Town Mayor’s Report to Full Council

12th June 2023

**14th January – Volunteer Centre Open Day at the Corn Exchange**Public event where many local good causes had stalls in the Corn Exchange in order to advertise themselves to potential members and volunteers. I was asked to say a few words at the opening and remained for a few hours to tour all the stalls and collect information. Briefly joined by Laura Farris MP.

**15th January – Pongal Event with the Newbury Tamil Community**A delightful event run by the Tamil Community at the Football Ground on Faraday Road was postponed from the previous day due to bad weather. Pongal celebrates the rice harvest and consists of boiling up cauldrons of rice over open wood fires. Much noise and celebration accompanies the first boiling over of the pots, followed by dancing and singing and the serving of the rice as a sweet sticky spicy pudding.

**19th January – Opening of the Fifth Road Playground**Opened the newly refurbished playground in Fifth Road accompanied by the Head Teacher and some pupils from John Rankin school. I was photographed squeezed into the children’s slide. Much fun was had by all.

**25th January – Burns Lunch at Falkland Grange**Invited to a splendid Burns Lunch with some of the residents and other local guests. The residents appreciated the Mayor being there, whilst the Mayor appreciated the most sophisticated and well-presented haggis, neeps and tatties ever seen. The guided malt whisky tasting was so successful that I had to walk home and collect my car the next day.

**28th January – UNA Holocaust Memorial Service**A very moving and beautifully arranged memorial service in the reception area of WBDC’s offices in Market Street. A rabbi led the service which was notable for its inclusivity of all groups persecuted by the Nazis, by lighting five candles representing each of them. Especially memorable was the singing of “Shalom” by a group of pupils from St John’s school. I was honoured to be asked to do a reading.

**8th February – Memorial Service for the Bombing of Newbury**A small service was conducted by the Reverend Gary Collins in the small garden at the corner of St John’s Road and Newtown Road where the memorial to the bombing of Newbury stands. A sizeable group of people were gathered, including a group of pupils from St Nicholas’ school. I was asked to lay a wreath as well as say a few words, where, as a former resident of Prospect Place, I was able to speak about my neighbour Edna Smith who was residing in one of the bombed houses.

**9th February – House Arts Competition at Trinity School**Trinity School have always been very keen to involve Newbury Town Council and the Mayor in the things they do, and this was just one more example. I was invited to attend the exhibition of art, sculpture, and other media and to observe the awarding of prizes to the winners. I never cease to be amazed by the level of talent shown by our local school students.

**11th February – NTTA Coffee Morning**I attended a coffee morning in the town hall collecting funds for the Newbury Twin Towns Association. I spent my time helping to promote the event and speaking to all the guests.

**11th February – Canal and River Trust Open Day**The event consisted of a few stalls arranged alongside the canal in Victoria Park. I attended for an hour or so the get information and pose for publicity photographs.

**14th February – 100th Birthday at Winchcombe Place**I was invited to the 100th birthday party of Winnie, one of the residents at Winchcombe Place. Spent my time speaking to the residents, who are always pleased to see the Mayor, as well as Winnie’s family and the staff at the home. The cake was excellent as it usually is.

**18th February – Coffee Morning Collecting for Earthquake Survivors in Syria and Turkey**Delighted to support another coffee morning supporting another good cause.

**18th February – Crafters Meetings at Speen Village Hall**An anniversary celebrating the 16th anniversary of a local weekly crafting group. I never realised there were so many different types of crafting to choose from. I presented an award to the organiser from the group and enjoyed excellent tea and cake.

**24th February – Silence for Ukraine**A silence was held on the steps of the town hall to commemorate a year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A good turnout of people considering the arrangements was made very late.

**24th February – Art Exhibition for Castle School**An exhibition at City Arts of artworks made entirely by pupils from the special-needs Castle School. The kids were thrilled to see their own work on the wall and to discuss it with the Mayor. Some were especially knocked out by seeing the Mayor’s Chain.

**25th February – British Legion Open Day**
I went along to the open day at the British Legion to help promote their membership drive and to help publicise their facilities for hire. I was also asked to present some thank you awards to some members who had set up permanent exhibitions.

