

NEWENT TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Newent Town Council's Annual Assembly held on Monday 21 March 2016 at Sheppard House, Onslow Road, Newent at 7.30 pm.

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

Also Present – The Clerk and 25 members of the public

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies – Cllr Beard
2. Approval of Minutes of the Annual Assembly meeting on 16 March 2015

Amendments – P2 – The Onion Fayre was held on 13 September not 19.

P 3 item 4 the idea for phased lights should have read 'for turning right'.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 16 March 2015. **Record of Voting:** 9 in favour, 3 abstentions.

3. Matters Arising

Cllr Blick gave an update with regards to the next phase of highway improvements in Church Street. Information regarding the proposed works will be displayed in the Library in April and works will hopefully begin in June and be completed before the Onion Fayre. Plans would also be available to view at the end of the meeting.

A resident enquired if the distribution of town leaflets is monitored as none were available at Labels. The Clerk confirmed that the current leaflets were being printed and would be distributed shortly.

4. To review the Town Council's Report for 2015/16 by the Town Mayor

Cllr Wood read out the following report;

This year has been an election year. There was one vacant seat and after much deliberation we co-opted Margaret Shere from Cliffords Mesne on to the Council.

This year our Clerk of twenty-five plus years, decided to take life a little easier, so we had to hold interviews for her replacement. We were very lucky and any one of the applicants could have done the job. After much consideration, we were unanimous in deciding that Katherine Noble should be our new Clerk. Welcome Katherine to your first Annual Assembly.

Office Accommodation – At the moment we are in rented accommodation. We looked to building new offices on the library car park, but this turned out not to be possible, due to the land being on a flood plain. The Council are setting up a

long term strategy for the maintenance and repair of all our building and land and hope to get something decided in the coming weeks and months.

Sports and Leisure – Our town is very lucky to have so many good sporting teams. I am not going to name them all because I will probably forget some and that would be unforgiveable, so well done and good luck in the future. We also have a group who are trying to set up a skate park for the young people or us oldies if you can stand the bumps and bruises. We also have a cycling group who have done a very good job of setting up a cycling route around Newent and the surrounding villages. This Council will continue to work with and support all of the clubs.

This year the Council will issue a regular newsletter around the town and we are also setting up a council website.

The amenity charges this year will rise by 2%. This is for the hire of the pitches on the recreation ground, burial charges, allotments etc.

We have also set aside time prior to council meetings for the public to ask questions about the agenda. The Listening Post, where the public can meet and ask the Councillors questions is on the last Tuesday of the month at 5.30pm at The Italian Kitchen in Broad Street.

Christmas Lights and Onion Fayre – this year's Christmas lights were a great success, with the addition of the very smart floats and I would like to thank the organisers for all their hard work. Once again the Onion Fayre was a great success and brings lots of people to our town. I know that it takes a lot of hard work and organisation and I thank the organisers.

This year the Council met with the Canal Trust regarding canal restoration, there will be a further public meeting on 14th April.

There was a request this year for the Market House to be used for a wedding venue, but the Council felt the layout was not ideal and it had only recently been enhanced by the History Group.

This year with a lot of hard work by Councillor John Celino, we have been able to supply the town with an outside gym with no cost to the town, thank you John.

The cemetery extension is coming along nicely, but we need to enlarge the car park to meet the parking regulations before utilising the extension.

This year we set the budget in December and the Precept for 2016/17 is £191,765.00.

Schools – The Principal at Newent School, Kirsten Harrison, leaves at the end of April and Glen Blamer will set up as Acting Principal from 1st May until 31st August, when the new Principal, Alan Johnson, will take charge. Alan is currently Principal at Aldercar School in Derbyshire.

Last but not least, I would like to thank our staff for all their hard work and all my fellow Councillors for their help and support.

