

# *Neston Civic Society Newsletter*



New mural in Neston station underpass, photo by Brenda Marple

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Website: [nestoncivicsociety.uk](http://nestoncivicsociety.uk)

## **Neston Civic Society Committee**

**Chairman** Derek Hogg  
[chairman@ nestoncivicsociety.uk](mailto:chairman@nestoncivicsociety.uk)

Michelle Johnson

**Secretary** Lindsey Hinks  
[secretary@ nestoncivicsociety.uk](mailto:secretary@nestoncivicsociety.uk)

Brenda Marple

**Treasurer** Janet Griffiths  
[treasurer@ nestoncivicsociety.uk](mailto:treasurer@nestoncivicsociety.uk)

Rob Ward  
[publicity@ nestoncivicsociety.uk](mailto:publicity@nestoncivicsociety.uk)

## **Talks**

Meetings are usually in the United Reformed Church Community Hall, Moorside Lane, NESTON CH64 6UZ, at 7.30 p.m. on the third Thursday of January, March, May, July, September, and November (the AGM). We usually have a talk, followed by complimentary tea, coffee, and biscuits.

**November 20th AGM** followed by **Peter Enevoldson - Know Your enemy: the Parkgate Mosquito**

**January 15th Steve Nelson, local estate agent - The state of housing in the Neston area.**

**March 19th Anthony Annakin-Smith, local historian and author - Interpreting the Wirral Landscape.**

**May 21st Gavin Hunter (honorary archivist and historian to the Leverhulme family) - The History of Thornton Manor and its Residents.**

## **Editorial**

In this Newsletter we have notes on three excellent talks, for the benefit of members who were unable to attend (and perhaps those who attended). We have notes about the draft Local Plan, which will affect how our area looks in future years. There is another in our series on local organisations, Neston Community Energy: if you know other local organisations that might like to be publicised, do let us know.

Thanks to Brenda Marple for Out and About, with photos illustrating the state of our shops. Thanks to Janet Griffiths for her summary of the work of the Town Council: Neston's Parish Council was set up following a campaign by Neston Civic Society, and although some of us have been disappointed at the bureaucracy, it has given Neston a voice.

Brenda Marple has taken lots of photos of the new graffiti art in the underpass at Neston station. Neston Civic Society adopted Neston station in 2006, led by Patrick Hughes, who later set up the Friends of Neston Station, which continues to keep the station looking good, supported by Transport for Wales. Neston Civic Society paid most of the cost of the art from the Ruby Holloway bequest, with funds also from the Town Council.

At our AGM on November 20<sup>th</sup>, we need some new members of the committee, please. We need volunteers to help at meetings, and with publicity, including editing the newsletter.

Rob Ward

## **What makes Ness Gardens special.**

### **Notes on talk by Nick Lightfoot, Curator of Ness Botanic Gardens on May 15th 2025**

Nick is researching the history of Ness Gardens. He looked back to 1998, when it celebrated its centenary, having been established by Arthur Bulley in 1898.

Lois Bulley, daughter of Arthur, gave Ness Gardens to the University of Liverpool in 1948.

Ken Hulme came in 1952, and as Director made Ness Gardens an important site for rhododendrons.

1966 was another important year, when Peter Cunnington came. We saw photos of Peter, who was in the audience, collecting plants from central and east Asia.

Nick then took us to 1972, when Hugh McAllister came. We saw video clips of Hugh cutting brambles to get to trees, and then recounting where the tree had come from, which was invaluable information in indexing all the plants. Ness Gardens has a very high proportion of its plants (33%) from the wild.

Nick told us about the research going on, into climate change and archaeology, and the educational work. He told us that they have three National Collections, and 17 Champion Trees. Drones now allow them to map the site in amazing detail.

He ended by encouraging us to compete in the Annual Show on August 17th.



*Rob Ward, Michelle Johnson, Nick Lightfoot, Derek Hogg, Janet Griffiths*

***Deva and the Dee: the nautical history and the creation of the ports along the river Dee***  
**Notes on a talk by Jennifer Watson from Sealand on July 17<sup>th</sup> 2025**

There was a packed audience to hear a fascinating account of the history of Chester and the Dee. On a hot and humid evening, we had a break part way through the talk. We heard about Romans, Vikings, Normans, Cheshire cheese, boat-building, and the impact of canals and railways, of taxes and fashions.

