

NEWENT TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Newent Town Council held on Monday 26 October 2015 at the Market House, Newent at 7.00 pm.

Present: Cllr E Wood (Mayor), Cllr D Blick , Cllr Mrs J Davies, Cllr E Heathfield, Cllr Mrs S Marcovecchio, Cllr Mrs C Howley, Cllr Mrs M Duncan, Cllr J Celino, Cllr Mrs P Celino, Cllr C Thomas, Cllr Miss M Shere

Apologies: Cllr R Beard, Cllr Mrs K Draper

Also present: Members of Newent Cycling Group, District Cllr L Lawton

12.00 Newent Cycling Group – presentation of cycle route plans

Mrs Tish Rickards – representative of the Newent Cycling Group made a presentation of the cycle route plans, particularly that relating to the proposed inclusion of the Jubilee Walk at Newent Lake.

Mrs Rickards advised a number of documents had been prepared for the meeting: a map, examples of signage, comments from a questionnaire the Cycling Group had undertaken at the recent Onion Fayre on shared used paths and a Jubilee Walk survey among local residents, copies of which were distributed to Members.

She stated the Cycling group's proposals will serve to enhance Newent's pleasant environment. They will make the Walk more readily accessible and attractive and therefore extend the benefit to more people than ever in our community. Recently Newent Cycling Group held a survey in the town and of the 50 people interviewed, 40 knew nothing about the Jubilee Walk. Still, they believe it does have tremendous potential; the potential to create a safe way of getting from one side of Newent to the other. It provides the ideal opportunity to create a shared space, free of traffic, for parents walking or cycling with children, pushing prams, teaching their children to cycle and to do so responsibly. It would be used for cycling to work, to school and to the shops. Walkers, and of course dog walkers would enjoy it. The Jubilee Walk would be a shared space too, for those mobility scooter users or people confined to a wheelchair.

She would now like to focus on cycling. The main reason given for NOT cycling is the perceived dangers from traffic. If people want to cycle to work, to the shops, or take their children to school by bike we need to give them the means to do so safely. At the moment the Lake acts as a barrier prohibiting people from cycling. There are some four miles of footpaths within Newent. The majority have "No Cycling" signs, while there is not one single route where pedestrians and cyclists can legally use the same path. Once car-free path in Newent, Jubilee Walk, would begin to encourage more people to get on their bikes. We believe this can be achieved in a considerate, happy, sharing, green space that supports the opportunity for physical activity for everyone. One of the joys of cycling is that it can readily fit into a daily routine better than most other forms of exercise. It doubles up as transport and it much easier than finding the time to visit a gym and is far less costly.

Let's just remind ourselves of the health benefits that physical activity brings to us, and these are now well documented:

- Physical activity increases cardiovascular fitness
- It increases muscle strength and flexibility combined with an improvement in joint mobility
- It decreases stress levels – people who take regular activity have few days off sick
- It improves posture, coordination and bone strength
- It decreases obesity and its associated diseases such as diabetes

Over 700 people a day are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes according to a new analysis by Diabetes UK and Tesco in July 2014. This type of diabetes is directly related to obesity and lack of exercise and it is REVERSIBLE.

Creating a shared use path, Jubilee Walk, would encourage physical activity, and might well help reduce the traffic in the town centre. It can only help to create a more pleasant environment for the community. Understandably people do have concerns about cyclists mixing with pedestrians. There are good ways to address this issue. Signs play an important role here, as well as providing the right cycling/walking culture within the town. We would support both. There are signs which specifically instruct cyclists to give way to pedestrians and it has been demonstrated, in other towns, that cyclists modify their speed to take into account other users.

The Newent Cycling Group's stand at this year's Onion Fayre attracted a lot of interest. We used the opportunity to ask people to comment on shared paths. 102 people gave their views and there was massive support for the view that cyclists and pedestrians could happily share the space. We thought you might well be interested to see their comments and we have included them in the handout. We would like to draw on Ledbury's experience. When Ledbury Town Trail was proposed there were indeed fears about the path being shared. In the 18 years since its creation, the Ledbury Area Cycling Forum has told us that it is well used, there have been no reported conflicts and the general feeling is that it is a "happy" space enjoyed by all users who show consideration for each other. Bella Johnson the Forum's publicity officer and manager of community rides including the Big Apple Bike Ride, emailed me her comments recently. She says: *- I use the TownTrail regularly and am always struck by the friendly consideration of all the users, with cyclists giving way to dog-walkers, families with prams and other users. It is a highly valued community space used by a wide cross-section of Ledbury as it links residential areas to the schools, the recreation ground, the town centre shops and other amenities. It is lovely to see the children enjoying their independence in a car-free place, where there are enough people about to keep an eye on their general safety. Mobility scooter users are especially appreciative. As well as the chance to get out into a woodland environment, they enjoy the social side of sharing the Trail with the wider community. Instead of the anticipated conflict, the Trail has proved to be a very valuable asset to Ledbury on many levels.*

