Newnham on Severn Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 22nd APRIL 2026 at 6.30pm
At
The Armoury Hall. Dean Road, Newnham

In attendance were FiftyThree parishioners, including seven parish councillors.
The Chair of council (Cllr F Bihlmeier) advised those present that the meeting was an annual informal gathering to allow general discussion on the village and issues of concern. No decisions can be made at this meeting, however, items identified can flow through to a future PC meeting. He then gave a brief summary of activities within council over the past year.
Council has a full complement of 9 councillors.

Housing
In March 2025 a Housing Needs Survey Report was issued by GRCC which was based on 724 dwellings contacted with a response rate of 20.4%.
The following underlying features were identified:
· 1298 residents (2021 Census)
· Largest proportion of residents are in the 70+ age group and live in 2 person households, having lived in the village for 20+ years
· 86 % of respondents own their own homes,5% rent from the local authority or a housing association, whilst 7% live in private rentals.
· 35% live in 3 bedroom houses 29% in 4 bedroom houses
· 92% use a car to access services
The outcome of the survey identified 3 households that may require social rent, 1 household may require affordable rent, 7 households are looking for affordable home ownership whilst 8 may require open market housing to buy. If the Homeseeker Plus register is added in there are 34 households with a local connection that need affordable housing for rent.
On the supply side a further development of 46 dwellings north of Unlawater Lane has been approved whilst the District Plan has to provide an additional 13000 dwellings in the next 20 years. As a larger village Newnham has to expect a sizeable share.

Victoria Hotel
Following 11 years of inactivity resulting in neglect of the building and the erection of HERAS fencing the question of land ownership in front of the hotel is still unresolved and will shortly go to court. A formal complaint by a local
resident to the district planners resulted in the answer " we can hear you but we will not do anything". This has now been escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman as not dealing with the fencing leaves local residents exposed to danger from traffic.

Parking
A planning application for additional parking at the Beeches has recently been prepared. We are also seeking to remove a restriction on the land for public leisure use.
EV Charging Points Station Road
Gloucestershire County Council's policy is that Newnham is a priority for the rollout of charging points to facilitate EV vehicle uptake. Initially 2 of the proposed bays will be enforced whilst the other 2 will be enforced when utilization warrants it.
Atlas Mobile Coverage
Atlas provides a service free of charge to areas of low network coverage. A survey of residents received 78 responses, with 77% in favour,10% against and 13% unsure. This low response rate is strange since modern land lines also need network coverage. A letter of support has since been sent by the council to move the project forward.

Land Ownership
Work is ongoing in seeking Parish Council ownership of the Green using historical documents and witness statements relating to the Council's longstanding maintenance activities. A submission to the Land Registry will follow.
There is currently an approach by the Diocese who consider the PC responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the churchyard including land owned by the Diocese.
The Council's view is that churchyards closed prior to 1972 are likely to be the responsibility of the District Council as the Local Authority.
Finance
Income in the current financial year was £61.9Kk whilst expenditure was £63.7k, leaving slightly reduced reserves of £54.2k as of 1st April 26. The 26/27 budget plans to reduce these healthy reserves by a further 8k supporting additional spend in the village.
Open Questions
A parishioner presented a formal proposal for a vote of no confidence in the parish council. The proposal was seconded by several other parishioners in attendance.

Below is the proposal as supplied by the proposer.

"Formal notice of motion under the Local Government Act 1972
I propose a notice of no confidence in Newnham on Severn Parish Council:
I have been advised that a motion of no confidence has limited hope of succeeding, because it is not an election year for Newnham Parish Council. That comes in 2027. But as the Annual Meeting is the only forum in which this can be proposed, I want it recorded that there are many parishioners who are disappointed and unhappy with the Parish Council.
While much good work has been undertaken, a number of recent actions have fallen short of what is expected of a Parish Council. There are 3 councillors in particular who have let Parishioners down. The motion focuses on the following, as we could be here for a very long time if every misdemeanour was listed
1. The decision to move meetings of the Parish Council from the accessible Armoury Hall to the Newnham Club was highlighted multiple times, by many parishioners, as going against the Equality Act and the Nolan principles.
2. The positioning of 2 village gates on either side of the A48, by 2 Parish Councillors, despite the resolution of 2 meetings of the Parish Council not to do so.
3. The Chairman, on at least 4 occasions, has been reported to the Monitoring Officer for showing disrespect to parishioners or for bullying. He was recommended to apologise for those offenses and to undertake appropriate training, neither of which he did.
4. There have been many occasions when an item on the agenda should be discussed and voted upon, but the Chairman has brushed it aside and made a unilateral decision and ignored procedure."

The proposal was supported by the following remarks.

"If any of the councillors mentioned have any moral compass or self-awareness, they will apologise or resign. If the other councillors who have enabled these actions take responsibility for having behaved against the interests of residents, they will act more appropriately in the future. In the case of the Chair, he should resign from the Council. The two councillors who went ahead with putting up gates as you enter the village, despite the council having voted against such a move, should explain themselves and apologise for misconduct. Resignations may be appropriate too.