**Chester as a port**

The Romans occupied Chester from 73 to 388 AD. In the Battle of Chester in 616 AD, the Anglo-Saxons defeated the Celts. Chester was a settlement for the Scandinavians, who built new quays, and traded with Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were Anglo-Saxon naval forces. The Normans built a wooden fort in 1070, and in the 12<sup>th</sup> century replaced it with a stone castle.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, ships were bringing furs, wines, fish, grain, timber and coal from France, Spain, and Ireland. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, fish, hides and cloth were exported, and wine and manufactured goods were imported. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century the population had declined following plague, and larger ships could no longer reach Chester.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the Civil War, with the siege of Chester and another plague, but later the cheese trade increased, and there was trade with the Baltic countries and Ireland. We heard of French pirates stealing cheese!

Attempts to keep the Dee navigable led to Navigation Acts in 1699, 1707 and 1732. Work started in 1733, and the new channel was opened in 1737, allowing ships up to 600 tons to pass. Sealand was named in 1777.

Jennifer showed us a map of 1732 with a ford or *saltesway* from Shotwick to Flint. A map of 1795 showed a safer way to cross, with ferries imaginatively called Lower Ferry and Higher Ferry.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century coastal trade had expanded, and ships even went to South Carolina, and ships were involved in the African slave trade. The arrival of canals, and then the railways in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, took trade away from Chester shipping.

The salmon trade was important. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century it was strictly controlled and taxed, but by the 19<sup>th</sup> century over-fishing had depleted the stock. Numbers increased in the 1920s, after salmon steps were created, but numbers again declined. In 2000 a chemical spill killed about 100,000 salmon.

The river Dee also powered mills, with six recorded in 1237. There were fulling mills, for making cloth, flint mills for needles, and mills producing tobacco products. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century a lot of wheat was milled at Dee Mills, and Chester was an important military supply base. A fire in 1895 destroyed Dee Mills. The site was bought by the City Council.

Ship building was important in Chester from 1672 to 1869, with orders from the Royal Navy, the East India Company and the West India Company.

**The Dee Estuary**

Jennifer showed us a diagram of the estuary with Ancient Harbours: on the Welsh side were Connah's Quay and Flint, while on the English side were Blacon Point, Shotwick, Neston, Parkgate, Heswall and West Kirby.

Shotwick had a 'road' to Flint, called the Saltsway or King's Way, last used in 1796. Neston had a New Quay that was active from 1560 to 1660: it's now called the Old Quay (not to be confused with the Old Quay pub in Parkgate!).





*Old Quay October 2025*

With the discovery of coal, Denhall Quay was built in 1791, and is still there, near the Harp Inn. As well as exporting coal, it imported limestone and slate, but fell into disuse with the advent of the railway.



*Denhall Quay October 2025*

Parkgate was an important port for many years, with ferries to Flint, Bagillt and Dublin, but suffered, as elsewhere, from silting of the channel.

On the Welsh side, we learned that Saltney means Isle of Salt. After the London to Holyhead railway was built in 1844, and the Chester to Saltney line in 1846, it became a busy port and shipyard. Sandycroft was also a busy port, with a tram road from a foundry to the river.

Queensferry no longer needed a ferry after a toll bridge was built in 1897. This was replaced by the bascule bridge in 1926. Wepre (Connah's Quay) was active in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with boatyards, one of which built the Kathleen May (which has been in Liverpool).

## **Leahurst: future as a University of Liverpool campus.**

### **Notes on a talk by Professor Paul Lunn, Head of the Veterinary School at Liverpool University on September 18<sup>th</sup> 2025**

Paul began his talk with a summary of his career. He grew up in Caernarfon. Having graduated as a vet at Leahurst in 1982, he did a Large Animal internship in Canada. He was in general practice in UK from 1985, then did a Residency and MS degree in USA from 1988. Back in UK, he did his PhD at Cambridge from 1991. He moved back to USA, and spent 30 years as an academic staff member in Wisconsin, Colorado, and finally as the Dean at North Carolina State. He became Head of the Liverpool Veterinary School in January 2022. Paul showed members of Neston Civic Society committee around Leahurst in January 2024.



