



Annual Report of Congleton Town Council 2014-15



Congleton Town Mayor- Cllr Denis Murphy- 2014/15



When people ask me what it's like to be the Town Mayor – I say 'It's the Best Job in Town'. This past year in office has only confirmed that opinion! As Town Mayor you meet some wonderful people, attend splendid events and spend time with so many people that do so much behind the scenes to make Congleton the delightful town that we all enjoy.

Over the past year I have attended around 200 functions in my capacity as Congleton Town Mayor. I can honestly say that I have enjoyed them all. On many of these occasions I have been accompanied by my Mayoress Mrs Joan Myatt and my Cadet Nathan Beard. Both Joan and Nathan have been a tremendous support to me. I strongly believe that more Mayors should look into creating a role for a cadet, as it gives young people a great opportunity to meet people and experience another side of life. Nathan, aged 14 and a Congleton Fire Cadet, has attended around 60 events in the past year.

Although every event has been special, there is not the time or space to list them all. Instead I would like to mention a few events that will always stick in my memory....

- Being with the Commonwealth Baton when Congleton hosted a visit in May 2014 – the only town in England to have a two hour event
- The Civic Parade and Service in June where the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire David Briggs and many fellow Mayors and Civic Dignitaries came to Congleton – the sun even made an appearance.
- Being introduced to over 100 stall holders at the annual Food and Drink Festival in Congleton in June.
- Representing Congleton at the Chief Constable's Award Ceremony where I met the new Chief Constable of Cheshire Simon Byrne
- Meeting both the North West and Britain in Bloom judges when they visited Congleton in July and August. Congleton won gold in both competitions. Also getting to meet the volunteers and teams that work on the In Bloom preparations.
- Enjoying Congleton Carnival – and joining in the parade from the Town Hall in a VW Camper Van!
- Representing Congleton at the World War One – Cheshire East Reflects event at Tatton in August – a truly moving occasion
- Attending numerous productions in our very own Daneside Theatre – but also in more unusual setting – such as the 'Home by Christmas' production at Congleton Railway Station
- Hosting the Princess Irene Fusiliers Brigade from Netherlands when they visited Congleton for the Remembrance Service where once again the people of Congleton turned out in their thousands to remember and show their respect for all who died in both world wars.
- Parading through the town with real reindeers at the start of the Congleton's Christmas Celebrations
- The laughter and fun had by all at the Town Mayor's Ball in March.

- Laying a wreath at the Anzac Day Gallilopi Commemorative ceremony at Congleton cenotaph – remembering that 16 Congleton soldiers lost their lives in that campaign
- Being part of the launch of Congleton’s summer Every Step Counts’ walking campaign with the inaugural walk at Astbury Mere.

Congleton really is a special town. The community spirit is second to none. The number of people who voluntarily give their time to help with organisations, clubs and societies for the betterment of others is staggering. As Town Mayor I have tried to promote and help these organisations where I can and I do thank everyone who contributes to making Congleton a better place to live, work or visit.

As Town Mayor it is also my duty to Chair the Town Council meetings. I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their support in making this role easier, and in particular may I thank all the Town Council staff – who I truly believe are the real town treasures and worth far more than the mayoral chains and mace! It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as the 696 Mayor of Congleton and I wish Mayor Number 697 all the very best and hope that they also agree that it is ‘The Best Job in Town’.



Cllr Denis Murphy and Joan Myatt with some of the “Town Treasures”.



Town Mayor Cllr Denis Murphy and Fiona Bruce MP at the Carnival 2014

Leader of the Council - Cllr Bob Edwards

We have just come to the end of four years in office, where I have enjoyed four years as Leader of the Town Council. It's time to look over our significant achievements as a Council during this last Municipal year and during the previous three years.

I think that the most significant and successful thing that has happened to the Town Council during 2014 was the integration of the **Streetscape Team** into our corporate structure. The costs of the team are paid for by Cheshire East. This single event has had the effect of more than doubling our workforce and has significantly increased our budget.