I appreciate that the council does much good and essential work and that it is often mundane. But you cannot have representatives who are bullying, disrespectful and who are not putting the interests of parishioners before their own preferences. There are also rules for local government, and anyone representing us on the Parish Council should abide by them.
I want it on record that Steve O'Leary, who resigned over the council's insistence to move to the Club for meetings, Joy Larkham and Mike Penny, have always put residents before themselves.
The Chair should recuse himself as there is a clear conflict of interest, and after any discussion I would like this motion put to a vote. Do I have a seconder for my proposal of a vote of no confidence"

Code of Conduct (Point 3)

There followed a very heated and personal exchange between several parishioners who had in previous years submitted code of conduct submissions against Cllr Bihlmeier, with Cllr Bihlmeier. Although the contents of several codes were discussed in detail these minutes do not summarise any of the conversation. None of the codes referred to were upheld by the Monitoring Officer at the time. As a result, the content of the codes should not be shared publicly. The only observation being, it was agreed by all parties that some recommendations contained with the code conclusions had not been completed by Cllr Bihlmeier.

Cllr Bihlmeier was asked if he considered the code complaints as a "badge of honour" as had been stated in public by him. Cllr Bihlmeier's response was that he cannot recollect if he may have said that or in what context had he done so.

Positioning of two village gates on either side of the A48 (Point 2)

Cllr Swiers stated that the gates had not been erected on behalf of the parish council, in the name of the parish council or funded by the parish council. Following advice from Highways the gates were removed as they did not comply with relevant standards. Cllr Blakeman added that he found it surprising that traffic calming measures had been met with objections.

The parishioner who raised the motion of no confidence against the council as a whole expressed the view that many councillors had left during their tenure due to the nasty nature of council under the tenure of Cllr Bihlmeier. On conclusion the parishioner requested a "Show of hands for Felix to resign" There followed a count to establish those showing in favour of the resignation. The Clerk conducted the count which at the second attempt was agreed at 22 of those in attendance.

Other comments were made on a range of issues. **The George** had been offered as a potential alternative to the Armory Hall, but the approach to council had been ignored. It was further observed that many of the current PC members have never been in the George since its opening, so unaware of the facilities. **Parish council meetings at Westbury** were a joy to attend and appeared more professional. **The council should do more** to try and bring the village together**. County Cllr Becky Hoyland** was quoted as saying at the January meeting held in the Club that the council was not listening to its parishioners. **Parishioners when raising a variety of subjects** at meetings are shut down and ignored. (Cllr Bihlmeier reiterated that public speaking during the council meeting is not permitted and public consultation is not easy to deal with). **A significant number** of the current parish councillors appear to be a clique and a much wider representation of the residents in the parish would be beneficial. **Communications** could be improved. Better communication between council and public would be beneficial. The Clerk confirmed all agendas, minutes and many other important documents are on the website and certain things posted on social media. It is not recommended for parish councils to interact via social media and Newnham adheres to this advice.

Newsletters although not produced at a set frequency are delivered to all households and supplies are left in business premises such as the Library, Shop @ the Ship, the George etc.

A suggestion was made that the annual parish meeting (where standing orders do not apply) should be held more than once a year if allowed. The Clerk confirmed this is a minimum government requirement and more can be held at the discretion of council. It was agreed that this should form an agenda item for a future PC meeting.

There appeared to be a consensus that the parish council does deliver on many aspects of the needs of the village. However, they need to listen to the comments made during this evening's meeting and public consultation.
Councillors offer their time free and often conduct activities to save the parish money. They are dedicated to the village and there are active projects that show their commitment **Questions were asked about 20mph speed limits through the village** related to concerns of speeding traffic, ignoring of pedestrians on Zebra crossings etc. The Clerk advised those present of the previous County Council sponsored development of a traffic regulation order that Newnham PC signed up to, but subsequently dropped by Glos CC. A new initiative funded through Highways has been initiated and the PC has signed up to it in principle. Now under development it may take several years to implement. Previous work with the Highways department to improve the visual aspects of the crossing and lighting were also outlined. Requests for formal pelican crossing lights have been rejected by Highways based on incidence rates and footfall compared to other areas in the county. Comment was also made that there would be complaints from residents along the High Street due to vehicle restarting following a light change**. Increasing sports facility usage** was discussed with a parishioner feeling the PC have been approaching it in the wrong way. A councillor agreed that this must be the case as little progress has been achieved since the agenda item has been active. The view was that active sports people/organisations in the area should be engaged to identify ideas**. Beeches tenanted parking** was raised as there are issues that the PC are not aware of. It was agreed that Cllr Smith and the Clerk would meet with tenants.
There being no further business, those present were thanked for their attendance and the meeting closed at 7.50 pm.

Signed…….. Date……