*Paul Lunn with an equine patient*

Paul explained that Leahurst is home to the Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Science, as well as the School of Veterinary Science. There are 400 students, in years 4 and 5 of the course. Students also do 30 weeks of extramural studies. The campus includes two farms, two referral hospitals, two first opinion practices, and conducts research. More UK vets graduate here than in any other vet school. (Some are bigger but have more overseas students.)

When Paul came back to Leahurst, he found the buildings needed a lot of repair. He outlined his plans for long-term development, involving partnerships with government, industry and Chester Zoo. He hopes to have two new operating theatres, an indoor arena for horses, and accommodation for students.

The large audience produced lots of questions and comments, including suggestions of ways in which students could be more involved in the local community, such as cat rescue. Members spoke of positive experiences of having vet students as neighbours. The VetFest at Leahurst had attracted many visitors in 2024 and 2025, and the Christmas carol concert in Neston Parish church had been a great success.

Paul offered his contact email, which anyone can use to share events/ opportunities that Leahurst might engage with. [VetSchoolDean@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:VetSchoolDean@liverpool.ac.uk)



### **Ruby Holloway Bequest - Update**

Newsletter 105 (May 2023) had an article about donations made from the Ruby Holloway Bequest. Since then, the fund has given money to Neston Primary School for playground equipment, to Neston Community & Youth Centre for Neston Civic Hall roof fund, and to Neston Music Festival for publicity.

Neston Flower society received money for its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary displays in the Town Hall, and Friends of the Wirral Way had funds for equipment.

Friends of Flint Meadow had money for a bench:



Money was given towards renovating and moving the Library mosaic, and Burton & Neston History Society received funds for information boards. Most recently the bequest helped pay for painting the mural in the station underpass, as seen on the front page and on page 16.

### **Neston Village Fair July 5<sup>th</sup> 2025**

Instead of the usual venue, Comrade's Field, the Fair was on a field off Raby Park Road. Despite the roadworks, there was an excellent turnout and many people visited our stall.



*Janet Griffiths & Lindsey Hinks on our stall. Rob Ward & Derek Hogg also helped.*

## **Neston Community Energy - The Journey So Far!**

It started with a conversation at a Neston Earth Group meeting about ‘doing something big’. In 2023 this group of committed climate change advocates decided to see what ideas residents had for impacting on the climate. Tackling pollution emerged as a key concern and much of the concern was about emissions from burning fossil fuels for energy i.e. for cars, homes or industry.

Neston Earth Group set up a group to look into solutions and they proposed that a community energy scheme might do the job, using the roofs of civic buildings to host small solar arrays to generate power for the building, for electric vehicle charging, and community benefit from any surplus income.

With the support of Neston Community and Youth Centre, our first public meeting as Neston Community Energy (NCE) was held in January 2024, attended by over 20 residents, where we presented ideas for ways to generate energy, including sun, wind, water, geothermal, and heat recovery. NCE was established as a Community Benefit Society (CBS), to bring green community energy projects to the CH64 area.

CWaC was already considering a solar scheme on the Clayhill Industrial Park, which would need a feasibility study. Clayhill was one of a number of possible schemes identified by CWaC, but was not considered a priority.

We consider the Clayhill site to offer a number of potential wins, with few downsides, but is an ambitious project for a new Community Energy CBS.

- It could produce low-carbon energy for about 30 years from a site that has little or no alternative uses.
- The site is well screened from neighbouring properties.
- Developing a solar park here reduces the need to use agricultural land.
- It has the potential to provide a modest profit for the benefit of the community.



*The ‘capped’ landfill site at Clayhill [Robert Thrift Photography]*



There are challenges with developing on a former landfill site. The weight of any construction must be kept to a minimum, to protect the clay cap that seals the landfill. This will add to the cost of developing the site. The size of the site means it will not benefit from the economies of scale that larger schemes can offer.

We applied to the Community Energy Fund (from the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ)) and obtained £37,825 for a feasibility study. The study was carried out by consultants [Scene Connect Ltd](#). A report produced in March 2025 concluded that whilst the solar park was technically feasible, there isn't a private customer close to the site to purchase the electricity directly and give the best financial return.

