

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
at 7 pm on Thursday, 6th July 2023

Present: Councillors Will Benbow, Susan Crooke-Williams, Wilfred Grainger, Marcus Themans (in the chair), Daniel Thomas, Linda West, Duncan White

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, PCSO Mal Goddard and PC Emma Strangwood, eight members of the public in person and two remotely plus Cllr David Fenwick.

1. Mayor's Welcome

In the absence of the Mayor, Councillor Marcus Themans, Deputy Mayor, welcomed everyone to the meeting. On behalf of the Council, he expressed sorrow at the recent death of Robert Toft, a former Town Councillor, and passed on the Council's sincere condolences to Robert's family.

Councillor Themans remarked on the terrible flood event which the town had experienced the previous month as a result of an extraordinary and extremely localised storm. This had shown a lot of weaknesses in the town's drainage system, some of which not been seen before. Councillor Themans was pleased to report that Shropshire Council was addressing the issues and he looked forward to ongoing discussions.

Other notable events in the town during the last month included a 'Made in Shropshire' Fair and the Wenlock Olympics, both of which Councillors had been involved in. The Much Wenlock Open Gardens event the previous weekend had also been a great success. The Mayor and Councillor Crooke-Williams had attended a SALC area committee meeting on behalf of the Council.

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor David Fenwick – holiday, John O'Dowd – unwell, Councillor Christian Toon – work, Councillor Chris Tyler – late arrival.

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. A member of the public stated that he knew preparation of a traffic management scheme for the Gaskell corner was in progress. He looked forward to seeing the report but urged an experimental period to ensure that the system recommended would work before introducing any permanent changes.
- b. A member of the public who lived in Sheinton Street, at the bottom of the town bowl, expressed his concerns about flooding. He had already discussed these with the Shropshire Council representatives attending the meeting. He mentioned the failure to maintain the eco-kerbs and drains and noted that a drain in Sheinton Street had been removed nine months ago and not been replaced. A promise had been made to rectify this within four weeks of the recent flood but now, into week four, there had been no action. He stated that because the drains were not effective, splash damage was affecting Listed buildings in the street, which could result in legal challenge from residents.
The resident referenced the failure to improve the drainage system in the town, the duty on providers to improve and expand drainage systems and the need to bring those systems up to modern standards. A report on flooding and the resident's thoughts on how to improve the situation was distributed to Members at the end of the meeting.
- c. The Chair of the Much Wenlock Flood Action Group reported that the National Flood Forum and Flood Action Group had triggered a S19 complaint against Shropshire Council over their duty of care following flooding. The evidence had been presented to Shropshire Council and a response was expected within the specified period. He praised Shropshire Council's Drainage and Flood Risk Manager but felt that the Highways department and others made promises with regard to flooding mitigation which were not kept.

In positive news, a good relationship had been established with the CEO of Severn Trent Water. Much Wenlock was to be the first town to receive a new automatic sewage screen which would allow water through but would prevent anything else entering the river. Work on this project would start within three months. Thanks were expressed to the CEO of Severn Trent and members of the Flood Group.

6. Policing

The Deputy Mayor welcomed PCSO Mal Goddard and PC Emma Strangwood to the meeting. PC Strangwood had just joined the local policing team from Ludlow, having been with West Mercia Police for around 15 years in total. She was aware of local issues and had worked with PCSO Goddard previously. A new PCSO was also expected to join the team within the next couple of weeks.

Members noted the written and verbal report provided and thanked PCSO Goddard for the regular reports. The officers left the meeting.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

“Flooding: my sympathies go out to the people of Much Wenlock who were flooded this time with the exceptional rainfall we had last month. I came out with a shovel to help with any blocked drains and saw Bourton Road like a river. I will praise the excellent work of the Shropshire Council street scene cleaning teams, who cleaned up the town the next day, and the drainage cleaning teams who worked both the next day and the Sunday after preparing Much Wenlock for the next thunderstorms we had from about 8am to 8pm. I was there to support the work and was very impressed with the officers’ work ethic. My thanks go out to all the people of Much Wenlock who helped with traffic marshalling and supporting neighbours.

Shropshire Council’s Drainage and Flood Risk Manager, John Bellis, is coming to Much Wenlock to look further at flooding and the culverts this month. And of course, I am delighted to see Andrew Wilde, Head of Highways and Richard Marshall, Portfolio holder, here tonight working with us. They will take questions from Town Councillors.

Vape Pen Motion: at the Shropshire Council meeting today, I proposed a motion to call on the Government to ban disposable vape pens. This is a type of electronic cigarette, which lasts for around 600 "puffs" and contains valuable materials such as lithium batteries and copper, as well as plastic. I have seen them discarded on walks around our town and the lithium and copper is essential for our green transition. Similarly, they are likely to cause a next health epidemic in young people. I am delighted to say the motion gained cross party support and a letter will be going to Government shortly.

Meet the Leader: the Leader of Shropshire Council, Councillor Lezley Picton, will be at the Corn Exchange on Thursday 13th July from 10 am until midday. Councillor Picton is coming to Wenlock for a drop-in session to answer questions from the public about the wide range of work Shropshire Council undertakes as well as to understand issues specific to Much Wenlock, something she will be well aware of from my meetings with her. Slots will be available on a first come, first served basis and everyone is welcome.