My congratulations and thanks go to all the staff of the Council for ensuring this smooth and improved transition of services. The Team, whilst maintaining the Town, its streets and green areas in pristine condition made some superhuman efforts in helping with our entries for North West and Britain in Bloom.

What else has been good?

New for 2014 was the introduction of the monthly **Artisan Markets** by City Markets, the company that runs Congleton's Market. There have been some weather problems over the year but the markets are warmly welcomed and well attended by both suppliers and residents. These markets are a welcome addition to our calendar and long may they continue.

After the success of the Olympic Torch relay which came through Congleton in 2012, Congleton was chosen to host a visit of the **Commonwealth Baton** on its tour around the UK. We were the only town in the whole of the UK to be invited – all other hosts were cities. What an accolade! Something that the 10,000 residents who turned out for the event recognised and celebrated.

It's difficult to say something new about the annual **Food & Drink Festival** held in mid-June. It goes from strength to strength. The event in June was another huge success blessed by good weather. It is a joy to see so many thousands of residents enjoying the success of Congleton's Community Projects team and their band of volunteers.

The **North West in Bloom** judging took place in mid-July and the **Britain in Bloom** was in early August. Thousands of hours from the Streetscape team and our many volunteers ensured success and we won gold in both events, putting us up with the top four towns in the whole of the UK. It's not easy keeping the pressure up but we were given some very supportive encouragement from the Britain in Bloom judges who visited us in December to help us plan for 2015. Three members of the In Bloom team spoke at the South West in Bloom conference sharing information of our success!

The middle of July was our bi-annual **Carnival** followed by "It's a Knockout". 2014 saw a new Carnival Committee which worked hard to see the Carnival return to its former glory. This year saw us building on the return of the popular floats with even more entries. There were many stalls and events in the park that made the day a great success. There is still much to do but we know that the wonderful people of Congleton will get behind the team and wish them every success for the future.

And to finish off the events for the year – the wonderful, well supported Xmas lights switch on! What a spectacular event this is every year, so well organised by the Lights Committee supported by Community projects and the merry band of volunteers. It's not just the children that enjoy the event! This year was particularly magnificent with the 'real' reindeers pulling Santa's sleigh. So exciting for the little children (and some not so little).



Covered so far are what I would call one off events. In the Council we also do a lot of long term planning for the future of Congleton. As part of our work on producing a Town Strategy in 2012 we helped Cheshire East with basic plans and strategies that we would like to see adopted over the next plan period (until 2030). Cheshire East took this information and incorporated it into their Local Plan which is intended to set the scene for growth and development over the whole Borough. Due to some disagreements with developers and The Planning Inspectorate the Cheshire East Plan is currently being re-evaluated. In the meantime, without an agreed planning document the Borough is under attack from Developers who believe they have every right to build where they want without consideration of the residents needs. To help overcome this problem, we like many other Towns and Parishes throughout the country, are producing a 'Neighbourhood Plan' which will carry some legal weight in informing developers just where they can site their developments. This plan will be widely consulted on and everyone will get their opportunity to contribute to it.

And finally, I hope many of you will have seen the recent announcement in the press that we have been awarded £1,000,000 by Cheshire East as a contribution towards our **Public Realm Strategy**. This award is the culmination of a long negotiation involving officers and members of the Town Council and members of Congleton Partnership. Plans are currently being drawn up as to how we will use this money but the end result will enable us to significantly update and rejuvenate the Pedestrianised area of the Town Centre. This is long overdue but although completion is unlikely before late 2016 we should have something that we can be proud of for many years to come. In parallel with the announcement of this grant, Cheshire East have committed to spending many millions of pounds in updating and improving the Leisure Centre.

At the start of this address I promised you a reflection of some of our other achievements since 2011. Each year we have achieved most of the above - it is part of what we do as your Council. The people of the Town seem to love a good celebration turning up in their thousands to mark each event. Bearmania in 2011, Olympic Torch Relay and Queens Diamond Jubilee in 2012, The Mercian Homecoming march and of course, the annual Remembrance Day parade. Seeing all of the people on the streets for these events makes me proud to be part of the Congleton Community and Leader of the Council.

