

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
 held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
 at 7 pm on Thursday, 7th April 2022

Present: Cllr David Fenwick, Cllr Mike Grace, Cllr Wilfred Grainger, Cllr Marcus Themans, Cllr Daniel Thomas (in the chair), Cllr Christian Toon, Cllr Chris Tyler, Cllr Linda West, Cllr Duncan White

Town Clerk: Trudi Barrett

In attendance: Eight members of the public, PCSO Steven Breese, Shropshire Councillor Lezley Picton

1. Chairman's Welcome

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and presented the following report:

Good evening all, and welcome to tonight's Town Council meeting and a special welcome to the Leader of Shropshire Council, Lezley Picton, whom I'd like to thank for taking time out of her busy schedule to attend and take questions from Councillors.

Just two days ago our Member of Parliament, Philip Dunne, met with the Town Council to discuss the issues close to residents' hearts. It was a very productive meeting as Philip left understanding our concerns about flooding, the impact of development around us and the financial challenges we have as a Council.

Since our last meeting, we have had the Annual Town meeting, which was well attended and is always an excellent platform to engage with our community. Thank you to the staff for arranging the meeting to all Councillors for their help and attendance; as a Council, we've taken all public comments on board, and they will be considered within the relevant committees or working groups.

The Town Council takes its civic role in the community very seriously, and I'm delighted to say that we have planted ten trees in the old cemetery as part of the Queen's Green Canopy to mark the Platinum Jubilee. Thanks must go to the Friends of the Cemetery, the Tree Forum, community volunteers and Councillors for planting the trees: they're on the official map, ready to be presented to the Queen in June.

Recently I had an invitation to go to William Brookes School as part of the JL Edwards Trust and listen to pupils bid for funding for projects, trips and other activities. As a successful bidder in 2003 when an 11-year-old, it was great for me to see a range of impressive students come forward with exciting projects. Good luck to them all.

The first 'Made in Shropshire' market in Much Wenlock takes place on Saturday 16th April. We've received valuable comments from traders that we've taken on board and we are looking forward to the event.

Tickets for the Much Wenlock Festival are now on sale from Penny Farthing and other places; it looks like a fantastic offering this year. On behalf of the Town Council, I thank the committee, made up of volunteers, for pulling this together after the pandemic's disruption.

The next Council surgery will be held this coming Saturday, 9th April between 10.30am and 12 noon at the museum – no appointment necessary.

Finally, a reminder that the Mayor's Special Church service is at 6.30 pm on Sunday, 1st May.

Tonight is my last meeting as Chair of the Council, and I would like to thank you all for making my chairmanship a special time and one I will remember fondly.

2. Apologies for Absence

It was RESOLVED to accept the following apologies: Councillor William Benbow – holiday, Councillor John O'Dowd – unwell.

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.

4. Dispensations

None requested.

5. Public Session

- a. With regard to agenda item 18, a member of the public requested the Town Council's support for a community speed watch scheme for Bourton Road, where there was currently no vehicle speed monitoring. Residents were concerned about vehicle speeds on this road, which was particularly dangerous on the narrow bend. There had been recent encouragement from West Mercia Police to set up speed watch schemes and 10 people had come forward to volunteer to take an active part in a speed watch scheme for Bourton Road. With Town Council support, the residents could approach the police and move forward with the initiative.

Members responded positively.

- b. A resident spoke regarding traffic at the Gaskell junction and the recent impact of temporary traffic lights at that junction, which had caused chaos. Traffic lights were obviously not a solution for the junction. The proposed developments at Buildwas, Tasley and Cressage would all bring more traffic through the junction. A long-term solution was needed and the only workable one, in his opinion, was a bypass for the town. What action did the Council intend to take?

The resident was advised that the Town Council had a Transport Working Group which was liaising with the Shropshire Councillor and Shropshire Council highways engineers regarding transport matters. There was also some extra funding associated with the Buildwas application for a feasibility study on the Gaskell corner.

