

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
at 7 pm on Thursday, 5th January 2023

Present: Councillors William Benbow, Susan Crooke-Williams, David Fenwick, Wilfred Grainger, John O’Dowd, Marcus Themans, Daniel Thomas, Christian Toon, Chris Tyler, Linda West, Duncan White (in the chair).

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, Diane Barlow – RFO, PC Andy Boardman, three members of the public in person and one remotely.

1. Chairman’s Welcome

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

“Happy New Year to everyone and may I take this opportunity to give you all my best wishes for 2023.

The lead up to Xmas was a quieter time for meetings. I met with the representative of the “Made in Shropshire” markets to progress our arrangements for the coming year. I also attended a joint meeting with Broseley Council with the Clerk and Councillor Toon to explore collaborative working on climate initiatives by both councils. Also the Bridgnorth & Shifnal area SALC meeting.

My wife and I, with the help of the office staff, set up a Xmas tree to represent the council in the festival at the church, which was a lovely display.

I attended the Windmill Trust event and helped to plant trees which had been bought with a grant from the council grant scheme and then later that day attended the Lady Forester Care Home for carols around the piano. I was asked to attend the Church Carol Service and gave a reading at the lovely, well-attended service. I also went to the Wheatlands Care Home for their Christmas mingle and enjoyed meeting most of the residents and some of the staff.

I am the chair of the Priory Hall Management Committee and they are going to apply for a grant from an energy conservation fund towards the cost of installing secondary glazing at the Community Hall. This application has to be submitted by 20th January and the Committee would welcome the support of the Council for the application so I will be emailing all councillors to ask for their support in the coming days. If this does gain your support, it will be formally ratified as an agenda item at a later Council meeting.”

2. Apologies for Absence

None.

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

There had been no requests to speak.

6. Policing

Members noted with thanks the written police report provided. PC Boardman was asked about motorists making off from the Wheatland Garage without paying. He responded that this was generally passing motorists but could provide no further information.

It was noted that both PC Boardman and PCSO Mal Goddard expected to attend the forthcoming Council Surgery.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

“Feasibility Study Meeting: at the last meeting, I reported that the feasibility study had started, per the monitors and cameras at various points in the town. Last month, members of this council’s working group and I met with WSP, who are doing the work. I made sure to pass on the comments of this council that putting the cameras up on a Tuesday afternoon and taking them down on Thursday morning wasn’t ideal. WSP confirmed that the data was collected over a 7-day period. However, the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras were used on a Wednesday and could come back if needed when compared to the rest of the data.

In the meeting, I also pushed for the traffic survey to be widened to give a view of rat running, and further analysis will be taken. Finally, I was delighted to hear that the brief is exactly as agreed in the Highways Briefing note for the Buildwas Power Station development, which was the wish of this council. WSP advised that the feasibility will consider all options “from doing nothing, signing and lining; up to signalised option and a bypass”.

Funding: similarly, since our last meeting, I’m delighted to say that I have had confirmation that Much Wenlock can expect £192,000 from the upcoming Tasley Livestock development. Credit must go to this council, local residents and me in our objection to the proposals due to their impact on traffic at the Gaskell Corner.

Parking Proposals: I’ve had the map back from WSP, and I’m afraid to say that there are some errors and omissions, such as double yellow lines on Sytche Close and the changes to Wilmore Street. I’ve already started gathering these up and am meeting with WSP to go through them.

Highways Improvements: much-needed road repairs will be undertaken on Barrow Street, which will be closed from 16th to 20th January within the hours of Monday - Friday, 09:30 - 16:00 each day.

Second Homes: I know many of you share my concerns about the affordability and need for houses for local people. To combat this in Shropshire Council’s budget, from 2024, all second homes will be charged double the rate of Council tax. This will only affect unoccupied second homes and not those rented out. The move would help to generate an extra £2.2 million a year towards local services in Shropshire.

Surgery: the next Council surgery will be held on Saturday, 14th January, between 10.30 am and 12 noon at the museum. No appointment is necessary. I’ll be joined by Town Mayor, Cllr Duncan White, and a representative from the Police.”

8. Designation of Windmill Field as a Local Nature Reserve

The Mayor welcomed members of Much Wenlock Windmill Trust to the meeting. An overview of the history of the Windmill Trust was provided: the Windmill Trust was founded in 2001 and had a 99 year lease for the Windmill Field with Wenlock Estates. DEFRA had provided financial support since 2003 and notification had just been received of an extension of funding for five years from 2023. The Windmill Trust was a voluntary group but most of the work on the field was undertaken by paid contractors.

Trust members outlined their aspiration to have Windmill Hill designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) to help protect and preserve the natural habitat. This would require support from the Town Council but would not necessarily involve a financial commitment, although the Trust would likely submit an application to the Town Council’s Grant Scheme later in the year. The Town Council could formally designate Windmill Hill a LNR, subject to certain provisions, such as delegation of the relevant power from Shropshire Council, consultation and a formal management agreement for the land. It was noted that the Windmill Hill was an important natural and historic site which was widely used by the local community and organisations.

