

CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING (FC1/25)

20th MAY 2026

Neston Town Council facilitated a public meeting regarding the Neston marshes and a discussion around costal access, in partnership with Cheshire West & Cheshire Council, on 7th April. The meeting featured presentations from the RSPB and Natural England with an open public forum afterwards. This meeting followed a site visit with stakeholders on Thursday 19th March to investigate current issues on the marshes and find solutions to allow members of the public to enjoy the marshes whilst still working to protect over-wintering and nesting birds in their precious natural habitat.

April and May are particularly busy months in the Council calendar as we prepare for the Annual Town Meeting, End of Year, and the Annual Meeting of the Council. The Finance Manager/RFO worked very hard to ensure a flawless closedown of last year's accounts, and we have received our End of Year Audit with no actions to carry forward. Neston Town Council should be very proud of this position. You will notice on the agenda for the Annual Meeting a large number of policies have been updated to ensure the Council remains compliant and relevant, and our set of operating rules follow the national guidance from NALC.

The Friday Market hosted a Special Easter themed Market on Good Friday, which included a visit from the Easter bunny, a children's Easter trail with a small prize for every entrant from Neston Town Council, free biscuit decorating and a craft activity with the Little Actors Theatre Company. Thank you to the markets team for working hard to deliver these special, enhanced markets.

The new Assertion 10 data requirements have come in force with a list of requirements the Council must follow, these rules have a strong focus on digital and data compliance. The legislation requires councils to confirm they are lawfully managing personal data (GDPR), using secure, official domain emails, and maintaining accessible websites. Neston Town Council introduced its new gov.uk domain prior these rules being implemented. As part of this, Town Councillors have been taking part in Data Protection Training, led by Breakthrough Communications, which run specially tailored sessions for Councillors. Our members of staff are also working through an online training module to ensure we are compliant across all areas of our services. Thank you to everyone for approaching this with enthusiasm and eagerness.

At the Annual Town Meeting on 5th May 2026, we welcomed representatives of some of the groups who had benefitted from grant and donation funding from the Town Council during 2025/26. Andrew Langshaw from the Neston Air Cadets spoke passionately about how the consistent funding from the Town Council has positively impacted hundreds of young people over a number of years, with help towards safety equipment for rock climbing and canoeing, as well as a banner kit last year for Remembrance Parades. Nikki Ruscoe from Neston Village Fair

explained that community charity stalls at last year's fair had hugely benefitted from the event as one of their main sources of fundraising for local good causes. Nikki also talked about plans for this year's upcoming event and how income generated from the fair is being reinvested for future years. Stuart Hardcastle from Neston Samba Pirates led a demonstration of drummers and praised the Neston Community for allowing his group to thrive through Positive Action. You can pick up a copy of the 2025/26 Annual Report from the Town Hall reception area or read the digital copy here:

<https://nestontowncouncil.gov.uk/documents/annual-report-2025-2026/>

Following ratification at March's Full Council meeting, the improvement works to the stage in the Main Hall have started with gusto. Our Caretaker/Market Officer has been working additional hours to completely re-sand the wooden stage surface before the installation of the brand-new custom-made stage curtains are fitted. As part of this work, Neston Town Council has also fixed and upgraded some of the previously defunct upper lighting fixtures and corner spotlights in the Main Hall. The newly installed lighting is now LED which will see a reduction in electricity usage and costs in this room. We hope to be able to continue upgrading the lights in the hall, when budgets allow, for long term benefits to the Town Council and those who use this flexible space. Our Caretaker has also fashioned a three-part system of wooden handrails for the rear access steps at the back of the Town Hall. This is a great addition and will assist users using these stairs.

The improvement works at the front of the Town Hall are well under way. Before the end of the Financial Year, all of our Heritage railings and visitor finger posts were repainted in a sympathetic manner. This intricate work was completed by a Heritage painting contractor from North Wales, whose attention to detail is second to none. Back in early October, the Mayor and officers held a meeting with Groundwork, a company appointed by Cheshire West and Chester Council to deliver a Market Towns Assessment for Neston. This project is part of the borough Council's wider commitment to supporting the vitality of local high streets and key centres, recognising the importance of sustaining and growing footfall through a more diversified retail offer and a high-quality visitor experience. After a follow up meeting with myself, a £1,500 grant was secured from Groundwork for the fingerpost painting part of the project. Groundwork have also negotiated a Neston and Parkgate profile on the Marketing Cheshire profile of their website. We hope this will soon be live.

I attended ChALC's Larger Councils Clerks meeting at Northwich Town Council on 15th April, hosted by Jackie Weaver. These sessions provide support for clerks and the opportunity to share issues our councils are facing, many of which are universal across Cheshire West, Cheshire East and Warrington.

Neston Town Council now has a full complement of seventeen councillors for the first time since the last elections. We have welcomed Cllr James Jardine into the Parkgate Ward; James is passionate about the local area and a keen volunteer. Many Neston Town Councillors are concerned about the lack of banking services in the town and submitted an initial application to Access to Cash UK in late March 2026. We also plan to join forces with NCYC to hopefully secure a banking hub in the CH64 area.

The Mayoral Honours Board in the Main Hall has been updated and reprinted to allow for more names to be added and to ensure the longevity of the original board. All of the staff Employee Development Reviews have now been completed and staff have new targets to work towards over the coming year. This will be reported to the next HR meeting in the new Council year.

2026/27 is already shaping up to be a great year. I look forward to continuing to work with you all and delivering positive outcomes for Neston.

Zoë Dean
Chief Officer
Neston Town Council
14th May 2026