

NEWENT TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Newent Town Council's Annual Assembly held online on Thursday
22nd April 2021 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Mrs C Howley (Mayor), Mrs M Duffield, Mrs K Draper, Mrs S Marcovecchio, Mrs R Wadley, R Beard, A Ralph, E Heathfield, Mrs G Moseley, Mrs K Selwyn, Ms C Birkan

Also present – The Clerk and 5 members of the public

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies – Cllr Mrs Gooch.
2. Approval of Minutes of the Annual Assembly meeting on 4th April 2019

Resolved: The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 4th April 2019 were approved. **Record of Voting:** Proposed Cllr Mrs Draper, Seconded Cllr Beard, All in favour.

(Cllrs Mrs Moseley and Ms Birkan joined the meeting at this juncture)

3. Matters Arising

None.

4. To receive the Town Council's Report for 2020/21 by the Town Mayor

Cllr Mrs Howley read the following report;

Good evening and thank you all for attending our first ever Annual parish Meeting via zoom.

Tonight, I will go through the main points of our year as Councillors, and what a year it has been. I am sure that none of us would have expected the year that we have been through, we most certainly are living in history in the making.

My year as Mayor commenced when the previous Mayor, Councillor June Davies who had been Mayor for three years, decided to hang up her chains. I was fortunate to be voted in as Mayor via a zoom meeting on the 8th June 2020

This year has been different to any year in so many ways, and whilst the opportunity to represent the town at social functions has been virtually nil, the pressures have been enhanced by the pandemic in other ways.

The Council staff have had to learn to work in a different way, working from home for the office-based staff was an option, however the estates team through the nature of their work had to carry on as normal as possible. Unfortunately, some work that required a hands-on team had to be put back, social distancing was becoming the normal way of working, and the very nature of the estate

team's work made this an exceptional challenge for them. We thank all the staff for the way they took to this challenge and appreciate all that they have done.

During the first lockdown a pandemic Crisis Management Team was set up, this enabled the members to have a weekly briefing with the clerk, and deal with any urgent matters immediately. You may imagine how the legislation was changing on an almost daily basis, making decisions was an almost impossible task, we did not always get things right, and apologise for that and trust that you the public understand the complications that we had to deal with.

We would like to thank publicly the We Will Help Newent Group, I am sure that most of you are aware of this group. They came forward, devised plans and worked tirelessly to ensure that the town was fully supported through the first lockdown. The whole town was looked after, prescriptions were collected and delivered, food was purchased and delivered, a befriending service was set up, they manned and answered two mobile phones 24 hours seven days a week. We appreciate all that they did, thank you each and every one of you.

We are also fortunate as a town to have the Lords Larder management team. Again, these people took on the greater challenge and ensured that all vulnerable families were catered for. We are truly grateful.

As a team we reached out to the young people of our community, asking for their thoughts and feelings during the first lockdown, spring 2020. We are grateful to those that took part. The result was a Children and Youth Memories book. These were printed by a kind sponsor for free, and can be found in St Mary's Church and the Library, for anyone interested in viewing this booklet.

In response to a public outcry regarding theft of tools etc. from residents' vans, and as a result of a meeting held by the Police for the community at the Community School, it was agreed to set up a new community initiative organized by Gloucestershire Constabulary. The Council facilitated an initial meeting for any adults interested in being actively involved in a new town community-police group. This group considers local policing issues and liaise/meets with police representatives. I am pleased to say that membership has grown, several meetings have been held, with positive input. Anyone wishing to join this group would be made very welcome, and should contact the Town clerk in the first instance.

It is sad that the Onion Fayre had to be cancelled last year and this, although the reasons are understood, the loss of this popular fayre is very noticeable. We hope the committee will be able to put this event on in 2022.

