

MINUTES OF THE **MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ONLINE WEDNESDAY 24<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2020** AT 7.00 P.M.

Present: Councillors R D Jenks (Mayor) Presiding  
M Joyce (Deputy Mayor)

Councillors: P Bullivant C Jenks  
Mrs C Bunday Mrs A Jones  
Mrs K Crout C N Parker  
B Hayes M Pilkington  
R Hayes M E Ryan  
M Hocking Mrs L Sheffield  
D Howe

Invited Guests: Reverend Gareth Regan  
County and District Councillor Mrs Jackie Hook  
Mrs Rosemary Whitbread

In attendance: Philip Rowe Town Clerk  
Samantha Scott Deputy Town Clerk  
Sally Henley Town Development Manager  
Alexandra Robinson Principal Administrator

515. **WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR**

The Mayor welcomed everyone, to the remote Full Council Meeting, including invited guests Mrs Rosemary Whitbread and County and District Councillor Mrs Jackie Hook.

516. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Corney-Walker, C Davieson and R Hall.

517. **INTERESTS**

None declared.

518. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020 were received and signed as a correct record.

519. **MAYORAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor reported that the government restrictions put in place to prevent the further spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had resulted in there being almost no Mayoral engagements. However Councillor Richard Jenks had engaged in a 'cyclethon' event raising funds for Kingscare charity.

520. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Mayor invited Mrs Rosemary Whitbread, a local resident and proprietor in Queen Street to speak in relation to the proposed alterations to Queen Street, Newton Abbot.

Mrs Whitbread thanked the Town Council for giving her the opportunity to speak and raised the following key points:

- Concern at the potential missed opportunity for consultation on public issues during the COVID-19 government restrictions;
- Concern at the proposed parking changes as part of Queen Street regeneration;
- Consultation and discussion with businesses and shop keepers in Queen Street to gain an insight into their views on the proposals and permission to speak on their behalf;
- Proprietors and managers in shops and businesses in Queen Street have raised concerns at potential loss of parking under regeneration proposals;
- Local businesses in Queen Street regard themselves as specialist shops and facilities providing services that need parking close by, as distinct from the main shopping area of the town;
- Concern at potential increase in shop vacancies on a gateway road into the town centre;
- Necessity for drop-off zones and delivery bays;
- Access to the town's main post office for frail and vulnerable shoppers;
- Necessity to retain as much parking as possible in a growing town; and
- Wider pavements should not be installed at the expense of lost parking.

The Mayor thanked Mrs Whitbread for her informative statement on the views of proprietors and businesses on the proposals for regeneration in Queen Street. Mrs Whitbread was invited to stay for the remainder of the meeting.

521. **REPORT FROM TOWN DEVELOPMENT MANAGER ON PROPOSALS FOR THE TOWN CENTRE AND IN PARTICULAR QUEEN STREET**

The Mayor referred to the comprehensive report prepared by the Town Development Manager, Mrs Sally Henley and noted that her verbal update would be taken in two parts. The first being a summary of the report, previously circulated, on the application by Teignbridge District Council under the Future High Street Fund scheme and the second to report on the town centre re-opening following the easing of Government restrictions.

**A. Future High Street Fund Application**

Mrs Henley thanked the Mayor for the opportunity to update Members and raised the following key points:

- The District Authority was fortunate to be eligible to apply for funding under the Future High Street Fund (FHSF), a scheme established in 2019 to revitalise town centres and therefore prior to the restrictions of COVID-19;
- Teignbridge District Council selected Newton Abbot for the scheme;
- The FHSF would provide the opportunity to support and strengthen town centres through the significant difficulties experienced on the high street in recent years;
- The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent government restrictions have amplified the hardship and economic difficulties faced by town centre businesses so the opportunity to be included in the short list for the funding was most welcome;
- The impact of the pandemic has been felt across the retail sector including national firms as well as independent stores, approximately 20 national retailers will not reopen following the easing of restrictions;

- Social media and local comment have concentrated on just part of the opportunities in the proposed applications;
- The Market Hall is included, a new modern uplifting façade to reveal the historic market hall;
- A multi-plex cinema in the centre of the town to compliment and enhance the growing night time economy and allow the redevelopment of the Alexandra Cinema as a feature within the developing cultural quarter of the town;
- Mrs Henley reiterated her efforts to engage with the businesses in the town and encourage their participation in the consultation process; and
- Concluded her summary report by emphasising that the proposals were principles and ideas at this stage and that Teignbridge District Council welcomed feedback in order to shape the final application bid.

