

NEWENT TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Newent Town Council's Annual Assembly held on Thursday 4th April 2019 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, A Jones, Mrs C Howley, E Heathfield, Mrs G Moseley and V Vesma

Also, present – The Clerk and 26 members of the public

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the stall holders.

1. Apologies – Cllr Blick.

Councillors introduced themselves.

2. Approval of Minutes of the Annual Assembly meeting on 11th April 2018

Resolved: The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 11th April 2018 were approved. **Record of Voting:** Proposed Cllr Beard, Seconded Cllr Mrs Howley, 10 in favour, 1 abstention.

3. Matters Arising

Cllr Mrs Davies confirmed the income received from lake charges for the year was £326.00 and income for the recreation ground and changing rooms, including use by the Rugby Club was £2,163.00.

4. To receive the Town Council's Report for 2018/19 by the Town Mayor

Cllr Mrs Davies read the following report;

WELCOME - As you know this is the last Annual Parish Meeting of the current Town Council as elections are being held in May.

Newent Town Council has been very busy this year, progressing with projects which were already underway and working on new projects which it is hoped will enhance the town and ease some of the problems which people experience on a day to day basis. The public are welcome to attend Full Council meetings which are held on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month, except through August, when they would be able to learn just what the Council is working on and perhaps appreciate the many hours of voluntary work they put in for the good of the town and its people.

This year:

- One of the Council's major contracts this year has been the much-needed tarmacking of the paths in the cemetery. Roots from trees were breaking through the paths, but this work has made the walkways level and safer to walk on.

- The Council has worked with the Rugby Club to finalise a licence for them to use the Recreation Ground on a long-term basis. This required many months of legal correspondence and meetings, but a satisfactory conclusion was achieved, and a good rapport is in existence with both sides working closely together.
- For our Community Wildlife Day bunting was erected last year with generous business donations offsetting some of the cost. With this substantial support and sponsorship from some businesses, the Community and Wildlife Day attracted many visitors to the town and was a very successful event. 'I love Newent' car stickers, again purchased by sponsorship, were handed out free to visitors in the town.
- The Town Council supported the Onion Fayre and provided our work force for the Friday as the Council does every year.
- 100 poppies were purchased and erected throughout the town to pay tribute to the fallen from the first and second world wars and to support the RBL in their commemorations. We also paid our own respects at the Remembrance Services at the School and at St Mary's Church.
- The Annual Christmas lights, together with the wonderful Cinderella Carriage, and celebrations associated with the event, were once again a great success and the lights did the town proud.
- A Civic Carol Service was held again and, in spite of the dreadful weather that evening, we were pleased to welcome Mayors from other towns, together with representatives from some of our local organisations.
- To provide a safer Newent we are working to have our CCTV cameras monitored 24/7 at police headquarters. Phase one completion target is September this year. I am pleased to report that the application for funding from the Police Commissioner's fund, has been successful with a grant of £10,000 available in two tranches, so we look forward to working with the Police at Waterwells.

(Cllr Wood joined the meeting at this juncture)

- The Council is working towards a safer Newent for residents and visitors with trying to reduce heavy vehicles passing through the town which ignore the 7.5 ton limit.
- The Council has been trying for months to alleviate the pigeon mess problem in the town through the District Council and beyond, but in spite of having contacted numerous pest control people, only one responded but was unable to help. The government has now provided local councils with some funding to tidy up town centres and the Forest of Dean has provided each of the four towns with £3,500 for this purpose. The pigeon mess is one aspect which is being dealt with and other town centre improvements are also being attended to.
- The Council is supporting the Newent in Bloom (NinB) committee by offering to pay for and plant up the tubs in the Town Centre this year and by planting more bulbs in the tubs later in the year for flowering next Spring. The

government grant mentioned for cleaning up town centres will be put to this purpose.