The Council was pleased to mark Remembrance Day by erecting large poppies throughout the town, we also turned the lighting of the Market House to red to offer extra support during this time as the usual parade through the town would not take place. My first official duty as Mayor was to join a small group of British legion members together with the Rev Simon Mason to pay tribute to those who

lost their lives during the first and second world wars. The ceremony was all the more poignant due to the pandemic we are in, technology came to the fore again the service was broadcasted by zoom and also You Tube.

The Christmas lights received rave reviews this year. The committee had worked hard endeavouring to brighten the town up and bring cheer to the residents. I believe that we can say well done to the committee you certainly achieved this.

We were unable to have the usual Christmas light switch on ceremony, and even worse Father Christmas had to stay in the North Pole. Again, thanks to technology the light's switch on was recorded and put on You Tube, the residents certainly watched this, and Father Christmas surprised us with a message for Newent's children read out by the Christmas lights Chair person.

During December we promoted a fiver deals event in the Town, unfortunately this event was cut short due to the pandemic. We thank the shops who joined in with this event we know that a lot of people did stay safe and shop local during this time. They certainly had some fantastic deals to choose from.

The Council agreed to fund two extra CCTV cameras in the Foley Road area. We now have 14 CCTV cameras placed around Newent.

I am sure that you all will have noticed a new resident at the Market Square. The beautiful sculpture of Valegro the dancing horse is at last sited in the square and has enhanced this area, and has become a very popular attraction.

We thank the Newent Initiative Trust, and other Council members involved in this, it has been a marathon for you to deal with but we are sure that now you feel that it has been worth all the trauma. A beautiful statue to a most special horse.

Sadly, on the 23rd December the town was affected by a flooding event. Several shops and houses were flooded, plus travelers were unable to reach home safely and had to abandon their vehicles. We thank the members of the public who assisted during this time, some distributed sand bags supplied by MKM, whilst others were able to open the primary school building this enabled 26 families to receive accommodation, warmth and hot food, in a Covid safe way.

A public meeting was held regarding flooding concerns, we thank the members of the public who attended, it was a very positive meeting, the outcome of this meeting is ongoing. A Newent Multi-Agency Stakeholders Flood Forum is in the process of being set up, and several other ideas are being considered. A short-term measure not a fix, however it is the Council's wish that this problem is dealt with for the benefit of all affected.

The Council has been working with Gloucestershire County Council and Highways regarding Traffic Regulation Orders. A consultation has taken place the results of which have been collated, we will receive the report very soon. We will as a Council be taking all of the consultation notes on board.

Extra grit barrels have been purchased - six in total and placed in areas where residents have requested them.

The Youth Action Group has taken charge of the unused Phone Box in the Tythings/Vauxhall area. The box will have a notice board containing lots of information for the residents. The group has also recently set up their own Facebook Page.

Having signed up to the tree charter, we applied for, and were awarded a grant of £600.00 from STWA for the purchase of trees. This has enabled tree planting to take place in the lake area, next to Court Road. Members of the public have assisted with this. During different days Councilors and residents picked up their spades and planted the trees. We thank Neil Evans and Leaf Creative for their support, they have been very generous. We also thank Castle Fruit farm, and the Girl Guide Rangers who also assisted with planting. For those that may not have noticed, we have also planted a peace tree in this area, supporting the Royal British legion, the Legion has supplied a plaque which recognizes those who lost their lives, a fitting tribute to VE and VJ days.

A sign has been designed and sponsored by businesses to be erected on the Foley Road T junction turning. This sign will promote all of the independent shops we have in the town that serve our needs. We wish to encourage people to turn left and shop in the town rather than turn right to travel to Gloucester etc. we believe that people are not always aware of what there is on their doorstep.

On the 23rd March in my role as Mayor I took part in the national Day of Reflection at St Mary's Church. This service was led by rev Simon Mason, prayers were said for the people affected by the pandemic over the course of the year, those that had lost their lives to this dreadful virus and those that were left grieving. A two-minute silence was held and after it was a privilege to tie a yellow ribbon to the Church railings in memory of and support to all of those who have suffered during this pandemic, on behalf of Newent Town Council.