How can we begin to repeat Ledbury's success here in Newent with the Jubilee Walk? The Newent Cycling Group has drawn up a scheme which we hope you will support. This is shown in your handout. We are suggesting an all-weather surface path from Two Rivers Housing at Cleeve Mill Lane, all the way to the top of the High Street at the traffic lights. In time that section of the pavement along the Ross Road, opposite the Kings Arms, could also be widened to create a shared path. This would allow safe access to Picklenash School or Glebe Close and from there to the Community School. Newent Cycling Group has received advice about the construction of the Jubilee Walk path from a local engineer and from Sustrans one of the country's leading charities enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport. We have been informed that it is perfectly possible with appropriate funding. The Group is willing to take on raising the funds and to work hand in hand with Newent Town Council to achieve this.

The All Party Parliamentary Cycling Group's "Get Britain Cycling" report in 2013 recommended an increase of cycle use from the current levels of less than 2 per cent of all journeys to 10 per cent by 2025 and 25 per cent by 2050. The Newent Cycling Group would like to do our bit working with the Town Council to make this happen.

Two years ago, we brought our outline proposals "Get Newent Cycling" to the Council – we were grateful to receive unanimous support. Last year, the Council further endorsed the Newent Loop. The Loop and our maps have proved to be very popular. With wonderful cycling countryside all around us, we can see that Newent is already beginning to develop as a local cycling centre. The Jubilee Walk will add yet another important element to this picture.

We would like to engage the support of the Council for our proposals and to work with Councillors to find tune the details. We believe this is an exciting opportunity for the Town Council to do something very special for Newent, for the wellbeing of the community and to enhance the safe and pleasant environment which, all of us so appreciate.

There are members of the Cycling Group here and we'd be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

Cllr Mrs Howley asked if the Cycling Group had made contact with the local Schools to gauge their opinion on children cycling to school. Mrs Rickards replied that they hadn't done so at this stage, however they had spoken to Shire Hall who considered the Jubilee Walk area would be a useful area for children to train. They had also had ongoing dialogue with the School on an informal basis but really their first point of call was with the Town Council to seek their support.

Cllr Mrs Howley went on to take issue with how the Ross Road path could be utilised for cycling in that it was a relatively narrow path and it was not practical to widen it given the steep bank running alongside it. The Cycling Group acknowledged this would not be easy.

Cllr Mrs Duncan asked in reality where were all of these children who would be riding their cycles to school come from? It was her belief that their parents many of whom would be working would want to take them by car and to park as close to the school gate as possible. She also believed that in reality the proposed shared use of the Jubilee Walk would have its fair share of mopeds and motor cycles all taking advantage of its hard surface.

Mrs Rickards stated that their intention was for the wider use, the broader range of people to include the local community.

Cllr Celino gave his support to the shared use of the Jubilee Walk and for access for the disabled and for pushchair users and that all walks of the community should be included.

Cllr Mrs Marcovecchio said that her concern was that Ledbury she believed grew out of the back of an housing development and didn't take up an already green space. It also had very good visibility. She also had concern for the wildlife and that it would encroach on the back gardens of the houses along the route which would also give concern for security. She also reminded the Group that local school children had planted 60 plus oak trees along the route of the Jubilee Walk which would no doubt be compromised.

Mrs Rickards and her colleagues advised that they saw the path had plenty of width and that visibility was not an issue. Ledbury's trail ran around trees and corners and there had never been any issues. It was not their belief the trail evolved from a housing development but that it ran on the line of a former railway track.

Cllr Mrs Shere expressed her support for the work of the Cycling Group but she had concerns that not enough people know about their plans, especially those living on the Lakeside estate. She also saw potential security issues from the exposure of residents' back gardens and asked if the Cycling Group intended to install lighting along the route of the path? She reminded the Group that the Town Council was already short of money – if the path went ahead would the Town Council be expected to maintain the path in the future, or would it be the intention of the Cycling Group to do this?