- The Town Council workforce provided the watering for NinB last year and are prepared to do it again this year.
- We are looking to improve parking restrictions in the town to allow more flexible shopping time and to increase footfall by providing electric vehicle charging points, both high and low power.
- The Town Council pressed for and work has now been carried out, on a Flood Alleviation Scheme, funded from about a £60,000 pot.
- Disabled access benches have been installed at the Lake as the result of money obtained from a Tesco initiative.
- The Council has been awarded £500 towards providing another defibrillator in the town.
- 78 Planning applications have been considered by the Council and commented on accordingly. Final decisions are made by the Forest of Dean District Council planning officers.
- An enforcement order has been placed on property next to the post office, as a result of raising the issue together with our District Councillors. Frequent ongoing requests have been made to try and seek what progress is being made.
- Having listened to some positive thinking traders, a town tour leaflet is almost at completion and we are also advertising in a new Gloucestershire business promotion book, one of quality.
- Plans are under way to provide a new recreation and community building on the Recreation Ground, for use by all. This will be funded externally from S106 monies.
- Plans are still under way to provide a Town Council Office in the town centre and when all documentation is in place, a public consultation will be held. Once again, this has involved a lot of time with meetings of the working group and with the architects and planners.
- The Council has agreed to ask the public's permission to sell the Cemetery Lodge and once proper procedures have been put in place, a public consultation meeting will be arranged.
- Several Councillors assisted the school on 3 consecutive mornings, walking pupils to local businesses, showcasing to them what it entails to be in employment and what opportunities are available. These visits were followed by a talk on the work of the Council.
- Newent Town Council is supporting the Valegro project and the proposed project to erect a statue to Joe Meek.
- Plans are being discussed to provide a feature in the form of a gateway, at the entrance to the Lake to make the area more prominent.
- A Steering Group has been formed and is working hard to create a Newent Development Plan.
- Necessary ongoing upkeep of the Council assets continues – Arboretum, Cemetery, Recreation Ground, Allotments, the Market House and the Lake,

talking of which we are grateful to the resident who made and donated the duck houses which now sit proudly on the Lake.

- Several Banks have been lobbied about bringing a mobile unit to the town, to no avail but we will keep trying.
- The Council worked with Severn Trent and Mark Harper MP to prevent the B4215 road closure on 14th February which would have lasted for several months. Severn Trent agreed to rethink their proposals, meet again with Mark Harper when ready and the Council will then arrange another public meeting as and when Severn Trent request it.
- Regular meetings are held with the Police and Highways regarding any issues or concerns which may have occurred from either side and most recently supporting the Police with a Town/Neighbourhood Watch Scheme.
- Representatives from the Council work with several outside bodies eg Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum, Health Forum, Freedom Leisure, Newent Initiative Trust and others as they arise.
- Two of our Councillors are working with GMTF, actively researching setting up a business forum, representative of all Newent businesses, the High Street and Business Parks.
- Work continues to computerise cemetery records, which go back to the 1800s and are handwritten. This is a mammoth and sensitive task, with no room for error.
- Due to the increased work load, an additional part-time admin assistant has been appointed.

(One member of the public joined the meeting at this juncture)

- Once the inevitable backlog of work has been caught up with, due mainly to the new Government Data Protection Regulations where all files and information on record is having to be dealt with accordingly, a Council Facebook page will be created, purely for information of Council activities. This will be monitored by our admin staff and will not be a model for cross communication.
- Having achieved the Local Councils Award Scheme Foundation level, the Town Council are now applying for Quality Level, which requires good governance, effective community engagement and council improvement. We have all the evidence needed so are hopeful of obtaining the Award.
- The Council has been represented at civic functions across our county and Herefordshire, bringing our town to the attention of the community beyond.

I finish by thanking my colleagues on the Council for their support and hard work over the last four years, our Town Clerk and her team for making sure proper procedures are always followed according to statutory legislation, and our workforce for endeavouring to keep our town and assets in good order. I also thank you all for giving up your time to be here tonight, I thank the many residents who appreciate the work of the Council and those businesses who support the Town Council. I have spoken to several local business people over the last few weeks and the general

feeling is that our town is tired and needs to attract more footfall. As a Council, we cannot do it on our own but by all working together in a positive way, we can move forward to ensure our town maintains its character and uniqueness and is a lovely place to live and work and visit.