We were extremely saddened by the death of Margaret Williamson MBE, DL. in April. Margaret has done more than anyone in galvanising support from many organisations and volunteers to promote the many projects (too numerous to mention here) that make this town what it is. She will be sadly missed.

Councillor Bob Edwards



In Bloom Winners 2014

Congleton Public Realm - Cheque for £1 million



Town Council

The Town Council has 20 Councillors, who are elected to represent one of the two wards in the town. Councillors are elected to serve a period of four years. Election held on 7th May 2015.

The Councillors serving during the lifespan of this annual report were:

East

Larry Barker (C)
Paul Bates (C)
Guy Brittain (C)
David Brown (C)
Bob Edwards (C)
George Hayes (C)
Sally Ann Holland (C)
Douglas Parker (C)
Glen Williams (C)
Rebecca Williams (C)

West

Dawn Allen (UKIP)
Gordon Baxendale (C)
Robbie Brightwell (C)
Louise Bours (UKIP- resigned Jan 2015)
John Saville Crowther (IVC)
Amanda Martin(C)
Denis Murphy (LD)
Jean Parry (C)
Neville Price (I)
Elizabeth Wardlaw (C)

C = Conservative, I = Independent, IVC=independent Voice of Congleton, LD=Liberal Democrats UKIP=UK Independent Party

Officers for the period of this annual report were:

- Town Clerk - Brian Hogan
- Support Manager - Jackie Potts
- Town Centre and Marketing Manager - Jackie MacArthur
- Admin Officer (Mayoral) - Linda Minshull
- Administrative Assistants - Andrea Morris-Wild, Sue Trow
- Business Administration Apprentice- Martha Hayes
- Facilities Manager- Chris Jones
- Streetscape Supervisor - Ruth Boffey
- Town Hall Supervisor - Mark Worthington
- Handyman - Chris Banks, Mark Worthington
- Streetscape Operatives - 10, plus 1 apprentice
- 3 Facility Officers - Pete Forster, Melvin Hulme, Al Shaw
- Casual Paddling Pool Attendants May - September
- 1 Caretaker - Tim Muston

Council Meetings

The Council has a number of committees, most of which meet around 6 times a year. The dates for meetings in 2014-15 were:-

Community, Environment & Services-	5/6 28/8 2/10 13/11 5/2 19/3
Council-	29/5 10/7 21/8 18/9 30/10 4/12 15/1 5/3 16/4
Finance and Policy-	29/5 28/8 23/10 27/11 8/1 19/2 26/3
Planning-	22/5 19/6 17/7 21/8 3/9 25/9 16/10 6/11 20/11 8/1 22/1 19/2 12/3 2/4
Town Hall Committee-	12/6 25/9 6/11 12/3

The Personnel Committee and Strategy Working Group are held as and when necessary.

How is the Town Council Financed?

The majority of the Town Council's money comes from a precept which is added to the Council Tax levy set by the Principal Authority. In 2014-15 the precept was £656,714 with a Support Grant provided by Cheshire East Borough Council of £65,558 which has been reduced by £9,796 over the previous year. Below is a summary of income and expenditure for the year ending 31st March 2015.

The money is spent providing services and representing the people of Congleton. In broad terms in 2014-15 the Town Council spent the money it raised on the following:

	Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	% of Budget
<u>Finance and Policy Committee</u>				
Corporate Management:-Expenditure	117,211	123,925	6,714	95%
Corporate Management Income	-71,629	-69,825	1,804	103%
Net Expenditure over Income	45,582	54,100	8,518	84%
Democratic Rep'n & Mgmt/Civic:-Expenditure	44,237	49,616	5,379	89%
Grants	66,985	72,577	5,592	92%
F&P Income - Expenditure Totals	156,804	176,293	19,489	89%
<u>Community, Environment & Services</u>				
<u>Streetscape</u>				
Streetscape Expenditure	469,069	482,398	13,329	97%
Streetscape - Income	-353,627	-346,314	7,313	102%
Net Expenditure over Income	115,442	136,084	20,642	85%
<u>Town Hall</u>				
Town Hall - Expenditure	147,229	160,542	-13,313	92%
Town Hall - Income	-96,990	-107,050	10,060	91%
Net Expenditure over Income	50,239	53,492	3,253	94%
<u>Capital Expenditure</u>	96,778	96,778	0	
<u>Total Net Expenditure</u>	604,226	657,136	52,910	92%
<u>Precept 2014/15</u>	656,714			
Underspend 14/15	52,488			