The report concluded: *“Our recommendation is to progress the project further as a community-led venture, seeking to de-risk the project prospects by securing an option agreement with the landowner (CWaC Council), conduct a detailed system design, develop a business plan, and secure planning permission. This will ensure that the community is best placed to progress the scheme where a local customer is identified and / or preferential export rates are secured.”*

The report findings were shared at a public meeting in March 2025, where there was widespread support for a Community Energy organisation in Neston. The potential for decreasing dependency on central supplies, raising income from projects to benefit the community and reducing carbon emissions has struck a chord with local people.

In July we heard that we can bid for stage 2 funding from the GB Energy Community Energy Fund for more detailed business planning. We intend to explore partnerships with other community energy companies, community shares and other energy sector providers/funders and explore how to secure preferential export rates for the energy generated. The technology in this sector is developing at pace.

In our first year we have received much appreciated support from councillors Martin Barker, Louise Gittins and Keith Millar and officers from CWaC. We received a small grant from Cheshire West Voluntary Action to pay the registration fee with the Financial Conduct Authority and a grant from Cheshire Community Foundation to support us in establishing administrative and legal compliance structures.

NCE has been working with local organisations and businesses to share information and support anyone wishing to make use of green energy. Recently NCE has been supporting Neston Community Youth Centre in looking at fitting solar PV as part of their planned roof renewal.

NCE has submitted representations regarding the energy implications of the CWaC Local Plan proposals.

If you think Community Energy in Neston is a worthwhile endeavour, do get in touch, become a member, bring your ideas, skills and enthusiasm, and play your part in combatting the climate crisis. <https://nestoncommunityenergy.co.uk/>

## Out and About by Brenda Marple

### Parkgate Road

The Tower building still has a For Sale sign up, and I imagine this not an easy property to sell with narrow winding stairs, and a very small commercial ground floor area, although the estate agents, Bolton Birch, now have it listed as 'under offer' on their website.

Liverpool House is for sale at £295,000. Dating back to the 1700's, there is a history of the property being converted for commercial use, then reverting back to residential accommodation.



Advert for J. Lawson Boot Repairs in the early 1920's. Copied from an article on Neston Past by Susan Chambers.

Village Hairdressers have now moved up the road into the premises occupied for a while by Autumn Sweets. The property they occupied is now for rent at £6,000 per annum for the ground floor space.

A bit further down, the 'For Sale' sign has come down on the property next to Redcliffe, so it will be good to see this occupied again.

### Bridge Street

It was nice to see plans for turning commercial premises of Just Riding Along and Hip and Harmony studio back into housing, and continuing the terrace. The plans, below, by architect (and former committee member of Neston Civic Society) Stephen Quicke) shows details that will make the new houses fit with their neighbours.



## High Street

Vista Abode on the High Street, has divided into two units again. Many residents will recall it was at one time two separate shops, among other things, a camera shop and barber shop. The second smaller unit appears to be available.

## Bridge Street

### Millennium Bridge Repainted

The Friends of Wirral Way have repainted the interior of the bridge.



*Photo by Brenda  
Marple*

## Ness Miners Memorial

Burton and Neston History Society dedicated the Ness Miners Memorial on Ness Green on 16 September. The memorial commemorates the men and children who worked in the Ness Collieries (1759-1855, and 1874-1927), and those who lost their lives. The project was supported by crowd-funding, with donations from Cheshire West and Cheshire Council, and local organisations. The memorial was designed by Hazel Blundell, and fabricated by Poplars Forge of Hawarden.



*Photo by Robert  
Thrift*



## **Neston Town Council Summer 2025 by Janet Griffiths**

A new Mayor was elected in May, Simon Davies, and Deputy Mayor Carol Braithwaite.



*Sion Jones (left) and new Mayor Simon Davies*

We co-opted a new councillor in July, Christopher Martin Halford. Unfortunately Cllr. Andrew Townsend has handed his resignation. He has served the Council well for the last five years.

Various councillors attend the surgeries held in the library on certain Tuesday and Friday evenings and Wednesday afternoons. The dates are on the website and in the library. Residents are invited to bring any problems such as housing, drugs, antisocial behaviour. CWaC Councillor Keith Millar also attends and the police, CWaC and NTC resolve most problems or pass the information to the relevant department.

Precept money has been used to replace the rear stage curtain in the Town Hall, provide water to the Marshlands Road allotments, replace consumables in the Town Hall defibrillator and buy a flag and banner to commemorate Victory in Japan Day.