5. Question time from the public

Questions submitted prior to the meeting were read out and answered as follows;

Linda & Peter Cox

1. How is the S106 money from the new housing developments being spent?

Forest of Dean District Council (FODDC) negotiates with each developer with regards to Section 106 monies and it will vary for each development.

Details of S106 contributions are contained within the report to FODDC planning committee and available on their website.

2. With whom can we communicate to ensure new housing developments have cycle routes?

Directly to FODDC planning department, local District and County Councillors and Gloucestershire County Council Highways.

3. How can we as a cycling group help the Town Council to develop their cycling, walking and disability strategies to encourage more physical mobility and help reduce traffic in Newent?

To respond to planning applications and respond to any future consultation documents.

Wendy Bird

1. Is it possible to have some type of traffic calming scheme along Church Street and High Street? Traffic lights or speed humps?

Cllr Blick stated that better signage will be erected as part of the highway improvements. Traffic calming is a concern for Gloucestershire County Council as measures can cause extra vibrations and they are trying to find an alternative solution.

2. Disabled parking signs are regularly ignored

Gloucestershire County Council's traffic enforcement team are responsible for enforcing parking rules. The Town Council has no jurisdiction on parking. The Town Council will request further visits to the town.

3. Sign post up to Market Square has been missing for ages?

After clarification of which sign this was referring to, the Clerk confirmed it would be reported to Highways.

Linda Pickover

I have been a resident of Scillonia, Bury Bar for 10 years and have on a number of occasions tried to find out from Mr and Mrs Mills of Millstrand Developments why there has been such a delay in finishing both our site (driveway and parking areas need final surfacing) plus the pavement and railings outside on the public road. So far I have been told by them that the hold-up is due to slow negotiations with the 'the council'. Until the public areas are agreed, they will not complete our site as they wish to do the works in one hit. Ten years is a long time to have waited with no progress whatsoever.

Would the Town Council have any influence on this matter? I, and others, use this pavement daily and it is a mess. As time goes by it is steadily breaking up and becoming a trip hazard. Also the area of the railings.

Unfortunately, the Town Council does not have any influence on this, as it is a matter for Gloucestershire County Council. The Town Council would be happy to forward your message to County Councillor Will Windsor-Clive, which was agreed.

John Wilkinson

What financial benefit, if any, will Newent receive from the solar panel farm on the Gloucester Road?

On completion of construction £1,000 will be paid per annum per megawatt peak of solar capacity generated by solar panels within Newent Town boundary for a period of 10 years.

Why was the phasing of the traffic lights not changed when new lights were installed?

This has been raised with Gloucestershire County Council. The Council will arrange a meeting with the Highways Manager to discuss again.

Barrie Wellington

1. *The Cemetery Lodge (formally the Town Council offices) has now been empty for 2 years. Can you tell me why no progress has been made considering over a year ago plans for a new office were in place on the library site.*

These plans were supported by the then Town Council, Gloucestershire County Council and the GAT&PC.

A large amount of time and effort was given to driving the project forward by town councillors and Martin Davidson planning expert for the GAT&PC.

The Town Council discussed office accommodation options at a meeting on 2 November. The two options put forward were for the refurbishment of the Cemetery Lodge and a new build. Neither option was approved.

2. *To my knowledge no action has been taken to prevent further deterioration of Cemetery Lodge and a possible loss of £25,000 when it was valued at £145,000 in 2013. A building proven to be not fit for purpose over 3 years ago is still in Newent Town Council's ownership.*

a. What do the Town council plan for the building?

b. Do the Town Council intend to provide the residents with a town centre office, if so. where and when?

The Town Council will be reviewing the Council's assets and any proposals for the Cemetery Lodge will be made public and discussed at a Council meeting. Any further options for office accommodation will be made public and discussed at a Council meeting.

A discussion on the office accommodation continued and it was suggested by a member of the public that the flooding at the library car park was inaccurate and that many wasted hours had been spent by previous Councillors on the proposals and that the Cemetery Lodge was not fit for purpose. It was confirmed that options for office accommodation are being reviewed shortly and all the assets of the Council will be reviewed, as there had been a lack of maintenance for many years.