6. Police Report

Members noted the written report provided. PCSO Steven Breese advised that PC Andrew Boardman was now in post and provided an overview of recent incidents. There was no definite information yet regarding the fire at the Sytche. Policing priorities would now be requested from the Town Council every six months, rather than every three months. PCSO Breese was thanked for his report.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

The Ironbridge Power Station liaison group will be having its initial meeting on 29th April, on site at the power station. Currently, the group includes me, Councillor Claire Wild, whose division it sits on, a Buildwas Parish Councillor, a Leighton Parish Councillor and a representative from Telford & Wrekin Council to go along with Shropshire and Harworth officers. I'll be pushing for another seat for a Councillor here to join me and will update shortly. The group will take forward residents' concerns regarding road safety on the Buildwas bridge, but essentially, the effect on other areas such as the Gaskell Corner and rat-running.

I'm increasingly aware that there is still activity at Farley Quarry, despite the planning permission being refused.

Shropshire Council has invested in the Planning Enforcement department recently and they are getting to grips with the situation.

I made the point when meeting with Philip Dunne that, as a Council, we're dismayed at a failed bid for the Bus Back Better funding; Councillors and officers worked together to produce an excellent bid that we were proud of, so it was disheartening to lose out.

Shropshire Council continues its efforts to support Ukrainian refugees; we now have access to the Government's Foundry system, which provides us with all the 'matched' hosts and Ukrainian families. As of last week, we have 147 matches within the Shropshire area. The Feedback and Insight Team are working on this data to extract what is needed to start undertaking DBS and property checks and to allow us to map the households for schooling, GP, and support purposes. I know of a few Much Wenlock residents who have registered under the scheme, so we could well see refugees from Ukraine here soon.

The cut-off date to receive a new recycling bin from 1st May has passed, but online orders are re-opening for bins to be delivered later in the year. The new bins are being made by Craemer in Telford using recycled plastic, and the rollout starts in South Shropshire.

Regarding the Local Plan Examination in Public, we have today received confirmation of the timeline for the examination, which will commence on 5th July 2022. Further information will be available early next week.

The next Council surgery will be held on Saturday, 9th April.

8. Councillor Lezley Picton, Leader of Shropshire Council

The Mayor welcomed Councillor Lezley Picton, Leader of Shropshire Council.

Councillor Picton thanked Councillor Thomas and referenced his youth and enthusiasm as a new Shropshire Councillor. She gave an update on the figures for Ukrainian refugees, advising that 189 properties were now registered in Shropshire and five Ukrainian families had already arrived.

Councillor Picton gave an overview of her role and activities at Shropshire Council. She was elected Leader of the Council in May 2021, the first female leader, having been a cabinet member for four years. She came into post knowing there were significant challenges, not least the budget. She was trying to bring together the north and south of the county, as it had always been felt that there was a division. She also believed that the Council needed to improve on the basics, such as communicating and listening to the public and she had been working on this, for example, ensuring that the Shropshire Plan was a document that people understood and read. Three promises had been made in 2021: a third wheelie bin for recycling, which was already underway; £40m over the next four years for highways - a budget of £60m had been agreed in February; to increase the number of communications going out from the Council, which had been done.

Councillor Picton was delighted that Shropshire Council had received a 'good' OFSTED rating for looked after children as well as several industry awards for adult social care and looked after children.

A low point had been not receiving any Bus Back Better funding recently. However, a significant number of councils had received nothing and Shropshire Council would submit a further application in the second round of bidding.

Most of Councillor Picton's time was spent working on finance, working with MPs and lobbying ministers at Westminster. There was no doubt that Shropshire Council was in an extremely precarious position with regard to its budget. A balanced budget had been achieved this year by using all of the Council's reserves, so the situation next year would be very serious. Other councils were in a similar position. She was concerned about government changes to the adult social care system, which would make matters worse for Shropshire Council.

Councillor Picton was well aware of some of the issues in Much Wenlock, particularly those related to planning.

Councillor Picton, then took questions.

Question 1

Cllr Toon: What were the short to medium term plans to tackle Shropshire Council's challenges and what were the priorities?

Cllr Picton: The biggest challenge was funding. Of the net budget for Shropshire Council (after the funding for education had come in and gone out), 80% was spent on social care, whereas the average around England was 60 - 68%. Currently 85% of people requesting adult social care did not have an assessment, but were helped in other ways by preventative action. Now the government had announced that everyone was entitled to an assessment, which would mean that many more people would require support.