The Town Council had a stall at the Summer Fair, which was held on the old pony sanctuary field in Raby Park Road, instead of the usual venue, Comrades Field (see page 7). Fortunately the day was wonderful and we were pleased to see so many attending.

The Neston Looking Better working group keep an eye on the appearance of the area. The number of open and closed shops are noted and volunteers continue to weed the public flower beds. The report of the West Vale Fun Day was excellent and NTC are happy to continue to support it financially.

The Marsh Working group continue to monitor the mosquito situation, and reports are put on the TC website. The TC pays for the traps which catch mosquitoes to assess the numbers. The long dry summer spell was good as it dried up shallow pools where mosquitoes breed.

The Community & Environment committee commented on the planning application for the small supermarket in the car park of the Royal Oak in Little Neston. Concern was expressed at the plan to move the bus stop, and that the building should be in keeping with the local landscape in a prominent position, and not a concrete box. They commented on an application for 14 houses on the former poultry farm in Lees Lane. This is close to the High road and the road is narrow and concerns were expressed that the entrance should be widened to permit clear visibility for cars exiting onto Lees Lane.

The Friday market continues to thrive with some special markets. During the school summer holiday another pirate-themed market was held, with the usual market trail for the children with a small prize for those completing it. We had 120 entrants this time and it was greatly enjoyed by parents and children. This year there was a real live 'pirate' complete with eye patch and cutlass, who successfully frightened a number of small children. A task and finish group is working on the 300th anniversary celebration of the market charter, which was given in 1728.

At the Council meeting in July, CWaC councillor Martin Barker reported on the shops in Brook Street. As part of the Market Town Regeneration plan, a local developer is prepared to take on the Lodestar and associated buildings to develop 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation. It is hoped that this will happen within the next 12 months.

NTC arranged an extra full council meeting to discuss the Local Plan proposals and give residents a chance to give their opinions. Rob Charnley, head of Planning at CWaC, explained the proposal and answered questions. The hall was packed, with residents sitting on the floor and standing around the walls.

The minutes of the meeting are on the TC website <https://neston.org.uk/>. (Town Council Services > Meetings and Agendas > Minutes.) A summary is on page 14.

## **Cheshire West & Chester Draft Local Plan Consultation**

### **Notes of Town Council Meeting 19th August 2025**

**The Mayor, Simon Davies**, and 12 other councillors were present, including Janet Griffiths, plus CWaC councillors Keith Millar and Martin Barker. Derek Hogg, Michelle Johnson and Rob Ward were there as members of the public.

The Mayor welcomed Rob Charnley, CWaC's Head of Planning to talk about the draft Local Plan. He urged all residents to respond to CWaC. Cllrs D. Ruscoe and N. Ruscoe declared a pecuniary interest, as landowners with potential land to sell.

**Mr Charnley** spoke about the current Issues and Options Local Plan Consultation, running until 29<sup>th</sup> August. The key message was that this is a consultation only. The target for CWaC has previously been 500 new homes, but the Council has consistently delivered 1,000 each year. The earliest the new plan will come into effect is 2027. A new plan needs to be submitted by 2026. A Local Plan can help to plan for infrastructure improvements, and ensure places do not join up through the green belt.

#### **Town Councillors' questions:**

Do plans take into account students? – No, a new Local Plan could do.

Could a developer come without permission? – No, they can be refused.

Previously refused developments have gone to the Secretary of State, which costs CWaC money. – Council is not liable to costs if they refuse on good grounds.

We need smaller social housing over 4-5 bedroom homes – If building on green belt, a minimum of 45% of the housing has to be affordable.

200 houses were built between 2010 and 2023, most executive homes; we have reached the area's limit for drainage. Younger families are moving away from the area.

Does Section 106 money feed into affordable housing? – We could demand 50% of houses in Green Belt to be affordable. Affordable rent is coming forward. S.106 has to be delivered on-site if it is not added to the local area.

Can we put a stop to people bidding for and buying land? – Any identified sites are still only options. Planning permission has to be gained.

What is the housing target for the borough? – 29,000 over 15 years (1,928 a year).

#### **Questions and Comments from Residents**

- Concerns over wildlife conservation
- Number of houses within the land bank
- Challenge assumptions of existing sites including former garage on A540.
- Infrastructure concerns for up to 3,000 additional homes.
- Importance of fields for wildlife (over-wintering birds) and the Dee Estuary.



