

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of an
EXTRAORDINARY TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
7 pm on Thursday, 15th August 2019

Present: Cllr. Adam Davy, Cllr. Graham Edgcumbe Venning, Cllr. Herbert Harper (in the Chair), Cllr. Dafydd Jenkins, Cllr. Kate Southan, Cllr. Marcus Themans, Cllr. Daniel Thomas and Cllr. Milner Whiteman OBE.

Town Clerk: Trudi Barrett

In attendance: Shropshire Councillor David Turner and 15 members of the public.

1) Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced agenda item 7.

2) Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Hill, Holyoak and Walter, who were on holiday.

These apologies were ACCEPTED and AGREED as APPROVED absence.

3) Disclosure of pecuniary interests

Members were reminded that they are required to leave the room during the discussion and voting on matters in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest, whether or not the interest is entered in the register of members' interests maintained by the Monitoring Officer.

None.

4) Dispensations

None requested.

5) Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, David Turner, gave an overview of the Shropshire Council Strategic Sites consultation and provided his comments. The development of particular relevance to Much Wenlock was that of the Ironbridge Power Station site, with proposals for 1000 homes, along with commercial areas and local services. Councillor Turner expressed concerns about school provision, medical facilities and the road network, as well as the proximity of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the site. Councillor Turner had communicated his concerns to Harworth, particularly those relating to the impact on road traffic in Much Wenlock.

Councillor Turner noted the number of homes already proposed for Much Wenlock in the Local Plan and the effect that these would have on the town.

Councillor Turner considered that the Power Station site did need to be developed but he was concerned that the growth of the development would not be matched by the provision of services and facilities. If a medical practice were required this would not be built at the outset and there would be increasing pressure on other local surgeries. A similar situation would arise with a primary school. The expectation was that secondary aged children would attend William Brookes School. This was likely to cause tension between Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils as it would impact on the number of children taken from the Telford & Wrekin area.

Councillor Turner was not so concerned about traffic during the demolition / construction phase as conditions could be set by Shropshire Council to cover this. However, it was not yet known whether the pulverised ash and gravel would be taken off the site by rail; if not, this would put additional pressure on the road network.

6) Public Session

At the Chair's discretion, Members of the public were given the opportunity to offer their views and make representations regarding item 7 on the agenda. Those who spoke raised concerns about the following issues relating to the proposed development of the Ironbridge Power Station site:

- a. An increase in traffic and pollution from vehicles associated with the proposed development, especially at the Gaskell Arms junction. Traffic would back up on each road, increasing the number of idling vehicles and their harmful emissions. It was noted that traffic would be generated not only by the housing proposed but also by the commercial area.

The Mayor noted that the Town Council had asked Shropshire Council to install a pollution monitor at the Gaskell corner but had been advised that historic monitoring had shown that air quality was not likely to exceed nationally set objective levels at this location and that there was no resource to provide monitoring. Members of the public were urged to write directly to Shropshire Council to seek monitoring.

- b. The need for a bypass for Much Wenlock to take through traffic out of the town centre.
- c. The impact on pupil numbers and intake at William Brookes School. It was understood that the capacity of the school was limited by the amount of play space around it and this would not be sufficient for a significant increase in numbers, even taking into account the Gaskell Ground area.
- d. The point could be made to Shropshire Council that the development of the site would not be successful unless the access and traffic issues associated with the site were resolved.
- e. Could Harworth be asked to hold a public consultation event in Much Wenlock on the basis that the town was only 3 miles away from the development site?
It was noted that public consultation events had already been held at the Power Station and in Buildwas and it was unlikely that any more would be held at this stage.
- f. A request was made that the Town Council reconsider its decision to support the Shropshire Council preferred site off Hunters Gate for the development of 80 dwellings as part of the Local Plan in the light of the proposals to build 1000 homes on the Ironbridge Power Station site.
Councillors agreed to add this item to the agenda of the forthcoming Planning Committee meeting.

7) Shropshire Council Strategic Sites Consultation

- a. Members noted Shropshire Council consultation on Strategic Sites from Monday, 1st July to Monday, 9th September, which included consultation on proposals for the development of the former Ironbridge Power Station site.
- b. Members considered the Town Council's response to the consultation, with particular focus on the development of the former Ironbridge Power Station site. Harworth had produced a master plan and were expecting to submit a planning application in September. Shropshire Council had issued a consultation document. A document had been presented by Invest in Shropshire to the MIPIM exhibition in Cannes, France, on 14th March 2019. It was noted that there were discrepancies between the documents in relation to the size and location of the areas for development.

There was a suggestion that the Town Council oppose the development of the site completely. However, Members agreed that the site would be developed and it would be better to concentrate on raising specific areas of concern and attempting to influence the proposals and mitigate the effects on the town.

Members comments are summarised below:

Location and Site

The Power Station site was at the end of Shropshire, on the border with Telford & Wrekin. Traffic from the site would need to come over Buildwas Bridge, which was a single track bridge and there was already congestion at the junction. All large vehicles would have to come down Buildwas Bank. The River Severn lay to the north and the Shropshire Hills AONB to the south of the Power Station. The site was in a cul de sac.

