

Chairs report

Thank you everyone for coming to our annual assembly. And I thank all of our community groups and service providers for coming along and presenting what they have to offer.

For those of you who have had the displeasure of listening to me speak before- you will know that I say this a lot; we are so incredibly lucky to have the facilities we have in this parish, and the people who run these groups and facilities very often do so for nothing. That sense of community is incredible, and I love talking about it. I am incredibly proud of the community feeling in Newent, they say you need a village to raise a family, well I think this whole Parish is certainly helping to raise my family.

Firstly I would like to introduce myself; I am Sara Hulbert and I am lucky enough to chair this fairly new Newent town council. And although we are very much individuals, different and diverse, I would like to think we are a team, maybe an odd team, most of us didn't know each other before, and we absolutely do not always agree, however I am convinced I have never had the pleasure of meeting and working alongside such community focused people. As I say we don't always agree; and I don't tell them this often but I actually really enjoy how we will challenge each other, giving us a balanced debate, and I respect our differing perspectives. We are quite a broad church but we are all working for the common goal- Newent town and parish.

Some of us are new to Newent and have not been councillors before, so we are learning from each other. I can only thank everyone on this team, including those in the office and estates team for being patient with me.

We first started to build this council last May, after unfortunately 9 of the previous council left this meant there were only 6 councillors, which in its self presented issues, however with 2 new councillors and 4 experienced councillors, a new clerk, and a truly great team in the office; with renewed enthusiasm and fresh eyes- we have had quite a year!

In that year we strongly objected to a large development on the edge of our town and we have employed a planning expert to assist us produce a comprehensive assessment to this application. We have also as a town council, with members of our community made progress on the Newent neighbourhood development plan. This is very much on a time scale now and this sort of application only proves we must not waste more time in ensuring our parish and town is not seen as an easy target. We remain dedicated upholding the best interests of our community and we need to ensure we have a long term vision for the needs of Newent and the surrounding areas. Hopefully many of you will have seen the advertising boards this evening, and I urge you to be a part of creating this development plan, this plan will allow us to shape the Newent town and parish of the future.

Newent recreation ground trust have nearly completed the community pavilion on the recreation ground, after what was a very quick build and a project that had literally started only days before most of us did. Unfortunately before even signing the contract the previous recreation ground trust had already identified a £20,000 deficit. Sadly as the building grew it seemed so did the deficit, however this deficit was not due to any increase in the contract price. The build was being partially funded by section 106 monies, unfortunately the trust had taken the decision not to obtain legal advice and once the new council was in place they sought legal advice this showed that the trust was not allowed to take the financing that had been put in place to cover the gap between the section 106 funding the build price. We as a council, as sole trustee of the recreation ground, have worked incredibly hard to navigate these issues and we have openly discussed and shared as much as we could at each stage of the project, and I can only thank our community for their patience as we finally look to complete the project very soon, at which point I'm sure the trust will release more

information. I thank the chair of the recreation ground trust for their time, diligence and commitment to create the great community asset the community pavilion will be.

On the 19th of June we invite his British Legion representatives including retired group captain Annie Reid to attend our armed forces flag raising in town. This was the first of its kind in our town for many years and it is an honour to add this to our calendar moving forward.

The estates team have continued to work tirelessly and shortly before the summer of 2023 they secured 2 more of the very ornate wood carvings around the lake. These are a beautiful asset to this area for all to enjoy.

The plants also had a seasonal refresh in town and the colour scheme of red, white and blue had already been chosen this was a beautiful touch in the year of the King's coronation. We are trying to choose our planting schemes with more care as our summers become more dry, we need to be mindful of how Hardy our plants are and attempt to use more resilient plants going forward. This will hopefully ensure our pots look spectacular for longer and reduce the need to remove flowers at different seasons and also reduce the the need for daily watering. We hope this will support us in being a more sustainable and green council in the future.

I have attended many events over the last year including an award ceremony in Lydney which was an incredible event celebrating heroes within their community. Something I don't think most communities do enough of, so I was so impressed to be invited to the event. I have had the pleasure of attending Gloucester cathedral to watch the Mayor of Gloucester take her seat in the cathedral. I have attended Newent community schools armistice day remembrance service, this was such a moving tribute to those who previously attended the school, and sacrificed so much for us. And Newent town council led the remembrance parade through our town with many dignitaries and community heroes, the British legion organised this and I was honoured to be apart of it.

