Town Mayor’s Report to Full Council

30th January 2022

**20th October – Performing Arts Evening at Trinity School**

An enjoyable evening that consisted of each house presenting a music/dance/drama piece produced, written, directed and performed solely by the students. Very high standard.

**21st October – UN Day Flag Raising on the Town Hall Steps**

Joined Graham Panting and others of the local UNA on the steps to raise the UN flag. Made a short speech about how the UN is more relevant than ever in the current world situation.

**29th October – Coffee Morning for Eight Bells in the Town Hall**

Supported the coffee morning in the Town Hall for one of the official Mayor’s charities for this year.

**29th October (Lunchtime/Afternoon) – Diwali Celebration**
With the Telugu Community at the Phoenix Centre in Newtown Road. I was given the honour of opening the Diwali celebration by lighting the ceremonial lamp (which was ringed with a repurposed string of Christmas lights due to the fire regulations in the hall). The Telugu community come from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Puducherry in the south west of India and are well represented in West Berkshire. They delayed the start of the celebration so that I could first attend the coffee morning, and they wouldn’t start without me. The celebration consisted of a programme of singing, dancing and poetry performed by groups and individuals of all ages, either side of a fantastic vegetarian meal. The traditional costumes were fantastic and were obviously a labour of love as it takes over an hour to dress each child.

**30th October – Heritage Open Day at the Town Hall**

After a slow start due to rain, the open day was a real success with many visitors seeing the Town Hall for the first time. I spent most of my time greeting guests in the Mayor’s parlour, posing for photographs and telling stories. There were a surprising number of visitors to Newbury, including many from overseas. The kids all enjoyed the cuddly toys and the gift badges.

**2nd November – AGM for Loose Ends Charity at Newbury Cricket Club**

Attended the AGM as a guest and representative of Newbury town council along with others. Good to see such a worthwhile homeless charity thriving in its new home. Proud of the support that Newbury town council has given them.

**3rd November – Official Opening of the Waterside Centre with Berkshire Youth**

A great event supporting, highlighting and celebrating the current and future success of Berkshire Youth. Attended alongside the local MP and Lord Benyon. I was asked to make a speech where I highlighted the bad press that young people get and how when treated with kindness and understanding they can shine. We saw many examples of fine young people and what they achieved during the evening, which was rounded off with a great set by the VoxFresh choir.

**4th November – Memorial Service for Queen Elizabeth II at St Nic’s Church**

A solemn and moving evening which should have been an honour and privilege to attend. Some of the official arrangements left a lot to be desired. Even the minister was embarrassed on our behalf. Received an official apology from WBC Chair Rick Jones afterwards, but he was not personally responsible.

**5th November – Mayor’s Coffee Morning for NWN Over-80’s Fund**

An official coffee morning in the Town Hall raising funds for the NWN over-80s Christmas parcel fund, speaking to visitors and posing for photographs with Jo Fulker of NWN.

**5th November (Evening) - Countdown for the Racecourse Fireworks Display from Newbury Lions**

Had great fun warming up the large crowd before initiating the countdown for the setting off of the fireworks. Julian Swift-Hook from Kennet radio drew the crowd’s attention to me dancing with my wife to the music on the gantry, which resulted in having to join some teenagers dancing in the crowd. A really good night.

**9th November (Morning) – “Chai & Chat” with Project Salama at the Riverside Centre**

A new charity set up to support victims of domestic abuse, especially in ethnic communities. (“Salama” being Swahili for “Safe”). Got good coverage in the NWN. Some moving stories from many of the attendees including men. I wish them every success.

**9th November (Evening) – “Where do we go from here” by the Rank-and-File Group at South Street Arts**

**Theatre, Reading**

A remarkable play performed by refugees, asylum seekers and other members of the community, using the metaphor of a railway station with arrivals, departures and a waiting room full of people with nowhere to go. Great question and answer session afterwards and had a good opportunity to talk to the refugees.

**10th November – RAF Welford Remembrance Day Service**

The first of four remembrance services. Laid a wreath on behalf of Newbury town council in the memorial garden at RAF Welford to commemorate lost British and American servicemen. As usual, Major Smith and the USAF were excellent hosts.