Our Newent Neighborhood Development plan stalled at the start of lockdown, there was a delay in replacing our advisor from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, plus members of the steering group had to become familiar with virtual technology, this being the only way to hold our regular monthly meetings. We got going again in the summer of 2020, we have launched a series of themed surveys online and in hard copy, made available at the large Co-op. We are grateful to the Co-op for lending us this space.

The next phase will be writing the policies. The evidence collected in these themed surveys, as well as views collected at previous smaller events and the consultation in 2019 will be crucial in creating the policies which will help shape the future of this town in years to come. NDP's take a substantial amount of effort to produce, it is not a quick process. We welcome new members to the group, who come from residents, business people, and Councillors of the parish of Newent.

During the year the council has considered 89 planning applications, as well as several footpath diversions.

We are consulted on street names for new developments, something that we all enjoy contributing to.

We have worked on FoDDC policies such as Draft Housing Strategy and Local Plan Economic Viability Assessment.

We also responded to government consultations such as National Planning Policy framework, National Design Code and The Forest Hospital.

Grant applications were received from several worthy causes, during the year we have supported the following charities

SARA	£ 200.00
Newent Initiative Trust	£9000.00
Newent in Bloom	£2000.00 (two year funding)
Cobalt	£ 300.00

The Historical artefacts displayed in the Market House have been donated to the Town Council.

A new Union Flag has been donated to the town, we appreciate the generosity and thank the person responsible for this.

Throughout the year numerous policies have been renewed and updated.

We hold regular meetings with the Police, and Highway's managers.

As well as attending full Council meetings every second and fourth Monday of the month Councilors sit on committees, and also form part of numerous working groups.

There is always plenty to do.

The public are very welcome to attend the full Council meetings and are encouraged to do so. The meetings begin with a public participation session, giving opportunity for residents to speak to the Council about any matters that give them cause for concern.

Sadly, our dear Queen lost her husband and consort of 73 years. The Council immediately set the protocol for the death of a senior figure in place, the flag was lowered, flowers were laid and services were attended. The Duke of Edinburgh was a truly great man, we thank him for his service to this country.

We thank our clerk and her team for their hard work, always ensuring that proper procedures are followed in line with statutory legislation.

We welcome a new recruit, newly elected Mrs Kay Selwyn, and thank her for putting herself forward for this role.

I finish by thanking all of the Councilors for their dedication and hard work during this last year, it has been a testing year for us all.

Thank you, the public, for attending this meeting.

5. To receive District and County Councillor reports

District Councillor Gooch submitted the following written report:

It has been an eventful year despite covid-19 lockdown. New ways of working have had to be introduced to enable to meet the functions of the Council, meaning we have had to learn how to participate to fulfil the duties we were elected to do.

No physical meetings have been able to take place since March 2020 this has not deterred or prevented me from looking after the concerns of residents or following up on any matter my attention has been drawn to.

Keeping in touch with the community to ensure vulnerable and isolated residents had sufficient supplies was one of the ways I was able to help.

It has been very pleasurable meeting and sharing ideas with other Community Dementia links and Community Engagement Officers to help to support those living with dementia and their Carers. The Forest of Dean Action Alliance and Dementia Friendly Community Enabler Team will be hosting a week full of online activities, information, education, and support during May.

As the FOD Champion Member for Health and Wellbeing I recognise the importance of looking after our mental health. Having creative or sporting interests has helped build resilience for some. We must not forget those who struggle and lend a listening ear or signpost to professional support. Attending training courses has improved my knowledge and understanding of such illnesses. We should not feel shame in asking for help and we must all do our bit to end the stigma.

The Meek Road recreation ground is proving to be a great success and helps to create a sense of pride for residents. A few issues raised with me have now been resolved, access to the car park is now open and a second litter bin has been installed. This facility was a long time coming however the result was worth the wait, it is not perfect, and I am sure that improvements/additions will be forthcoming given time. The park is owned and maintained by Forest of Dean District Council.

