

MINUTES OF THE **MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ONLINE WEDNESDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> JULY 2020** AT 7.00 P.M.

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

Councillors: P Bullivant D Howe  
Mrs C Bunday C Jenks  
D Corney-Walker C N Parker  
R Hall M E Ryan  
M Hocking Mrs L Sheffield

Invited Guests: Reverend Gareth Regan  
Nigel Canham Communications Advisor

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

529. **WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR**

The Mayor welcomed everyone, to the remote Full Council Meeting.

530. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs K Crout, C Davieson, R Hayes and Mrs A Jones.

531. **INTERESTS**

None declared.

532. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020 were received and signed as a correct record.

533. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

534. **MAYORAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor reported that the government restrictions that remained in place had resulted in there being fewer opportunities for Mayoral engagements. However Councillor Richard Jenks was pleased to advise that he had been invited to the opening of the new Waffle Inn in the town and the opening of the 'No Limits' Café in Sherborne Road. The café was a community enterprise supporting adults with learning difficulties. The Mayor concluded his report by commending Percy's haberdashery for celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> year of trading in Newton Abbot. All the events were welcome and a positive start for the re-opening of the town centre in such challenging times.

535. **MAYOR/CLERK ACTIONS DURING INTERVENING PERIOD BETWEEN COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The Mayor updated Members on the actions taken on behalf of the Council during the period of COVID-19 Government restrictions. The Mayor advised that he had written to Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP in support of Devon and Cornwall Police request for additional resources and funding, and noted the particular pressures upon local policing during the peak holiday season. The Town Clerk confirmed that he had not been required to take action on behalf of the Council since the last meeting of the Council other than those elements relating to Newton's Place and he would report further under Minute (541) below.

Members noted the action taken by the Mayor and accordingly it was;

**RESOLVED** that the Council approve the actions taken by the Mayor, Councillor Richard Jenks during the intervening period between Council Meetings.

536. **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 Mrs Lesley Sheffield, Chairman of Community & Heritage Committee thanked the Mayor for his invitation to report and advised that there were no issues pertaining to the Community & Heritage Committee at this time.

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

- Receipt of the environmental cleansing equipment;
- Financial pressures facing local government and the need for the Council to review its Vision, Priorities and Objectives for the year ahead at the earliest opportunity; and
- Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) delayed submission due to COVID-19 but would request a Special Meeting of the Council to approve.

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

- Continued Interim management and consideration of Planning Applications.

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

- Management and review of existing Council Health and Safety Policies updated to reflect changes required from implementation of safeguarding from COVID-19.

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

- Recorded appreciation for Events Co-ordinator Mrs Natalie Hicks for her foresight in managing the amendments of the Events Programme and the plans in place for Events 2021;

- HMS Triumph Freedom of the Town Parade deferred until Spring 2021 further details would be provided in due course;
- The Royal British Legion were unlikely to be able to provide a Service of Remembrance but a virtual alternative was being discussed in order to mark the occasion, and
- Events for Christmas would be severely affected by the restrictions under COVID-19 but the Christmas Lights would be installed and the Events Co-ordinator was investigating the possibility of Christmas Projections to enhance the town's festivities during the Christmas season.

#### 537. **COMMITTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES**

The Mayor reminded Members that under Minute 20/04(497)a the Council had currently suspended all Committee and Sub-Committee meetings. The Mayor was pleased to report that the Council had successfully managed all matters effectively by means of virtual (remote) meetings and he made a particular note of thanks to the Members of the Planning Committee who had responded to all Planning Applications with due regard as a statutory consultee.

Councillor Richard Jenks added that despite the easing of government restrictions that further advice from NALC had encouraged Local Councils to continue to meet remotely at this time. The Mayor invited comment from Councillors on future meetings during the current circumstances.

Following a discussion among Members, who strongly supported the necessity to consider the Council's strategic vision and maintain effective social distancing for the safety of the Council, its employees and the wider community, it was:

**RESOLVED** that a) the Planning Committee would continue with the interim management arrangements for considering Planning Applications; b) the Council would adhere to the advice of NALC and approved the continued suspension of all Committees and Sub-Committees until 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 (to be reviewed at the next meeting of the Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020); and c) to hold a virtual meeting of the Strategic Planning Forum on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to review the Council's Vision, Priorities and Objectives.

#### 538. **GREATER EXETER STRATEGIC PLAN (GESP)**

The Mayor invited Councillor Mike Hocking to update Members on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) and its implications for Newton Abbot.

Councillor Mike Hocking reminded Councillors of the background to the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan and how the proposals would provide a planning framework that operated over the top of both the District Council's, Local Plan and Newton Abbot's Neighbourhood Development Plan. He emphasised that the plan required careful consideration given its implications for development both in Newton Abbot and across the wider community.

Councillor Hocking made reference to a recent press article which summarised the outline development areas to meet the needs of GESP and their implications for Newton Abbot. He advised Council that once the papers had been released to the public inviting comment on the proposals, that a working group be established to consider a response on behalf of the Council. Councillors discussed the broad proposals made under GESP and the implications for Newton Abbot and the wider region, following which, accordingly it was:

**RESOLVED** that a) Councillor Mike Hocking be given delegated authority to investigate the matters concerning the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) in more detail and b) that once the consultation papers were released later in the year that Councillor Mike Hocking Chair a working group to review the proposals and report back to the Council within the consultation period.

