

NEWENT TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Newent Town Council's Annual Assembly held on Wednesday 11th April 2018 at Newent Memorial Hall, Newent at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillors Mrs J Davies (Mayor), E Wood, Mrs K Draper, Mrs S Marcovecchio, Mrs M Duncan, Mrs R Wadley, R Beard, D Blick, Mrs C Howley, C Thomas, E Heathfield, Mrs G Moseley and V Vesma

Also present – The Clerk and 38 members of the public

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies – None.

Councillors introduced themselves.

2. Approval of Minutes of the Annual Assembly meeting on 20th March 2017

Resolved: The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20th March 2017 were approved. **Record of Voting:** Proposed Cllr Mrs Howley, Seconded Cllr Mrs Draper, All in favour.

3. Matters Arising

Cllr Mrs Davies explained that the items would be addressed in the Mayor's report.

4. To receive the Town Council's Report for 2017/18 by the Town Mayor

Cllr Mrs Davies read the following report;

Firstly, I would like to welcome you all to our new format for the Annual Parish Meeting and express the Council's thanks to our service providers for coming along and supporting the evening, which we hope will be of benefit to them and the general public.

Dog fouling has been an issue in the Arboretum, the Recreation Ground and on various paths around the town. In order to highlight the problem, Rob Carpenter, our Street Warden, gave a talk to year 6 students at the Federation of Schools, advising them of the dangers to health – it can cause blindness to children if the faeces come into contact with their eyes, as well as being very unpleasant if it is trodden in. I was pleased to be asked to attend with Rob and in so doing launched a competition for the children to do a poster, depicting the dangers of dogs being allowed to foul on highways and public places. The posters are on show around the hall and I am pleased to announce the winners:

1st prize: Mia, 2nd prize: Maddie, 3rd prize: Charlotte

This has been an extremely busy year for the Council, with much being achieved. The coming year is the final one for this particular Council, with elections being held again in 2019.

Much needed refurbishment work has been done in the changing rooms at the recreation ground. A new ventilation system was installed and new non-slip flooring laid. The work has made a significant difference to the changing rooms and made them much more pleasant to use.

A new licence agreement with the Rugby Club is in process, matters now being finalised with the relative solicitors.

Cllr Mrs Howley came up with the idea of having a Town Open Day and this was held in June. The idea was for businesses to showcase what they had to offer and to prove that most things could be bought or arranged locally. Many businesses went out of their way to make the day successful. The Town Council purchased bags to give out to shoppers with the Market House logo and words 'I shopped in Newent' on them, and these proved to be very popular. We couldn't believe that so many bags disappeared so quickly. Sincere thanks to those businesses who sponsored the day. This year we are planning a Community and Wildlife Day on 14th July, to be run on similar lines, so please look out for that.

Much needed work has been done to repair and paint the legs on the Market House. Because it is a listed building and therefore needs specialist treatment, it was a very costly job but, being the main focal point of our town, the work was necessary to preserve one of our main assets. It attracts many visitors during the spring and summer months and we are very grateful to the Market House stewards who give up their valuable time to show people around and talk to them about its history.

Last year the Town Council was invited to become affiliated to the Newent Branch of the Royal British Legion, which we readily accepted and look forward to supporting the British Legion with its valuable work in the community. Remembrance Services at St Mary's and at Newent Community School were attended by myself, as Mayor, and by other members of the Council.

In order to keep residents up to date with what the Town Council is doing, the Newent Magazine kindly provides us with space for this purpose. Cllr Mrs Moseley is our newsletter editor and collates the monthly information for print. Unfortunately, we have just heard that our space is being reduced by half, so news will be more restricted in future. However, all the latest news and information is on the Town Council website so can be viewed there.

A very successful Christmas Lights switch-on event was held again this year. This seems to go from strength to strength and I would like to thank those organisations and businesses who take part and make it such a successful and joyous occasion. We are, as always, grateful to our sponsors and those who

raise money for the switch-on, without whom the event could not go ahead. Special mention must be made of Cllr Mrs Draper and her team for all the hard work that goes into making the switch-on the success it has become and our workforce for actually erecting the lights which is by no means an easy task

As part of St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival and following on from our own Christmas Lights event, we organised a Civic Carol Service. As far as I am aware, this was the first Civic Carol Service held in the town, although I believe a Civic Service was held on a couple of occasions some years ago. We were pleased to welcome dignitaries from the Forest of Dean District Council, as well as the Mayors from Ross-on-Wye and Lydney and representatives from many local organisations. The choir from Picklenash stole the show. It was a very enjoyable evening and started off the Christmas festivities in a pleasant but poignant way.

