

NEWENT TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of Newent Town Council's Annual Assembly held on Wednesday 27th April 2022 at Newent Community School, Watery Lane, Newent at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Mrs C Howley (Mayor), Mrs K Draper, Mrs M Duffield, Mrs G Moseley, Mrs S Marcovecchio, Mrs J Gooch, Mrs R Wadley, Mr R Beard, Mrs C Birkan and Mrs W Odhiambo (7.51pm)

Also present – The Clerk and 27 Members of the public

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting

1. To note Apologies for Absence

Councillor Mrs K Selwyn

2. Approval of Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on Thursday 22nd April 2021

Subject to the change on page 5, '*Newent in Bloom £2000.00 was for two-year funding not one*' the council approved the minutes by majority decision.

Resolved: The Minutes of the Council meeting held on Thursday 22nd April 2021 were approved by majority decision.

3. Matters arising

There were none.

4. To receive the Town Council's Report for 2021/2022 by the Town Mayor Councillor Mrs C Howley

Good evening, everyone, a very warm welcome to you all, and thank you for attending the Annual parish meeting this evening. I am going to take you through the main points of the council's year and afterwards we will have time to answer the questions submitted to the Clerk.

The year commences from the 26th April 2021.

This year is my second year as Mayor, having been elected again last May together with Cllr Mary Duffield as Deputy Mayor, and again a very different year due to Covid 19 still raising its ugly head, meaning that social functions have been much less than in the past, yet time taken up with other issues.

At least the council has been able to return to face-to-face meetings, we found that the community school offered a suitable venue, we received positive responses from the public who found this venue easy for parking and very accessible.

The issue of fishing permits was reviewed this year, it was decided to offer up to 20 extra permits per year to people who reside outside of the town. Those that wished to fish at Newent Lake yet fell outside of our area could apply, a charge would be made of £100.00 (sic) this sum would go in some way to offset costs incurred by the council in maintaining the lake water healthy for the fish etc. this has been well received by fishermen.

Newent Rotary was able to secure funding for a chat bench, they approached the council for permission to place the bench in the Market Square region. The council was very pleased to accept this offer, you may see the bench which is placed under the Market House. I have noticed it is now being used very regularly by residents. The bench was formally given to the council on our Love Newent Fayre day, more of this later.

The 5th July 2021 was frontline workers day, the council, along with other members of the Royal British Legion, Rotary, and the community was able to raise the Frontline Worker's Flag in the town to support all frontline workers. This was some way we could show our respect and support for these people.

The council now has a Busking Code of Practice in place, anyone wishing to busk in the Town can do so, the delegated area is under the Market Square, and dates/times can be agreed by application to the Clerk.

After taking advice, and receiving a comprehensive report from our Locum Clerks, the council agreed that all councillors email address should become .gov addresses. This has been actioned and offers a safer way for all councillors to carry out their business.

The council is now producing a monthly newsletter, with the able assistance of our Clerk. This newsletter promotes/showcases the work carried out by the council, plus it also includes news and information from any clubs and groups in the community. We hope that this will encourage groups to promote what they are doing and be interesting information to the wider community.

There is a lot happening in our Market town, the network we have is something that we should all be proud of. Should you have any information/news that you wish to include in the newsletter please contact the Clerk in the first instance.

During July the Mayor and Deputy Mayor were invited by the Mayor of Lydney to attend an evening of Military Music in Bathurst Park Lydney. It was a beautiful summer evening with drinks and refreshments taken to the background of the Nottingham Calvary Unit Band playing a selection of military music and themes. There was also a bands woman who sang some Vera Lyn songs. The final part of the evening included the Beating the Retreat, and the bugler playing the last post.

This year we held our first ever Love Newent fayre. This was made possible by grant funding from the Welcome Back Fund. This was held on the 4th September, being the first opportunity for us to open up the Town again and come together to celebrate who we are and what we have. We were very fortunate that the sun shone on us very brightly that day, always a plus.

We had music under the Market Square, ably managed by David Sass, Newent Rotary took over the Memorial Hall car park and displayed many beautiful vintage cars and vehicles, this was well received by members of the public. Plus, as mentioned before, Pudsey Bear was in attendance and formally presented the chat bench to the council, he also raised welcome funds for the Children in Need appeal.

A living statue in the form of a knight was in the town delighting people of all ages, traders, and local groups, came out onto the streets and showed the public just what they had to offer, the town crier entertained us as well.

