

**Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of Newbury Town Council  
Held in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Market Place, Newbury  
At 7.30 pm on Monday 30 March 2020**

**Present**

Councillors Phil Barnett; Jeff Beck; Martin Colston; Jo Day; Billy Drummond; Sue Farrant; Nigel Foot; Chris Foster; Jon Gage; Roger Hunneman; Olivia Lewis; Pam Lusby Taylor; David Marsh; Vaughan Miller; Andy Moore; Gary Norman; Elizabeth O’Keeffe (Town Mayor); Erik Pattenden, Sarah Slack; Martha Vickers and Tony Vickers.

**Officer present**

Hugh Peacocke – Chief Executive Officer  
David Ingram – Community Services Manager  
Margaret Gore - Corporate Services Officer

**Apologies for absence**

Councillor: Stephen Masters  
Absent: Councillor Jeff Cant

**61. Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Phil Barnett, Jeff Beck, Billy Drummond, David Marsh, Andy Moore, Erik Pattenden, Martha Vickers and Tony Vickers are also Members of West Berkshire Council, which is declared as a general interest on their behalf and a dispensation is in place to allow them to partake in discussions relating to West Berkshire District Council business

**62. Virtual Meeting**

Councillor Elizabeth O’Keeffe, Town Mayor, explained that because of the Coronavirus restrictions this meeting was being held on Zoom , a video conferencing service, as provided for in Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

To assist in recognising the participants, the Mayor had a red background, some of the Council members had a yellow background and officers of the Council a blue background.

The Mayor said that as this was our first time to hold a meeting in this manner there may some blips along the way and asked for patience should this occur as this was a learning curve for us all.

As the meeting was open to the public so that they may view the proceedings, the Mayor advised Members and observers to be aware that the meeting may be recorded by any of the participants.

The Mayor invited anyone with any questions relating to the proceedings or decisions, to email them to [TownCouncil@newbury.gov.uk](mailto:TownCouncil@newbury.gov.uk).

*“This is an historic occasion but sadly at a time of great concern for us all. Be assured that NTC is working and cooperating with WBC, the Community Hub, Volunteer Centre and other parish councils to ensure essential services and information are provided to you all.*

*There will no doubt be bumps in the road, but we will get through these difficult times together. The work , giving and selfless of our community groups and many individuals is amazing. Councillors are also involved with groups in their wards, if you need to contact a councillor you will find all our details on the NTC website. There are sadly a few selfish people around and some who will try to take advantage of the vulnerable if you notice anything contact the police.*

*On this occasion there are no members or public questions. This will be resolved for future meetings”*

**Proposed:** Councillor Martin Colston

**Seconded:** Councillor Jeff Beck

**Resolved:** That in view of the current Coronavirus crisis that this meeting of the Council is conducted virtually.

### 63. Minutes

**Proposed:** Councillor Roger Hunneman

**Seconded:** Councillor Jeff Beck

**Resolved:** That the minutes of a meeting of Newbury Town Council held on Monday 3 February 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

### 64. Leader’s Statement

Councillor Martin Colston, the Leader of the Council, made the following statement to the meeting:

*Madam Mayor, Councillors, Officers and members of the public.*

*We are in unchartered waters right now with the Covid-19 crisis. And along with other local councils around the country we are doing our utmost to maintain as many of our essential services as we can while at the same time protecting the safety of our residents, our officers and our Members.*

*I just wanted to say a few words about how we are organising ourselves so that we continue to function, and what we are doing in order to support our residents during the crisis.*

*Firstly, in order to keep delivering as many of our services as possible we have already taken unprecedented measures as follows:*

- *In accordance with the latest guidance from Central Government designed to keep us all safe and reduce the burden on the NHS, we have:*
  - *Made arrangements for all our officers to work from home wherever possible, and if and when they have to come into the Town Hall, they are ensuring strict social distancing and hygiene measures are followed*
  - *Closed the Town Hall to the public, although residents can still call or email officers. The main number is being diverted to one of our officers at home so calls can still be directed to the appropriate officer and all officer direct lines are diverted to their mobile phones*
  - *Closed the enclosed spaces in our public parks, including the tennis courts and bowls club in Victoria Park and all fenced in playgrounds and the Splash Park,*
  - *Posted notices on our play equipment and outdoor gym equipment advising residents that they should no longer use these facilities due to the risk of virus transfer*
  - *Cancelled all Civic engagements for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor*
  - *Postponed our Annual Town Meeting that was due to be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March*
  - *Postponed our second Climate Change Community Workshop that was due to be held on 25<sup>th</sup> April*
  - *Postponed our Civic Awards presentation evening due to be held on 1 April*
  - *Suspended our Saturday morning surgery on the steps of the Town Hall*
  - *Postponed our planned VE day celebrations on 8 May (these might now be held in conjunction with VJ day)*
  - *Carried out training so that, like this evening, we can hold our council meetings remotely while still enabling the press and members of the public to join. This will continue until further notice*
  - *Taken steps to ensure the resilience of our organisation to continue should officers become ill with Covid-19, and we will be passing resolutions in support of some of these measures this evening*
- *We are focussing our resources on maintaining the essential services that we are still allowed to deliver, notably:*
  - *Shaw cemetery*
  - *Maintaining our open spaces and keeping them open*
  - *The market*
  - *The public toilets at the Wharf*
  - *Our allotments*
- *We rely on a number of excellent contractors to deliver many of our services. Our partners are doing all they can to continue to provide their services to us and our residents while at the same time keeping their staff and all of us safe.*
  - *As with most organisations around the country, they are facing staff shortages due to self-isolation of those employees who are showing symptoms of Covid-19.*

