

# MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the  
**TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**  
 held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock  
 at 7 pm on Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 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, one member of the public in person and two remotely.

## 1. Chairman’s Welcome

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

Since we last met at Full Council it has been a busy time. We have started on our journey to begin pulling together our Strategic Plan Document for the forthcoming years.

Amongst the numerous meetings, including the HR committee, we have also commenced preparation meetings for the upcoming Coronation town celebrations on Sunday, 7th May - “Picnic on the Green”. This is being held during the afternoon on the church green where we are hoping that residents will come together to mark this momentous day with entertainment and a town social gathering. The High Street, Wilmore Street and Barrow Street will be closed for the day so that families can move around safely.

A committee has also had a further meeting with the team from Greenwood Projects, who are making progress with our applications for funding to future-proof our beautiful Guildhall.

This month the Gaskell Management Committee, in a joint project with the Wenlock Olympians, planted an oak tree in the Gaskell, which will be registered as part of the Queen’s Green Canopy project. The Oak was grown from an acorn from the “Coubertin” oak already in the park. Also we have the new addition of some beautiful iron gates at the entrance to the park to replace the old wooden ones. They look spectacular and greatly improve the entrance to our park. My thanks to everyone who made these things happen.

I have attended the AGM of the Windmill Trust, who we are working with to register Windmill Hill as Local Nature Reserve. I have joined the committee to forge a link between the Council and the Trustees. I will seek to formalise this with a permanent position on the committee for a representative of the Council as a way of looking to the future with the upkeep and maintenance of the hill and, hopefully, in the future, a nature reserve status.

## 2. Apologies for Absence

None – all Members were present.

## 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

The local policing team had sent apologies.

- a. Members noted with thanks the written police report provided.  
 Concern was expressed about the continuation of drug taking by the railway line and the lack of action to address this. The matter would be raised with the local policing team at the next Council Surgery.
- b. **It was RESOLVED to retain the same policing priorities for the town for the next six months: theft (outbuildings), drugs and speeding.**

## 7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

**Local Plan:** As all in this chamber are aware, the Planning Inspectors have concluded the Council has met its legal Duty to Cooperate with adjoining authorities such as the Black Country. As many of you will be aware from following the hearing sessions, this was a major source of objection.

One takeaway from this is the Council will be able to proceed to the Stage 2 hearing sessions and continue to work towards the adoption of the Plan. However, the other takeaway is that there is some serious work required which, whilst common in these circumstances, is less than ideal. The Inspectors have highlighted a number of areas before Shropshire Council can confidently set out the timeframe for the Stage 2 sessions. Whilst officers assess the Inspectors requirements in detail and set a timeframe for a response, the Examination will be on 'pause'.

From Shropshire Council's point of view, every effort will be made to meet this work promptly and get to the Stage 2 hearing session on sites as soon as possible. From the Town Council's point of view, the picture has changed since we last looked at reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan, which is on our agenda tonight.

**Traffic Survey:** The survey looking at the Gaskell Arms Junction is continuing and at the request of myself and Councillors, has been expanded to look at rat running through the town. Licence plate recognition cameras were put up this week to examine further where the traffic is coming from, looking in detail at Sheinton Street, King Street and St Mary's Road. The feasibility study is considering all options "from doing nothing, signing and lining; up to signalised option and a bypass", and I am hopeful it won't be long before we get the reports. A further meeting is scheduled for the end of the month.

**Electric Cabling on the High Street:** On 15<sup>th</sup> February I had a meeting with Shropshire Council officers and the National Grid to look at the High Street electricity network as they need new cabling to go down the High Street after the fault which occurred three months ago near to Man's World. The cabling is damaged and a short term fix was made which means the road needs digging up to fix the problem longer term and upgrade the cabling. There will need to be a road closure for up to six weeks, although pedestrian access will be maintained at all times. Any faults we get will result in an unplanned, emergency road closure for up to six weeks so waiting until October to avoid peak tourist season could be a mistake. It's important to note the new cabling will increase the capacity, which is needed. This item is on the agenda so I won't say more now.

**Surgery:** The next Council surgery will be held on Saturday, 11th March, between 10.30 am and 12 noon at the museum. No appointment is necessary. I'll be joined by Town Cllr Marcus Themans and a representative from the Police.

## 8. Minutes

- a. **It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the corrected minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.**
- c. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the HR Committee meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022.**

## 9. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the written and verbal report from the Town Clerk on outstanding matters and action taken since the last Council meeting. It was noted that whilst the Council would be able to claim back VAT on the viability study for the Guildhall, more detail on other elements of the Guildhall project was required to clarify further VAT implications.