**11th November – Wreath Laying at the town War Memorial**

A short service and wreath-laying at the town war memorial at 11:00 on 11/11. Joined by some old soldiers which made it an honour to lay the wreath.

**12th November – Interview with Kennet Radio**

I was interviewed by Paul Walter of Kennet Radio about what Remembrance Sunday means to me and to explain the arrangements for the following day. Still available at:

<https://kennet.redio.co/listen/again?date=Sat,%2012%20Nov%202022%2011:00:00%20GMT>

**13th November – Remembrance Sunday**

The main event for Remembrance Sunday. I think taking the salute is the biggest honour the Mayor has in his year in office. I was warned in advance by Cllr Drummond about how emotional it is when hundreds of people march past and turn to salute you, and he wasn’t wrong. I was able to wear the medals of my late father (Korean War) and grandfather (Battle of the Somme) and felt very proud. As usual, the whole thing was beautifully arranged by the Newbury town council officers in association with the Royal British Legion. Being asked to read in the church service afterwards was also an honour. British Legion refreshments were as excellent and generous as ever.

**19th November (8:00) – Table Tennis Marathon at Fairclose Centre**

I was invited by Cllr Miller to open the Table Tennis Marathon at Fair Close Centre at 8:00 on a Saturday morning. I was impressed he managed to show up in support. Managed to take 6 points from the expert player which should mean £6 for the centre. Hadn’t played for 40 years. Was due to last for 24 hours so I hope it raised a lot of money.

**19th November (10:00) – Launch of Day Festivities for Christmas Light Switch-On**

Consisted of a few photo opportunities with the organisers and a tour of the stalls meeting the traders.

**19th November (18:00) – Launch of Evening Festivities for Christmas Day Light Switch-On**

Getting across a crowded market square in full robes and chain from the town hall to the stage was interesting. I considered crowd surfing but decided on just a few excuse-me’s and the good-humoured crowd parted to let me through with the occasional stop for a selfie. It’s not often you get to share a stage with Father Christmas, Snow White and Elsa from Frozen but it’s just another ordinary day for the Mayor. I made a short speech and warmed the crowd up (mostly by getting kids to compete with their parents for making noise) and then the lights were turned on after the countdown. I read in the press afterwards about some problems with the sound but everyone I spoke to on the night seemed to have had a great time.

**20th November – Trans Day of Remembrance at the Reading Biscuit Factory**

This event consisted of watching a film dedicated to remembering the hundreds of Trans people across the world who have been murdered because of their gender during 2022. Many of the presenters in the film were present in the audience and I managed to speak to them afterwards. I was surprised to see my own branch of Rock Choir on screen providing the musical backup to the listing of the names. It is always sobering to find oneself in a tiny minority in a large group of people and also thought-provoking. The main lesson I gained from speaking to those present, was that Trans people suffer abuse almost every day of

their lives. Food for thought.

**24th November (Morning) – Opening of the Wheelchair-enabled Seesaw in Victoria Park**

A lovely morning having fun on the seesaw with local wheelchair-using kids. Some great pictures in the NWN. The kids really enjoyed it and also demanded to use the roundabout with me pushing. Had to have a lie-down afterwards. Many plaudits are due to the Newbury town council officers who made this happen, especially Darius Zarazel who secured the lottery funding. In fact, the officers now refer to the seesaw as “the Darius”.

**24th November (Afternoon) – SEWA Charity Donating Toys to Homestart**

I was contacted by Amit Chorgi of the SEWA charity to recommend a good cause to accept a donation of children’s toys for Christmas. I put them in touch with HomeStart who have many struggling parents on their books. They contacted HomeStart and worked with them to provide bespoke presents for the children. This was the official handover day at Broadway House and I was delighted to be photographed alongside representatives of both charities, with great coverage in the NWN.

**24th November (Evening) – Presentation of KS4 Awards at St Bart’s School**

I was asked to present some of the awards to the high-achieving previous-year’s Year 11 students and to say a few words. Going into schools is always a pleasure.