The lake was host to tractors and the fire engine, all of the young children so enjoyed pretending to drive these vehicles, we are truly thankful to those that gave up their own precious free time to support the fayre and give so much pleasure to the young people. We had face painting, a magician, laser shooting, music, all offered to the public for free! Together with the Guides and other community members showcasing who they are and what they do.

We also offered '*I've Shopped in Newent*' bags, and Newent mugs again for free to people; it really was a day to give and share. Again, a big thank you to the staff who worked and assisted in the setting up of this event, and all those who helped on the day, it was exhausting but good fun.

The council was pleased to recognise those that gave their lives during the two world wars. The large red poppies were once again displayed throughout the town, this being a poignant mark of respect to the fallen, and their living relatives. The Deputy Mayor and I were privileged to represent the council at the community school, to join in with their Remembrance Service. The school ground was filled by the school members, they were a credit to their school with the respect and behaviour that they displayed. The last post was played by a young sole trumpeter, a very touching moment.

The Deputy Mayor was able to represent the Mayor at the Remembrance Service Sunday the 14th November.

Earlier on in the year, the Royal British Legion was at last able to meet and perform a dedication ceremony for the Peace Tree (to be found in the Lake area). During the dedication the names of Newent's fallen from the two World Wars were read out, followed by a minute's silence. The tree is a fitting tribute, and very worth a visit.

A public meeting was held at the Glebe Community Centre on Thursday the 18th November. This was held by the Emergency Plan Working Group and was very well attended.

Officers from, Highways District and County attended. They gave a broad view of what their responsibilities are, and how it sits with the Town Council, and what the community can expect from them. There was a question-and-answer session when members of the public put forward their concerns to the relevant responsible officer and received answers and information as required.

It was agreed to look into an early warning system, this has now been set up. The idea is for an early warning system activation alarm system for people to receive an early warning when the water coming down into Peacock's Brook reaches a certain height. This was set up and funded by the County Council, and it is hoped that this will be a useful aid to assist those that suffer with flooding in the town.

Another very positive outcome regarding the flooding, is the formation of Newent Neighborhood Flood Association. This forum has been set up by likeminded individuals who wish to be proactive, and work together to assist each other in finding ways forward to aid against flooding and be of assistance should the worst happen. The group has been very professionally set up in a manner that is a credit to them.

The Forest-of-Dean District Council supplied 75 Flood Saxes free of charge, which they delivered to Newent Council in order for them to be fairly distributed to residents affected by flooding, this has been actioned, all residents who wished to receive a flood sax have done so, however if you or someone that you know have not received this free offer, please let us know and we will rectify this matter immediately. (We do have a small number of saxs available).

We are pleased to say that the council agreed to form a Newent Climate Emergency Forum. This has been met with good interest. It will be positive for the Town to work together on this very important issue. So far, the group has helped produce a pledge and action plan for the Town Council after its launch at the 'Love Newent Fayre' last year. Following the NTC office move to new premises, work should be starting shortly on the Action Plan.

Several members of the Group attended a Forest of Dean district-wide one day conference in Lydney for Local Leaders in Climate Change. Members heard presentations on topics including home insulation, biodiversity, and parish outreach, and took part in discussions all of which will help in planning a programme for the parish. In particular, the Aurora Project administered through the District Council, will be inviting local participation to minimise carbon emissions.

The Group is also hoping to work with the FoDDC to identify land owned locally by the district which could be used to increase biodiversity.

The council has also approved, with agreement of the community, to borrow funds from the Public Works Loan Board. This loan is to carry out necessary repairs to our Market House. I am sure that you would all agree how important it is to maintain this historic asset for the community.

The loan will be £58000.00 borrowed over a term of 7 ½ years, the loan repayments are expected to be around £8200.00 per Annum.

A precept increase consultation was met.

During November the council was advised of changes to be carried out to the building occupied by its staff at Glebe Community Centre, the building is to be fully revamped. This meant that we could no longer occupy the room we were using. However, I am pleased to say that we were offered alternative accommodation, in the same area but on ground floor level and away from other users, in other words rooms solely used by the council.

We have now moved to this accommodation; we give grateful thanks and recognition to all of the staff in the way that they worked and went over and above expectations to enable the move to happen in (what appeared to us) a very smooth transition. The rooms are in fact a great improvement for the staff, they are certainly more secure, plus there is a disabled entrance facility so that at last we are all inclusive and able to facilitate all needs.