- Concerns over sewerage, wildlife, loss of tourism and visitor economy in Parkgate.
- Concerns over field next to Brook Lane due to precious family connection.
- Reasons for three options in the Plan. Can there be a mixture of all?
- Neston train station does not directly link to Chester or Liverpool.
- Concerns over fears of compulsory purchase of land.
- Reliance on landowners who wish to sell.
- There are a lot of very small, narrow roads in the area.
- The need for more social housing.
- A request to extend the consultation deadline.

### **Town Council response to the CWaC Local Plan Consultation:**

“In principle, NTC agrees that development is necessary, angled strongly towards a high percentage of affordable and social housing. Infrastructure needs to be increased and improved...there needs to be a focus on derelict and unused sites.

Neston will look chiefly at ...green belt which needs to be retained for recreation. Any land identified as brown belt is to be developed first, followed by grey belt.

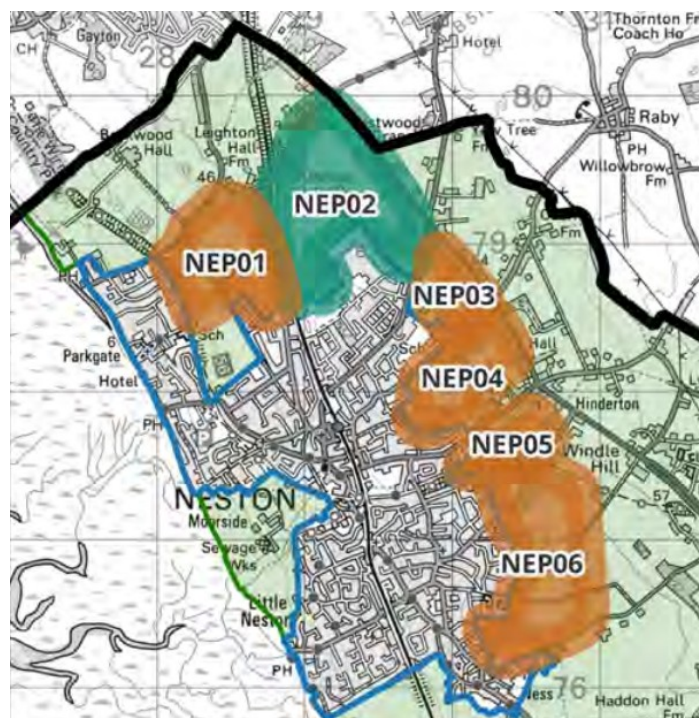
...NEP02 would be suitable for some mixed-use development as well as NEPO3 for potential sites. NTC does not consider that NEP01, NEP04, NEP05 or NEP06 are suitable for any development.

...need to include new schools...new water treatment centre... upgrades of all essential services and improvements to public transport...

...a blend of ...all options would be most suitable, whilst retaining as much of the green belt as possible from Option ‘A’ with not as many house as... ‘C’.

...increased development in the area could have a big impact on wildlife ..preserve the town’s sanctuary for wildlife and areas of outstanding natural beauty...needs to be a balance of nature with its significant impact on tourism and businesses.”

Screenshot from  
CWA website.



## The Friends of Neston Station and new murals for the underpass

In 2006, Pat Hughes led the adoption by Neston Civic Society of Neston station with Arriva Trains Wales. Later this became a separate group of volunteers who help to look after the station, now with Transport for Wales. The station now has planters, which need watering in dry weather, and recently needed refilling after being waterlogged in wet weather. They pick up litter, cut back vegetation around the two car parks, and plant the triangle by the Raby Road entrance. The Town Council pay for plants.

In September, Andy Birch, a professional graffiti artist from North Wales, created a mural to replace one he did in 2016. Most of the funding came from the Ruby Holloway bequest. Neston Town Council also contributed. Andy worked with 18 students from Neston High School, led by Ms Cleverly Dodd and Mr R. Williams, of the Art Department. The art includes Vikings, an owl (for the Dee estuary), old and new trains.

*Andy Birch (using his mobile phone to plan the next mural), R. Williams, Pat Hughes and Ms Cleverly Dodd.*



*A steam train, Neston Civic Society logo, and Neston Town Hall (Brenda Marple photo)*