Mrs Rickards' colleagues advised that maintenance had not as yet been discussed, however it was not the intention to ask the Town Council for any funding. There were no plans to install lighting along the route of the path.

Cllr Mrs Davies referred to the survey carried out on Onion Fayre Day and asked how many local people were surveyed and how many people who came from outside of the town? Was it explained to them why the Jubilee Walk was originally created, what it represented, and what it was intended for – which was a woodland walk? Mrs Rickards responded that they had surveyed a mixed group – many were local and many were from outside the area. The survey essentially brought together their experiences of shared use paths – which was the Cycle Group's angle on the survey. It had been a useful exercise – lots of people coming through, interested in taking the Cycling map, very interested in cycling in this area and to hear about the Newent Loop.

Cllr Thomas spoke in favour of the proposal and felt that whilst the path in question was named Jubilee *Walk* it should be available for all users – walkers, cyclists, the disabled to enjoy.

Cllr Blick stated that currently the Jubilee Walk was used exclusively by dog walkers. Most members of the public did not know it is there and the access to it is very poor. The eastern end is virtually impassable. The Cycling Group have offered to undertake the work, to undertake the fundraising and to come back to the Council with everything that might need to be put in place. He urged Members not to throw out the shared path usage based on a few people objecting to changes to the environment, but to look favourably at it for the future generations of the town.

Cllr Mrs Howley referred to the Cycling Group's literature Management Plan drawn up for the Lake which stated " we feel if a continuous path were to be created this would be an ideal shared route especially if it had a tarmacked surface" and illustrated by contrast, an extract from the Council's own Management Plan for the Lake wooded area which stated "The footpaths are not all weather and perhaps neither should they be as nature rules."

Cllr Heathfield advised he had spent some 7.5 hours in Lakeside engaging with residents about this matter. He advised the foremost concern was how would the path open up the properties thus allowing access for traffic such as speeding mopeds? It was also felt that once properties were made visible it would give opportunists greater ease for criminal activity. The width of the path was also considered unnecessarily wide and also the disturbance to the wildlife's natural habitat. Cllr Heathfield said he was personally in favour of cycling for the environmental and health benefits such activity gave. He considered cycling good for Newent and therefore encouraged finding an alternative route that is beneficial to all and detrimental to none.

In the absence of further comment, Cllr Wood put the matter to the vote:-

In favour of permitting a shared use cycle path at Jubilee Walk: 4, against 6, 1 abstention.

The matter therefore failed.

12.1 Correspondence

12.1.1 Newent Community School – request to incorporate use of Recreation Ground (for meeting) within Emergency Plan

The Clerk advised that Newent Community School were considering its Emergency Plan and as part of this requested that should the need arise in an emergency situation to evacuate the school consideration be given to allowing them to utilise the Recreation Ground as a meeting place.

Cllr Blick proposed approval be given to this request which was seconded by Cllr wood and unanimously agreed.

12.1.2 Ofcom – Radio Licence fee

The Estates Foreman advised that unfortunately the Ofcom licence to utilise the newly acquired radios at a cost of £75.00 for a three year period as advised by the Contractor had proved to be incorrect and in fact the cost was £300.00 for a three year period. The Contractor apologised for this error and assured it had been given in good faith. As savings had been made in the short-term in the use of mobile phones, it was agreed that the cost of the licence be found from this budget heading. Cllr Wood proposed the licence be purchased which was agreed by 10 votes in favour, 1 against.

12.2 Business

12.2.1 Planning applications – see attached

12.2.2 Words and Music Festival – Cllr Blick

Cllr Blick proposed the Council consider the introduction of a Words and Music Festival in the town for 2016. He felt the town was a very good venue for such an event and there were many talented people in the area in the form of songwriters, poets, musicians etc who could contribute. He proposed the Council give support to this when budgetary provision was considered.

Members agreed to consider this when making budgetary provision.

12.2.3 Estate Supervisor's report

The Estates Supervisor reminded Members of tree work that was imminent at the Lake area following recommendations in the Arboriculturalist's report. He urged Members to take note of the trees in question which were all marked with red paint.

He further reported that the Arboriculturalist had inspected the Arboretum with a view to undertaking a future management plan and had remarked how impressed he had been with the area. It was unanimously agreed that he be instructed to undertake such a management plan of the area at a cost of £300 plus vat.

