

MINUTES OF THE **MEETING OF THE COUNCIL** HELD ON **WEDNESDAY 18th MARCH 2026**
AT 7.00 P.M. AT NEWTON'S PLACE, WOLBOROUGH STREET, NEWTON ABBOT

Present: Councillors C Parker (Mayor) Presiding
L Cooke (Deputy Mayor)

Councillors: B Bailey A Ineson
J Bradford A Hall
P Bullivant G Jennings
R Buscombe M Joyce
D Corney-Walker M Ryan
T Corney-Walker L Wood
C Davieson N Yabsley
A Gibbs

Officers in attendance: Phil Rowe Town Clerk
Sam Scott Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
Pierre Doutreligne Projects & Strategy Officer
Linda McGuirk Principal Administrator
Nigel Canham Communications Advisor

By invitation Freeman Mike Hocking
Freewoman Carol Bunday
Reverend Gill Daniel
3 x Representatives of Discover Newton Abbot website

Also, present 4 x Members of the public
District Councillor J Hook
County Councillor J Fry
County Councillor M Cockerham
Senior Case Officer for Martyn Wrigley MP, J Rice

419. WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR

The Mayor welcomed those present to the meeting and invited Reverend Gill Daniel to open the meeting with prayers.

420. APOLOGIES

- a) A valid reason for absence was received from Councillor Paul Parker.
- b) Further to Minute 25/11(275b), where Councillor Tom Corney-Walker was granted a further leave of absence of up to three months, with the situation to be reviewed at the end of that period, Members were due to consider the current position following the expiry of the three-month period on 12th February 2026. However, as Councillor Tom Corney-Walker was present at the meeting, a review of his extended leave of absence was not required. Members welcomed Councillor Tom Corney-Walker back.

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421. **INTERESTS**

None declared.

422. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 21st January 2026 were received and signed as a correct record.

423. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

424. **PRESENTATION – DISCOVER NEWTON ABBOT**

The Mayor welcomed three representatives from the Discover Newton Abbot website to the meeting and invited them to give a presentation to Members.

The presentation provided an overview of the website and its development, including:

- A tourism-focused website for Newton Abbot
- A live demonstration of the website; the events page was highlighted as the most viewed and is regularly updated
- A shopping page featuring direct links to local businesses, with regular updates
- A business directory, with 83 businesses added since launch
- Popular content including the walking and hiking trails page
- Website usage statistics and analytics
- A dedicated markets page
- A requirement to report back to the Shared Prosperity Fund after 12 months
- Initial plans for Phase 2 of the project

Representatives outlined opportunities for further support from the Town Council, including:

- Promotion via the Council’s social media channels
- Links from the Town Council website
- Features within the Town Cryer newsletter
- Support in promoting the history of Newton Abbot
- Regular updates on Town Council events
- Collaboration with Visit South Devon

Additional aspirations included the use of Pulse Hubs with QR codes linked to the website.

Members were advised that further work is required to improve search engine optimisation, with additional funding needed to support this.

The Mayor thanked the representative for their presentation and invited questions from Members.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

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- It was noted that Yellow Umbrella has relocated and the website is not fully up to date.
- Members commented that a dedicated Community Projects page is absent and that community services should be more prominently featured.
- Concerns were raised that the website is not sufficiently inviting or visually vibrant.
- Questions were raised regarding the name of the website and potential duplication or confusion with “Visit Newton Abbot”.
- Members queried the overall project cost and expressed concern from residents regarding how funding has been utilised.
- Clarification was sought on the £27,000 expenditure relating to signage and promotional materials for Queen Street businesses, including how business data had been collected, noting that some smaller businesses were unaware of the website.
- It was highlighted that UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) branding should be included on all materials, and its absence was queried.
- It was suggested that clearer information should be provided on how local events can be submitted for inclusion on the website.

In response, the representatives offered to convene a further meeting to discuss the matters raised in more detail.

Members agreed that the representatives be invited to attend a future meeting to continue discussions.