The well attended and exciting Christmas Lights switch on was able to go ahead this year. This event is always fun for the community, again hard work for the organisers but very worthwhile. Many members of the community took part in the parade through the town, again it was heartwarming to see the young people taking part, and the enjoyment on their faces. Thank goodness Father Christmas was able to visit again, he was very popular this year, he had been missed by many of the children last year, so they were out in force this time. We thank the Memorial Hall Committee for hosting him.

The Christmas Lights Committee have been successful in receiving grant funding for this event, this has enabled the council to purchase new Christmas lighting for the town. This came at good timing. Some of the lights had aged and needed updating, therefore this has now been actioned, securing a fantastic display for years ahead. This is a great achievement for all concerned. Whilst the lights are beautiful, they come at a cost, it is welcome that this update has not been met by the precept.

We were able to hold the Mayor's Civic Christmas Event this year and thank all at St Mary's Church for their hard work in ensuring that this event was able to take place. The event was well attended, by the community,

We thank the Dolphin Club for their singing of Away in a Manger, and the young school children for their carols, and reading of an amusing verse. We were able to finish the event off at the Memorial Hall with Ellie Pensom playing the violin in the background, whilst people chatted, and indulged in mulled wine and mince pies.

The council agreed to set up a committee structure, this has taken a lot of work mainly carried out by our Clerk. We held an Extraordinary Meeting to agree the structure of these committees. We aim to go into this working structure in the new financial year. We will have four committees, Finance and Staffing, Planning and Environment, Communities, and Regeneration. We will still hold a full council meeting, although this will be on a monthly basis, not fortnightly.

The exciting thing about the committee structure is that they are all public meetings, so transparency is very evident. Plus, the public will be able to assist and take part in these meetings should they have knowledge and interest in any subjects being discussed and worked on. Members of the public will not of course have voting rights; however, I am sure that their input will be very valuable.

Some of you had probably noticed that the reeds in the lake had become very overgrown and intrusive, and needed to be removed. Taking advice from the relevant bodies, the estates team hired in plant and equipment for the job. The Foreman undertook training to be able to drive the equipment, which pulled up the reeds in a suitable way, the reeds were placed on the water's edge to allow water etc. to return to the lake and then removed for disposal. Several people have commented favorably on the improvement.

Clifford's Mesne is also under the umbrella of Newent Town Council, served by Cllr Ruth Wadley. The residents have nominated the Yew Tree Inn as an asset to their community, we were very pleased to support them in this. We all need a pub to meet up with our friends, to eat drink and enjoy each other's company.

We are pleased to say our CCTV cameras have been updated, they are now all pan zoom and tilt type, giving very clear vision to the service personnel who access them. All cameras are linked to Waterwells, this enables officers at Waterwells to see immediately any incidents as they occur in the town. The officers would use this ability should there be any serious incidents, it has been most certainly effective with at least one serious incident last year.

Stagecoach buses have given concern to residents in Newent and the surrounding areas, young and not so young residents have come together to bring the seriousness of losing the 132 service and the reduction of the 32 service, between Newent and Ross-on-Wye. Other communities like Dymock and Ledbury are also affected.

Newent Town Council were happy to support our county councilor with this issue. Letters have been posted to all interested parties; we were also supportive of Cllr Moseley attending a meeting at Ledbury Town Council on our behalf. We have supported funding from the Precept by £520.00 towards the running of a trial shopper service to Newent to meet passenger needs, we do hope that this will assist those that are cut off from our Market Town, and more worryingly doctors and other necessary services. In fact, this morning saw the first 632 community bus arrive, very exciting. Congratulations to all involved.

We have several working groups; however, I will mention two here as they will continue to work in the same manner when we move to a committee-based structure.

Youth Action Group, although taken time the group is now beginning to thrive. They have a Facebook page set up over a year ago, with 380 followers. The primary project this year has been to refurbish the local phone box in Vauxhall Tythings area. The door required mending, that was undertaken and then young people set about painting the phone box making it look cared for. The group had a stall at the Love Newent Fayre to raise its profile and encourage new members.

The group will play a part in the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. They have been asked to participate in a blog article for the national association for Local Councils (NALC for short) and they hope to promote local democracy week.

Newent Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP for short). This group offers our community the chance to set out a vision for the future of Newent in terms of planning and development. Our town is likely to expand considerably over the term of the next FoDDC Local Plan which runs until 2041 and once the NDP is completed, it will carry statutory weight within the decision-making process. The Steering Group is making steady progress with its themed surveys to add to the body of evidence needed to create the policies that will form the major content of the finished Plan.