Members of the public were then given the opportunity to raise questions.

A query was raised regarding a recently installed pipe from the library into the watercourse. Cllr Blick confirmed this had been installed by Gloucestershire County Council.

A discussion took place regarding flooding in the town and that the £40,000 available for flood measures had not been spent. Cllr Blick confirmed that a flooding engineer from Forest of Dean District Council is in the process of taking levels and drafting designs. Concern was raised regarding proposals for Scraggs Bank and that the daffodils would be removed. Cllr Blick stated that the area would be a dry lagoon and would only fill up with water during periods of heavy rain.

A question was raised on how much S106 monies had been spent and if any monies were left. This is not dealt with by the Town Council and it was suggested the enquiry be redirected to the District Council, who administer the monies. The Town Council were asked if they consult with residents on what S106 monies should be spent on. The Council will be looking at ways of engagement with residents and would be happy to receive suggestions.

A concern was raised regarding children using the outdoor gym as the concrete surface was not suitable. Cllr Celino explained each piece of equipment had a safety warning and disclaimer stating they should not be used by children. The surface was already in place. Guidance has been provided by the supplier and Council's insurance company and rubber matting is not a requirement. The area will be inspected by RoSPA annually. A comment was made that the equipment is too tall. A Lakeside resident commented that no residents were informed about the equipment being installed and did not see the survey. More consideration should have been given to the location as it could cause antisocial behaviour and parking problems. A litter bin is needed.

A question was asked regarding the SUDS survey at the new development on Watery Lane and if it had been undertaken to the new regulations. The current

drainage system for Watery Lane is not adequate. It was confirmed this has been undertaken as part of the planning process and the Lead Local Flood Authority would review the document.

Concerns regarding the zebra crossing were raised and if it will be moved. Highways have recently attended a meeting with Councillors and inspected the zebra crossing. The lines will be repainted.

The Council were asked if they know the plans for the Black Dog. The Council had not received any information, but was aware it had been sold. This led on to a question if there were any other large planning applications. The Council has been consulted on a number of applications. Details of all planning applications in Newent can be viewed on the District Council's website. Concerns were raised that with more development the sewerage system may not be big enough. Severn Trent have confirmed there is capacity in the system.

Safety concerns were raised regarding the junction of Johnstone Road and Watery Lane and turning right into Watery Lane from Glebe. The Council agreed to raise these with Highways.

The Council was asked why the cemetery gates were being closed at night and at the weekend, as this causes access difficulties for wheelchair users. The Clerk confirmed that it was due to vandalism. A comment was then made about the general increase in vandalism.

The Council were asked if a decision had been made regarding the cycling and skate park. The Mayor confirmed that the recreation ground had been discounted and other sites are being investigated.

Concerns were raised regarding dog fouling and a question if anyone had been prosecuted. The Council was not aware of any prosecutions. A meeting with the street warden department will be arranged to discuss the issue.

The lack of parking provision at the arboretum which is causing problems for residents was raised. The Council agreed to investigate possible solutions.

A member of the public stated that the fence at the arboretum is in a bad state and needs repairing before the livestock are put back into the neighbouring field.

It was reported that the tap at the cemetery is split. The Clerk confirmed this would be repaired.

A member of the public stated that residents who moaned and complained they do not know what is going on, should attend the Council meetings and take more of an interest.

The Council are hoping the newsletter and new website will help inform residents. The Clerk responded to a question regarding the website to confirm it would not be a forum, but a contacts page would be available.

The Council were asked what is being done for the Queen's birthday celebrations. The Big Lunch is taking place in June and two Clean for the Queen events have taken place and snowdrops planted.

A resident thanked the Council for their work.

The Mayor thanked all the public for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.50pm.