

9th October 2020



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon,

The last six months have been completely unique for the country, and indeed the world, in dealing with a virus which spread rapidly across the globe. It has required some difficult decisions to be made balancing the need to keep us all safe whilst allowing life to continue as normal. To hear the Prime Minister speak and to read the national media coverage we've seen that the answers are not always straightforward.

Locally we've had to make difficult decisions along the way. Most recently we took the decision this week not to allow the Michaelmas Fair to go ahead. A regular fixture in Newbury's calendar each October, it's something we know people look forward to – including many Councillors and Council staff. After careful deliberation, we came to the view that the event could not be held safely. It was a difficult decision, and one we made in the context of recent increases in national infection rates and guidance from Government, including the Rule of Six.

It wasn't a decision which we came to in isolation and was based on advice from health professionals and the police. Although we concluded the event could not proceed, we believe that local people will understand our predicament and support the decision we reached.

As we head into autumn we will need to continue to respond to the pandemic and changes in infection rates. There has been a noticeable increase in tempo in recent weeks after a steady summer, and coronavirus prevention and containment continues to be a priority for us. Locally there has been a significant increase – 100 new cases in the past fortnight in our District– so now more than ever we all need to play our part in protecting ourselves, and our loved ones.

Work has begun on the creation of a local contact tracing cell to supplement national test and trace efforts. It will provide a local support in helping to trace people who might have been exposed to Covid-19 and where national efforts to locate people have been unsuccessful. Importantly, calls will come from a local number which we hope will encourage people to answer them. The local system will launch early next month and you'll soon see publicity about the new arrangements. We want people to know about the service and what to expect, both to ensure that calls are answered and help people distinguish genuine calls from anyone seeking to take advantage of people's concerns around this. As unbelievable as it might sound, there are people who will seek to use the test and trace service to scam people and we want to avoid that at all costs.

Elsewhere there continues to be discussions nationally about a new three-tier system for local lockdowns. This would standardise the approach to the coronavirus restrictions and, we hope, some criteria for each tier so it's clear what the measures are and what triggers them.

While our response to Covid remains a core priority for us we are also heavily focussed on our other important areas of work. This week we have launched a public consultation on our leisure strategy for the next ten years. Concentrating on physical activity, sport and the recreational use of our open spaces, we've set out our plans for the leisure offer in the area and its contribution towards making sure the district remains a great place to live, work and learn.

Elsewhere we have recently provided an update on our plans to invest £43 million in our schools in the next three years with new buildings, expansions, refurbishments and special needs facilities. These include the recently completed new school in Theale, a new kitchen at Hungerford Primary School, Castle Gate refurbishments and extensive improvements planned for Falkland Primary School in Newbury. These are just some of our projects – there is lots going on and plenty to be excited about.

To conclude what has been a busy week, it was Clean Air Day yesterday and a chance for us to reflect on our new Environment Strategy and all that we hope to achieve for our green district. We recently published our strategy for ultra-low emission vehicles and the work we will do to encourage cleaner travel. It includes ensuring new homes in the district have charging points for electric vehicles and to provide on-street charging infrastructure in residential areas where people do not have driveways to charge on. It is broader than this however, and it includes working with businesses and other partners such as the rail industry to deliver private charging infrastructure too.

Alongside cleaner and greener cars, cycling and other forms of active travel will continue to be a focus for us. We hope to hear soon about our latest application for national active travel funding – and as soon as we hear anything we'll let you know.

Yours sincerely,



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