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the rate of progress. Without the usual opportunities for street stalls and community engagement, the Steering Group has had to rely primarily on online engagement, although several door-knocking sessions in recent months have produced good rates of return for the surveys. Following the general questionnaire at the first public consultation in October 2019, the themes of the subsequent surveys have been Transport, Environment part one (habitat), Amenities, and currently Environment (part two (human impact)). Housing and Business are two further topics that are coming up.

The council was pleased to support local businesses with their desire for a street market in the town. A street traders' license has been applied for; costs were met by the town promotion budget.

You may have seen that the council has been flying the Ukrainian Flag on our flagpole. It is flown to show solidarity and support to that country at this time.

Pete Rochford Chairman of the Joe Meek society presented a bust of Joe Meek to the council. The unveiling took place at the Market House and was very well attended. The bust will be retained at the Market House in the music room, for all visitors to enjoy.

During the year, the council has considered well over 100 planning applications, as well as being consulted on street names for new developments.

Grant applications have been received and considered, during the year we have supported the following charities/organizations

- Newent Initiative Trust £10,000.00
- Citizens Advice Bureau £1500.00
- Young Anglers now free of charge
- Youth Support Service - through St Mary's Church
- Deed of variation monies £8250.00

The council supported a neighbourhood watch bike marking event at the recreation ground costing £100.00, and the Forest of Dean Youth association holiday activities also at the recreation ground, costing £300.00.

After 7 years as a Councillor Mr. Eli Heathfield resigned on 6th April 2022. We would like to thank him for his work with the Town Council and wish him all the best for the future.

Staff changes

We have had a change of Clerk; Katherine Nobel left us in June 2021 and for a short while we had use of a couple of Locum/Interim Clerks to cover essential duties.

We welcome our new Clerk, Michael Greenfield, who started in October 2021. Michael has had to hit the ground running, and still manages to smile.

Michael has been updating our policies, ensuring that as a council we manage ourselves correctly. He is currently undertaking training for his Certificate in Local Council Administration affectionately known as CiLCA We thank Michael's team for their hard work it is an ever-changing cycle of work carried out, even under the most testing times, with civility and good humor.

We are very sorry to say goodbye to Dee Morley who has worked for the council for 32 years. We wish her well; she will be missed.

I thank all of the councillors for their dedication and hard work carried out during this last year. The coming year will I am sure be filled with plenty to do. Should you, the public wish to contact any one of us our details are on the Newent Town Council website, or the Clerk will also provide contact details.

Thank you for attending this meeting.

5. To receive District and County Councillor reports

- a. Mr Vilnis Vesma, Forest of Dean District Councillor, submitted the following written report:

Waste and recycling have featured high on my list of activities over the last year. Our performance on provision of new and replacement recycling containers has not been good but I have got individual cases resolved when they were brought to my attention. I also pressed successfully for more paper and card capacity in the Lewell Street Car Park recycling area. Less successful have been my efforts to have the bins moved to one side to improve the view from the car park to the lake area, which would have contributed in a small way to making the town more appealing to visitors.

Facilities for young people: I have been supporting the long-running campaign for a skate park, securing an admittedly small amount of extra funding through the planning process, and organising an online auction of promises.

Travel and transport: the District Council has a working group on so-called “active travel,” which is usually taken to mean walking and cycling. Within that narrow definition I have been helping Newent Cycling Group’s campaign to improve the cycle link to Hartpury College and University, and onwards to Gloucester. With the advent of electric bikes this route, which largely avoids main roads, could help to reduce car traffic—at least in fine weather—on what we call the Newent to Gloucester corridor. But I have also been pushing for the Active Travel group to widen its remit and encompass lift-sharing, ride-on-demand bus services, and other forms of travel that reduce car use but are suitable for the less able and people with children, shopping, and luggage, not to mention anybody who is travelling in poor weather or during the hours of darkness.

Town centre revival: I have recently been active helping the local shops and other businesses with their efforts to revive the town centre, for example by brokering the handover of the dormant Newent and District Business Club to a fresh committee of enthusiastic business people. I attend the District Council’s town-centre liaison group whenever possible and argue Newent’s case for support. Current issues include the possibility of tree planting in the town centre and, more importantly from a financial point of view, securing a fair share of the £1,000,000 available to the District under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund announced in the last few days.

- b. Mrs Julia Gooch, Forest of Dean District Councillor, submitted the following written report:

Dear Residents

The Annual General Meeting took place in May 2021 the first full council meeting in person.

Over the past year I have attended and chaired eight Meetings of Full Council, sat on one Licencing meeting, eleven planning meetings, three strategic overview and Scrutiny meetings and seven Cinderford Northern Quarter Inquiry meetings.