## 10. Nominations for Mayor 2023/2024

Councillor Daniel Thomas proposed the nomination of Councillor David Fenwick as Mayor. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Linda West.

**It was unanimously RESOLVED to nominate Councillor David Fenwick as Mayor for the civic year May 2023 to May 2024.**

## 11. Nominations for Deputy Mayor 2023/2024

Councillor Wilfred Grainger proposed the nomination of Councillor Marcus Themans as Deputy Mayor. Councillor Themans had the longest tenure on the Council and demonstrable leadership on the Gaskell Committee, dealing with a range of stakeholders. He played an active part in the Finance Committee and would be a capable support for the Mayor. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Christian Toon.

**It was unanimously RESOLVED to nominate Councillor Marcus Themans as Deputy Mayor for the civic year May 2023 to May 2024.**

## **12. The Guildhall Renovation**

A further meeting had been held with Greenwood Projects and matters were progressing well. A draft application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund had been prepared to seek additional funding towards the viability study. The application needed some refinement but the Council was in a strong position to submit the application once approved. The next meeting was scheduled for April. The viability study was the first step in the process; views would be gathered from stakeholders and the community and the study would look at all options for the renovation and operation of the Guildhall to future proof it. It was planned to carry out the viability study over the summer and the timeline for the project would be circulated for the information of all Councillors.

## **13. Draft Shropshire Local Plan Review 2016 - 2038**

Members noted a report on recent developments with regard to the Examination in Public of the Draft Shropshire Local Plan. The Inspectors had indicated that the Examination would proceed, but had found the development strategy set out in the Local Plan to be unsound and had requested that Shropshire Council review, update and answer the questions raised. Only when this work had been completed, would the Inspectors proceed to Stage 2 of the Examination, site assessments. A timescale for response was awaited from Shropshire Council but there was likely to be a delay of up to a year before moving to Stage 2.

## **14. Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Development Plan**

The Planning & Environment Committee had resolved to recommend to full Council that a Steering Committee be formed to review the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

There had been a degree of criticism of the Committee from some members of the public that this had not been initiated sooner. The Committee believed that now Stage 1 of the Local Plan examination had concluded, it was appropriate to begin to review the Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan period would end in 2026. It was noted that changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) proposed by Government, strengthened the emphasis on Neighbourhood Plans being reviewed every five years to be effective.

It was requested that Shropshire Council be asked to clarify their understanding of the purpose and expectations of a Neighbourhood Plan.

It was noted that the Neighbourhood Plan would need to be supportive of the draft Local Plan and that this would bring challenges during the process of review. However, the proposed changes to the NPPF would give increased weight to some Neighbourhood Plan policies. Several matters would need to be incorporated into the plan, such as consideration of developments of chalets and static homes in the area.

For the time being, it would be necessary to work on the basis of the current version of the Local Plan and to address any changes to the Local Plan in due course, carrying out a further review of the Neighbourhood Plan at a later date, if necessary.

**It was RESOLVED to set up a steering group to begin a review of the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan.**

Members of the Planning & Environment Committee would consider the composition of the steering group at their next meeting and make a recommendation to the April full Council meeting.

## **15. Parking Proposals**

Members received an update on consultation on the parking proposals for Much Wenlock. Amendments had been made to the previous version of the map, which was expected to be available in the next couple of days. Consultation dates had yet to be announced. It was expected that a public drop-in session would be arranged with Shropshire Council officers and the Shropshire Councillor. It was important that the Town Council was also represented.

## **16. High Street Road Closure**

Members noted that a road closure would be necessary in the High Street for up to six weeks for the installation of new cabling for the electricity network. If the necessary work was not carried out, it was likely that the system would fail, leaving High Street shops and residents with no electricity. Emergency work would then need to be carried out with an unplanned road closure.

Members considered the temporary loss of parking in the High Street and how this might be addressed. It was suggested that Shropshire Council be asked to offer free parking in St Mary's car park for up to 40 minutes (to match the free High Street parking) for the duration of the road closure. It was noted that such arrangements would only be possible if the closure were planned. Shropshire Councillor Daniel Thomas had been asked to seek views from the traders and Town Council and report back to Shropshire Council and National Grid. Members concurred that it was essential to plan the work for an early date.

Members were advised that it was possible to apply directly to National Grid for compensation for the disruption, but this was a difficult procedure. It was suggested that Shropshire Council could provide temporary free parking and obtain compensation for the loss of income from the car park, as this provision would benefit traders indirectly. The inconvenience for residents should also be considered.