Congleton Town Council Management Accounts March 2015

Grants Given in 2014/15

The Town Council has supported local voluntary and community groups with approximately £68,535 worth of grants in 2014-15. Among those assisted were:-

Grants given to hirers of the Town Hall		2,942
Congleton Museum	Notional Rent	4,500
Community Projects	Project Support	16,000
Congleton Partnership	Rent	1,533
Citizens Advice Bureau	Annual Grant	15,000
Christmas Lights	Christmas Lights	9,000

Total		48,975
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Team Congleton 2012	Legacy Projects	1,500
Friends of Congleton Park	Cables etc. for Park Events	180
Friends of Congleton Park	Brass in the Park 2014	250
SOL Theatre School	Summer Theatre School 2014	1,000
Bromley Farm Community Trust	Support for B Farm News	380
Congleton Building Preservation Trust	Support for Physic Garden	500
Macclesfield & Cong District Scouts	Support for Jamboree	250
Congleton Harriers	Cong ½ & ¼ Marathon	250
Congleton Jazz & Blues	Support 2014 Festival	500
Cheshire & Shropshire Immediate Care	Help equip Volunteer	
	Doctors in Congleton Area	1,000
Congleton WW1 Awareness Group	Support for "Over by Christmas"	300
Open Space Arts Festival	Support for Arts Festival	250
Congleton Musical Theatre	Production of "Anything Goes"	500
Tornados Basketball Club	Sponsorship of Shirts	250
St. Peter's Church	Restoration- Phase 2	1,000
Ruby's Fund	Grant towards the Sibling's Room	500
Congleton Town Football Club	Grants towards Floodlights	1,500
Bromley Farm Friendship Group	Christmas Party	214
Congleton Choral Children's Choir	Support for Children's Choir	250
Congleton Harriers	Support for Cloud 9 Race- March 15	250
Dane Valley Scout Group	Purchase of Defibrillator	1,290
Team Congleton	Support for "Every Step Counts"	2,000
Congleton Cricket Club	Junior Kit	250
Trinity Methodist Church	Towards New Heating	1,000
Congleton Spiritualist Church	Towards New Windows	250
Friends of Congleton Park	Brass in the Park 2015	250
SOL Theatre School	Summer Theatre School 2015	1,000
Congleton Green Space Trust	Support to purchase- Vale Allotments	2,000
Bromley Farm Community Trust	Support to produce B Farm News	400
Congleton Community Credit Union	Membership of CEVS	45

Total		£19,559
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Services Provided

What Services does the Town Council Provide:

1. We fund 50% of the cost of four out of the seven Police Community Support Officers.
2. We operate a Handyman Service who are responsible for cleaning up a variety of areas around the Town, removing litter, graffiti, tidying open areas, clearing pathways and alleys, anything to make the Town cleaner and tidier.
3. We operate a Streetscape Team consisting of a staff of 11 transferred from Cheshire East Borough Council on the 1st January 2014. Their role is to keep the Town tidy, empty litter bins and look after the ground maintenance activities in and around the Town and in Congleton Park.
4. We have recruited an apprentice for the Streetscape Team and will recruit a second apprentice in the summer
5. We have a Market Town Manager who organises a variety of events in the Town as well as spending time promoting the Town and its businesses
6. We have restored and refurbished the Town Hall which was inherited from Congleton Borough Council; this has cost about £750,000, which included recently refurbishing and re-roofing thirteen of the various roofs that make up the Town Hall complex. The finance for the work is provided by way of a low cost Government loan and an interest free loan from the former Congleton Borough Council
7. The Council returns approximately £69,000 per year to organisations within Congleton to support their various activities, including making a significant contribution to the Citizens Advice Bureau
8. The Council provides Allotments
9. The Paddling Pool is opened annually and maintained
10. All of our Councillors are volunteers and do not receive any remuneration or fee whatsoever

