



Melton Mowbray Town Estate
2 Park Lane, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 0PT



Graham Bett, Chairman

Report to the Annual Town Meeting

30 October 2024

When I stood here last year, I reflected on an extraordinarily difficult year in which we called a halt to the Town Estate's failure to tackle, or even acknowledge, a looming financial crisis, and the charity's consequential failure to meet the needs of the people of Melton Town.

I explained then, that if the TE continued to bury its head in the sand, it was putting at risk the very future of the parks, the markets and other facilities the Charity provides for the people of the town.

So last year, a new course was set, and it is pleasing to report real and tangible progress towards recovery. We have turned a corner (actually it feels more like a series of slaloms) and are set along the road to better times.

The process has not been without pain. Few people genuinely like change. So, explaining openly and honestly - to staff, tenants, partners, and customers - even to ourselves - that change must happen - was not popular.

Implementing it, even less so.

However, I can now report that we have stabilised and modernised the organisation; we've controlled costs, and begun to tackle the issue of charging other organisations for their use of our facilities, land & buildings.

As Feoffees, we could not ask everyone else to change, but not ourselves. We needed to change the governance of the TE - to modernise and stabilise the charity, while respecting its history and legacy.

You will see reference to our governing document in the Report. It is the "Scheme of Arrangement" as of 1 December 1989, as amended on 23 June 2020 and 02 September 2024. We're not the first to "modernise" -- the 1989 SoA replaced the Deed of 1793.

The main focus of this most recent change is to reduce, over the next 3 years, the size of the Board of Feoffees to eight, by electing two Feoffees per year. As part of that process, we are also moving to having a single Townwarden (who is also a Feoffee) appointed by and from the Board.

Of course, although I am pleased to report that we are now moving in the right direction, there have been setbacks. After just 9 months of incredible dedication and success in laying the foundation stones and stabilising the organisation, we lost our CEO, Linzi Elliott in December.

But “out of adversity comes opportunity”¹ and the Board took a brave and crucial decision to tackle head-on the strategic need to increase the income. It recruited a successful commercial manager, Dean Rees, as CEO in February 2024.

This appointment was made just as the College site on King Street was sold for an amount that far out-weighed earlier offers.

By the way, sadly, the sale of the King Street site finally ended over 400 years of the Town Estate’s involvement in the provision of schools for the people of the Town.

However, the proceeds of the sale are already providing a modest return for general funds, and are the bedrock of our investment in the future number, range, size and quality of financially successful events and activities in our parks and markets. It is the extra income from these events that will support our charitable aims and begin to meet the expectations of the people of the town.

Other specific matters from 2023/24 I should mention include:

Café in Wilton Park: it is unbelievably frustrating that it takes so long to be allowed to remove an old bowls pavilion / ex café. The delays have cost us a whole season of trading and lost pleasure & enjoyment for the public. At least we could re-open the Kiosk in Play Close and this is proving very popular.

Town Estate Markets The importance to the town of our markets is clear, yet largely goes unrecognised or acknowledged by many decision makers.

As with other issues, we have taken our heads out of the sand and faced up to the reality that market contraction is here in plain sight for all to see. We have just received expert advice on new ways to develop and protect our markets. This advice will be considered – and acted upon – in 2025.

Clearly their also needs to be urgent and effective action to invigorate other aspects of the town centre, so we will be looking to work with partners – the County Council, the Borough Council, and the BID – to achieve our vision.

You have seen a glimpse of what is possible with our Friday “Borough Market”. But much more needs to follow.

Parks

¹ Benjamin Franklin

Thinking of seeing a glimpse of the future. Large numbers of Melton people really enjoyed our free big screen showing in Play Park of the England matches in the European Cup this summer. And many also enjoyed the film nights.

I need to be frank; we want to put on free events for people whenever we can; but they can only happen when we have significant income from other sources to subsidise such events. Some will be through sponsorship; but others such as this week's fireworks, we must charge for.

We recognise the need to improve facilities at Sysonby Acres, where the caravan facilities really need hardstandings to extend the season.....

But our other focus for our parks is to protect and improve them as a wonderful facility for Melton people to freely enjoy.

In this respect, the "greening of Egerton Park" is another glimpse of what is possible. We have been planting, and will continue to plant, more trees and shrubs to provide for interest, wildlife, and shade in the context of climate change; while of course, preserving the Cricket Club at its centre.

As with the markets, we very recently completed a survey of all our trees; and feoffees will soon be considering the recommendations. Like so many aspects of the TE, this is something that has not been sufficiently done over many, many years. Changes will be seen. Some trees in our parks are, like many of us, getting a tad old. Some will be lost, some reduced – but many, many more will be planted.

I was asked recently whether our plans for a Park Centre are forgotten? The answer is absolutely not. We need the Park Centre to provide improved facilities for the public – toilets, café, activity room – while providing us with income streams that are more tolerant of the weather.

No recent report about the Parks would be complete without mention of the MOWS boats. We were pleased to see the successful launch of the rowing boats in Wilton Park, and look forward to future collaboration with MOWS for the 12 seater tour boat.

So, to sum up our plans and priorities for the future:

- Continue to improve the sustainability and efficiency of the charity Why? so that it can better serve its charitable aims and the people of Melton Town.
- Improve the parks by planting hundreds of trees and shrubs, to ensure they continue to meet the changing needs of the people of Melton, in response to climate and social change

- Increase the number, extend the range, and improve the quality of activities and events provided in our parks
- Increase the number, extend the range, and improve the quality of markets run directly and indirectly by the Town Estate
- Develop proposals, including a business plan, for an attractive Park Centre in Play Close that includes a welcoming café for park users, toilets, other space for community use, and a base for the Charity

Finally, and most especially, I want to say something about our staff. Every year the same sentence appears in the report and minutes: "The Board of Feoffees wishes to thank the Town Bailiff and his staff for their hard work and loyalty throughout the year."

But I would like to go further this year.

There are consequences for the staff of the financial crisis the Town Estate has had to face. First of all, there are too few staff being asked to do too many things. Also, as part of our modernisation process, we have had to make changes to their working arrangements, which has been unsettling for some.

Much of what they do, is taken for granted, yet when people have a go at the Town Estate, they forget they are talking about real people, doing their best, often in difficult circumstances.

So, I would like to pay a special tribute to the staff who have kept the show on the road during difficult times, and be very clear, that their efforts are appreciated, and do not go unnoticed.

So, I move two motions:

- the adoption of the Report.
- A Vote of Thanks for our staff for all their hard work this year.

And will take questions, and comments on anything connected with the TE at this point.

--- End ---