It was noted that 850 houses planned for the site would be on the area containing 2 million tonnes of sand and gravel. This would need to be removed prior to development as the sand and gravel was a strategic resource – if the sand and gravel could not be removed, the area could not be developed. The developer would be reliant on Network Rail and the railway bridge to remove the resources, but it was understood that no agreement over the use of the railway had been reached with Network Rail as yet.

It was noted that the power station building would need to be retained as it contained power switches. Industrial units, rather than housing, would be constructed close to this building as the switching made a very loud noise.

Councillors were keen to see affordable housing to buy as well as rent on the site, rather than a high percentage of large homes.

Landscape and visual impact

Councillors noted the sustainability appraisal summary for the Power Station site, IRN001. It was noted that there was a “poor” indication for both housing and employment. The mitigation proposed in the document referred largely to buffer zones.

Councillors were concerned that much of the site was greenfield and development was planned for this area as well as for the brownfield parts of the site.

It was noted that the area was extremely sensitive in terms of both natural and historic environment, with the adjacent World Heritage Site and AONB.

Education

A primary school was proposed for the site but this would not be opened until 5 – 7 years after house building began. Local primary schools would be affected by the interim increase in pupils.

It was proposed that secondary aged children would attend William Brookes School, however, it would be difficult to extend the school due to its location. It was noted that an invitation to the meeting had been made to the school’s Chair of Governors but nobody from the school had been available to attend during the school holidays. However, the Chair of Governors had advised that the school had been involved in discussions about the redevelopment of the power station site and they were confident that they would be able to develop the school to accommodate the expected increase in the number of students.

Councillors were concerned that additional pupils coming from the proposed development would affect the intake from the current catchment areas.

Medical facilities

Discussions had focussed on the Ironbridge medical centre, however, the proposed development would also impact on Much Wenlock and Cressage medical facilities, which were already stretched. It was agreed to seek the views of the medical practice on the proposed development. Although medical services were proposed for the development site, these would not be built immediately and there would be problems during the transition period.

Climate Change

It was noted that the additional traffic and traffic management systems, such as traffic lights and roundabouts, would increase standing traffic and air pollution. This would be a particular problem at the Gaskell Arms junction. It was difficult to understand how this could be permitted in the light of Shropshire Council’s recent declaration of a Climate Emergency and desire to reduce carbon emissions.

It was noted that the local heritage railway group were keen to extend the railway to Ironbridge, although this was not suggested in the consultation. Should this happen, the coal fuel required for a heritage railway would further increase pollution.

Highways

There was great concern from members of the public and Councillors about the impact of both the residential and commercial development on the road network.

It was noted that Harworth was undertaking traffic monitoring but that this went only to Emstry. Councillors believed that the monitoring should be extended to take into account the A49 as far as the Dobbies island in Shrewsbury. The intention was to use the Telford & Wrekin traffic model, which included multiple sets of traffic lights. If traffic lights were to be installed at the bottom of Buildwas Bank this could lead to accidents caused by traffic failing to stop at the bottom of the hill.

Concerns were expressed about the condition of Buildwas Bridge and what arrangements might be made should the bridge need to be closed for any reason.

Councillors were keen to push for a bypass for the town to relieve congestion and pollution. It was noted that a bypass had been planned some 20 to 30 years ago but the qualifying criteria had changed and the bypass was never built. Shropshire Council officers had asserted that 1000 homes would not warrant a bypass and that there was no money to build one.

The suggestion of a park and ride scheme on the site would only increase traffic in the area. If a railway were to be introduced, this should be a modern railway, not a heritage railway.

Councillors were concerned that drivers trying to avoid congestion would use the local “rabbit runs” through narrow lanes in the area. Sat navigation systems would not prevent this as locals knew the way.

Concerns were expressed that both Harworth and WSP had been co-sponsors of the marketing presentation made at the MIPIM exhibition in France. WSP was the consultant which advised Shropshire Council on highways matters and this could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and RESOLVED to prepare a response to the Strategic Sites Consultation relating to the Ironbridge Power Station site based on the comments noted above. No comments would be submitted in relation to the other strategic sites proposed. Councillors Harper, Hill, Jenkins and Thomas would work on the response, which would be circulated to all councillors for comments prior to submission.

Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

Pursuant to Section 1(2) of the above Act it was **PROPOSED, SECONDED and RESOLVED** that, due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the public and press should not be present.

8) Gaskell Recreation Ground Drainage Work

Councillors noted the revised specification and quotation for drainage work on the Gaskell Recreation Ground, which had been amended to include the installation of a water pipe and further drainage pipes. It was noted that preliminary work was due to start on Monday, 19th August.

It was **PROPOSED, SECONDED and RESOLVED to approve the quotation from DW Shotton Landscapes in the amount of £69,776.70 + VAT, with the funds coming from the allocated reserve for the drainage work (£66,701.99) and from general reserves (£3,074.71).**

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Signed.....
Town Mayor

Date.....