**25th November (Morning) – Opening of “Sostrene Grene” in Parkway.**

This is the tenth Sostrene Grene store to open in the UK and Newbury was specially chosen to be the first location in the south of England. I was welcomed by the staff and the General Manager of Sostrene Grene UK. Had some fun chatting with the (long) queue of waiting public outside whilst the store was made ready, after which I cut the ribbon and recorded a message for the head office staff in Denmark.

**25th November (Afternoon) – Fairclose Centre 55th Anniversary Lunch**

Attended the 55th anniversary lunch at the Fairclose Centre. Enjoyed chatting to all the members and said a few words on the microphone. Chose the light option for lunch (scampi and chips followed by coconut jam sponge and custard). Well light-ish anyway. Enjoyed it immensely, as did Anthony the macebearer who was my assistant for the day.

**26th November – Mayor’s Benevolent Fund Coffee Morning**

Coffee, cake, chat, gentle persuasion.

**27th November – Santa Fun Run in the Market Square with Newbury Rotary Club**

Started the 1K and 5K runs after judging a best-dressed dog competition (won by a dachshund). Didn’t wear my robes so as not be mistaken for a runner (didn’t need the padding). Waited until the end to pose for photos with most of the participants. All ages took part and seemed to enjoy it. Money raised for good causes.

**1st December (Morning) – Community Furniture Project Awards**

Delighted to be able to give out awards to volunteers at the Community Furniture Project. Many of the recipients had special needs of various kinds and all were delighted to receive their awards from the Mayor. This is a great organisation with multi-dimensional benefits for the community.

**1st December (Evening) – Christmas Party at Falkland Grange Care Home**

Had great fun talking to the residents who were all having a great time. Ended up sitting on Santa’s knee and singing impromptu duets with him. Have been invited back for a Burns Lunch just before the Full Council Meeting.

**2nd December – Presenting Awards to Students at the iCollege in Bath Road**

Gave out awards for achievement to many of the students. Made a speech about how life was not about being the best but trying to be the best you can be. Impressed by achievements of these young people, most of whom have been failed in some way by mainstream schooling, and by the dedication and professionalism of the staff. Also spoke to many of the parents who were very supportive of their kids.

**4th December (Morning) – Packing Parcels for the NWN Over-80’s Fund at Sainsbury’s**

Helped pack 1,800 parcels in just over two hours along with staff volunteers, NWN staff, cubs, brownies and others. Everyone had great fun whilst working for a worthy cause.

**4th December (Evening) – York Nativity Play at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Aldermaston**

Delighted to be invited to this performance of the Nativity play from the York Miracle Cycle. Apparently, this tradition goes back over 50 years and seems to be a well-kept secret. Not only is the performance a delight as it uses the whole church as the stage, but the church itself has one of the finest sets of Medieval wall paintings I’ve seen. It seems that Oliver Cromwell didn’t know the secret either. Will certainly be buying a ticket in future years.

**6th December – Newbury Hospital League of Friends Carol Service, St Mary’s, Thatcham**

First of six carol services. Inn, stable, manger…etc. Hark the Herald, Oh Little Town etc. Made very welcome. Nice mulled wine, good cause.

**10th December (Morning) – NWN Over-80’s Parcel Distribution from Faraday Road**

Posed for photos with volunteers loading cars at the NWN offices in Faraday Road and then set off doing some deliveries myself over the next few hours. Delivered to about 30 homes. All the senior folk were chuffed to bits to have the Mayor delivering to their house. Great fun.

**10th December (Afternoon) – Charity Concert for Eight Bells at St John’s Church**

Fantastic charity concert given by a local choir with a raffle. Very generous choir and congregation raised over £700 for Eight Bells for Mental Health which will be doubled by the Good Exchange.

**11th December (4:00) – Thatcham Civic Carol Service, St Mary’s, Thatcham**

Second of six carol services. Birth, Shepherds, Star…etc. Away in a Manger, God rest you merry etc. Amusing speech by Mayor of Thatcham with terrible puns. Local hand-bell group were very good. Couldn’t stay for mulled wine and mince pies because I had to rush off to….

**11th December (6:00) – Hungerford Civic Carol Service, Hungerford**

Third of six carol services. Wise men, gold, frankincense…etc. Good king Wenceslas, In the deep midwinter etc. Nice welcome from Mayor of Hungerford. Interesting technology in the church. Very hot mulled wine.