425. **REPORTS OF COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES**

The Mayor invited County and District Councillors to provide a report on their recent activity in Newton Abbot.

District Councillor M Cockerham had submitted a report in advance of the meeting and welcomed questions on matters contained within the report, which included:

- Highways matters, noting that 9,700 potholes were reported in February, and encouraging residents to report issues directly
- A proposal for a 20mph speed restriction in Buckland

During discussion, Councillor M Joyce emphasised the importance of ensuring that repairs are carried out to a sufficient standard, expressing concern that temporary repairs are ineffective and highlighting a perceived lack of supervision of contractors.

Councillor C Parker reported on discussions at HATOC with Devon County Council Highways, noting that the cost of implementing a 20mph scheme is significant and that it is likely to be some time before the proposal is progressed.

County Councillor J Fry reported on issues in which she has had direct involvement:

- Budget matters, welcoming the increase in highway funding
- Resident and business concerns regarding current traffic problems associated with highway repair works on Ashburton Road
- Attendance at resident surgeries
- Ongoing monitoring of highway responses and service delivery

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District Councillor P Bullivant reported on issues in which he has had direct involvement:

- His role as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, including matters relating to Teignmouth Lido
- Issues concerning travellers on the Forde House car park
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) expenditure
- The current pothole situation
- Investigation into the A383 speed camera
- Progress at Highweek, noting that the Scout Hut is now complete
- Submission of a petition regarding residents paying full Council Tax in areas where limited services are provided

The Mayor reminded Members that reports should focus on matters directly affecting Newton Abbot.

District Councillor J Hook had submitted a report in advance of the meeting and welcomed questions on matters contained within the report, no questions were raised.

District Councillor R Buscombe reported on issues in which he has had direct involvement:

- Local Government Reorganisation
- Asset Transfer Policy
- The Sherborne Car Park housing scheme, which is due to commence shortly
- Concerns regarding potholes and the level of investment in the road network, with reference to tracing public expenditure on repairs

District Councillor A Hall reported on issues in which he has had direct involvement:

- A Council Tax increase of 2.99%
- The removal of the 50% reduced rate for vacant properties
- Attendance at the first Masterplan Board meeting

District Councillor J Bradford reported on issues in which she has had direct involvement:

- Attendance at Planning and Licensing Committee meetings
- Resident concerns regarding NA3 and Public Rights of Way (PROW) across the fields
- Reporting of potholes and related highway issues

District Councillor M Ryan reported on issues in which he has had direct involvement:

- Regular attendance at the Buckland Hub

District Councillor C Parker reported on issues in which he has had direct involvement:

- The installation of security measures in local parks to address ongoing concerns

The Mayor thanked the District and County Councillors for their reports as they provided a valuable insight into the issues within Newton Abbot.

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426. **MAYORAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor, Councillor Colin Parker, provided an update on recent engagements that he and the Mayoress had attended, as circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor highlighted the following events:

- Insects Uncovered Exhibition at the Museum
- Attendance at 100th birthday celebrations

The Mayor advised that he will not be holding a concert at the end of March.

427. **POLICIES**

The Mayor, introduced the policy documents, as circulated prior to the meeting and advised Members that the policies were recommendations from the Policy & Resources Committee.

Members considered the following policies, as circulated prior to the meeting.

- Committee Membership Policy
- Artificial Intelligence Policy
- Capability Procedure
- Deductions from Pay Procedure
- Town Crier Recruitment, Conduct & Review Procedure

Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED that the policies in relation to the:

- Committee Membership Policy
- Artificial Intelligence Policy
- Capability Procedure
- Deductions from Pay Procedure (As amended)
- Town Crier Recruitment, Conduct & Review Procedure

be hereby, approved and adopted subject to an amendment to the Deductions from Pay Procedure to remove reference to “shortage of work”, as this does not reflect the current contracts of employment.

Cllr M Ryan declared an interest as he is related to a member of staff.

428. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION**

The Projects and Strategy Officer reported on the recent Local Government Review (LGR) Working Group meeting. Reminding members of the forthcoming consultation deadline of 26th March 2026 and the need to address asset transfer separately from wider unitary proposals.

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The (LGR) Working Group has proposed that an Asset Transfer Project Board be established to assess, on a case-by-case basis, the merits and feasibility of assets offered by Teignbridge District Council.

Members also considered a draft response to the LGR consultation, which highlighted concerns regarding lack of consensus, governance, geography, potential democratic deficit and limited consultation time. It was proposed that the response be submitted jointly by the Mayor, Town Clerk and Chairperson of the LGR Working Group.

Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED that Newton Abbot Town Council hereby:

- a) Submits the draft response to the Local Government Reorganisation consultation.

Councillor J Bradford abstained from voting.

- b) Establishes an Asset Transfer Project Board to progress discussions on the potential transfer of assets and services.
- c) Agrees that membership of the Asset Transfer Project Board be determined from the Full Council.

Members invited to express their interest to join the Asset Transfer Project Board by contacting the Town Clerk.

Members were further advised that a dispensation will be sought for District Councillors in respect of participation in matters relating to asset transfer.

429. **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR)**

The Mayor gave an update on the current situation relating to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, advising Members that the External Auditor had delayed closing the AGAR due to an anonymous challenge.

The Mayor advised that the integrity of the Council had been challenged, with potential reputational implications. It was noted that this had resulted in delays to the audit process, leading to additional costs to residents and placing increased pressure on the work of the Town Clerk and the Responsible Financial Officer

Members were informed that the External Auditor had now responded and confirmed that the matter had been reviewed and closed, with no foundation identified for the challenge.

Members expressed their support for the Responsible Financial Officer and the Town Clerk.

Concern was raised that the actions referred to have the potential to undermine the democratic functioning of the Council and were considered unacceptable. Members emphasised the Council's duty of care to its staff.

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430. **PROCEEDINGS OF COMMITTEES**

- a) The Minutes of the Meeting of the **Planning Committee** held on 27th January 2026, as presented by the Chairperson, Councillor N Yabsley were received and approved.
- b) The Minutes of the Meeting of the **Community & Heritage Committee** held on 4th February 2026, as presented by the Chairperson, Councillor L Cooke were received and approved.
- c) The Minutes of the Meeting of the **Policy & Resources Committee** held on 11th February 2026, as presented by the Chairperson, Councillor L Wood were received and approved.
- d) The Minutes of the Meeting of the **Planning Committee** held on 17th February 2026, as presented by the Chairperson, Councillor N Yabsley were received and approved.
- e) The Minutes of the Meeting of the **Planning Committee** held on 10th March 2026, as presented by the Chairperson, Councillor N Yabsley were received and approved.

431. **LATE CORRESPONDENCE**

None.

432. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting to be held on Wednesday 13th May 2026 (Annual Council Meeting)

The Mayor expressed his thanks to Members and Officers for their support during his Mayoral year.

433. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, it was:

RESOLVED that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item of business as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

434. **STRATEGIC MATTERS – UPDATE FROM THE TOWN CLERK**

The Town Clerk reported on the following strategic matters and requested that Members grant delegated authority to progress actions arising from the following projects:

- a) Asset Opportunity
 - Borrowing approval has been granted

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- Ongoing investigations and due diligence are continuing

b) Old Forde House

- A Architectural Heritage Fund payment request has been submitted
- A comprehensive feasibility study and business plan have been completed

At 20:38, Councillors D Corney-Walker and T Corney-Walker left the meeting.

c) Asset Transfer Opportunities

- Ongoing investigations and due diligence are continuing
- Outlined the process and potential timescales

Arising from the above discussion, it was;

RESOLVED that delegated authority be hereby granted to the Town Clerk to continue discussions and progress actions relating to the above projects.

Meeting closed at 20:50 hours.

Chairperson (Mayor).....

Date.....

Chairperson (Mayor) initials.....