

ALSAGER TOWN COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

As we come to the end of our Council year it is time to reflect and report on what happened during the last year and what our aims and aspirations are in 2017-18.

The Town Council has 14 Councillors representing the 3 wards in Alsager: East, West and Central.

EAST WARD

Councillor S Bishop
Councillor C V Burgess
Councillor D Burgess
Councillor C Pletscher
Councillor T E S Jones
Councillor S Helliwell

WEST WARD

Councillor R Fletcher
Councillor J Smith
Councillor P Williams
Councillor R Tyson

CENTRAL WARD

Councillor D I Hough
Councillor H Robinson
Councillor D Keen
Councillor M Gruse

I would like to thank on behalf of the Council, the staff for their commitment and hard work in a year which saw the retirement of Dave Dingle as Acting Town Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer whilst recruitment took place. Nicola Clarke was appointed Town Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer in September 2017.

Officers for the period or part thereof for this annual return were:

Acting Town Clerk	David Dingle
Town Clerk and RFO	Nicola Clarke
Assistant Town Clerk	Carol Bagnall
Finance Manager and Assistant	Jo Melia and Leanna Jackson
Alsager Civic Manager and Assistant	Andrea Taylor and Nolana Fielding
Assets Manager and Market Assistant	Eddison Attu and Don Williams
Admin Assistants	Michelle Buckle and Jenna Eardley Griffiths
General Assistants	Andrew, Colin and Claudia
Bar Supervisor	Daryl
Casual Staff	As Required

The Council has several Committees most of which met around six times in the year. The Committees are as follows including Alsager Institute Committee which is a charitable trust managed by the Town Council:

Full Council
Finance, Policy and Governance
Planning, Environment and Community
Alsager Civic and Services
Personnel (Meets as and when required)
Alsager Institute

This year saw the Alsager Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group working towards the final stages of producing a draft Neighbourhood Plan for Alsager. The Town Council continues to

fund Alsager Partnership in the valuable work it undertaken in serving the local community around community services and the events that are staged throughout the year for the benefit of the Town and surrounding areas.

How the Town Council is financed

The majority of the Town Council's money comes from a precept which is added to the Council Tax levy by the Principal Authority Cheshire East Council. In 2017-18 the precept was £351,217.

The total year income to the Town Council for the year was £834,518.

The money was spent providing services and representing the people of Alsager in broad terms as follows:

Planning, Environment & Community Services	£32,564
Town Council Services	£219,377
Alsager Civic	£170,852
Public toilets	£14,620
Allotments	£3,359
Market	(£1,907)
Town Centre Services	£8,035

Expenditure has been incurred against earmarked reserves in the year totalling £14,848. Furthermore, new earmarked reserves have been created which are anticipated to be utilised in the next financial year totalling £30,354. The underlying surplus generated in 2017-18 is £34,925 of which £11,813 is being utilised as funding for the Alsager Civic Refurbishment Phase II Project, with the remainder increasing the level of general reserve which now stands at % of the net budgeted revenue expenditure for FY17/18.

The Town Council has supported local voluntary and community groups in 2017-18. These grants cover a wide range of activities run locally by groups and benefitting the residents of Alsager.

Those supported include:

One World
Christ Church Alsager C of E
Alsager Community Church
Alsager Women's Institute
Alsager Sequence Dance Club
Alsager Civic Lunch Club
Alsager Pikemere Townswomen's Guild
Alsager Senior Citizens Club
2493 (Alsager) Squadron, Air Training Group
Alsager Girl Guides
Alsager Animals in Need
Alsager Bridgestones ASC

The Town Council also supports the Big Switch On and Christmas Market. This event was a huge success again this year and was a significant event on the South Cheshire/North Staffordshire calendar.

The event is a credit to the Round Table and Alsager Partnership and I would again like to extend my thanks to them for all their hard work and dedication.

The Annual Carnival, Summer Concerts in Milton Park, Dementia Awareness week and Fairtrade Fortnight continue to be well supported and engage with the community of Alsager young and old. Our thanks also go to the “In Bloom” group for their work in enhancing the Town with the colourful floral displays and planting.

What Services does the Town Council Provide

1. The Town Council has continued to provide funding for Alsager Partnership and in 2017-18 continued to demonstrate the positive impact the Partnership has on the Town. The level of funding for 2017-18 was £22,773. The Partnership has 3 representatives from the Town Council and takes a lead role in organising and co-ordinating events in the Town such as the Christmas Lights Switch On, the Summer Music Festival, Easter Egg Hunt and other provisions initiative the latest initiate to make Alsager a Dementia Friendly Town which is a truly inspirational community initiative.
2. The Town Council had a joint funding agreement with the police for the position of Police Community Support Officers for the year which has now ceased. Reports on their activity are discussed by the Council which include work relating to dealing with offenders and crime together with engaging with the community on initiatives which include: -
 - High school visits
 - Plus Dane Housing Drop in sessions
 - Nursery and Medical Centre visits
 - Elderly and Residential Home visits
 - Retailers and Shop Drop Ins.
 - Community Speedwatch.

I am pleased to report that Alsager is a safe place with crime continuing to reduce. Although the Town Council no longer contributes to the PCSO budget their presence will continue to add to the safety and well-being of our residents.