Preparation for meetings is vitally important sometimes it can be quite daunting when a report is 100s of pages long but reading the reports is vital in the decision-making process.

Public meetings are webcast and available to either watch live or at a more convenient time.

I have attended training and webinars as there is always something new to learn or to participate in. I have this year attended training in the use of social media, equality and diversity, safeguarding, housing & homelessness, highways, flooding, affordable housing, health & equalities, the impact of the pandemic on younger and older people and living with dementia.

I have joined in with Community Dementia Links remotely as well as town centre liaison meetings.

I joined Staff and District Council Colleagues for a Great British Spring Clean.

I have been able to assist or address concerns raised by residents or referred them in the right direction.

The state of our roads has been a major concern, Southend Lane has rumbled on for several years with promises of re-surfacing, now that the developments are completed and after contacting the Cabinet Member for Highways at Gloucestershire County Council, I am informed this road is due to be resurfaced in this financial year in the meantime the deepest potholes have once again been repaired.

Blockages to public rights of way, the cleaning of the steps from Foley Road to Culver Street, the bund which slows down surface water before it reaches the Town Centre, tree protection orders and removal of hedges/trees, planning issues, overgrown hedgerows and Meek Road recreation ground are all areas I regularly keep my eye on and report problems to the relevant department for rectification where necessary.

I continue to support the young people's quest for a skate park and have identified significant funding which is earmarked towards the project.

I continue to liaise with Newent Initiative Trust and young people as it is important the Town serves to support everyone. 'The Big Answer' <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/the-big-answer/> is an interesting survey. There are times when we all need someone to listen but not just listen, we need to hear too.

I have chaired steering/working groups

- To provide a memorial within the district in recognition of the Battle of Imjin; this work is ongoing
- The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebration – approved by Full Council on 14th April 2022 – Congratulatory Scroll to HM the Queen, planting of seven wild cherry trees with a commemorative plaque at the Cyril Hart Arboretum, bunting, flag raising and proclamation at FODDC Offices

I organised a winter owl evening at the International Centre for Birds of Prey to raise funds for my charity Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF). These events also help promote our district with civic leaders from within our county and neighbouring counties. The Mayors of Hereford, Tewkesbury Town, and Tewkesbury Borough, Cinderford as well as the Deputy Mayor of Cheltenham, my Vice Chairman, staff, district councillors and friends thoroughly enjoyed the event and gave praise promising to return. Sadly the opportunity has been lost as we received news that after 55 years this wonderful attraction which brought thousands of visitors to the district has closed for good, however it is pleasing to note that Jemima Parry Jones MBE will continue with the conservation work that began with her Father Philip Glasier many years ago.

The bells rang and Pillowell Silver Band performed in true Christmas Spirit at the Church of St Mary, St Peter and St Paul for my Christmas Carol Service. I was delighted to welcome residents of both Westbury & Newent Parish, the High Sheriff of Gloucester, Deputy Lord Lieutenant's, Chair of Gloucester NHS Trust, the Mayor of Cinderford and Deputy Mayor of Cotswold District as well as Officers & Councillors from both the District Council, Newent Town and Westbury Parish Council. Proceeds from the carol service went to Forest Voluntary Acton Forum (FVAF) and Westbury Church.

Civic duties representing FODDC has included

- Cutting the ribbon for the launch of Market to your Door - a mobile food van
- Beat the Retreat concert at Bathurst Park, Lydney – hosted by Lydney Town Council
- Attending the launch of Accxel a new construction training centre located at Cinderford – Constructed with government grant funding of just short of £2million
- Tibberton Alms-houses Garden party – renovation of one of the Alms Houses with grants from FODDC
- A service at Gloucester Cathedral for the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Imjin – The service was both Commemorative and Education, with a keynote address given by TV presenter and Historian Peter Snow. The Salamanca Band and Bugles of the Rifles played during a march by Riflemen, serving soldiers, including representatives of 170 Battery RA and Veterans through the City.
- The Battle of Imjin concert held at St Pauls Church, Parkend – The Royal Forest of Dean Orchestra performed 'Holding the Hill' written by Liz Lane to commemorate the battle of Imjin River and a performance from solo violinist Marie Roberts
- Tewkesbury Mop Fair – Tour escorted by Mr & Mrs Danter
- Remembrance Parade and laying the wreath on behalf of the FODDC at Cinderford War Memorial – A parade from the Town Council Offices to the Town Centre Memorial followed by a parade to the Soldiers and Sailors for refreshments.
- Cheltenham Racecourse for both the Mayors of Tewkesbury & Cheltenham Borough's Charity Event – funds raised for the Samaritans, Scoo B doo and SARA