As a member of the planning committee, I prepare in advance of the meeting by reading reports and reviewing documents available online. Unfortunately, the constitution (rules) does not allow my participation with questions or debate when the application is in my ward (Newent & Taynton) I can however address the planning committee for 3 mins as well as asking officers question at any time.

In May 2020 I addressed planning committee on several concerns regarding the scheme for 230 houses North of Southend Lane (accessed from Foley Road) subsequently making a complaint as several policy issues failed to be addressed. I raised concerns where a developer sells a home bounded by a fence inside the original boundary hedge and there is no lifelong management plan for the hedgerow. I am pleased this appears to have been considered with the site at Bradfords/Watery Lane. This site was granted planning consent five years ago, a fresh planning application was considered last week. I was able to persuade the planning committee to instruct Officers to add an additional condition to prohibit construction traffic using Bradfords Lane. I expressed the importance of conditions regarding drainage and hedgerow management. I was disappointed there were no developer contributions for much needed remedial works to Cemetery Chapel or Lodge however it was welcoming that our schools will benefit from contributions as well as providing recreational facilities. I stressed the importance that should the developer be reluctant to legally agree these contributions, the application must be returned to planning committee for the decision making.

Unfortunately, the Appeals Inspector did not uphold the FODDC enforcement notice at Culver Street and the developer was awarded cost. A different Appeals Inspector also disagreed with FODDC refusal for 50 houses at Ross Road/Bradford's Lane, the Inspector did rule this site will bring developer contributions for our schools.

It is important that Residents take interest and comment on shaping the Neighbourhood development plan and the Districts Local Plan as once land is allocated for development it will be extremely difficult if not impossible to refuse a developer consent to build.

The stunning sculpture of the Valegro Statue now adorns the Market Square, seeing an idea come to fruition is very satisfying despite the battles which had to be overcome and the sad death of one of the lead fundraisers. Credit and thanks to the Chairman of Newent Initiative Trust for his will of iron as this application took 16 months to be approved unlike the Stag statue at Coleford which took just 3 months.

I shall be supporting Newent Initiative Trust to bring forward the much longed for skate park as soon as I am able to identify the necessary funding.

In June 2020 I was elected as Vice Chair of Foddc this is a role which supports the Chairman in his absence to perform ceremonial duties and to preside over meetings of full council.

I was also elected for a third year to chair the constitution working group, the constitution sets out the rules for which we must or should follow.

I look forward to a brighter year where we can enjoy meeting and hope that by continuing to work with colleagues at County, District and Town a lot more can be achieved to benefit residents.

With best wishes to you all

6. Question time from the public

Cllr Mrs Howley confirmed that some questions had been submitted prior to the meeting and they were read out by Cllr Mrs Duffield.

Question from Newent in Bloom

I believe the arboretum will have its 21st birthday this year. Is the town council going to do anything to celebrate this? If so, what form might that take, and when?

Cllr Mrs Howley responded as follows - Indeed the Arboretum has reached its 21st birthday this year, it having been created in April 2000 as part of the national Millennium celebrations. Whilst the Council has yet to discuss this, I believe I can say with some certainty that whatever plans it may decide to make, they will be somewhat limited due to the Covid 19 restrictions. Unfortunately, we would not be able to have, or indeed want to encourage large gatherings in these circumstances. One Council member has suggested perhaps a summer picnic with some background music. This would work if we had a ticket entry and groups were socially distanced within the permitted numbers. I am sure we could commission a 21st birthday cake – with an Arboretum theme, to share with those attending. However, we are open to suggestions, so please let us know of any ideas you may have, but please bear in mind the limitations we will be required to work within to ensure we all stay safe.

David Gregory

I would like to ask about electric vehicle charging points in and around Newent please, as there is a noticeable void on the charging map.