Newent was the first town in the Forest to have its own Town App. It was introduced primarily to help dementia sufferers find their way around our town and is proving to be a welcome aid to others as well.

Hopefully you will have all noticed the new information board installed at the Lake. We were able to purchase this from a grant from the Gloucestershire Environmental Trust and are very pleased with the result. We feel it fits in very well with the surrounding environment.

Also, in the Lake area you will have noticed some new picnic benches, designed to accommodate wheelchair users. These were purchased with money won from a Tesco incentive, and thanks again to Cllr Mrs Howley for her input into the project.

The Local Council Award Scheme is designed to celebrate the work of the very best of local councils and provides a framework for councils to achieve their full potential. A lot of work has to be done to achieve this award and I am pleased to say that, thanks to our Town Clerk who ensured we were well up to date with all the policies and essential criteria needed, Newent Town Council has been awarded the Local Council Award Scheme, Foundation Level Award.

Work is being done in the new cemetery extension where the Garden of Remembrance has been marked out. This is ongoing and will eventually provide a quiet and peaceful area for people to sit.

The office accommodation in Court Lane, which the Town Council was pursuing, did not materialise due to the offer we were advised to make by the District Valuer, being rejected. It was obvious from the comments obtained during the public consultation, that residents wish to have a town centre office, particularly elderly people who are not computer literate and prefer to speak face to face with someone. They say they do not find the current accommodation at the Community Centre easy to access and the Cemetery Lodge was a long way for many, without transport, to walk. We have looked at Barclays Bank but this was

rejected by a majority vote at an extraordinary meeting of the Council last week as some councillors felt there were issues with the building which could make it unsuitable in the long term. Renovation to the Cemetery Lodge was also discussed at the same meeting but this was also rejected for the reasons already stated. By a majority vote, it was decided the council should once again look at the possibility of a new build and will shortly start the necessary process. Progress can be obtained by reading council meeting minutes and once relevant information has been compiled, the council will go out to public consultation again.

A full tree survey has been undertaken and necessary work will be completed as advised.

Planning applications are considered at Council meetings and to the end of January, 69 had been brought to the attention of the Council. Whilst we are invited to comment, the final decisions are made by the Forest of Dean Planning department.

We now have regular meetings with the Police in an endeavour to maintain a safe and secure place to live and we meet regularly with a representative from Gloucestershire County Council Highways to report any issues.

The Council has started looking into the possibility of making a Neighbourhood Development Plan. Discussions by a working group are in the very early stages, and as soon as more information has been gleaned, it will be brought to the attention of the public. Cllr Mrs Moseley is the lead on this and will be pleased to discuss the project with anyone after the meeting.

Councillors have made themselves available to members of the public by holding the Listening Post half an hour prior to council meetings. However, during the last 15 months only on 4 occasions have people taken advantage of this opportunity and so it was agreed at the last council meeting that the Listening Post scheduled for the next meeting on 23rd April, will be the final one. Councillors will always make themselves available to discuss issues with the public and this can be arranged in future by contacting the Town Clerk.

Ongoing projects:

CCTV is being upgraded and we are working with the Police on this matter

Tarmacking of cemetery paths and access road will be undertaken, once the roots from the trees which are bursting through the existing pathways, have been dealt with.

We continue to keep the paths around the Lake in good order and ensure the oxygenation of the Lake itself is operated efficiently for the health of the fish, and the work in the arboretum is ongoing, making it a pleasant place to walk.

Day to day work such as hedge cutting and grass cutting continues to keep our workforce very busy and we rely on our allotment holders to keep their plots up to standard.

The snow caused severe problems this year but once our workforce themselves could manage to get into work, they did their best to ensure pavements and pathways were cleared and that sufficient salt was placed in strategic areas around the town.

I cannot end this report without thanking my fellow councillors and District Councillors for the support they have given me this past year. We have worked hard and achieved a lot, so my grateful thanks to you all.

I must also thank our workforce for their support. Our Estates Supervisor and his team for the work they do for the town; our Assistant Clerk for the admin support she gives to our Town Clerk and, of course, our sincere thanks to Katherine, our Town Clerk for all the hard work she does. Katherine is our guiding light and ensures that, as a council, we follow correctly all legislation and guidelines as laid down. Her job is a thankless one and one she does to the best of her ability. She came to us a very experienced Clerk and a condition of Katherine's employment was that she obtained the CiLCA qualification. (Certificate in Local Councils Administration). She achieved this in a very short time and by studying in her own time. I am sure I speak on behalf of all councillors when I offer you my congratulations and thanks, Katherine.

I would also like to thank the residents, traders and organisations who give us their full support and appreciate what we endeavour to achieve for the town and community and for that we are very grateful.

Thank you all for giving up your time to come here this evening.