Congleton Town Council is the most local level of Government. It serves the town's 26,500 residents by:

- Providing an essential link between town residents and Cheshire East Borough Council to ensure grass roots views are heard and considered.
- Facilitating economic development and regeneration of the Town
- Examining all planning and licensing applications and giving opinions to the Borough Council on behalf of local residents
- Managing a range of local services and facilities to benefit the Town including the Town Hall, handy-man service, streetscape and grounds maintenance services, paddling pool and allotments
- Providing financial support to a variety of community groups and organisations which support the well-being of Congleton residents.

Key Achievements

Some of the major achievements for 2014/15 include:

- High Street facing office facilities open Monday – Friday 9-5pm
- Part-funded Four Police Community Officers for the Town (£47.2k)
- Produced quarterly Town Council and Community Newsletter (Bear Necessities)
- Streetscape operations now managed by Town Council
- Continued and developed the well-respected Town Handy Person Scheme
- Worked on promotion of the Town
- Christmas Fayre and Lights Switch on ceremony
- Supported town events such as the Food and Drink Festival
- Continued to support an active Youth Committee to serve the Town
- Provided direct support to Congleton In Bloom, and Cheshire Community Pride Awards
- Achieved gold in both North West in Bloom and Britain in Bloom.
- High Profile Congleton Partnership & liaison with businesses
- Promoted business and Link2Prosperity
- Northern Link Road close to becoming a reality with a large government grant being provided
- Lobbied Cheshire East Council to support the Public Realm Strategy and gained a grant for £1m
- Provided Town Centre Management & was one of ten High Street UK 2020 Pilot Towns
- Continued to promote the Town Hall as a Wedding Venue and held further Wedding Fayre

Some key initiatives for 2014/15- taken from the Corporate Strategy are:-

An Active and Engaged Community

- To administer the community grant scheme to help support and develop local groups including the CAB
- Support the Congleton Community Partnership
- To operate openly and share information through the Town
- Council website, community newsletter, notice boards, print and social media
- To continue to engage in the town's next generation by supporting youth organisations and facilities and by working with the Town's Youth Councillor Committee
- Support Sport & Leisure facilities, which promote healthy lifestyles, including supporting Team Congleton's activities in assisting in the Every Step Counts Walking Campaign
- Support Congleton's Food and Drink Festival
- Maintained Mayor's Cadet Scheme
- Producing a Neighbourhood Plan, with assistance from volunteers and key members of the community

A Sustainable Environment

- Continue the Town Handyperson service and integrated with Streetscape Team
- Directly support “In Bloom” initiatives in Congleton Bromley Farm and Buglawton
- Encouraged more volunteers to become involved in the town clean teams and Congleton In Bloom
- Fund four Police Community Support Officers to work in the Town and support the work of Shop-watch
- Measure the Carbon Footprint of the Town Hall
- Support efforts to soften and green Mountbatten Way, included in Public Realm Strategy
- Completing phase 4 of the River Dane Walkway to provide a green corridor across the town
- Continued to facilitate and promote phase 1 & 2 of the Public Realm Strategy and gained £1m of funding from CEC
- Actively support the Management Plans for our Conservation Areas
- Work with parties to ensure that regeneration and new developments reflect the heritage and traditional architecture of the Town
- Supporting the development of the Cenotaph area as a local heritage scheme

A Strong and Diverse Economy

- Lobbying Cheshire East to provide a Lifestyle Centre
- Lobbied for high quality employment sites and improvement of existing Business Parks to be included in the Local Plan
- Provide Town Centre Management
- Work with partners to utilize the Town’s entrepreneurial strength
- Lobby Cheshire East for use of S106 money for Town Centre Regeneration
- Advocate for improved public transport links
- Support the Musical Festival- Jazz & Blues
- Work with retailers to maintain trade group (s).