**26th February – Planting of the Flower Bed for Ukraine**
I was asked to plant the first shrubs in the repurposed peace garden on the Wharf, alongside a large group of volunteers. I spent the time afterwards speaking to the volunteers, many of whom were Ukrainian, and enjoyed seeing the flower bed which had been themed yellow and blue for Ukraine.

**2nd March – Blue Plaque for John Newport Langley in West Street**Officially opened the Blue Plaque for John Newport Langley at the Samaritans Building on West Street, close to the site where he used to live. He was a Professor of Physiology whose pioneering research formed the basis on which much of modern pharmacology and pharmaceutical drug development depends.

**5th March – HMS Tigris Memorial**The annual remembrance service for the war-time loss of HMS Tigris was held at the British Legion in Pelican Lane. I laid a wreath on behalf of Newbury Town Council and the service was well conducted with a leading contribution from our own town crier.

**6th March – Opening of Newbury Spring Festival**Attended a reception at the Corn Exchange to launch the 2023 Newbury Spring Festival. The dignitaries included Chris Boulton of the Good Exchange and the Earl of Carnarvon.

**9th March – Opening of Composting Toilet**The highlight of the year. Opened the new composting toilet at Newtown Road Cemetery and was photographed sitting on the bench next to the toilet seat. Used the experience in many speeches afterwards to illustrate the range of the Mayor’s responsibilities. On being told they had to “go outside the box” to get the thing built, I suggested going inside the box would be better.

**10th March – Kennet Radio Party**A small gathering at the British Legion to celebrate the 5th anniversary of Kennet Radio’s FM licence. I made a speech as did the Mayor of Thatcham and I was asked to cut the cake.

**11th March – Berkshire Schools Mock Trial Heats**A splendid day at Reading Crown Court observing the process and lending my support to Trinity School which was one of the eight competing schools. Very impressed by the dedication and hard work of the kids, who were mostly in year 9. I celebrated as much as the kids did when Trinity was declared the winner and through to the regional final on 13th May.

**13th March – Rotary Club Annual Dinner**My wife and I attended the Rotary Club Annual Dinner at the Donnington Valley Hotel. Impressed by the number of charities they support. I was asked to say a few words and was generously granted honorary membership for a year.

**15th March – Civic Awards**
One of the highlights of the Mayor’s year is the Civic Awards ceremony in the town hall. A lot of entries this year and the event was splendid with everyone enjoying it. The winners were all suitably honoured and there were some excellent pictures in the NWN. Congratulations to all the officers for putting on such a good event.

**17th March – City Arts Exhibition of Works of Margaret Hodges**I was invited to a private viewing at City Arts of the exhibition “Learning to Look” by local artist Margaret Hodges.

**20th March – Volunteer Centre Knowledge Event at Shaw House**The only royal engagement of my term in office. I was asked to be in the welcoming party to receive HRH the Duchess of Gloucester for the Knowledge Event at Shaw House arranged by the Volunteer Centre. She was very pleasant and asked me if I had to polish the chain myself. I explained that you didn’t need to polish gold. The event itself was excellent and was of huge benefit to all the charities present, finishing with an enjoyable interactive singing session with VoxFresh.

**21st March – BALC AGM**Cllr Phil Barnett asked me to attend the Berkshire Association of Local Government AGM in Reading. Was very useful for networking with BALC, HALC and NALC.

**22nd March – West Berkshire School Maestros in Basingstoke**A magnificent event performed by a mass choir of West Berkshire Primary Schools. I sat in the audience with all the proud parents. All of Newbury’s primary schools were represented. The standard of music was exceptionally high and included a fascinating “body percussion” item that was only initiated and rehearsed on the day itself.

**25th March – Newbury Symphony Orchestra**I was invited to attend a concert given by the Newbury Symphony Orchestra at St Nicholas’ Church. One of the best things about being Mayor is being invited to events that you would normally attend anyway. Music was by Stravinsky, Shostakovich and Korngold. Afterwards, I was informed by a member of the orchestra that they made a major error in the Korngold piece. If they did, I don’t think anyone noticed; I certainly didn’t. We are very lucky to have this orchestra locally, their standard is extremely high. I shall be going to all their future concerts, even though I won’t get as good a seat as this.