- The Mayor of Newent's Christmas Carol Service at St Mary's Church – performances by Picklenash School and Newent Dolphin Club, refreshments at Newent Memorial Hall.
 - The Mayor of Gloucester City Annual Civic Service at Gloucester Cathedral followed by refreshments at the Guild Hall
 - The Showmen's Guild Luncheon at Swindon – An annual event which bring civic guests from across the country, speeches made on the stigma, mental health and how Showmen and their families volunteered during the pandemic.
- c. Mrs Gill Moseley, Forest of Dean District Councillor, submitted the following report:

Forward Planning

I have been attending the cross-party cabinet portfolio holder's support group at which this emerging Local Plan (2026 - 41) is discussed and shaped, on a regular basis. So far, there have been two phases of the process which produces the final draft which will need to be approved by government inspectors before it can be adopted by the FoDDC and becomes part of statutory planning law. More phases, including further public consultation, are yet to come.

The option of a single settlement has been put on the back burner while a thorough investigation on paper has been carried out to look at another option of dispersal through all settlements which can absorb more sustainable growth. Permissions for approximately 4K more dwellings are needed to add to those presently granted within the district.

Newent has been identified in all phases as being likely to take several hundred more dwellings and I, along with my district Newent colleagues, have been vocal in stressing the need for a master plan and new infrastructure which will only come with significant new development, most likely to take place at the south-eastern fringes of the town.

This activity sits well beside my role as Chair of the Newent Neighbourhood Development Plan whose span matches that of the emerging FoDDC Local Plan.

Solar Farm Applications

In addition to the current Rymes Farm solar array off the B4215, two further applications have been made either side, at Moat Farm, Anthony's Cross and at Laynes Wood Farm. In addition, a further application to the north of the B4215 in Hartpury parish is in the pipeline. If all or some of these applications are approved, the landscape between Newent and Highnam will be altered dramatically.

While the need for renewable energy is readily accepted, the extent of these adjacent applications needs very careful consideration regarding the impact on the local landscape and character of this rural area. I was therefore pleased that leaders of the affected parishes and two district councillors got together informally and as a result, invited their councils to request a meeting between representatives of the area and leading officers of the FoDDC as the local planning authority.

At present there is no strategic plan against which to measure the impact and no obvious protocol under which to determine the applications with regard to each other.

Other Matters

I was pleased to work with a member of the Green Party to put forward a motion at Full Council in support of 20mph speed limits where communities want them, which links in with my work as a County Councillor.

I am also pleased to note that more members of the public are attending the NTC meetings.

- d. Mrs Gill Moseley, County Councillor, submitted the following report:

Composition of Gloucestershire County Council

In order to understand the processes of the County Council, it is useful to know its political composition. The Conservatives make up the majority ruling group of 28 with the 25-strong opposition comprising 16 Liberal Democrats, 5 Labour/Labour & Co-operatives and 4 Greens. This means in practice that the Conservative Group controls the council and its decision-making processes through the Cabinet, with its members holding portfolios which cover the business of the entire council.

However, opposition party members are very active. We bring forward motions to full council, chair two of the committees and take a full part in the scrutiny and other committees. I sit on the Environment Scrutiny Committee, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Planning Committee.

My group has long championed an investigation into the pollution of the rivers which has now reached national headline status. A GCC working group has now been set up at long last. My colleague Cllr Jeremy Hilton chairs the committee which holds responsibility for Fire Services in the county.

Motions to Full Council

Even before I was elected last May, I was contacted by a councillor from Dymock Parish Council who had put through a local motion calling for the County Council to implement 20mph limits where communities wanted them according to the Stockholm declaration.

I was very pleased to take this to my group and it became our first motion of the new term. It was accepted in principle by the Conservative majority, and we expect it to form part of the new Road Safety policy which is due to be approved in June.

We also put forward a motion relating to the method that Highways use to repair our roads, knowing that fixing one pothole while leaving others to deteriorate, rather than fixing them there and then, would bring quicker improvements. That did not get very far, sadly, but at least it highlighted the issue when, one after another, almost all the Liberal Democrat Group, including myself, stood up to relate particular problems in their areas.