“Streetscape in Action”



Reindeers at the Christmas Light Switch On

Public Realm

The Town Council published a Congleton Town Centre Plan in March 2008 which outlined the preferred development strategy for the Town. This plan was then used to inform a Public Realm Strategy which was published in 2011. As part of the 2011 strategy conceptual designs were published which included enhancing the pedestrianised Bridge Street /Little Street area and creating a Shared Space at the intersection between Bridge St /High Street and Moody St / Market Street, referred to as Festival Square.

In December 2014 Cheshire East Council confirmed that in principle £1m was available for these enhancements and instructions to progress the scheme were issued.

As part of the early stages for the scheme a Topographical Survey has been commissioned and this was undertaken in the week commencing 9th February 2015, illustrating that the first preliminary work for the scheme has commenced.

The actual projected work programme is shown below:-

Workstage	Month												
	Jan-15	Feb-15	Mar-15	Apr-15	May-15	Jun-15	Jul-15	Aug-15	Sep-15	Oct-15	Nov-15	Dec-15	Jan-April-16
Budget Cost Plan review	█	Complete											
Briefing of Portfolio Holder		█	Complete			█				█			
Briefing of Local Members		█				█				█			
Cabinet			FWD PLAN	█				█					
Topographical Survey		█											
Briefing CTC (scheme scope discussions)		█				█				█			
Project team meeting			█	█		█		█		█		█	
Project Governance (TEG /EMB)			█ Gateway 1						█ Gateway 2				
Initial Site investigations			█										
Preliminary Design				█									
Consultation / Engagement							█				█		
Detail Design									█				
Construction													█