- *So far, with their help, we are still able to keep most of our open spaces maintained and safe, and we will continue to do so for as long as this is possible.*
- *Unfortunately, due to staff shortages, we are unable to guarantee the regular opening and closing of Newtown Road Cemetery and so have reluctantly taken the decision to close it to the public for the time being. I recognise that this will be upsetting for those who enjoy the cemetery, but I am sure that residents will understand we cannot continue everything as normal right now and have to make priority calls based on resources and safety and in line with guidance and directions from Government and Public Health England*

*I can assure you we will do our utmost to keep our core services going. However, depending on how long this situation continues, it may be that more of our services will be affected. If we do have to suspend any further services, we will let our residents know, and we trust that they will show understanding.*

*In terms of NTC supporting residents during the lock-down, we believe that marshalling resources and expertise centrally through the new Community Support Hub is the right approach. We will therefore be passing a resolution this evening to give the support of this council to the Community Support Hub and authorise our officers to take all reasonable actions and allocated appropriate resources towards the Hub to help tackle the Covid-19 crisis. And I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have come together to create the Hub and co-ordinated its activities.*

*I have been tremendously heartened with the way our local community has responded to ensure support for the elderly and vulnerable with groups springing up on a district, town, ward and street level. Many of our Members are actively involved in these groups as well as with local charities and other organisations. We will continue to offer our individual and collective support to these local groups where we can, while also supporting the work of the Hub.*

*Lastly, on all our behalves, I would like to thank all our officers for the dedication, resourcefulness and flexibility with which they are approaching Covid-19. Well done. I know you will all keep up the excellent work.*

*None of us know how long this situation will continue, but I feel sure that when we come out at the other end the strong community spirit that we are witnessing now will stand us in good stead as we move to get things back to normal.*

## **65. Measures to deal with the Coronavirus Emergency**

The meeting considered the report from The Chief Executive Officer detailing actions to enable the Council to respond to the current emergency. These measures included steps to improve the Council's business continuity arrangements, to amend Standing Orders, to suspend the Council's Strategy, where required, and to agree that the Council will work with the newly established Community Support Hub in responding to the emergency.

**Proposed:** Councillor Jeff Beck

**Seconded:** Councillor Jon Gage

**Resolved:**

- **To Approve** the proposed amendments to Standing Orders
- **To Authorise** the Corporate Services Manager (David Ingram) and the Civic Manager (Elisa Adams) to make payments and otherwise give instructions to the Council's Bank (Handelsbanken) electronically through the Corporate Internet Services in relation to the operation of its accounts
- That where appropriate the Council's Strategy 2019-2024 is suspended to enable the Council to respond to the current crisis. (Before taking decisions which are not in accordance with the Council's Strategy, officers must consult the Leader of the Council and/or the relevant Committee/ subcommittee chairperson.)
- That budgets may be re-allocated within the agreed precept level to enable the Council to respond to the current crisis. (Before authorising such expenditure, officers must consult the Leader of the Council and/or the relevant Committee/ subcommittee chairperson.)

**Proposed:** Councillor Martha Vickers

**Seconded:** Councillor Billy Drummond

**Resolved:**

- **To support** the Community Support Hub and authorise officers to take all reasonable actions in response and allocate appropriate resources towards the Hub in addressing the coronavirus emergency.
- **To suspend** the Council's Key Performance Indicators until further notice so that Officers can respond to the emerging crisis in support of the Hub.

When closing the meeting the Mayor stated that *"Staying at home does not mean complete isolation from family ,friends and neighbours stay in contact ,through skype, phone, WhatsApp, Zoom etc. - we are blessed to have technology. If you must leave your home keep at least 2 metres apart. Wash your hands frequently."*

( Members voted unanimously for all of the resolutions approved at this meeting)

**There being no further business, the Town Mayor declared the meeting closed at 7.42 pm.**

**Town Mayor**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_