It was noted that no alternative dates were available for the scheduled 'Made in Shropshire' markets, which would need to be cancelled if a road closure was in place.

**It was RESOLVED to request that the electrical work be undertaken immediately after the first 'Made in Shropshire' market on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and to request that Shropshire Council offer free parking in St Mary's car park for at least 40 minutes, with provision of relevant signage to indicate this.**

The Clerk was asked to formally email Shropshire Councillor Daniel Thomas with the resolution.

Members noted that a road closure on the above dates would mean that the High Street would be closed during the Coronation celebrations in May, however, this would not impact directly on the event planned for the Church green.

### **17. Bourton Road Speed Monitoring**

Members noted an update on speed monitoring and enforcement on Bourton Road. The West Mercia Police Road Safety team had identified a location on the public highway which could be used by a motorcycle enforcement officer. The site had been risk assessed and it was hoped to have the location operational as a Community Concern site sometime in March. Speed monitoring would be undertaken regularly at this site as well as on Farley Road, Stretton Road and Bridgnorth Road and drivers exceeding the speed limit would be prosecuted.

Councillor Toon had shared this information with residents of Bourton Road who had thanked the Council for persevering and welcomed the positive news.

### **18. 20's Plenty**

- a. Members considered a recommendation from the Planning & Environment Committee that the Town Council resolve to support the '20's Plenty' campaign for Much Wenlock and Shropshire.

**It was RESOLVED to support the '20's Plenty' campaign for Much Wenlock and Shropshire.**

- b. **It was RESOLVED to call on Shropshire Council to implement a 20mph speed limit on town centre roads in Much Wenlock.**

- c. Members considered the above two resolutions sufficient with regard to the '20's Plenty' campaign.

### **19. CCTV**

Members considered information concerning the possibility of upgrading the town's CCTV system. A proposal and quotation had been provided for an upgrade and extension of the Council's CCTV system, which gave an indication of requirements and costs. It was noted that further quotations would need to be obtained. However, there was no funding available from the Police & Crime Commissioner for the financial year 2023/24 and there was no Council budget for CCTV for the coming financial year.

Members queried the value for money of such an extensive system and thought that scaled back provision might be more appropriate. CCTV could act as a deterrent to crime.

It was agreed that Councillor Toon should review the specification to hand and seek other potential funding sources.

### **20. Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III**

Members noted progress with arrangements for marking the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III in Much Wenlock on Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The working group had met twice so far. Road closures had been arranged for the High Street, Wilmore Street and Barrow Street from 10 am to 8 pm. A picnic on the green was proposed, in which all members of the community could participate. Some entertainment had already been offered as well as storytelling, background music and a choir. The Church was supportive and the WI had offered to provide refreshments.

### **21. Consultation**

Members considered a response to the following consultation:

Shropshire Council consultation on the draft Shropshire Destination Management Plan 2023 – 2025 – deadline for response 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

Members felt that the document focused specifically on formal attractions, not the enjoyment of casual visits to look around a town. The Guildhall should be added to the list of attractions. In his capacity as Shropshire Councillor, Councillor Thomas advised that the document was intended to set out what tourism should look like in Shropshire in general.

**It was RESOLVED to respond that the Town Council was supportive of the priorities outlined in the draft Shropshire Destination Management Plan and to request that Shropshire Council add in the Guildhall and consider the general ambience of towns, rather than just specific tourist attractions.**

**22. 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. Police Neighbourhood Matters alerts
- g. Healthwatch Shropshire Press Release on Local Patient Experience report
- h. Notification of Cost of Living Crisis in Shropshire Q&A Session on 14<sup>th</sup> February
- i. VCSA Newsletter, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023
- j. Details of ‘Food for Thought’ presentation: How to drugs get into Broseley (and similar small towns) and how do we stop them? on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023
- k. Neighbourhood Watch newsletter ‘Our News’ for February 2023
- l. Details of South Shropshire Youth Network Conference on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

**23. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting**

Members were invited to suggest items for inclusion on the agenda for the next meeting:

- Coronation celebrations
- Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

**24. Date of next meeting**

Members noted that the next meeting would be held at 7.00pm on Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2023 at the Guildhall.

**Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960**

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

**25. 2 Burgage Way**

Members noted an update on the sale of 2 Burgage Way.

**26. Correspondence**

Members considered further correspondence received from a member of the public.

**It was RESOLVED that the Council’s stance remained unchanged.**

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

Signed ..... Town Mayor      Date .....