**28th March – Launch of Newbury Monopoly**The most bizarre event of the year (or “different” as the Town Marshall called it). I spent a couple of hours parading down the town hall staircase, marching through the marketplace, posing for photographs, and doing radio interviews, accompanied by the town crier and “Mr Monopoly”, a cartoon character. All this to launch the new Newbury-themed Monopoly set which should be available by the end of the year. Front-page coverage by the NWN followed with much excitement generated.

**31st March – RAF Welford Lancaster Memorial**Market Street was closed and inadequately signed meaning that I was 40 minutes late meeting Bryan Sylvester at the town hall. Consequently, we were slightly late arriving at the RAF Welford gate and had to be fast-tracked to the service. In the confusion, the wreath was left behind which caused some embarrassment for us, but most people were understanding. A few of those present wanted to lay wreaths a second time at the main outdoor memorial in the pouring rain. I redeemed us somewhat by offering to lay the wreath on behalf of the American commanding officer whilst he was tied up with hosting the guests.

**8th April – Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race**A cold, early, foggy start to the day in order to assist with the start of the Newbury leg of the annual Devizes to Westminster canoe race. Stayed for several hours to see all the teams off and pose for photographs with them. I attended this event last year as Deputy Mayor, so I met up with a lot of old friends. Also met the “Nippy Dippers” wild swimming ladies who posted my picture with them on social media, which my wife got to hear about even before I got home.

**8th April – Taste of Ramadan at Riverside**Many of the non-Muslim community were invited to celebrate Ishtar (the breaking of the fast after sunset) on this particular Saturday in the middle of Ramadan. I was accompanied by the Deputy Mayor and by Cllr Gourlay at a presentation about what Ramadan means to Muslims followed by evening prayer and a meal. I realised after several speakers that I was on the programme to give a speech. Cllr Foot lent me a pencil to make some notes about what to say while others were speaking. I made some comments about standing up to prejudice by removing ignorance and sharing our cultures with each other, which went down very well. An event such as this will be held next year, and I encourage councillors to attend if they can as all are welcome.

**21st April – Eid Prayers at Newbury Mosque**Due to the weather, this was moved from the field in Enborne Road to a staggered event at the mosque in Pound Street. I was invited to observe and say a few words. I was very honoured to have been invited and was made very welcome by Imam Mobasshir and everybody.

22nd **April – Speakability Clock to Clock**
A fund-raising event for one of my Mayor’s charities. I joined members and volunteers to walk from the clock tower to the town hall. The town crier was unable to attend but kindly lent me his bell to attract additional attention on top of that already generated by me in full robes and chain. A short walk but, nevertheless, a big deal for some of the member stroke survivors. Delighted to stay that nearly £2,000 was raised.

**22nd April – Eid Barbecue**
This a follow-up event to my attendance at Eid prayers the day before. (Eid is the celebration feast at the end of Ramadan). My wife and I were shown great hospitality by Mobasshir and the whole community. All ages were present and there was something for everyone. “Eid Mubarak” (Happy Eid).

**26th April – WBHF AGM**The West Berkshire Heritage Forum held its AGM at Shaw House. I am a member of the committee, but they asked me to come as Mayor in order for photo opportunities etc. They do excellent work and work very closely with Newbury Town Council.

**28th April – Thatcham Mayor’s Civic Reception**Thatcham has a tradition of holding a reception at the end of their Mayor’s term in order for him to reflect on the year and award the cheques to his charities. A splendid evening with excellent food, my wife and I were extended the honour of sitting at the top table with the rest of the Chain Gang.

**2nd May – Coronation T-Shirt Printing at Mary Hare Primary**The first of my coronation-themed events. I was invited to meet some of the pupils and staff at the new Mary Hare primary school as they had fun screen-printing t-shirts with a royal theme. I had not appreciated that as well as being deaf, many of the kids have other issues, such as autism, so the staff have a very challenging job. I was invited to have lunch with the kids afterwards, which was a joy.

**4th May – Coronation Celebration at Falkland Grange**A short visit in between tasks on election day in order to open up the Coronation celebrations with my old friends at Falkland Grange Care Home.

**4th May – Trefoil Association Coronation Barbecue at Thirtover Place**I met the ladies of the Trefoil Association as Deputy Mayor at their 6th anniversary celebrations last year, so this was like visiting old friends. My wife and I were very well looked after. The barbecue was somewhat curtailed by rain, but festivities continued in the hall afterwards. As before, I was the only man present but that was no issue for them or me. The cake was particularly good.