There were also problems with professionals in the care sector arising from the impact of Covid and competition for staff with other sectors. The maximum increase that Shropshire Council could offer was 6% and the Council's social care partners had advised that they needed 30 – 60% to survive. This was coupled with problems within the health service: if care packages could not be put in place, then people could not come out of hospital, leading to bed blocking. On average the bill for adult social care was going up by £12m every year.

Around £60m was needed for next year's budget deficit. There were many really good projects going on across the Council but to make a meaningful difference, more funding was needed.

Other priorities were the north-west relief, the redevelopment of Shrewsbury town centre and the Local Plan.

Question 2

Cllr Grace: A recent survey of residents carried out by the Town Council endorsed the view that Shropshire Council should drop the development plans for Much Wenlock and that the Town Council should determine development in the town through a review of the Neighbourhood Plan with community engagement. However, it seemed that this approach was fine for other towns but not for Much Wenlock. Could Cllr Picton agree to the request to drop the proposals and let the town determine the options for the future?

Cllr Picton: Cllr Picton advised that she was not a planner. The draft Local Plan would go before the Inspectors, who were aware of Much Wenlock's objections to the preferred site in the town. Shropshire Council's planners maintained that the proposal was a sound option. If the Inspectors found that the proposal was not sound, then Shropshire Council would have to remove or modify it, but that would depend on the Inspectors. Shropshire Council Members could not change the Plan now, as it was with the Inspectors.

Cllr Grace: Shropshire Council had the option to accede to the request from the Town Council to make the modification during the enquiry, before the Inspectors made their report.

Cllr Picton: Shropshire Council would not do that.

Cllr Grace: Why would Shropshire Council treat Much Wenlock differently to other towns?

Cllr Picton requested clarification on the situation with regard to the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Grace: The previous Town Council would not refresh the Neighbourhood Plan on the understanding that the Local Plan would determine everything for the town and the Neighbourhood Plan would be refreshed thereafter. In May/June last year the new Town Council had asked Shropshire Council to change the Local Plan and was refused, in contrast to Bishops Castle and Cleobury Mortimer.

Cllr Picton: Those towns had applied under emerging Neighbourhood Plan status, with Plans that would run until 2038. The planning officers and portfolio holder had agreed the process followed for Much Wenlock.

Question 3

Cllr Tyler: During the visit of Philip Dunne MP the road network had been discussed, especially the Gaskell corner. In the Local Plan there was talk of a proposal for a strategic growth corridor from the West Midlands and M54, linking up with the A458 at Bridgnorth. This implied that there would be further development. What effect would that have on the Conservation Area of Much Wenlock, the Shropshire Hills AONB and the tourism led economy?

Cllr Picton: For Cllr Picton, a strategic growth corridor meant the M54 link specifically and she believed that Shropshire Council should be very mindful of the AONB and areas of historic and natural beauty. There was no doubt that Shropshire needed to increase its economic prosperity and increase jobs. Many start-up companies were coming in, which would not even be noticed but were all providing economic prosperity. The road network through Much Wenlock was certainly not suitable for extensive growth. It was about finding the right type of growth for the smaller market towns, which did not have to be industrial and commercial companies involving big wagons. In her view, Local Enterprise Partnerships did not take enough notice of small/medium businesses and tourism.

Cllr Tyler: Development would put huge additional pressure on Much Wenlock – how could the town be protected?

Cllr Picton: The issue of the five-year land supply and the implications of not having that in place were greatly concerning. She had expected the Local Plan to be adopted this year, but the timescale had slipped and her fear was that if the Plan did not go through, Shropshire would be prone to unregulated development.

Question 4

Cllr Fenwick: Shropshire Council had ambitions for positive and purposeful relationships with key centres such as Much Wenlock. What did Shropshire Council intend to do differently to work with Much Wenlock in improving the lot of communities and their places. Was there a real understanding about the democratic role of town councils to ensure there was a status that could not be bypassed in the planning process? What was the purpose of a Neighbourhood Plan if it was just going to be ignored?

