Mayor’s Report to Full Council – 19th October 2020

When we last met in June of this year the expectation was that the Coronavirus situation would be much improved by now. Alas, we are far from where we had hoped to be. To meet my commitment as Mayor I decided that a change in how the Mayor operates was needed. I therefore became proactive rather than reactive . In normal times the Mayor responds to requests to attend engagements from charities, businesses, services etc. Also to be the representative of Newbury at all civic events.

Initially there were very few requests and Civic events such as VE Day and the Mayor’s Drive were cancelled. Once we began to emerge from the lockdown, I kept an eye on re-openings of retail, then hospitality and lastly entertainment. I carried the pendant with me whenever I did a recce of the town. I thanked managers and staff for the efforts they were making to open and provide their services to our community. Let us remember some were having to take decisions about personal risk. Owners purchasing screens, masks, sanitizers, signs etc. To manage stock in order not to be left with large amounts if closures came again. All I could do was wish them well, thank them and let them know Newbury Town Council were behind them and ready to listen to suggestions and comment. All were grateful for the visits and thankful for the Council’s support. Believing in ‘put your money where your mouth is’, I took it literally and did eat and moderately make my way round hospitality, restaurants etc.

The Mayor’s office has continued to send letters to individuals who have contributed above and beyond to the community, raised funds for charity or for personal achievements. Eighty three have been published on our web site since June 1st. We also offered chats with the Mayor by phone. The service is open to all and is still on offer. The idea is to reach those unable to leave their homes or to those who just wished to share their situation with someone outside their immediate circle.

In the last month, more requests have started to come in. I have been invited to several virtual AGM’s: Citizens Advice, Time To Talk, Seminarians, Home Start and I attended the Belonging Project event on webinar.

A few photo calls have been requested over the months. It was lovely to meet with Florence a primary school pupil who was concerned about dog poo. She had developed a scheme to place poo bags in containers she made and put on dog walking routes. The most recent was at the independent optometrist Valerie Jerome celebrating having been selected as one of the hundred top small independent businesses in the UK by Small Business Saturday UK.

I opened Laundromat Speed Queen in Boundary Road a high-tech laundrette. I visited Sebastian’s Charity Trust shop in Kennet Centre, a charity supporting families who have seriously ill children. They cancelled the official opening ceremony to keep crowd gathering down. The opening of the new Lidel store at the retail park was a slight challenge as I had to be there at 06:45. My thanks to Ian Campbell , chain security for driving in from Bedwyn to collect me at 06:30. I took part in a promotion video sponsored by the BID and Newbury Town Council to promote Newbury as a destination for retail and pleasure. I await the release with anticipation. We organised a very successful Treasure Hunt to raise funds for the Mayor’s Benevolent fund and other charities.

Of course everything is not going as we might have hoped. Businesses have closed. However as my report illustrates some new ones are also opening and more are in the pipeline. Let us continue to shop local and support the vulnerable in our town.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all my fellow Councillors who have taken on extra issues and given so generously of you time over recent months. We must not forget you are all volunteers. To our CEO Hugh Peacocke and the whole staff team including those who support our allotments and Friends’ groups. They have all gone over and beyond their roles and I know it has not been easy setting up and working from home. Finally to the people of Newbury you have been wonderful in doing so much to support others and provide services.

Let us keep positive, keep up the good work and eventually come out of this stronger.