

LOCUM CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT
ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING (FC1/25)
20th May 2025

As the official Civic Year draws to a close, I must thank the retiring Mayor, Cllr Sion Jones for his dedication to the Council and continued hard work over the past twelve months. It is never easy working full-time and holding down the office of Mayor for any Town Council, and Sion has performed his duties with grace and humility, showcasing his long-standing commitment to Neston.

Cllr Brenda Marple has also served as Deputy Mayor for the past two years and will be retiring from the position in 2025/26. I'm certain that Brenda's unwavering enthusiasm for all of her local volunteering efforts and support of numerous local groups will still continue with gusto. Thank you, Brenda.

April and May have been extremely busy months with a heavy workload of policy renewal behind the scenes. Neston Town Council will vote at the Annual Council meeting on a brand-new and up to date version of Financial Regulations, with covers both the 2024 updates and the most recent 2025 amendments, which NALC published in March 2025. The Procurement Act 2023 and the Procurement Regulations 2024 came into force on 24th February 2025. Schedule 1 of the 2023 Act contains the thresholds for contracts for the supply of goods, services and the provision of works. The new legislation replaces previous legislation, such as the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

At this year's Annual Town Meeting held in the Town Hall on 6th May 2025, members were treated to a rousing performance by the young members of Neston Samba and their cohorts. Members were thrilled to welcome representatives of a number of local groups who were grant recipients in 2024/2025. It was inspiring to hear accounts of the wide variety of projects the Town Council has supported over the past year. We enjoyed presentations from The Neston Flower Society who celebrated 65th years with a council-funded, 3-day exhibition in the Town Hall, Neston & District Art Society whose exhibition was also funded, and the Neston Village Fair Committee who have been hosting the well-loved town event for the past 25 years! Thank you to all of those involved for giving up your time for the benefit of the Neston's wider community.

The Mayor of Neston, Cllr Sion Jones, accepted the Annual Report 2024/2025 on behalf of the electorate. You can view a digital version of the report on our website using the following link <https://neston.org.uk/documents/annual-report-2024-2025/>. Copies are also available to pick up in reception. During the last financial year, Neston Town Council provided grants and community donations totalling £20,639.40, supporting the activities in the local community

as well as events. The report showcases another excellent year of progress for the Council and positive partnership working with the wider Neston and Parkgate community.

I am very proud to report that for the third financial year running, Neston Town Council has received its completed Year End Internal Audit with note no issues arising from the year end audit 2024/2025. Congratulations to the council's RFO for all of his hard work and document preparation. This confirms that the Town Council is conducting all of its financial obligations and legal practices in an appropriate manner. This year's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) has been completed requiring Full Council sign off next week.

On 19th March, Neston Town Council hosted the Cheshire West & Chester Council Localities forum, which provided local Town and Parish Councils with the opportunity to meet with CWAC's senior leadership team and hear, first-hand about the area's potential plans for devolution. Local Plan surveys have also been completed for CWaC regarding local settlements, identifying key features and local service centres. Our areas were split into Neston and Parkgate and Windle Hill.

I meet regularly with Town Council team managers in order to strategise and catch up on projects and developments across our delivery service. We all have a good working relationship and assist with problem solving and information sharing. I met with the Council's IT consultant on 14/04/25 to discuss website accessibility, software updates and the inevitable movement of the Council PC operating system to Windows 11. The new server will be installed over the coming weeks, which includes a battery backup for server power. Following an unfortunate contractor issue in early April the main Town Hall server was accidentally switched off and remote access was temporarily lost. Moving forward, with the new server in place, any loss of power should not be a problem in the future. In early May, the C&E Manager and I met with representatives of Friends of the Marshlands Eco Park Group to receive an update on the group's progress and to share ideas and knowledge.

Regular discussions are still ongoing with CWaC's Property Services managers. A new and updated building lease is required going forward which will hopefully be combined with an extension to the Council's current Asset Management Agreement. The Town Hall roof work is now close to completion. A broken window pane on the first floor was replaced earlier this week and we await installation of the final two skylights.

Zoë Dean
Locum Chief Officer

Neston Town Council
15th May 2025