The Estates Supervisor requested permission to purchase a cordless drill/nut runner at a cost of £250.00 to be found from the Tools budget. He advised this would be of a decent standard unlike the cheaper version which was not up to the jobs in hand. Cllr Wood vouched for the equipment stating he had a similar drill which was of a professional standard and which would save the workforce considerable time. It was unanimously agreed that such a purchase be made.

The Estates Supervisor advised that one of the Newent Maps had been taken down from the wall in the vicinity of the Card Shop following the owner wishing to have remedial works

undertaken. Whilst this work had been completed the owner advised that whilst he did not have any objections in principle to the return of the map to the wall, it had been found that the wood beneath the rendering was rotten in considerable areas and it was preferred that an alternative place be found for the map to be hung. Members were asked to give consideration to a suitable alternative position which they were unable to do so at the precise time.

The Estates Supervisor was asked to give urgent attention to the hedge at the entrance to the allotment site as it was causing visibility problems when vehicles were exiting the allotment site. The Estates Supervisor advised that the hedge could only be cut back to a limited position due to the fence line. It was agreed that the entrance splay needed to be widened to alleviate this problem and that Cllr Blick and the Estates Foreman would meet on site shortly to discuss how this might be achieved.

12.2.4 To give consideration to monthly accounts

Cllr Wood proposed acceptance of the monthly accounts which was unanimously agreed.

12.2.5 Progress of Cemetery Extension

The Estates Supervisor reminded Members that before the Council could begin to utilise the Cemetery Extension it needed to extend the car park to make provision for the additional space required, this being a requirement of the planning consent. The Estates Supervisor illustrated this by way of plans and layout of the car park both existing and proposed. He advised that it was the intention to then tarmac the whole of the area including the main path from the Watery Lane entrance to the Chapel area, and then the new paths in the extension and the pathways in the existing Cemetery. It was agreed that quotations for the work be sought.

12.2.6 Public session prior to Council meeting – questions raised

Cllr Mrs Marcovecchio reported that during the public session prior to the last Council meeting a member of the public – Mr Mansfield had questioned the demise of the toilet block on the Recreation Ground and the need for it to be retained for public use.

Cllr Wood reminded Members that the Council had already looked into the possibility of retaining the toilet block and for using it for storage but it had proved not feasible to do so. The Council at the September meeting had formally raised No Objection to the method of demolition of the toilet block and had since received notification from the District Council of its imminent intention to do so. He therefore proposed no further discussion on the matter.

12.2.7 Rugby Club – storage on side of Changing Rooms

Cllr Wood advised that the storage on the side of the Changing Rooms contained the Rugby Club's scrummaging machine but due to its location near a slope, youngsters could not

manage to manoeuvre the equipment. It was suggested that a stone path be made between the two buildings so that the scrummaging machine could be taken in and out of the storage area on a flat surface. It was agreed that this should be at the cost of the Rugby Club and that the Estates Supervisor should meet with the Secretary of the Club to discuss further.

12.2.8 Computer networking/Back-up

Members were advised that the Council's computers did not have adequate back-up cover and in the event of rearrangements in the Office, computer networking would be advantageous. It was agreed to ask ex-Cllr Roger Pilkington, who had looked after such IT matters during his membership of the Council, if he would assist the Council in recommending the way forward in this matter.

12.2.9 Any Other Business

1. Cllr Mrs Howley advised that the representative – Rosie Lovall of Glos Wildlife Trust – My Wild Space project had advised she would like to meet with Councillors at the Lake to discuss the project further, a date put forward as 9 November. It was agreed that Cllrs Mrs Howley together with Cllr Mrs Marcovecchio, Cllr Thomas and the Estates Supervisor would attend, at a time to be advised.

2. Cllr Celino reminded Members that on 8th November a Remembrance Service would be held in St Mary's Church to which it was expected the Bishop of Gloucester, the Chair of Glos County Royal British Legion and two parishes would all be in attendance. He requested numbers of attendees from the Council in order to reserve seating and reminded them that they could take part in the street procession to the Church if they so wishes. Ten people confirmed their attendance.

3. Cllr Mrs Davies reminded Members that the AGM of the Newent Allotment Association would be taking place on the following Saturday at the Kings Arms Newent, following which a game of skittles would take place. Please advise the Chair if anyone wished to attend.

This concluded the business of the meeting and it was declared closed at 8.15 pm.