5. Question time from the public

Cllr Mrs Davies confirmed that some questions had been submitted prior to the meeting and they would be read out and answered accordingly.

Question from Cynthia Offord

1. *Questions relate to the proposed charges for the use of the Recreation Ground and the Lake area:*

What is the projected income if these charges are levied and has the Council looked at making savings on its expenditure – it is hoped that all councillors have had sight of the terms of the covenant put on the Recreation Ground at the time it was gifted to the residents of Newent by Andrew Knowles and his trustees, as well as the section 52 agreement with the District Council, covering the lake area from 1970's?

With regards to the covenant on the Recreation Ground, all Councillors have seen the document, as this has been considered during the licence agreement

negotiations with the Rugby Club. The section 52 agreement relates to the lake area, although the Paddock area was sold at a later date and not part of the same agreement and therefore is not affected by the Council's charges.

Over the past few years the Council has worked very hard to keep the Council Tax increases to an absolute minimum, to do this the Council had to consider other forms of income to off-set the ever-increasing maintenance costs.

Questions were raised about how much income the Council expected to make from the charges. The Council did not anticipate a specific amount, but will provide the actual income at next year's meeting.

A resident asked for clarification as to what charges were being referred to. Cllr Mrs Davies responded by reading the list of the Council's fees and charges which included the reduced rates for charities.

The Council were asked if the Angling Club and Young Anglers were going to be charged to fish and this was confirmed.

A resident enquired what income had been received from events last year and the Clerk explained that the charges only start applying this year from 1st April.

Several comments were made about charging charities for events. One resident stated that the charges were not unreasonable and the Council should also look at charging the professional dog walkers who use the Arboretum. Cllr Wood asked if residents were happy to offset the cost in their council tax for those who fish or hold events?

District Councillor Gooch enquired if fishing at the lake was only allowed by Newent residents. The Clerk stated that complaints had been received regarding why the Angling Club did not pay when some of their members did not live in Newent. This is part of the reason why the decision was made that only Newent residents can fish in the lake and everyone would have to pay for a permit.

Questions submitted from Andy Offord

1. *The Town Council intends to charge for the use of the park, recreation ground and Market House. Who do they intend to charge and how much is the council expecting to raise annually by introducing these charges?*

The Market House charges relate to any organisations or individuals who wish to hire the Market House.

Charges for the Lake will be made for any events taking place on the site.

Charges for the Recreation Ground will be made for any events taking place on the site and pitch hire/changing rooms hire for sports clubs etc. Newent Rugby Club have a long-term agreement to use the pitches and changing rooms and are charged accordingly. The Council is not expecting to raise a specific amount of money. The monies will go towards the administration costs and general maintenance.

2. *How much does the Town Council spend on the Christmas lights and the turning on event, and what additional financial benefit does the Christmas lights event bring to the town. Has the Town Council made any quantitative calculations regarding this?*

The Town sets a budget each year for the purchase and erection of Christmas lights and the switch-on event. The 2016/17 budget was £2,500.

The local businesses are extremely supportive of the event and for last year's event £2,146.60 was raised in sponsorship, bingo nights and raffles which were organised by Sweet Memories. Buildbase also waived all charges for the hire of the equipment for erecting the lights and other businesses waived or reduced fees e.g. printing cost. The whole event is organised by volunteers and the event stewards are also volunteers. Several businesses have late night shopping on the switch-on event and also participate in the window display competition and have stalls. The event is extremely well attended by local children and adults.

The expenditure for the 2016/17 event was £4,609.46.

Christmas lights are a very important part of the season and if the Town Council did not light the town, it would almost certainly have a detrimental effect on the businesses and an extremely negative impact on the town itself.

The Town Council does not organise the event for financial gain.

The Council receives a lot of positive feedback from the businesses and residents and it's unlikely the Council would receive so much support if the Christmas lights were of no benefit to the town.

A query was raised regarding the costs, which was clarified.

The Council were asked what the money was spent on and Cllr Mrs Draper explained that costs include replacement lights and bulbs, a Christmas tree for the town as well as towards the switch-on event and electrical works. A member of the public felt that a lot of money was spent and did not bring in any money to the town. Cllr Beard responded by stating that the lights are talked about a lot on social media and numerous visitors come to the town to see the lights. Another resident asked that the lights are not interfered with as the elderly residents get the benefit of Christmas without having to travel to other areas.

Cllr Mrs Howley gave an explanation about the budgets and that any monies spent is carefully considered and the Council does not just spend up to the budget maximum.

Cllr Mrs Davies asked a representative from the Onion Fayre Committee if charities are charged to participate at the event and this was confirmed, although they do get a reduced rate.