**12th December (11:00) – Queen Elizabeth Memorial Tree Planting on Stroud Green**

Arranged by WBC and Newbury Racecourse. Invited as a representative of NEWBURY TOWN COUNCIL.

**12th December (12:00) – Remembrance Event at Greenham Control Tower**

Remembrance event for the US military personnel killed on Greenham Common in wartime accident. Honoured to be asked to lay the first wreaths alongside the Mayor of Thatcham and Major Smith from the USAF at RAF Welford.

**13th December – Mayor’s Festive Afternoon Tea for Over-75’s**

Delightful event initiated by Cllr Drummond last year to replace the Mayor’s Drive. I had a great time calling the bingo numbers, giving out the quiz answers and generally conducting the proceedings. The guests must have had a good time as one of them proposed three cheers for the Mayor. Rather too good a time was had by a table of old chaps who seemed to find the spare supply of port and sherry (and one of them won an additional bottle of bubbly in the raffle). Many thanks are due to Elisa and the officers and civic team who

volunteered on the day, and to the volunteer councillors, especially Cllr O’Keeffe, resplendent in elf costume. I think this is now firmly established as an annual event and long may it last.

**15th December – Presentation of KS5 Awards at St Bart’s School**

I was asked to be present at the awards to the high-achieving previous-year’s Year 13 students. Always good to see young people achieving things.

**16th December – Newbury Civic Choir Service at St John’s Church**

Fourth of six carol services and the only one hosted by Newbury Town Council. Thanks due to all the officers and civic team for helping to arrange this and for turning out on the day, complete with robes and maces. A lovely event, much appreciated by the congregation, many of which were members of Speakability. Jennie Kersey, an aphasic stroke survivor volunteered to do one of the readings, which was a very big deal for her, and was rewarded with a spontaneous round of applause at the end. Thanks are also

due to Elisa Mullen, both Cllrs Foot and to Laura North, an Eight Bells member, who each did a reading. Thanks also to all the councillors who came. Refreshments afterwards were lovely, and the retirement collection was shared between the two Mayor’s charities.

**17th December – NTTA Lunch at The Watermill Theatre**

I attended the Newbury Twin Town Association lunch at the Watermill Theatre. A very pleasant event with a very worthwhile organisation.

**19th December – Carol Service at Winchcombe Place Care Home**

Fifth of six carol services. Herod, innocents…etc. See amid the winter snow, Silent Night etc. An event obviously enjoyed by the residents and very nice to be at. Very well looked after as ever. Very good cake.

**20th December – Thames Valley Police Carol Concert at Christs Cathedral, Oxford**

Last of six carol services. Gospel according to St John ..etc. Oh come all ye faithfull… etc. Grandest carol service I went to. Readings given by Chief Constable of TVP (who “ordered” the police officers in the congregation to sing loudly), the Police Commissioner and others. Fantastic music and choir. Beautiful building. At the end of the service, I met and chatted to the Mayor of (somewhere else in Berkshire) who was picked up by his private limo (complete with council crest), as I walked down to the bus stop back to the park and ride. My conscience is clear with reference to the Precept payers of Newbury.

**21st December – Signing of the new Grounds Maintenance Contract at the Town Hall**

Good pictures in NWN.

**25th December - Christmas Day Lunch for Seniors Given by St George’s Church**

Attended the event for a couple of hours prior to lunch being served. Spent the time chatting to the seniors who were all having a lovely time. Made a short speech and called the bingo numbers. Nice calling to people old enough to know the responses. (77 ….?).

**31st December – Ringing in the New Year at St Nic’s Church**

Climbed the 66 steps of the bell tower with my whole family to witness the ringing in of the new year at midnight. As it’s more than 40 years since I rang a bell, I was quite relieved that they didn’t ask me to have a go. Tradition states that the Mayor provides the whisky. As I provided an Old Pulteney from my malt collection, I banned anybody from pouring it in their coffee. Their whisky enthusiast was absent due to illness, but they managed to save him some. Food provided was welcome. I will consider taking it up again (bellringing, not whisky) but they practise on Monday evenings when most council meetings are held.

Perhaps a word with the CEO…

Cllr Gary Norman, Mayor of Newbury