Cllr Picton: The Local Plan was very much a high-level document and there would also be service plans, including one about communities. Cllr Picton did not think that Shropshire Council made enough of its relationships with town and parish councils. All of her communities would say that the planners didn't take any notice of them. It was very difficult for Shropshire Councillors in the planning process as they were always under pressure with regard to appeals. A Neighbourhood Plan carried weight and Cllr Picton would be disappointed if Town Councillors really felt that their Neighbourhood Plan had not been listened to. A Neighbourhood Plan did not stop development but determined what the community wanted in terms of development. She would be happy to arrange a meeting with Shropshire Councillor Ed Potter, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration and Planning.

Cllr Fenwick: Town Councillors would be pleased if Cllr Picton could go to the Shropshire Council planners and ask them to listen to what Much Wenlock had to say as Councillors genuinely felt that the town's assets were at risk.

Question 4

Cllr Themans: Given the budgetary problems of Shropshire Council, why was the Council still carrying on with the enormously expensive and dubiously beneficial northern relief road and the development of Shrewsbury town centre? There was also pressure on schemes that had a great impact on small towns, such as increased parking charges, which would push shoppers away, but not bring significant revenue to Shropshire Council.

Cllr Picton: Cllr Picton disagreed completely – these projects were based on capital sums, not revenue, and Shropshire Council's problems were with the revenue budget. The north-west relief road was almost entirely funded by government. However, this project was not a foregone conclusion, as planning permission and the business case were still to be resolved. She would also argue the economic benefit of the road, which would address the misery of rat running. If traffic was to be reduced through Shrewsbury, it needed to be given another way of moving.

With regard to the centre of Shrewsbury, there had been talk since 1998 about redevelopment. The approach into the town from Frankwell car park through the 1960s buildings was unappealing and did not encourage tourists. The only way to resolve that was to buy the shopping centre and take the leap to shape the place. Now developers were now keen to become involved.

With regard to car parking charges, people didn't come to Much Wenlock for shopping, but because it was an interesting, beautiful town.

Cllr Grace: It was important to connect planning and tourism. The previous Local Plan inspector turned down plans for Hunters Gate as he thought the spread of development out of town would affect the attractiveness of the town for tourism. There was no joined up thinking. The Neighbourhood Plan provided in the round thinking, yet it had been set aside.

Cllr Picton: When Shropshire Council was recruiting a new Head of Economic Growth they had looked for somebody with experience of joining up issues and had appointed Tracy Darke who had experience of economic growth and planning.

Question 5

Cllr Tyler: Flooding was a major issue for the town and would never go away, but the situation was not improving and the town had suffered from significant flooding as recently as 2020. The Town Council had set up a Strategic Flood Working Group, with input from external experts, and was looking at various initiatives including 'slow the flow'. Why had a scheme not been put forward to look at this issue, particularly when Much Wenlock was in the highest response category?

Cllr Picton: Was anyone from the Town Council involved in the River Severn partnership? (no) Cllr Picton would come back to Councillors on this issue.

The Mayor noted that the Town Council had been working quite well with John Bellis, Drainage and Flood Risk Manager at Shropshire Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Picton for her attendance and contribution.

9. Minutes

- a. **It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 3rd March 2022.**
- b. **It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 1st February 2022.**
- c. **It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 20th January 2022.**

10. Town Clerk's Report

Members **NOTED** the written report from the Town Clerk on outstanding matters and action taken since the last Council meeting.

11. Responsible Financial Officer - CiLCA Qualification

Members were pleased to note that the RFO had successfully completed the Certificate in Local Council Administration and expressed their congratulations.

12. Mayor Making

Members noted arrangements for Mayor Making on 5th May 2022.

13. Shropshire Draft Local Plan (2016 - 2038) – Examination in Public

Members noted a report from the recent meeting with members of the community who had submitted Regulation 19 objections to the Draft Local Plan. A number of common areas had been developed to help prepare a case for the Examination in Public around water resources, consultation, the strategic development corridor and quality of place. A further meeting was planned.

Results of the recent residents' survey had now been analysed and compiled into a report by the Council's Administrative Assistant.

