



## **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING REPORT**

**THURSDAY 24TH APRIL 2025**

**PRESENT:** Town Councillors, Colchester City Councillors, Essex County Councillor, Town Clerk, guest speakers (Adam Pipe, Bob Winnington, David Jarvis) and members of the public.

### **TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT - Mayor's Annual Report, April 2025**

#### **Welcome and Introduction**

Welcome everyone to our annual town meeting, not to be confused with the Annual Meeting of West Mersea Town Council, and which is to be held on 15 May 2025. This the town's meeting where you can see what has been happening over the last year, to ask questions and have your say. It's also an opportunity for us all to know a bit more about our community and the organisations and individuals that work to make a difference.

This last year has been challenging, but as with any year there are always positives and negatives. But overall, we are in a better position than this time last year. There have been changes and we are now moving forward in a more positive direction.

#### **New Clerk and RFO**

After a lengthy, robust recruitment process, West Mersea Town Council was pleased to welcome a new Town Clerk – Kirsty. Kirsty comes from a background with very similar governance to Councils and is settling into her role well.

Alongside the Town Clerk's role, we have also appointed a Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) who comes with a wealth of experience in finance.

Both Kirsty and the RFO are already helping WMTC move forward and continue to look at ways where we can implement better processes for the future. We thank our Locum Clerk, Petra Palfreyman for all her hard work in getting us through a difficult period and introducing the new Town Clerk and RFO to their roles.

A huge thank you to the Councillors who give up their free time to work for the benefit of the community. As everything is a team effort, I'd like to thank all council staff, those in the office and the groundsmen and cleaner who all play their part in what the council does.

So now a quick look at areas where we have put work into over the last year.

#### **Finance**

Finance and the various processes involved continue to be reviewed, especially now that we have our new Finance Officer, which has allowed us to take a fresh view of things to see where changes may be possible. We especially thank the RFO and indeed Kirsty our Clerk for the huge amount of work that they have in the first part of this to get everything as up-to-date as possible. Various finance information can be found on our website, including monthly income and expenditure. These go up to the end of February, and March will be included shortly. There is also information on the precept and budgeting.

Despite various challenges our finances remain stable. Having just mentioned the precept, although nobody likes an increase, we have continued to keep that increase under 5% again this year. So, our 4.23% increase represents a 41p a month increase per Band D property.

### **Community engagement and communications:**

We are committed to improving engagement and communication with the community.

- Newsletter – whilst we have not continued with the printed newsletters, we do send out regular updates via digital e-newsletters.
- We publish regular updates of council business in the local press, to keep residents as informed as possible.
- Councillor Surgeries continue to take place on the first Saturday of each month (except May, which is 10th May), when two Councillors are available at the Council Chamber, from 10am-12pm. No need to book, just turn up between those times and discuss council related subjects with the Councillors.
- We continue to update the website with information such as financial reports, policies and other documents, and e-newsletters.

### **Boardwalk**

The long-awaited renovation of the boardwalk on Coast Road is finally complete. Projects like this one take a long time in the preparation and delivery, due to the many issues around certain permissions needed from different organisations, along with other technical and safety requirements and logistics. One of those safety requirements to note, which was not part of the old boardwalk, is edges. These are there to prevent wheelchair users accidentally going over the edge, similarly making it easier and safer for those who are blind or partially sighted.

### **Almshouses**

Local homes for local people is something that has been mentioned many times for this community. This year West Mersea Town Council has been successful in brokering an arrangement between City and Country (Brierley Paddocks) and the newly formed Mersea Island Almshouse Trust for the building and gifting of 6 almshouses - they will be of benefit to locals of all ages who need such accommodation. Despite the negatives associated with any development on the island, we see this as a great positive.