539. **POLICY DOCUMENTS**

The Mayor introduced the Policy documents, previously circulated drawing Members' attention to the key principles contained within them. Changes in the Health and Safety policies reflected the required changes to safeguard from COVID-19. Following the review of the documents it was;

**RESOLVED** that the Policy documents:

- a) Health and Safety Policy Manual 2020
- b) Safe Working Practices relating to:
  - (i) Electrical Safety
  - (ii) Guidance on Manual Lifting and Handling
  - (iii) Potentially Abusive or Violent Persons
  - (iv) Working Alone
  - (v) Safety in Offices and Museum
- c) COVID-19 Office Reopening Summer 2020, all be hereby, approved and adopted.

540. **NALC MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT – CONSULTATION**

The Mayor invited the Town Clerk to update Members on the proposed revised Model Code of Conduct as provided by NALC.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the revised Model Code of Conduct was a result of the outcomes and findings made in the Government's Paper on Standards in Public Life which sought to highlight the discrepancies and inefficiencies in providing a secure framework to deal with inappropriate behaviour among elected members.

The revised NALC Model Code of Conduct had been in circulation for a few weeks and the Clerk reported that it had been met with considerable disappointment among the Larger Councils Committee and had noted concerns that the new document did not address the issues raised. Mr Rowe acknowledged that whilst Newton Abbot Town Council did not face the issues that the document sought to address, that they were prevalent among other Local Councils and the document did not satisfactorily meet the requirements to provide effective sanctions where necessary.

Councillors discussed the revised Model Code of Conduct and raised their disappointment and concerns at its lack of effective measures to uphold the high standards expected of those in public service, therefore following discussion it was:

**RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be authorised to advise NALC of the Council's disappointment in the Draft Model Code of Conduct and its apparent lack of robust measures to uphold the high standards as expected in public service.

541. **NEWTON'S PLACE PROJECT – UPDATE**

The Mayor invited the Town Clerk to provide a verbal update on the Newton's Place Project. The Clerk reported that there had been significant progress since his previous

update at the last meeting of the Council in June 2020. Mr Rowe highlighted the following key points:

- The Lethbridge Diving Bell, Railway signals and levers and the Sandford Orleigh screen had all been installed successfully;
- Creative CORE, the Museum designers had been on site since 6<sup>th</sup> July and had almost completed their three week installation of cabinets, show cases and wall mounted graphics;
- The Museum team were working alongside the team from CORE to populate the show cases with exhibits from the collection in their respective themes;
- The suspended model railway track had been installed and the train and carriages would arrive at the end of the week for commissioning and testing;
- The Museum stores would be fitted out by the end of next week;
- The Museum team were making preparation for re-opening in early October using Eventbrite for pre-bookings only initially;
- The works to the land adjacent were well underway, with flower beds set out and a stone facing applied to the retaining wall between the land to the side and the rear;
- Once the land adjacent had been laid with new tarmac the Clerk had commissioned the front pavement area to be relaid as well to improve the appearance to the front of the building following the 'patchwork' of paving left following access by numerous utility companies;
- The GWR bench has been dipped in preparation for repainting and would be located to the side of Newton's Place together with the Town Council's noticeboard;
- A cursory archaeological study did not reveal any finds in the land adjacent but provided assurance that any prospective medieval material had not been disturbed in the works;
- The banners for the front elevation would be installed later in the week and provide impact to the building whilst the issue with gaining Planning consent for suitable signage remained unresolved with Teignbridge District Council;
- An area of concern was the water ingress from the delayed installation of down water pipes and rain water goods and the subsequent damp to the Museum store; therefore
- Temporary water down pipes would be installed prior to the weekend to prevent further water damage from the impending rain forecast for the weekend.

The Mayor thanked the Town Clerk for his comprehensive report updating Member on the progress at Newton's Place and 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.

#### 542. **COMMUNICATIONS ADVISOR – UPDATE**

The Mayor invited the Council's Communications Advisor, Mr Nigel Canham to update Members on his recent activities on behalf of the Council. Mr Canham highlighted the following key points:

- Remained a member of the Newton's Place Working Group and advised on media and communications issues accordingly;
- In noting the wide coverage of the recent press release on the the proposed re-opening of the Museum there had been positive feedback;

- The Herald Express had offered a fortnightly column entitled 'Newton Matters' and Mr Canham invited contributions from Councillors; his most recent article focused on changes in Newton Abbot and the next would be the opportunity to eat out for less as part of the Government's incentive scheme throughout August;
- Mr Canham would continue to monitor Council matters and release copy to the press accordingly;
- Mr Canham had completed a survey of the existing Finger Post signs in the town and prepared a report of the changes needed to redirect the public to Newton's Place.

The Mayor thanked Mr Canham for his update report and for his expertise in assisting in preparing communication for the public and wider community.

**543. LATE CORRESPONDENCE AND MATTERS ARISING**

The Mayor invited Councillors to raise matters arising:

Councillor Mrs Carol Bunday thanked the Town Council for their continued support and financial assistance to the Community Interest Company. Councillor Bunday recorded her sincere appreciation of the Manager Mrs Emily Farrell who had been a huge asset in providing assistance to the Courtenay Centre.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported on the successful appointment of two Facilities Maintenance Officers who should be able to take up their posts in mid August.

The Town Clerk noted that it was unfortunate that the Council had not been able to meet the criteria necessary to secure grant funding for the town centre improvements made available to towns as part of the re-opening following the easing of Government restrictions. However he was pleased to report that the town had received a grant from the Police and Crime Commissioners Fund of up to £20,000 to enhance the CCTV provision and town centre security arrangements. Mr Rowe also commended the conduct of the Council throughout the meeting in the light of the issues raised in Minute (540) above, that despite the unfortunate IT issues apparent with remote meetings that the Council carried out its business effectively and professionally.

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

**544. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Council was to be held on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020.

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Chairman (Mayor)