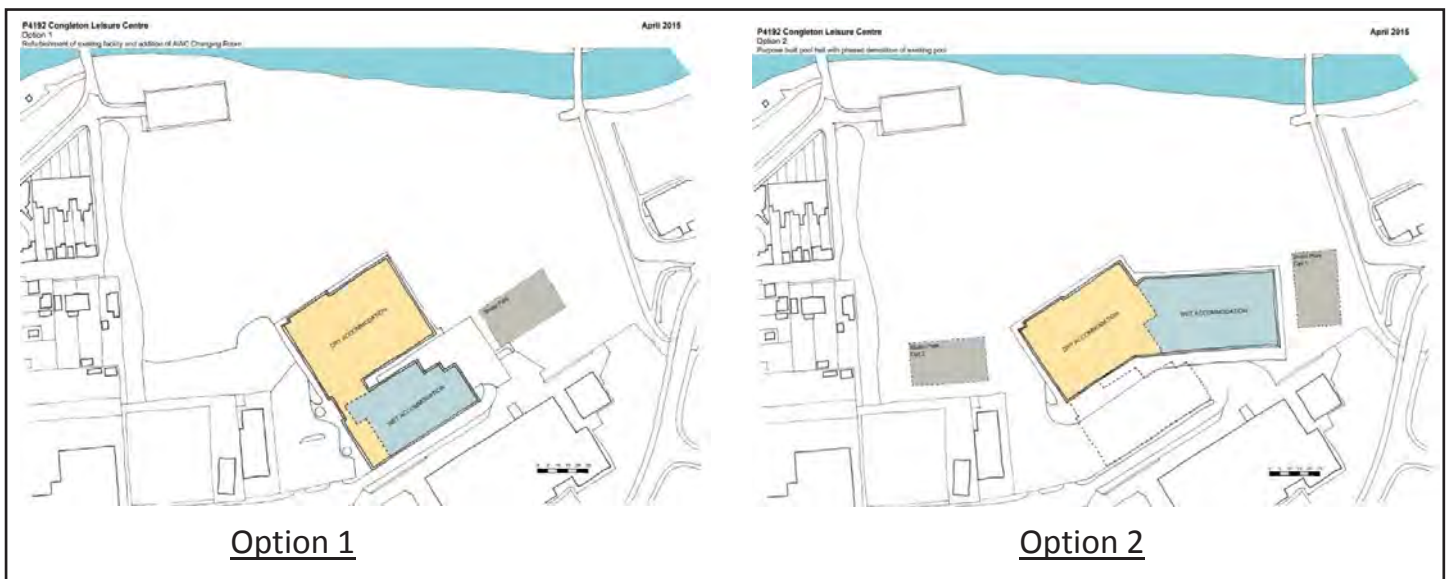


The artist's impressions provide some idea of how the pedestrian area might look in the future but, detailed designs outlining materials to be used, specific design parameters and street furniture to be installed, have yet to be produced.

Congleton Leisure Centre

Cheshire East Council is committed to providing an enhanced healthier lifestyle/ Leisure Centre for Congleton. A pre-consultation survey in October 2014 showed Congleton public's main priority was an updated Leisure Centre building with added/ upgraded facilities with the swimming pool being the most important with 74% indicating that they would really like a pool to be available and 67% would really like a sports hall.

In March 2015 Cheshire East cabinet approved £8.5 million plan to modernise CLC. Considering Option 1- using the current site and option 2 including some new build.



Cheshire East Council will be working with sporting clubs and park users, including Congleton Rugby Club and Friends of Congleton Park, as plans start to develop. There could also be an improved skate park and new landscaping and planting to improve the bio-diversity of the site.

This is an exciting opportunity of Congleton, with a vision of a greatly improved Leisure Centre, which will turn into a reality.

Congleton Leisure Centre - continued

Artist's impression of how the Leisure Centre could potentially look like when viewed from Hankinson's Field



Artist's impression of how the Swimming Pool could potentially look

Artist's impression of how the Fitness Suite could potentially look



Neighbourhood Plan



Congleton is in the process of creating a Neighbourhood Plan for the town. This will be a major piece of work during 2015-16 and one that needs to be right as it will have an impact on the town for the next 30 years. Providing Congleton's Neighbourhood Plan passes all the legal steps AND is approved by the majority of residents who vote in a referendum, the plan will become a document that must be considered by developers, planners and the planning inspectorate until 2030.

Through a Neighbourhood Plan we can influence where we want new homes, shops and offices to be built. We can have a say on what those buildings should look like and what infrastructure and services are needed to help our town prosper.

The Neighbourhood Plan concentrates on land use. It cannot be used to block development planned by Cheshire East and it has to take account of at least the minimum number of homes planned for the area. However it can be used to determine the style, location and type of development that Congleton people think is best for Congleton as well as a protecting the heritage and open space that is valued by the community.

The Neighbourhood Plan is being driven by a Steering Group made up of local people from business, residents and community groups as well as some elected Town Councillors. There are a number of themed groups which are working on specialist areas – such as health and education, economic development, town centre, transport etc.

Everyone who lives in Congleton can get involved! The more people involved, the stronger the plan will be.

- An initial questionnaire has been sent out to all households – please fill it in!
- A more detailed questionnaire will follow – please help us with this too...
- You can keep up to date at www.mycongleton.org
- Twitter feed [#mycongleton](https://twitter.com/mycongleton)
- Email talk@mycongleton.org



New Councillors

Elected in May 2015

East Ward

Larry Barker (C)
Charles Booth (C)
Peter Broom (C)
David Brown (C)
Bob Edwards (C)
George Hayes (C)
Sally Holland (C)
Anna Morrison (C)
Harvey Richards (C)
Glen Williams (C)

West Ward

Nick Adams (C)
Suzanne Akers- Smith (C)
Dawn Allen (UKIP)
Andrea Armitt (C)
Geoff Baggott (C)
Paul Bates (C)
Robert Boston (Lab)
Amanda Martin (C)
Jean Parry (C)
Liz Wardlaw (C)

C = Conservative, L = Labour, UKIP = UK Independent Party

Contacts

You can contact Congleton Town Council by:

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