5. Question time from the public

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

Question from Graham & Margaret Highton

We were surprised to note that Newent Town Council did not object to the planning application P1990/18/OUT: Land off Bradfords Lane Newent - Outline planning application for up to 50 dwellings, new planting and landscaping, informal open space, car parking, vehicular access point from Bradfords Lane and associated ancillary works. All matters to be reserved with exception of the main vehicular access. (Resubmission)

Although;

- 1) This site was proposed in the revised (Deposit) draft of the 2003 Local Plan and discussed at the 2003 Local Plan Inquiry, where the Inspector did not support its allocation, recommending instead that land off Foley Rd be allocated. I believe that the inspector stated that the horse chestnut trees going along Bradford Lane formed a natural end to Newent. This site is not in the recently approved Forest of Dean District Council Allocations Plan.*
- 2) It is outside the Defined Settlement Boundary*
- 3) Over twenty residents objected with many different reasons to the original application and this resubmission.*

The Town Council historically have objected to all large planning application in the town, so does this application mean that Newent Town Council are now going to support more housing in the town.

The Town Council reviews each planning application on an individual basis, it does not have a set policy in responding to developments of any size.

The Town Council has objected to several of the large-scale planning applications.

The Council does refer to the National Planning Policy Framework when determining a proposal for resolution.

Cllr Mrs Moseley also confirmed that once the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) was in place it would have the same legal weight as the District Plan. A public consultation will be held in October and it would be an opportunity for residents to make their views heard. Mrs Moseley gave a brief overview of the NDP

process and reminded residents about the process for speaking at the District Council's Planning Committee.

Cllr Mrs Davies also added that the developer had attended two Council meetings, which the public could have attended and addressed the Council with any comments about the Bradfords Lane planning application.

Question from Tish Rickard on behalf of Newent Cycling Group

The Newent Loop has contributed towards Newent and the District becoming a destination for recreational cyclists. This has helped local cafes, shops and B&Bs.

With rapid housing development in Newent, what does the Council plan to do for local people to help make it safe for young and old alike to get around the town by bike for day-to-day journeys?

What longer term plans does the Council have to improve the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists thus helping tackle pollution, congestion and physical inactivity?

The Town Council has continually raised concerns regarding the lack of footpaths being installed in the new housing developments within the town.

The Town Council has participated in speed watch events to help reduce speeding in the town and is also looking into the parking and weight restrictions to improve congestion in the town, which would make it safer for cyclists and reduce pollution.

Although the Town Council does not have any jurisdiction with regard to footpaths or highways, as this is the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council, if you have any suggestions for improvements, the Town Council would be happy to pass these on to the County Council.

With regards to physical activity, the Council installed an adult gym at the Lake area, as well as extending the walking area at the Lake to incorporate an access for all Wildlife Walk. The Council supports Freedom Leisure's Xplorer events at the Lake and as mentioned in the Mayors report, has recently agreed a long term licence for the Rugby Club to use the Recreation Ground. Again, if there are any suggestion that you would like the Council to consider, please do contact the Town Clerk

Question from Lynn Ashton

Would it be possible for NTC to publish a single web page &/or leaflet with a chart outlining which local authority is responsible for what, with contacts for who to inform/complain to?

It seems that NTC gets questions /complaints about all sorts of things, eg planning, flytipping, potholes and footpaths, which are not within their remit, but come under FODC or Highways or County Council or a contractor.

(Or worse, people don't complain to NTC so that they can be put straight, but blame 'the council' among themselves and their friends).

If a chart was freely available people might find it easier to direct their requests to the right quarter.

