

Newbury Town Council

Mayor's Report for Full Council Meeting on 30th January 2017

Fellow councillors, ladies and gentlemen...

In the three months since the last Full Council meeting on 31st October 2016, my Mayoress and I have attended a total of 33 events on your behalf, including a variety of interesting Christmas engagements.

You will recall that at the October council meeting last year I reported to you that I had represented the town at the funeral of former Mayor of Newbury Chris Hall.

Once again, I have had occasion to perform the same duty, representing Newbury at the funeral of former Mayor Barbara McMahon last week, following her death at the age of 94.

Born in Newbury in 1922, Barbara McMahon lived in Newbury all her life.

She worked as a teacher at Greenham Court School, in my ward of Pyle Hill, a school which is now known as The Willows.

She served as a Newbury district councillor and was elected as mayor in 1983.

Our thoughts are with her family, her two daughters, Louise and Diane, her four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

The funeral was held last Friday January 27, at her parish church, St Francis de Sales, Wash Common.

The Town Council paid its respects to former councillor McMahon by observing a minute's silence at the start of the Policy and Resources committee meeting on 16 January.

On a more cheerful note, I was privileged to be invited to not one Diwali celebration, but two.

The mega Diwali at Newbury racecourse has become a regular annual feature in the town's social calendar, and as guests of honour, along with other members of the local chain gang, my Mayoress and I enjoyed thoroughly entertaining evening.

The highlight of the evening for me was when the chairman of West Berkshire Council, Councillor Quentin Webb, was invited onto the stage for a brief lesson in Indian dancing. Councillor Webb gave a very good account of himself, and was an excellent sport, though I suspect he would be the 1st to admit that Indian dancing is probably not his strong suit. I believe the video is on Facebook somewhere...

The following day was a different type of Diwali celebration – a smaller family event where the stars of the show were definitely the children of all the families taking part. A fabulous afternoon of colourful singing and dancing, at which my Mayoress and I had a front row seat.

The over 80s parcel fund is another annual entry in the town's civic calendar, in my Mayoress and I were pleased to support it on behalf of the town Council. We particularly enjoyed the parcel packing session at the beginning of December – this involved starting with an empty bag and going around a series of tables, each with a different item, putting one of each item in the bag.

What started as an orderly procession around the tables with one bag at a time quickly turned into a competition with various people seeing how many bags they could manage to fill at once and how quickly they could get round the course and get back to the beginning with a new empty bag.

The occasion was fun and festive, punctuated with bacon butties and much laughter. It was great to see so many different groups of youngsters from local schools, Scouts, guides and so on, all keen to help pack Christmas parcels for the older members of our community.

As usual, December mayoral events involved a lot of carols and a lot of mince pies. Fortunately, I am a great fan of mince pies, so I was very happy to fulfil my mince pie eating obligations to the community. I'm afraid my singing voice for the Christmas carols was not so good.

The civic carol service just before Christmas was a very special event, because it was a joint carol service with my chosen charity, West Berkshire Mencap.

Several different scenes from the Nativity story were performed by Mencap clients during the service, which added considerably to everyone's enjoyment of the evening.

The last mayoral event of the calendar year was a visit to West Berkshire community hospital on Christmas morning, to join the Mayor of Thatcham and the patients for a chat and some carol singing.

Having to be in hospital is not a fun thing to do on Christmas day, and although many patients had family members visiting, I'm sure they would all have preferred to have been at home with their families. I'm pleased that we were able to bring a little extra Christmas cheer to their day.

January has been a quiet month for the Mayor of Newbury, but things are getting busy again so I look forward to having more to report to you next time.

Thank you very much, and I am of course happy to answer any questions.

Julian Swift-Hook

Mayor of Newbury

30th January 2017