The Mayor thanked Mrs Henley for her informative update and invited questions from Councillors who raised the following key points:

- Mixed sentiment about the proposals, recognising the importance and value of the funding opportunity for the town but concern at the potential loss of parking;
- Encourage a long-term view for the benefit of the town;
- Concern that engagement with the businesses needs to go further acknowledging that some are not contactable as either closed or furloughed under the government restrictions;
- Concern that a loss of parking in Queen Street would cause a subsequent loss of business;
- Fantastic opportunity to modernise and revitalise the Market Hall;
- The town would benefit from a modern multiplex cinema to encourage and develop the entertainment opportunities in the town for all to enjoy;
- Other existing sites for stage performances are available in the town;
- Potential for pedestrian area in part of Queen Street with fair car parking prices in sites in the town;
- Request Teignbridge District Council to reconsider the proposals for Queen Street element of the application bid;
- Access along Queen Street could be hampered by narrowing road width;
- Question of how many cyclists able to do household shopping with bicycle rather than car as transport into and out of town;
- Additional carparking via new deck in Cricketfield would be needed in advance of any reduction in parking elsewhere; and
- Parking needed in close proximity to 'take-away' vendors.

Mrs Henley clarified that the temporary measures as proposed by Devon County Council to assist in social distancing in the town would no longer go ahead. Following a lengthy and detailed discussion, accordingly it was:

**RESOLVED** that the Town Council fully supported the investment that the funding from the Future High Street Fund would bring to Newton Abbot; however it recorded its concern for the Queen Street redevelopment proposals contained within the application bid and requested that these be substantially revised and alternatives be considered.

## **B. Town Centre Re-Opening**

Mrs Henley reported that following the easing of the government restrictions for non-essential retailers that more of the town centre shops were opening again. Mrs Henley advised that some towns had implemented visual aids and reminders on the

pavements and in the streets to reinforce social distancing but that Newton Abbot had decided that this was not needed and that customers were taken practical and sensible measures to safeguard themselves and others when moving about the town. Efforts had been concentrated within businesses and retail premises and local proprietors and managers had worked very hard to put practical safety measures in place to ensure that customers felt safe and welcome in the town. She noted that there had been some queuing but that this had been sensibly managed and overall, she was very pleased to report that the town was waking up and starting to revitalise once more. Further services such as barbers and hairdressers would re-open from the end of next week.

The Town Development Manager informed the Council that Teignbridge District Council had tried to secure funding from the European Regional Development Fund but until very recently it had not included funding for practical measures such as sanitiser stations which would be a benefit to the town.

The Mayor thanked the Town Development Manager for her update and invited questions from Councillors who raised the following key points:

- Concern for the number of staff in the retail sector who are dependent on rising footfall to ensure they return to full employment from the furlough scheme rather than face redundancy; and
- Concern that the government's willingness to reduce the social distancing from 2m to 1m plus would effectively increase risk and to remain cautious until a vaccine became available for all.

The Mayor thanked the Town Development Manager, Mrs Sally Henley for her informative and comprehensive reports on the town centre.

## 522. **COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS ADVISOR**

The Town Clerk introduced Mr Nigel Canham, the Council's Communications Advisor and reminded Members that his contract had been extended for a further 12 months to assist in the promotion and media coverage of Newton's Place.

Mr Canham thanked the Council for inviting him to speak and raised the following key points in connection with his role as Communications Advisor:

- A background in local journalism, media and public relations advice to prominent local businesses;
- Involvement in local charitable trusts and local issues within the community;
- Knowledge and understanding of the different tiers of Government and the separation of roles at each level; and
- Willingness to develop community understanding of the Town Council, its role and involvement in the community and the promotion of Newton's Place.

Members thanked Mr Canham for his continued efforts on the Newton's Place Project as Media and PR consultant to ensure that a clear message was delivered to the wider community throughout the programme. The Mayor endorsed his appreciation for Mr Canham's efforts on the project.

## 523. **MAYOR/CLERK ACTIONS DURING PERIOD OF COVID-19 GOVERNMENT LOCKDOWN**

The Mayor updated Members on the actions taken on behalf of the Council during the period of COVID-19 Government restrictions.

- a. Response to Teignbridge Draft Local Plan  
The Mayor reported that all councillors had been invited to comment on the document and he thanked those who had made contributions. The response document, previously circulated would be sent to Teignbridge District Council within the consultation period.
- b. Order for the purchase of the Environmental Cleansing system and Trailer had been placed and awaited delivery;
- c. The Deputy Town Clerk had progressed the recruitment of two Facilities Maintenance Operatives and interviews would take place towards the end of July 2020.
- d. The Newfoundland Way public toilets were reopened as part of the easing of government restrictions and the reopening of shops and were being carefully monitored.

Members commended the Mayor and the Clerk on their prompt actions and accordingly it was;

**RESOLVED** that the Council approve the actions taken by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor, Councillor Richard Jenks on actions taken during the period of COVID-19 Government restrictions as listed above a) to d).

#### 524. **REPORTS OF COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN**

The Mayor invited Chairman to report on matters in relation to their Committees or Sub-committees during the period of COVID-19 Government restrictions.