In response to questions from Councillors, members of the Trust confirmed that they wished to preserve and maintain the land as a meadow, with open access for the public. The DEFRA agreement also specified that the field had to remain a meadow and could not become a woodland. If the designation as a LNR went ahead, this would also give the Town Council a legal interest in the management of the field. It was noted that the desired designation would cover the field only, not the wooded area. The landowner was supportive of the designation. Members of the Trust had previously been involved with Local Nature Reserves in other areas, were familiar with the designation process and could assist the Council in this regard.

It was RESOLVED to agree in principle to support movement towards the designation of the Windmill Field as a Local Nature Reserve.

Members of the Windmill Trust were thanked for attending and left the meeting.

9. Minutes

- a. **It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 1st December 2022.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 1st November 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. The Clerk reported that the Christmas lights contractor had agreed to fit swift boxes to the side of the Corn Exchange and would attempt to fit a new rope to the flag pole at the Guildhall when using the cherry picker to remove the lights. It was noted that a speaker on '20's Plenty' had been invited to attend the next Planning Committee meeting.

11. Amendment to Code of Conduct

It was RESOLVED to agree to amend the Town Council Code of Conduct to correct an omission in Table 2: Other Registrable Interests.

12. Budget 2023/24

Members reviewed the draft Council budget and precept for 2023/24, as recommended by the Finance & Asset Management Committee. Members noted the increase in the Tax Base notified by Shropshire Council and information provided by the RFO regarding the impact on the proposed precept. A 9.9% increase in the budget would represent a monthly increase of £1.51 for a Band D property. Members were mindful of the current rate of inflation and the need to set a prudent budget.

It was RESOLVED to approve the budget for 2023/24 incorporating total expenditure of £306,939 and a precept of £249,532, representing an increase of 9.9% on last year's budget.

13. Strategic Plan

Members noted progress with devising a strategic plan for the Council. **It was RESOLVED to set up a working group comprising Councillors David Fenwick, Marcus Themans, Chris Tyler, Duncan White and the Clerk to further develop the plan.**

14. The Guildhall Renovation

- a. Members noted that the application to the Architectural Heritage Fund for a Project Viability Grant had been successful. **It was RESOLVED to accept the grant award of £12,000 from the Architectural Heritage Fund towards a viability study for the Guildhall.** It was noted that this would not cover the total cost of the study and that further funding would be required. If no additional, external funding could be secured, the Council would need to make up the shortfall.
- b. It was noted that a meeting with Greenwood Projects was scheduled for 10th January, when next steps would be considered. Councillors Benbow, Fenwick, O'Dowd, Themans and White and the Clerk would attend the meeting.

The RFO left the meeting.

15. Correspondence with Andy Begley, Shropshire Council

Members noted the response to the Town Council's complaint regarding the performance of Shropshire Council's contractors, in particular, WSP received from Prof. Mark Barrow, Executive Director: Place, who had written on behalf of Andy Begley, Chief Executive. The letter had raised Councillors' concerns and progress had been made with WSP since the letter had been sent.

It was RESOLVED to thank Prof. Barrow for his response and advise that the Council would be monitoring progress with WSP and other contractors.

16. Meeting with WSP regarding the Feasibility Study for the Gaskell Corner

Members noted a verbal report from the meeting with WSP held on 8th December 2022 regarding the feasibility study for the Gaskell corner, which those attending had found very useful. As mentioned by Councillor Thomas in his Shropshire Council report, they had expressed their concerns about the traffic cameras being in place over a Wednesday and were pleased that the brief WSP were working to matched the Highways Briefing Note for the Power Station. The next meeting would be held in January and Councillors would establish the level of confidentiality required by WSP for reporting back.

17. Consultation

Members considered a response to the following consultation:

- a. Shropshire Council Budget Consultation 2023/24 – deadline for response 30.01.23. Following some discussion of the financial situation of Shropshire Council and spending priorities, it was **RESOLVED to make no response to the Shropshire Council Budget Consultation 2023/24.**
- b. West Mercia PCC Budget Proposals – deadline for response 06.01.23. **It was RESOLVED to make no response to the West Mercia PCC Budget Proposals.**

18. Correspondence

Members noted the following items, which had been circulated via email:

- 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. Information from the RSN Rural Market Town Group
- f. Friendly Bus Newsletter December/January
- g. Shropshire Hills AONB Annual Review 2021-22
- h. Police Neighbourhood Matters alerts
- i. News from Shropshire Hills AONB December 2022
- j. Latest news from Shrewsbury & Telford NHS Trust 19.12.22
- k. Shropshire Lieutenancy Christmas 2022 Town and Community Links Newsletter
- l. STAR Housing News December 2022
- m. South Shropshire Climate Action Christmas Newsletter
- n. Zero Carbon Shropshire Green News December 2022
- o. SALC training programme 2023

19. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

Members were invited to suggest items for inclusion on the agenda for the next meeting: the King’s Coronation.

20. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held at 7.00pm on Thursday, 2nd February 2023 at the Guildhall.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm.

Signed
Town Mayor

Date