**Neighbourhood Plan** – this is being used in planning and various decisions from Colchester City Council have quoted our policies. In particular:

- **Policy WM7** 'Loss of bungalows and chalet dwellings' which states that conversions of bungalows into two-storey dwellings must not have a detrimental impact on the character of the vicinity.
- **Policy WM 10** states development which will result in the loss of existing open space, sport or recreation sites or facilities, including allotments will not be allowed unless it can be demonstrated that the space or facility is surplus to requirements or replacement for the space or facilities lost is made available
- **policy WM27** which states that proposals will recognise and address the key features, characteristics, landscape/building character, local distinctiveness and special qualities of the area. It goes on to state that proposals will produce designs that respect the character, scale and density of the locality.

With things ever-changing, especially with regards to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Local Plan, we are now starting to review our Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that it can be as robust as possible.

### **VE Day 80 – 8th May 2025**

West Mersea Town Council is once again proud to be part of the National Beacon Lighting events being held across the UK to mark the 80th Anniversary of the end of WWII in Europe.

The Beacon event is being held on Thursday 8th May on the Victoria Esplanade Car Park from 5pm through to the beacon being lit at 9.30pm. We are very pleased to welcome as our host and commentator, former radio presenter Steve Scruton, who many will know from his BBC Essex days.

We hope people will enjoy and join in with a nostalgic vintage 1940s vibe running through the event, with a range of entertainment to suit all ages.

There will be a mix of live music from our very own Out of Tuners group, the Fat Penguins, and Vintage Billie Williams. There will also be various stalls and activities. Our local fire engine and crew will be on site, so people can take the opportunity to go and see them and their firefighting equipment. We are very pleased to have a military presence once again with various personnel from Colchester Garrison attending. The beacon itself will once again be lit by Garrison Commander Lt. Col. Ed Rankin. This is a celebration of a key moment in history so come along and get into the swing of it.

I look forward to this next year being a more settled time of unity, positivity and productivity.

Cllr Sophie Weaver  
Mayor, West Mersea Town Council

### **GUEST SPEAKERS:**

**ADAM PIPE – HEAD OF ROADS POLICING** gave an update on the General Roads Policing picture across the force, some of the challenges, priority areas of risk, and operations the police have planned to mitigate those risks including using updates in artificial intelligence. A question-and-answer session from the public followed.

**DAVID JARVIS –MERSEA COMMUNITY MAKE AND REPAIR** gave a talk on setting up Mersea Community Repair and Make (MCRM) so that people can come together to make things, repair things, repurpose things and learn new skills in a safe and welcoming space. The idea behind this is Men's Sheds meets the Repair Shop, but it's not just for men as all are welcome. It's well understood that such initiatives improve the mental health and well being of those who attend, particularly those who are isolated in their lives, so the social element is just as important as the making and repairing. People can just come for a chat and a coffee. Information about the MCRM can be found on the website.

Currently they are looking for suitable premises, somewhere central to minimise the need to use a car to get there. Meanwhile they expect to have a small start-up workshop running by the end of April. It's very early days for MCRM but already there is a significant interest.

**BOB WINNINGTON – WEST MERSEA BEACH HUT WATCH** – The Chairman of West Mersea Beach Hut Watch spoke about having regular patrollers who make sure that the huts are safe and secure and that they are not weather damaged. There are membership benefits such as discounts for car parking and for beach hut insurance. WM Beach Hut Watch have also developed connections with local organisations. There is an AGM each year in September, and a newsletter is published 3 times a year to keep their members informed. An established website has been developed over the last 12 months and WM Beach Hut Watch work collaboratively with the council to improve the overall presentation of the beach hut area. Mersea now have three recycled boats that have been planted with the help of the council. The Lions and MIND have taken on the responsibility of looking after one each. Other areas of enhancements are also taking place. Donations to RNLI, Strood Cam, Lifeguards and Refresh Mersea are made to support the community. There are some vacancies on the committee for any people interested in joining the committee.

### **PUBLIC FORUM - The public were invited to raise questions**

MOP 1 Public requested information about the local Alms houses and why there are only one- and two-bedroom houses available.

MOP 2 Spoke about ANPR, and maintenance costs involved. Requested more information on the issue.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.