Local Buses

I cannot imagine there is anyone here who does not know about the drastic withdrawal of the 132/32 Stagecoach bus services beyond Newent. I was involved with trying to find solutions at a relatively early stage and today, as you have heard, a 26-week trial shopper service has started. There are more details at the stall, and I must pay a huge tribute to Clare Stone, who leads the Buses4Us campaign group which has been behind the planning of this route for several long months and is now working on a replacement service for the lost routes between Newent, Ross, and Ledbury.

Other Matters

There are a number of other issues with which I have been involved at GCC, either through residents contacting me or through some of the other nine parish councils in my division. These include the closure of four GCC-owned residential homes, biodiversity corridors, general transport issues, and so on. I also have a councillor scheme which can award grants for Covid Recovery to community groups and organisations, and a Highways Local Fund for small projects which promote safety on the Highways and Footpaths in my division. I am always happy to be contacted about any of these matters or any others which relate to the GCC.

6. Question time from the public – Chaired by the Town Mayor

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

Question about the Post Office from a resident.

I understand that Newent's post office building is being sold and there is a chance that we will lose a post office in the town. The loss of the Post Office Counters service would be a blow to many residents. Has or is the Town Council assisting in seeking to preserve a post office presence in the town?

Councillor Mrs C Howley responded that the Post Office have a duty to provide a service and that they are actively looking for someone to take over the business.

There is one business interested in setting up a Post Office, which is exciting news, and we will come through this period of uncertainty.

Councillor Mrs Gooch commented that she had contacted Mr Mark Harper MP, on this subject and he is looking into the matter.

Question about town planting arrangements from a resident.

The original ideas were to have NTC using a contractor in the town and the Town Council staff to undertake duties.

Shrub beds, do we have an NTC Planting Plan? What is the strategy?

The council is strong on ideas, but we need specifics.

NTC needs to take advice and turn aspirations into a plan of action.

Councillor Mrs Gooch commented that advice had been taken from the Royal Horticultural Society regarding planting arrangements.

Comment on the Ukrainian Support in Gloucestershire from Rev. Simon Mason

Rev. Simon Mason spoke about the creation of a Ukrainian Hub.

There are plans to create a wider planning support network and the creation of a Ukrainian Hub, for those who are expecting to host refugees.

The intention is to cover Newent and the surrounding areas.

There are two strands to the project

1. *Refugees on location*
 - *Enabling them to talk with each other*
 - *Cook Ukrainian food to share with the local community*
 - *Community opportunities to meet the refugees*

This is an opportunity to provide the refugees with some control and support and to enable them to build links within the local community.

2. *Support host families*
 - *Small pilot of host group to be formed that can fill a function to host families*
 - *Refugees have needs and there may be a way to move families between hosts, if needed*

If any person would like to be involved, please contact Rev. Simon Mason at St Mary's Church, Newent.

It was commented that Councillors Mrs K Selwyn and Mrs C Howley are already involved and that there is an aim to broaden the project to other schools in the area, to enable a meaningful Newent welcome to the refugees.

Councillor Mrs C Howley thanked Rev. Mason for the comments.

Comment on various issues from a resident.

- *Lack of communication - 3 days to get questions for comment.*
- *Advertised in the New Ad, but can it be advertised further?*
- *Ring Road by the bypass, disgusting condition. Can something be done?*
- *Can something be done about the pot holes?*
- *Dog mess in Newent, the Recreation Ground (rugby field) people never clear it up. We need to be educating people on this.*
- *Cars parked on the pavement when the rugby is on down Watery Lane.*

(Note: Councillor Mrs W Odhiambo arrived 7.51pm)

- *Manhole cover, Watery Lane it is broken, and nothing has happened to repair it, so now it is covered.*
- *Popes Alley is a shortcut into town and is disgusting and needs improvement.*
- *Recycling centre in the car park is not good. It needs to be addressed and the council need to do something about the recycling at the car park. Visitors need to see the best of Newent. We need proper bins, big ones for everyday and proper recycling facilities.*
- *Put an advert in the press and let us know who the councillors are. New Ad needs publicity.*
- *New Ad needs a couple of community pages in it.*

Councillor Mrs C Howley commented that Newent Town Council had spoken with Street Wardens about the arboretum and the lake and have handed bags out to stop the dog fouling. There is a need to be persistent with this, as not everyone does this. On the recreation ground it is not a pleasant thing to come across.

A resident commented that the suggestion is to have a bin with tissues and gloves, similar to a petrol station.

Councillor Mrs C Howley commented that people can carry their own dog bags. The Clerk will pass the information onto the relevant organisations for their action.

Councillor Mrs C Howley thanked the resident for his comments.