The coldcroft shires journey end event was of huge proportion not only for the miracle that Jamie and Millie were healed enough to continue such an event but also the weather. It was just so incredibly wet, that didn't dampen spirits though and the coldcroft shire event by the lake raised £400, for several charities. We were incredibly happy to support Jamie and the horses after what had been such a difficult time, but again the community rallied around him and encouraged them all back to health and to continue the event. Which I am most grateful for.

We have engaged with the junior and secondary school in Newent, I have been lucky enough to visit Newent Community School to talk to year 9 students. They were given the opportunity to ask me questions about being on the council and about being the Mayor. Many of their questions were around what a Mayor does, what the council does, and we were able to have great discussions about some of the tasks that are undertaken on a daily basis, to the duty of being a councillor and the civic duty of a Mayor. I was incredibly impressed with their behaviour and on the calibre of question they asked me, their enthusiasm for what we do was quite incredible. I have also helped judge a Christmas cake competition at the junior school. Their efforts were outstanding and I think maybe a Newent bake off should be arranged.

I also met with the Newent brownies, we met in the market house and discussed all of the incredible artefacts in there, as well as talking about my favourite things about being the Mayor. Now that questions was easy to answer, because it is those sort of events I genuinely love, I relish the opportunities to engage with our young people. Ultimately, they are the next generation of our community and the next Newent town council. I feel it's important they have a sense of pride in their surroundings, the parish, the town, the people, and I think it's important that they feel heard and valued as part of our community, for what we do today effects their future, and maybe because I am a parent of 3 young Newent residents, I feel a great responsibility for that. I have been blessed with

so many opportunities to meet with outstanding people in our community and other local groups, I have had the opportunity to visit other towns and talk with their councillors. I can honestly say I have had a great year for meeting wonderful people.

The Christmas lights event was another amazing occasion, and I truly was in awe of the spectacle. All of those people came out to support the event, and we thank you all. I had never stood on the scaffold before, so that was quite an incredible view. We hope with your support we can continue to make this event magical.

We have made some changes to the way we engage with the community and recently have used our community engagement policy on several things including talking with the fishing community with regard to the lake and residents in close proximity to small play area. We have started a regeneration working group which is open to all, there is a very loose agenda we talk about what we enjoy about Newent, what we would like more of, and what we want Newent to have in the future. I'm very passionate that we must change the narrative of Newent I hear a lot of Newent used to be great... Newent is still amazing! Take it from someone who isn't a native, Newent is such a community- there it is that word again! But the regeneration group is where all events are now welcome to be 'sounded out' by both council and you the community, we have had many different events come forward to showcase what they want to do, and other events have come forward to ask for the councils support, we have found that often the organisers leave with each others contact details and have been sharing ideas and resources.....what a community. The council have started to use our calendar on the website more and we hope going forward we can use our website to advertise all of the community events, even if the council have not organised them- we want to Champion how much Newent has to offer, because I am always blown away by how much is happening each week in Newent. Presently our working group meetings are advertised on social media and our website, please come along to have a positive contribution to our wonderful town. The 16th of May 2024 at 7pm is the next meeting in the community pavilion on the recreation ground, come and have a look around and have a chat.

We have been using our social media much more and we have even added the foreman Friday. I feel our estates team are not given the fan fair they deserve, they almost seem the unsung heroes of our town. Their job is never ending and so I wanted to show what sort of tasks the team get up to on a weekly basis. I hope many of you enjoy it, and "like" the Newent town council social pages. We have also been busy working on our newsletters, the admin team have been out visiting our local businesses to give them a little write up in our newsletter. This is a fantastic new addition and we hope to highlight all of the businesses we have in our town and parish.

We have given grants to several community groups from youth provision to new sports groups, we have been delighted to see so many new groups start up, but only sad we cannot support them all financially.

Have we made mistakes over the last year? Maybe. But who in this room hasn't? We are all human after all. The thing with mistakes is learning from them, and we have adapted and adjusted- we have evolved because of our mistakes. We have attempted to mitigate all the issues we have been faced with, with the respect and dignity we all deserve. We always encourage everyone to read our minutes and the agendas for the forthcoming meetings, these can be found on the website along with all of the supporting papers. You are all most welcome to any of our open meetings, and we are advertising these meetings where we can, including local magazines. We are always looking for more ways to listen and to engage, we understand there is more work to be done on this and as a council we can only take your lead, I hope that with your support we can improve in this area.

As I said, it has been quite a year, but when you are surrounded by a community that loves this parish as much as you do, it is all so much easier.

I cannot thank you all enough for your support over the last 12 months. I will continue to cherish Newent and endeavour to build the Newent and parish for our own and our children's future.