**5th May – Coronation Celebration at Fir Tree School**The first engagement of an exceptionally busy day. After attending the election count at the racecourse, I attended four Mayor’s events in succession. This was a delight as all the children were very excited and happy to see the Mayor. When asked who the children thought I was, one little girl put her hand up and said: “Mr Tumble”. I’ll settle for that.

**5th May – Coronation Lunch at Fairclose Day Centre**A delightful lunch at the Fairclose Centre. I joined in with all the festivities and spoke to nearly all the guests. There was a post-lunch singsong with a local band and my wife and I were asked to present coronation medals to all the guests.

**5th May – Educafe Raffle Draw**My wife and I attended the Educafe Raffle Draw at Newbury Library. Educafe provides a wonderful service to vulnerable people in the town, and I was able to meet a lot of the service users including many from overseas. As well as drawing the raffle and saying a few words alongside Rick Jones, the WBC Chair, I was also given the dubious pleasure of losing some money on the human fruit machine.

**5th May – Coronation Afternoon Tea at Donnington Hospital Alms Houses Trust**I joined the party at the precise moment that the visiting Morris Dance Group were starting up a new set. My wife and I were “invited” to join the dance and duly obliged after some initial instruction. The former High Sheriff of Berkshire, Willie Hartley-Russell, was also in the dance, resplendent in a black cowboy hat. He later took great pleasure in identifying his ancestor’s crest on the chain (John Winchcombe). The tea and cake afterwards were excellent.

My thanks go to the Mayor’s attendant, Ian Campbell, for being available all day so I could attend this and the previous three events in full regalia.

**5th May – Open Studios Launch**After returning to the racecourse to wait for the declaration of my ward, I arrived late at this event. My wife had gone on ahead and was very worried that she would have to give my speech. As it was, I arrived during the speeches and was handed the microphone about ten seconds afterwards and had to follow a fine speech by Gary Collins. It was my fourth impromptu speech of the day, so I was in good practice by then. I have been visiting the Spring Festival Open Studios for 30 years or more, so it was easy to find things to say. We are very lucky to have this institution on our doorstep.

**6th May – Coronation at Waterside Centre**The only event I attended on Coronation Day itself. It was very informal and relaxed, but I was able to speak to many of the young volunteers, which is always a pleasure. I also played football with some of the kids. That was not a good idea.

**7th May – Coronation Street Party at Westfields Community**I attended eight street events on this day. I was invited to this one and opened a street library and a new bench before heading for the tea and cake.

**7th May – Spring Festival Event in Victoria Park**I attended a Spring Festival band concert at the bandstand in Victoria Park. They stopped the music at one point for me to say a few words. I spent the rest of the time handing out coronation badges to the kids in the audience.

**7th May – Coronation Street Party at Lipscombe Close, Clifton Road, Denman Drive, Howard Road, Conifer Crest and Meyrick Drive**I attended six other street parties during the day. Some had invited me to come, and others I found from the list of street closures on the WDC website. Everyone was delighted to be visited by the Mayor and myself and Ian were plied with tea, coffee, snacks, beer and cake all day. Every one I attended had a picture published in the NWN.

Thanks again are due to Ian for having the stamina to last the day which enabled me to be in full regalia all day.

**12th May – Lions Anniversary Dinner**An honour for my wife and myself to be invited to the Newbury Lions Annual Dinner. They asked me to say a few words about the Lions and I had plenty of material, having been at their events throughout the year, including the Racecourse Fireworks Night and the Christmas Lights Switch-On. They further honoured us by presenting to my wife a generous cheque for the Mayor’s Benevolent Fund.

**13th May – Berkshire Schools Mock Trials Final**The follow-up to the event I attended on 11th March where Trinity was against seven other schools in the regional final. The standard of prosecuting and defending was even better than before. Trinity came third and I was very proud of them. My thanks go to the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, Sir James Puxley, whom I persuaded to take some time afterwards to pose for photos with the Trinity school kids, who were particularly thrilled.

**14th May – Mayor Making**The end. A wonderful year, remember it forever. Cllr Foot is buckling up for the ride.

Cllr Gary Norman, Mayor of Newbury