3. The Town Council contributes towards the CCTV provision in Alsager which is managed by Cheshire East Council. Quarterly reports are received, and the Town Council is glad to see their effectiveness.
4. The Town Council provide a number of allotment sites which are managed by the Alsager Gardens Association. I would like to thank the association for managing this provision which is much valued by the community in meeting the needs of both young and old, and am pleased to report that improvements have been undertaken this year in making the allotments more disabled friendly.

The sites are located at:

- Cedar Avenue

- Lawton Road at Percy James Close
 - Coronation Avenue
 - Talke Road
5. Alsager Civic, a community hub, is at the centre of the services provided by the Town Council. Its mission is to “promote those activities which address and enhance the community spirit and social well-being of Alsager residents across the spectrum of its demographic mix and to act as a vibrant focal point for the town along with providing value for money for the Town Council and local council tax payers”.

The Town Council oversaw the refurbishment of the Civic which has re-opened and proved extremely popular with a full calendar of bookings.

I am very pleased at the level of community services the Alsager Civic is providing with its mix of support for local community organisations to its programme of family events. There can be no doubt that the standards provided by Alsager Civic are much valued by the community. We are aware that the aim of Alsager Civic is to provide value for money for the Town Council and local council tax payer by generating income from its activities and by prudent management of its running costs. We are now in the sixth year of ownership and full management of Alsager Civic and our understanding is continuing to grow. We continue to strive for good value for money in operating Alsager Civic in its wide range of services that it offers to the local community and its cost to the Council tax payer and are pleased that the annual running costs at the Civic are continuing to reduce with a subsidy of just £15,059 being reported for the 2017-18 financial year.

6. The Wednesday Outdoor Market which operates from Fairview Car Park continues to provide a key service to the residents of Alsager and comprises of a mix of up to 8 stalls, the market is always keen to invite new traders.
7. The Public Conveniences sited along Crewe Road comprising of male, female and disabled toilets are provided by the Town Council at an annual cost of £14,620. Repairs of an essential nature have been undertaken during the year and this has involved works in renewing doors and external railings and the provision of baby changing facilities. The conveniences are both maintained and cleaned by the Town Council and are considered a key service to the visiting and local community. We thank Alsager In Bloom in the provision of external planting which contributes to the public conveniences and the general amenity of the area.

Alsager Town Council is the most local level of government. It serves the town’s 14,000 residents by providing an essential link between town residents, Cheshire East Council and other public service providers to ensure that the local views are heard and that their influence is meaningful.

The Town Council is a statutory consultee on all planning application and key strategic planning policies. The Town Council along with resident groups and the local MP have continued to campaign against speculative applications for housing development which have been exacerbated by the continued inability of the Planning Authority Cheshire East Council to evidence a 5 year supply of housing land. Over the last 12 months the Town Council’s Planning and Community Services Committee have considered and made observations on over

100 planning applications. As part of the consultation on the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy we have considered carefully our response on the proposed site allocations in and around Alsager and together with reviewing the wider land use policies as contained within the plan have submitted our views to Cheshire East Council as Planning Authority.

The Town Council is aware of the increasing need for local burial space. The local provision at Christ Church is reaching its end for new burials and local opinion is such that new space is needed. In the requirement for burial space consideration will need to be given as to what type is required, either traditional or less traditional and what land can be provided and where. The Alsager Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group in its land use planning work is well placed to consider this requirement for Alsager and this requirement will no doubt feature in their work.

It is worth reminding all the efforts made in community engagement with the democratic process and that the Town Council offers a period of public participation at the start of its meetings to which any local resident can come along to comment or raise a local issue. These issues can range from a major planning application to details of the council budget and requests for the Town Council to both influence and intervene when considered necessary with other public service providers.

The Town Council continues to provide good governance in relation to the administration of its affairs and again in 2017-18 received confirmation from its financial auditors that its policies and procedures meet all statutory requirements and that its systems of controls are adequate for the purpose and effective.

The Town Council produces a bi-monthly newsletter contained within the Alsager in Focus magazine which is circulated to every household and business in the Town.

Our website is continually developing in providing the community with Town Council information. We continually develop the website to meet the needs of the public and to promote Alsager Civic in the services it provides.

Challenges in the Coming Year

- To continue to exercise its power of influence on matters best serving the Communities of Alsager.
- To continue with assistance of the development of a Neighbourhood Plan in partnership with the local community to both influence and determine sustainable development within Alsager in support of and in conjunction with the Local Plan.
- To continue to build on the success of Alsager Civic following its refurbishment in its service delivery to the community of Alsager and its deficit management.
- To further develop the Wednesday Market.
- To continue to work with Alsager Partnership in its service to the local community and economy and to regularly monitor the Service Level Agreement.
- To continue to explore with Cheshire East Council, the transfer of the office premises to the Town Council.
- To continue with the provision of grant aid for local good causes.
- To enable the provision of local burial space for the community of Alsager.

- To maintain the General Power of Competence of Local Councils and to continue to develop the Town Council's work as the first tier of local government and community leader for Alsager.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, the Town Council has had a challenging year and looks forward to meeting the challenges of 2018-19. We may not get it right all the time, but we can assure residents that the Town Council is committed to both engaging with and providing local services to our residents as effectively and efficiently and as cost effective as possible in creating a feeling of well-being and preserving the character of our Village in making Alsager a great place to visit, live and work.