It was RESOLVED to endorse the survey report and to express thanks to the Administrative Assistant.

The report could now be put into the public domain.

14. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Briefing

Members noted information from a CIL briefing given by Shropshire Council's Planning Policy and Strategy Manager, which had been attended by Councillor Tyler and the Clerk. A copy of the presentation had been circulated to Members.

Councillor Thomas was asked to check whether there was still a discrepancy between north and south Shropshire with regard to CIL funding.

15. Shropshire Council Consultation on Proposals for Car Parking Charges

Members considered proposals for increases to car parking charges in Much Wenlock. They noted the current situation with regard to residents' permits and season tickets in the town's car parks, and the very low take-up in Much Wenlock of 9 residents' permits out of 51 available. Promotion and signage of the car parks was poor. Members noted information submitted by a member of the public regarding the proposed increases in charges and concurred with the views expressed regarding parking problems in Much Wenlock and the negative impact of the proposals.

It was RESOLVED to object to all increases, and to respond to the consultation as follows:

- a. Residents' parking permit charges should be kept at the current level or reduced.
- b. Residents' parking permits should be vigorously promoted through local publicity – posters, flyers, retailers, the hospitality sector, local websites, parish magazines, social media, town and parish councils.
- c. There should be no increase in hourly parking charges.
- d. Signage indicating pedestrian routes from the shopping area to the car parks should be introduced.
- e. There should be repeated promotion of the various methods of payment to park hourly, especially the MiPermit app.
- f. 'Pop and shop' should be promoted, as suggested in b. above, especially in those locations where vehicles were frequently parked inconsiderately or in contravention of regulations.
- g. Directional signage at the entrance to car parks should be regularly checked to ensure that it was not obscured by foliage.

16. 'Climate Champion' for the Town Council

It was RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Toon as the Council's Climate Champion, to be reviewed in May 2023.

17. Policing Priorities

Members reviewed the town's policing priorities for the period April to September 2022. Members noted activities undertaken by the local policing team in relation to the current priorities. It had been observed that drug taking appeared to have moved to different areas, including the railway bridges and Pinefields.

It was RESOLVED to retain the current policing priorities of theft (outbuildings), drugs and speeding for the next six months.

18. Community Speed Watch

Members considered a request from a member of the public for Town Council support for a Community Speed Watch scheme in Bourton Road, Much Wenlock.

It was RESOLVED to support the initiative and to pass the request on to the local policing team.

19. Ambulance Emergency in South Shropshire

Members considered correspondence from a member of the public in Ludlow regarding cuts to the emergency ambulance service in South Shropshire and the excessively long waiting times. Members had personal experience of unacceptable delays in ambulance arrival times and the lack of local knowledge.

It was RESOLVED to support the petition asking the West Midlands Ambulance Service to re-open the ambulance hubs which had been closed across South Shropshire and to return the rapid response vehicles.

20. NALC Smaller Councils

Members considered correspondence from NALC Smaller Councils Committee regarding services for members.

It was RESOLVED to suggest that NALC address the following issues:

Focus on shortcuts to operational good practice

Technology standardisation – what are other councils doing – hardware, usage, configuration, recommendations.

21. Correspondence

Members noted the following items, which had been distributed via email between meetings:

- a. SALC information bulletins and other information
- b. NALC newsletters and other information
- c. Press releases from Shropshire Council
- d. Rural Bulletins from the Rural Services Network
- e. Single Use Plastic: how do bans differ across the UK and EU
- f. Friendly Bus Newsletter April 2022
- g. Details of various conferences and workshops

22. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

Members requested that the Shropshire Local Plan be included on the May agenda and the following items be included on the agenda of the June full Council meeting:

- '20's Plenty' – speed limits
- Review of website

23. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the Annual Town Council Meeting (Mayor Making) would be held on 5th May 2022 at the Guildhall and that business deferred from that meeting would be considered at the meeting to be held on 12th May 2022 at the Guildhall.

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.

It was RESOLVED to suspend standing orders to allow the meeting to continue beyond 9pm.

24. Legal Matter

Members considered recent correspondence and determined a response.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Signed
Town Mayor

Date