

Newtown Community Association AGM 18.2.12

CHAIR AND SECRETARY'S REPORT

I am happy to report that the Association has had a very positive year and all involved have enjoyed the fruits of their labours. The main events were the two-day Belmont 125, which brought people together from far and wide, the regular Sunday cafes and the Halloween celebration with over 400 people attending.

Our regular meeting attendance is still increasing. The Committee meets almost every month, eleven open meetings in all and some sub-groups, so we have all been kept busy! They are open to all and the Committee really does want and need your involvement.

We prioritise a report from the police each meeting and I take this opportunity to thank our Community PCSOs, Aurea, and Nick, for their attendance at meetings. They have provided a friendly line of communication between the Police and the community. Aurea has now moved to Tiverton and we have a new PCSO, Kate Rees, who we welcome today.

2011 has been a very active year and we have been fortunate to receive grants for a lot of the projects undertaken. Exeter City Council again kindly granted us £1,900 to cover the cost of rent. Our thanks go to Cllr Westlake for the grant of some £1,500 towards access improvements to the hut which urgently needs to be spent. Exeter Community Initiatives assisted us in securing Lottery Funding of £3,338 towards our Belmont 125 event and exhibition. £736 was secured for approximately 50% of the cost of the football wall with Cllr. Westlake and NCA funds making up the difference. £500 was also given in the form of sponsorship by Moorfield Group for the Halloween event. About £100 was given by Waitrose to allow the community bulb planting to happen for a second year. This event involved our University student wardens and assistance from the City Council Parks Department.

We have a series of ongoing projects for 2012. The most imminent of which is nearly completed in Albert Street. The rose bed will be entirely replanted very soon with a wonderful new set of rose bushes. Your Committee is gradually finding funding for at least another three projects – including a second table tennis table.

The Committee along with a team of volunteers redecorated the Hut at the end of 2010. We still need help with painting and repairs of the hut which is ongoing with so many people using it.

Jackie, our Hut Bookings Secretary, reports that from January to December 2011 the hut has been used 910 times. The average number of bookings per month has risen to 77 and over the year we have had 78 occasional bookings. Weekly and monthly or ad hoc are users total 17 different groups. Their use has increased in the number of times they use the hut.

In June Jackie introduced a hard copy booking form to confirm bookings, with advance payment for all bookings, which makes record keeping more efficient. However, although this has worked very well for occasional bookings, some regulars are reluctant to accept changes which is a pity as Jackie is trying to streamline the system. The use of a key pad on the door instead of keys has helped greatly, but informing each user when the code changes, which has to be done for insurance purposes, does cause some anguish. We still have issues over storage which is never enough.

We have run a number of themed cafe events in the Hut, a format which has shown itself to be a manageable social focus. Sunday morning cafes are clearly popular and this year we are planning to alternate Sundays with Saturdays in an attempt to reach a wider audience. Last year's Blitz cafe was a huge success and provided a reminiscence opportunity for many of our older residents. We will repeat it in 2012. We offered accommodation to Respect at their event in June and will do so again this year. Last year I understand they had 18,000 people through the gate. Our 125th anniversary of Belmont Park in July restored links with many ex-Newtownians and entertained young and old alike. Our autumn bulb planting around Newtown is now a regular event.

The main topics for discussion at meetings during the year have included: themes for cafes and other events especially the idea of cafes and events for older people, Basic Food Hygiene certificates for cafe leaders, the Sensory Garden Project, continued need for maintenance and refurbishment of the hut, fund raising, Police issues and the proposal to switch off street lighting, liaison with University student wardens, projects such as the football wall, cleaning, Health and Safety and Fire precautions and finally the Vision Project.

You will see on the notice boards a series of plans and drawings about the proposed new building to replace this one. Your Committee, with the help of its architect, is now at a point where a planning application has been submitted to the City Council. In the next few days notices will appear in the vicinity advertising the proposal. This is another opportunity for Newtown residents to consider the design and have a say. Your committee do believe that it is time Newtown has a modern community facility and that it will be a long term asset.

An AGM is an important event for any organisation but it is also a very good time to say thank you. On behalf of The NCA I would like to propose a huge vote of thanks to everyone who helped us this year:

- Ian Harrison and George Dumble who as well as their committee role, still spend many hours bringing the hut up to standard, along with several kind volunteers. Thanks also
- Derek Burnside, our Treasurer,
- Gay Smith, our Secretary,
- Peter Montgomery our website editor,
- Michael Parrott our indefatigable Publicity Officer,
- Jackie Holdstock our patient Bookings Secretary, who has daily contact with all hirers,
- All our cooks and bottle washers in the kitchen: Sally and Steve, Polly, Joan, Kat Thomas, George and Gaby and many more!
- Sue Gould our cleaner who against all odds keeps the hut spick and span.

Heartfelt thanks are also due to our tireless councillors, Devon County Council representative Cllr Richard Westlake, and our two Exeter City Council representatives Cllr Roger Spackman who replaced Cllr Shepherd when he stood down and Cllr Richard Branson. They have supported us by enthusiastically supporting The Vision Project and eventually achieved the Football Wall for the park this summer.

Finally, the successful continuation of Newtown Community Association is dependant on increasing active members who can assist with the work of the committee and the fun things like events. The current small committee with the Chair and Secretary are hard-pressed and can only tread water unless there is more enthusiasm from other residents, Please let's start 2012 by speaking to all our neighbours and friends in the area to encourage them to come to meetings, make suggestions and even to join the committee.

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