Question about town centre visitors to businesses from a resident.

A resident asked about the footfall of visitors to local businesses.

The footfall is not there. Can anymore be done to encourage local people to do their shopping?

Councillor Mrs C Howley commented that events take a lot of time to organise and that the Town Council is open ideas on how to increase footfall to the town.

Members of the public may have ideas and the council has applied for a market licence, which will be issued imminently.

Another parish found having the licences useful. However, some local traders close early.

The town council is willing to work with local business and there is a business club in the town. Covid has also affected businesses.

Councillor Mrs M Duffield commented that from Onslow Road/ Gloucester Road approximately 700 cars turn right onto the bypass. A sign is needed for them to turn left to come into Newent.

We need to enable new Newent to come into Old Newent. If you have ideas, please let us know.

Question about town centre supermarket from a resident.

A resident commented that the town requires a decent supermarket, and that signage into Newent is a good idea.

Comment on various issues

A resident commented on various issues

There needs to be an alternative supermarket, other than the ones in the town.

Question about 'Big Lunch' event from a resident.

A resident asked about restarting the 'Big Lunch' event.

Rev. Simon Mason commented that a band concert is being planned for August.

Question about 'International Women's Cycling event from a resident.

A resident commented that there will be an international cycling race in Gloucestershire, passing through Newent on Wednesday 8th June. The resident asked if the council are doing anything to support this event.

The Clerk will forward the information to councillors.

Question about a pop-up café at the Lake area from a resident.

A resident asked about having a pop-up café at the lake area.

Councillor Mrs K Draper commented that has has been considered and additional information is being sought.

The public are encouraged to speak with the council.

Question about a town champion from a resident.

A resident commented that there are a number of commercial premises that are vacant. There are real possibilities for various types of commercial activities. Over the 26 years that they have resided in Newent there has been a demise of shops.

How much money does the council raise, as we do not seem to go for money?

Another resident commented that the council have done a good job and that they are engaging with young people.

Councillors Mrs C Howley commented that we will continue to work with young people.

Councillor Mrs C Birkan commented that it may be helpful to have the residents signing up to be actively involved.

Councillors Mrs C Howley commented the council are developing a committee structure and for it to work the town council needs their voice and opinions.

We will continue to advertise the committees through our website and make it an easy read.

A member of the public asked if it is a conversation between the public and council?

Councillor Mrs C Howley commented that the committees are part of the council structure, but the town council are encouraging people to be involved.

Councillor Mrs R Wadley commented that since being a councillor she has learnt that by complaining often, you get things done.

The example is potholes and highways. Make complaints directly to those responsible.

Keep reporting it through the proper system/channel, contact county highways for potholes.

Councillor Mrs G Moseley commented that people can contact 0800 514 514 Emergency line and report it. These are listed on a 'Reported Portal' and action usually occurs within 24 hours, as there are criteria for this.

Councillor Mrs G Moseley commented on the by-pass and mentioned that it was part of a forward plan. There is approximately a £81m shortfall for highways and the current method used by the authority is not fully effective, however we work with the systems that we have.

Councillor Mrs G Moseley commented that there are several people who help:

- a. from the Newent Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) group. If you would like to make a difference, please join the Steering Group
- b. Newent Climate Change Group, working to an action plan
- c. Bus4Us, community action for better public transport group

Comment about pride in where you live residents.

A resident commented about having pride in where they live, and that people should get outside and improve the environment.

There are also dangerous steps in Culver street, which are hazardous for children.

Councillor Mrs G Moseley commented that there was a lack of pavement in Culver Street for safe passage. There are also issues at Cherry Bank and Connemara Close as there are steep, and a push chair is difficult to get down. In relation to Foley Road, steps are not the only access.

Councillor Mrs Gill Moseley is to speak with Mr Andrew Middlecote, Highways Team, Gloucestershire County Council regarding the steps.

A resident commented that we live in a rural town and now they want pavement in the rural town. There needs to be a stop to the satellite navigation lorries and there needs to be a slowing of traffic, not to urbanise it. 20mph speed limits are needed.

Comment about councillors meeting the public from a resident.

A resident commented that councillors should take names, email address, and have 1:1 meeting over a drink and speak to the residents first.

Question about cross gender use of amenities from a resident.

A resident commented that the council engaged with real world issues and debate, and what is the council's view on a man becoming a woman and using female facilities.

Councillor Mrs C Howley thanked the resident for the question and commented that the type of question was not for tonight's meeting.

With no further questions raised the Mayor thanked all the public for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.38pm

DRAFT