A. Councillor Colin Parker, Chairman of Finance & Audit Committee reported on the following issues:

- Commended staff for the purchase of the environmental cleansing equipment and the progression of recruitment of facilities/maintenance operatives;
- Costs associated with the Newton's Place project were being closely monitored and a report would be prepared for Council in due course;
- Whilst Newton's Place had been challenging it was a building to be very proud of and the community would be delighted with the new facilities that it offered; and
- Sincere thanks offered to Councillors Mike Hocking and Mike Ryan for their considerable work in helping throughout the new building; moving furniture, setting up the storeroom and the overall assistance to all the staff to enable them to move into their new offices.

B. Councillor David Howe, Chairman of Planning Committee reported on the following issues:

- Interim management and consideration of Planning Applications;
- Consultation and consideration of Major Planning Applications, 20/00585/MAJ and 20/00586/MAJ in relation to Houghton Barton; and 20/00802/MAJ being the Halcyon Road Car park redevelopment.
- Council response to the Draft Local Plan.

C. Councillor Mike Hocking, Vice Chairman of Policy & Resources Committee reported on the following issues:

- Management and review of existing Council Policies updated to reflect changes in the RFO.

D. Councillor Mrs Lesley Sheffield, Chairman of Community & Heritage Committee reported on the following issues:

- The continued efforts of the Community Engagement Consultant and Museum staff to provide online activities to engage with the public using the Museum website and social media.

E. Councillor Mrs Carol Bunday, Chairman of Events Sub-Committee reported on the following issues:

- The Freedom of the Town Parade by the ship's company of HMS Triumph would be deferred until Spring 2021;
- The Official Opening of Newton's Place to be deferred until 2021;
- Remembrance Day would be marked but would require particularly careful planning and the Chairman welcomed the involvement and assistance of all Councillors to ensure adequate safety measures were in place and
- Confirmation that the town would have Christmas Lights in 2020 as a wonderful boost to the community albeit it may not be possible to hold a parade.

## 525. **POLICY DOCUMENTS**

The Mayor introduced the Policy documents, previously circulated drawing Members' attention to the key principles contained within them. Changes in the policies reflected the changes to the Council's RFO and those aspects needed to comply with the Council's Accounting Standards. Following the review of the documents it was;

**RESOLVED** that the Policy documents:

- i) Statement of Internal Control
- ii) Anti-Fraud and Corruption and
- iii) Fixed Asset Depreciation be hereby, approved and adopted.

## 526. **NEWTON'S PLACE PROJECT – UPDATE**

The Mayor invited the Town Clerk to provide a verbal update on the Newton's Place Project. The Clerk advised Members that the project was in its final stages. Whist snagging works continued alongside the last remaining elements of the conservation works; the three large museum exhibits were being installed over the next couple of weeks. Mr Rowe was pleased to inform Members that the Sandford Orleigh screen had been reassembled and had been installed at the end of the Chancel area and looked magnificent. The organ pipes had been reinstalled and complemented the other features which formed the original church such as the font and pulpit. During the following week the Lethbridge Diving Bell would be installed and all the elements of the railway signals had been brought from the former Town Hall by the Clerk and Councillors Hocking and Ryan to enable the specialist to install them in their new part of the exhibition area.

The Clerk continued that Creative CORE and their installation team would be on site from 6<sup>th</sup> July to fit-out the Museum exhibition space with the cabinets, graphics and allow the Museum staff to work alongside in cordoned areas to infill with display objects from the collection. With this in mind the Project Team felt it would be realistic to suggest a soft opening towards mid-September subject to the completion of the Museum fit-out and further information would be provided in due course.

Mr Rowe concluded that he was assured that Newton's Place would deliver the aspirations of the Town Council and the wishes of the wider community.

The Mayor thanked Mr Rowe for his verbal update and invited comments from Councillors who raised the following key points:

- Councillor Ryan acknowledged that there had been an enormous amount of work required to complete Newton's Place and he made particular thanks to all those involved including close family members who had supported the extensive hours taken to move the project forward;
- Noted the scaffolding to the rear of the premises to finish works to the rainwater goods;
- Expressed sincere appreciation to Councillor Bullivant for housing the Museum cabinets prior to their delivery to Newton's Place for the fit-out; and
- Noted the very positive support from the Heritage Fund and Arts Fund in Newton's Place as a wonderful example of heritage redevelopment in the South West.

Members echoed their appreciation for the work undertaken by the Clerk and the Project Team to deliver Newton's Place. Accordingly, it was:

**RESOLVED** that the verbal report by the Town Clerk on the Newton's Place Project be noted.

527. **LATE CORRESPONDENCE AND MATTERS ARISING**

The Mayor advised Councillors who wished to make further comment on the Draft Local Plan to make their submissions directly to Teignbridge District Council.

Councillors noted the technical difficulties and inconsistent broadband reception when using remote video conferencing software.

The Mayor conveyed his good wishes to all Councillors and staff to continue to keep well and stay safe in these unusual circumstances.

528. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Council was to be held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020.

-----  
Chairman (Mayor)