



Cllr Tim Adams
Leader, North Norfolk District Council

Mr Steve Blatch
Chief Executive North Norfolk District Council

31 January 2023

Dear Cllr Adams and Mr Blatch,

I am writing to inform you that the popular Active Fakenham Easter Sunday Funday and races annual event may have to be cancelled this year. Although NNDC have no role in, or responsibility for, this event I thought its possible demise may illustrate some interesting issues. These relate particularly to cooperative working across the voluntary, public and commercial sectors, an area which, it seems to me, the NNDC and NCC seem to be lacking, at least in Fakenham.

Active Fakenham works productively with dozens of local businesses and hundreds of volunteers. We also have a good working relationship with Fakenham Town Council. The Easter event alone has nearly one hundred volunteers involved, many giving up their Easter Sunday for no remuneration.

As you may (or may not) be aware, Active Fakenham has been organising local events and activities for over ten years. We have so far run nearly two hundred and they are all themed around "well-being" and have aimed to be inclusive and/or low cost. Many have also brought economic benefits to the town.

One small, but pertinent example is the use of the crowd control barriers for the Easter event. For several years we have borrowed the NNDC barriers at no cost to the NNDC. We collected and returned them. When I asked last year to borrow them I was informed that NNDC had "lost" them. When I tried to clarify this by email I received no reply and further emails were returned as "not read". Similarly this year I have had no luck. The implications of this are:

1. The lowest estimate I have been able to obtain for the hire of these barriers is £1,500.00 which is likely to make the event unworkable. Previously local firms collected the NNDC barriers for no cost to us as their community contribution.
2. As well as feeling this response was unprofessional (as is losing 150 crowd control barriers) I felt patronised and ignored. I do not feel this attitude encourages community support at a time when resources are limited.
3. If the event is cancelled several hundred people will be denied this free to view and cheap to enter healthy event.
4. The event raises the profile of the town and probably generates additional income and increased visitor numbers. People attended from across the region and further afield. I had enquiries from the Netherlands.



5. It is generally felt in Fakenham that the focus of the local authorities is to prioritise the coastal and tourist areas at the expense of the less glamorous towns. For example, the investment in the new café and resources at the Sheringham theatre (the one just down the road from the swimming pool!). An investment which I fully support,. If there is no bias in favour of these towns there is certainly a perception of bias.

In addition we have tried to focus our events on non-traditional areas for these kinds of events. So, for example, the women's cycle race has gained a particularly good reputation (last year it was won by the National Champion) and we have had entries for the runs from people aged one to over eighty.

It is felt that both NNDC and North Norfolk County Council have a strongly "top down" approach and do not like to work with their communities. I speak here as someone who is heavily involved in the local community and someone who has a successful local business as well as experience over several years working in public sector.

Of course, all costs have increased and although Active Fakenham is hoping to deliver a full programme of events this year, we will be reviewing our activities for 2024 with the expectation that they will be sharply reduced. This year we planned our Easter Sunday Funday and races, we have organised and funded some theatre for the Junior School, we will run the Duck races and Cardboard raft races, the Get Active in Fakenham Week and the Ride North Norfolk non-competitive cycle sportive. In addition we have set up the Tourist Information Centre/Hub (closed by NNDC some years ago and with no support from NNDC although we did get set up support from the Fakenham Town Council) and we hope to run some more free cycle safety checks and maintenance sessions in the town and local villages. I also expect there will be a range of incidental activities in the coming year.

It is regretful therefore, that both the NNDC and Norfolk County Council have been unable to support so many local people, organisations and businesses to provide amenities for their own localities. I appreciate that after many years of austerity and unfair cutbacks to the public sector (which local government has taken more than its fair share) it is a shame that you seem to be taking such a traditional and short sighted approach to enabling communities to provide low cost solutions to our current problems.

It seems to me that if our town centres are to thrive, or at least not to decline, then the communities that are part of them should be treated with respect and maybe even listened to.

Yours sincerely

Richard Crook
Chair, Active Fakenham

CC
Fakenham Town Council
Fakenham District and County Councillors
Leader and Chief Executive Norfolk County Council