encourages the idea of being less reliant on traditional institutions and managing services locally. A key strand of the policy is public service reform and shaping and controlling our own towns and villages.

As a Town Council, we are committed to ensuring that Nantwich is a safe, attractive historic market town and a prosperous place to live. In this Talk of the Town we are letting you know about the exciting prospect of managing our own buildings and services in the town in the future. It should not cost any more than it currently does. This will give control back to local people through their Councillors. Remember Town Councillors are not paid and do not get any allowances. They are councillors because they are interested in Nantwich and want to maintain it as an attractive market town.

We want to hear your views about what we feel is a great opportunity.

Contact your local councillor or Riddell Graham the Town Clerk in the Town Council offices:-

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Tel: 01270 619224 Fax: 01270 619225 Email: nantwichtc@nantwichtowncouncil.gov.uk

TOWN COUNCILLORS



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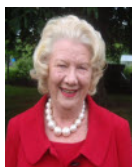
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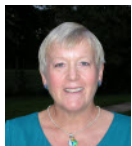
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