Under useful information on the Town Council's website, there is a chart listing the responsibilities and contact details of Gloucestershire County Council and the Forest of Dean District Council, as well as contact details for the local County and District Councillors.

Councillors are happy to receive any questions relating to issues in the town.

A chart could be added to the Facebook page when published.

A resident raised concerns regarding drug dealing, which is being shunted around the area rather than being dealt with by the Police and asked what the Town Council are going to do about it? It was explained that this was a Police matter, however, the Council have and will continue to raise concerns with the Police.

Councillors also stated that the PCSO does have a handle on the situation, but information needs to be reported to the Police and it takes time to gather evidence.

The Council were asked if they were aware and involved with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) issues. The Council is aware and Police investigations are taking place, but it must be made clear that the situation is no better or worse than in any other area and further discussions would not continue, as it could hinder ongoing Police investigations.

The Council were asked to give an update as to when the Arboretum car park will be enlarged. The professional dog walkers' vehicles are causing a problem. It was confirmed that monies were earmarked last year and more has been included in this year's budget and the works should be completed this financial year. The Council were asked if the residents could see the proposals and it was confirmed they could be seen at the appropriate Council meeting when the plans will be considered.

A resident asked when the flood prevention works would be taking place on Peacock Brook, as there seemed to be little enthusiasm for the works to be undertaken. As stated in the Mayor's report, the flood attenuation works had been completed. Works did take time to progress due to a number of reasons and consent being required by the landowner.

Concerns were raised regarding dog fouling between Foley Road and the Co-op. The District Council had put up notices and sprayed the floor, but there are no dog bins in the area. It was confirmed that that District Council does not provide dog bins anymore but dog waste can be put in litter bins. Councillors agreed to raise this further with the District Council.

A question was raised regarding the Cemetery Lodge and if another public consultation was required as one was undertaken 18 months ago? It was confirmed that the previous consultation was dependent on purchasing the premises in Court Lane, however, unfortunately the purchase had fallen through. A resident then asked about the office accommodation, as the value of the Cemetery Lodge will be decreasing. Again, it was confirmed that a public consultation would be taking place in the near future.

Residents were reminded that the information from meetings is available in the Council minutes, which are available on the website and in the Library and residents are welcome to attend Council meetings to be kept up to date with information. A resident suggested that if a future building had toilets and hearing loop more people might attend the meetings.

The Council were asked if the field on Meek Road had been put out to tender or the Council were still talking about it? The field and proposed works are the responsibility of the Forest of Dean District Council.

Cllr Vesma was asked by a resident to give an overview of gateway feature project for the Lake, which he duly did. The gateway feature is to visually connect the car park to the Lake area and Cllr Vesma met with the Head Teacher from Newent Community School to discuss the project. The resident then spoke about the unsightly entrances to the town due to the commercial buildings, the smells and lack of maintenance to the verges and entrance signs to the town. It was confirmed that the sewerage works were being upgraded, which should reduce the odours and that although the commercial buildings may be unsightly, they are proving much needed employment and it's no different in other towns.

A representative from Newent in Bloom stated that MKM had paid for a thousand daffodil bulbs to be planted at their site and suggested that maybe some of the other companies on the site could be asked to do the same.

Residents were informed that the NDP Steering Group would be undertaking a character assessment as part of the NDP process. Residents were asked that if there are any volunteer photographers available to help, it would be appreciated.

Residents were reminded about the litter pick event taking place on Saturday 6th April at 10.30 am, meeting from the Market House and all volunteers would be welcome. A resident suggested these should be held more often and it was agreed that the Council could look into doing this, but it was dependent on when the equipment was available.

The Council were asked to put pressure on the District Council regarding the street cleaning contract and it was confirmed that the Contract Manager had recently attended a Council meeting to discuss the new contract. The Council were asked why they did not tender for the works. The contract was for the whole district and not just Newent.

A resident pointed out that people do not come to Newent to drop litter, it's the residents of the town who do it.

The Mayor thanked all the public for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.17 pm.

DRAFT