I have spoken to some Council members in the past, but nothing appears to have progressed and we need to do all that we can to promote the use of electric vehicles as air pollution is now attributed to be responsible for 1 in 5 deaths worldwide due to fossil fuel usage

Cllr Beard was asked to respond to this question, and he did so as follows -

Newent Town Council has worked to provide an electric vehicle charging facility, recognising we have some 12,000 vehicle movements past our town daily. This data was provided by the Severn Trent survey, when they wanted to close the road and was taken at the traffic lights on the B4215.

The project will provide electric vehicle charging to encourage travellers and visitors to stop off in Newent Town, thereby increasing footfall and business

opportunity; such as taking a visit to a coffee shop or retail therapy in its many and varied shops.

The project will be based at a single location and provide both high power and low power chargers. The power supply for this facility has been discussed with Western Power Distribution and can be delivered. It will hopefully be within the car park owned by Forest of Dean District Council in Lewall Street, near the public conveniences. When visitors emerge on to the main street, opposite the Library, they will see the signage directing them into the Town, shops and Market House"

We have handed over to Forest of Dean District Council our project information and shall be pressurising them to move this forward as the base line work is now complete.

The location was chosen as being the optimum location for all users and revenue generation opportunity for town businesses.

Mr Gregory stated that it would be better to have more lower power points. Cllr Beard confirmed that investigations are taking place with regards to installing one high power point and several lower power points, although the demand is not there at the moment it will be future proofed.

Victoria Martin

I would like to ask the Town Council what actions they are taking to address the Climate Emergency? For example, do they use a green energy provider for their buildings, do they use banks who don't invest in fossil fuels, are they running any initiatives to support electric cars, public transport, cycling etc?

Cllr Mrs Howley responded as follows - Whilst we, as most Council are, aware of the impact of Climate Change and the need to respond to it, in answer to your specific question we currently utilise EON as our electricity supplier to our Market House, Cemetery Lodge and Chapel building. Whilst we would choose a green option when able, our priority is based on keeping our costs down as much as we can to the Council tax payer, having firstly sought three competitive quotations. Our offices are rented and we will engage with our Landlord to see if there is an opportunity for them to investigate a green energy supplier. Regarding banks, as you are no doubt aware, we no longer have these facilities in our town yet we still receive payments by cheque and cash and to avoid unnecessary travel, we have little choice as to where we might use alternative banks. In addition, new Council members are often required to visit the bank for identification purposes – Councillors who may not drive, will require access to a bus route to a bank that is fairly local in order to do this. Triodos and the Co-op have been mentioned, and we will certainly look into these options, to see if they are viable for our needs.

Public transport is the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council and we can forward that part of your question to them. Yes, we are looking into electric vehicle charging points, as answered previously.

Newent Cycling Group has, I believe with the help of District Councillor Vilnis Vesma, been lobbying for cycle routes to be part of the new building estates. I expect this would also be incorporated into the Neighbourhood Development Plan. We are very fortunate to have on our doorstep, the Newent Cycling Loop – a circular 28 mile route in total, very well sign-posted, which takes in neighbouring parishes and beautiful countryside for everyone to enjoy. Those of us with less energy can conveniently reduce the route half-way, diverting to undertake much less mileage, either way it is a lovely recreational facility to have and may encourage us to use our cars less and cycles more on other journeys.

A resident responded by saying that anything that can be done is heading in the right direction. Also, cheques and cash can be paid in to the Post Office for the Co-op bank free of charge up to a value of £12.00 per month. Another member of the public added that ID checks can be done by post.

A resident asked if the Council will be considering having Council papers circulated electronically instead of paper as they currently are? It was confirmed the Standing Orders would need to be reviewed and appropriate IT devices supplied to councillors, but this could be considered. Some Councillors confirmed they struggled reading from a screen and preferred printed documents. The resident was pleased that the Council would consider this.

With no further questions being raised The Mayor thanked all the public for attending and declared the meeting closed at 7.43 pm.