Cllr Mrs Wadley stated that she had organised a number of charity events for large and local organisations and had always be charged for using any facilities.

A resident asked if the charity stalls under the Market House were charged and it was confirmed that they are not charged.

1. *Following the public consultation last November what is the situation now regarding centralising the council office?*

As stated in the Mayors report, the Council were unable to proceed with the purchase of a premises in Court Lane. The Council met on 4th April to discuss further options and the Council agreed to look at the possibility of building an office in the Library Car Park or on the Paddock at the Lake. A full public consultation will take place in due course.

2. *Following the recent heavy snow falls would it be possible for copies of the Newent Town Council Emergency Plan to be made available to households in Newent?*

If members of the public wish to apply for a copy of the Emergency Plan, a redacted copy can be supplied (charges apply for photocopying).

The Emergency Plan is activated in conjunction with the District Emergency Planning Liaison Officer and its aims are to increase resilience in the local community while awaiting the assistance of statutory authorities/emergency services or in support of them.

The document is a council internal procedure and it would not be of any benefit for the document to be issued to all residents.

3. *Regular users of the arboretum and residents affected would like an update on plans to expand the car park.*

The Council budgeted £1,000 in the 2018/19 accounts towards the cost of extending the car park. The Estate Supervisor will be preparing drawings and costings for the works for consideration by Council later this year.

Questions were raised regarding the purpose of the emergency plan, which was responded to by a resident. An example of when the plan would be used was also given.

A resident referred to the question regarding office accommodation and asked what evidence was there for a town centre office. Cllr Wood responded stating that it was confirmed in responses from the last public consultation, the results of which are published on the website.

Question submitted by Terry Weaver

1. *"Would the Council please clarify what the latest options for council offices area, the process by which the options will be analysed (comparison of capital and through-life costs (maintenance/heating/lighting etc.), impact upon community use (e.g. loss of Library Car Park/Loss of use of green area adjacent to Lake Car Park) and where the results will be made public etc."*

As stated earlier, the Council have decided to take two options forward - a new build on either the Library Car Park or on the Paddock at the Lake.

The Council will undertake all the necessary requirements to provide all the required information at the public consultation. Utilities are a revenue expenditure which would be essential at any office building and therefore are not required to be costed for the consultation.

The impact upon the community will be identified by the responses to the consultation.

The results of the public consultation will be discussed at a Full Council meeting and published on the Council's website, as per the previous consultation.

Cllr Vesma added that a benefit of a new build is that there is an opportunity to reduce the utility bills by building a low energy premises. A resident responded by stating that there is no evidence that a new build would cost less in the long term than The Lodge.

Cllr Blick stated that when designs were drawn up for a new build an analysis on the pros and cons for both the new build and The Lodge was undertaken. A new build could also incorporate a large meeting room as the current facilities at the Market House are not accessible to all.

A resident asked for the Paddock location to be confirmed. Cllr Blick stated that the area was going to have a Dr's Surgery built on it some years ago. If you enter the Lake from the car park it is the raised area on the left-hand side before Old Maids Walk.

A resident asked if another zebra crossing could be installed outside the card shop. Gloucestershire County Council have been approached in the past but would not allow it due to the proximity of the sharp bend in the road. Cllr Mrs Davies said this would be raised again with the County Council.

A resident referred to the car park at the Arboretum and asked if a parking area on Watery Lane had been looked into. Cllr Blick confirmed that it had been considered, but Gloucestershire County Council will not allow it due to visibility concerns.

A resident asked if 20 mph signs could be erected in the town. PCSO Griffiths stated that signs were in the town. Enforcement and speed checks are being carried out in the area and the Police are working with the Town Council to start a Speed Watch project.

A query was raised regarding mobile speed cameras and if these could be used in the town. It was confirmed the cameras would be used as part of the Speed Watch project.

A resident spoke regarding the need to extend the car park at the Arboretum, as the current layout was causing difficulties for drivers. Professional dog walkers are parking their vans in the car park and should be charged.

A resident asked the Council to give a collective vision. Cllr Vesma stated he has some ideas but they had yet to be officially discussed by the Council. The vision is for a market town that is attractive, convenient to get to a destination and an experience.

Cllr Mrs Moseley stated that the Council are looking into the feasibility of producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan and spoke about the process and what is hoped to be achieved. A resident asked if grant funding was available and this was confirmed. Previous plans that had been produced will be used in the process and local organisations will be asked to contribute.

Cllr Beard stated that the Council are doing things today, as well as looking at a longer term vision. The Council are looking into the parking restrictions and engaging with the local authorities to find short term solutions. Issues with the new street lighting is also be pursued.

The Mayor thanked all the public for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.33 pm.