Advice Surgery: my next advice surgery will be held on this Saturday 8th July, between 10:30 am until 12 noon at the museum. No appointment is necessary and I’ll be joined by Town Councillor Linda West and a representative from the police.”

8. Review of Flood Event in Much Wenlock on 12th June 2023

- a. The Deputy Mayor welcomed to the meeting Shropshire Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Regulatory Services, and Mr Andy Wilde, Head of Highways at Shropshire Council. He noted it was important not to blame, but to find solutions to the ongoing problems in Much Wenlock. There was clearly an issue with funding and he urged Shropshire Council to work with the Town Council, the Flood Forum and the community to see where more money could be obtained to get things done.
- b. Councillor Marshall thanked the Town Council for the invitation to attend the meeting and responded to points raised as follows:
 - He would speak to the relevant officer at Shropshire Council the following day regarding replacement of the drain in Sheinton Street.
 - He fully understood the frustrations with flooding and the drainage system and Shropshire Council was doing as much as they could at the moment. The recent flood response and the way the team had mobilised had been impressive.
 - The financial pressures had been widely reported and sometimes there was no choice but to push back flood alleviation measures due to other priorities, such as social care.
 - A significant amount had been invested in pothole repair and Shropshire Council was working hard behind the scenes to open up the opportunity to purchase from smaller, local operators.

Mr Wilde expressed thanks for the invitation to attend the meeting and made the following points:

- Significant changes had been made to the Highways service over the past two years, including improved service, reduced unit cost, driving down defects and addressing the root causes of defects, often water and lack of drainage. The Council had started self-delivering many services. Previously contractors had not always addressed the underlying causes of problems and had not captured data to help resolve them.
- Funding was a challenge but the Council had been successful in securing some external funding from the Challenge Fund for work in Much Wenlock and other market towns affected by flooding.
- The Council was working with partner agencies to gain a comprehensive picture of the causes and effects of flooding. The recent event in Much Wenlock had been a 1 in 100 year flood event. These were becoming more common and many factors could have an impact; all data needed to be captured.
- Shropshire Council was negotiating with landowners to explore ways of slowing the flow and mitigating flooding on private land.
- Design work for flood alleviation measures was in progress and Shropshire Council was working with other organisations. He was confident that the resources were in place to move forward positively, although support from the community would be essential to reach the best outcome.
- The reality was that prevention and mitigation would help but the problems were acute and any drainage system in the world would sometimes be overwhelmed.
- The recent flood response had been very effective and appreciated by the community.

Town Councillors raised the following questions:

Q Shropshire Council's Drainage and Flood Risk Manager was very highly regarded but under-resourced, just one person. Councillors were also concerned about the relationship with WSP as often, after allocation of work to WSP, there was no action.

A The WSP contract had just been re-let for four years. Some staff who had previously been externalised had been brought back into Shropshire Council's team. The team was now structured differently: two members of staff had been added to the flooding team and another was being recruited. In addition, the team had been equipped with jetting and camera equipment and could provide better information and intelligence from the field.

No specific concerns about the performance of WSP had been flagged with Mr Wilde before and projects he had been involved with had met their timescales, although he was prepared to look into the concerns of Councillors.

Q MW was a rapid response catchment area and in a unique situation that required unique management. Various strands were being pulled together but there was no overall strategy or policy document specifying relevant management arrangements. This meant it was not possible to see where the gaps were and also meant that it was not possible to make the case for funding as strongly as might be done.

Several reports had been produced on flooding in the town, including the Mouchel report. Had Shropshire Council ever reviewed the actions recommended in this report?

A Yes, the Mouchel report had prompted some of the attenuation, however, it might be that some work that had been recommended had not been followed through.

Q Was it correct that the Government was releasing funds to address flooding?

A Yes, funding pots were available but Shropshire Council had to be selective and put together a case. The funding offered was often for specific scenarios. The Council did submit applications but was not always successful.

Q What funding did Shropshire Council have and how would it be shared?

A The Council had been successful in securing funding of £3.2m for five towns in Shropshire. The funding would be allocated when designs were in place; some flooding problems were easier to solve than others. One of the changes that had been made in the WSP contract was to ensure that WSP was more proactive in seeking and securing external funding for Shropshire Council.

Q The Town Council had often been dissatisfied with the poor service and performance of WSP.

A In some areas they were very effective and in others not so effective. A good outcome often started with a good instruction. There was now a new arrangement in place and new expectations of WSP.

Q A S19 report had been mentioned - was this something that was being actioned?

A It was believed so, but Andy Wilde would follow this up.

- Q Was it worth providing examples of WSP's poor performance?
- A One of the questions to be asked was 'how smart have we been in commissioning' and how specific have our instructions been? The flood and drainage team had been increased now and there would be more support with issuing instructions.
- A There was a lot to be said for having a single point of contact for flooding issues, to prevent people being passed from pillar to post.
- Q The current flood manager was excellent, but he needed support.
- A Members of the team on the ground were now much better equipped to provide information and support.
- Q It was necessary to understand what a good solution to the flooding looked like, to aim high and try to obtain funding for the best option, rather working within the available budget but not aiming for the best solution.
- A Yes, a 'best solution' would inform applications for funding. It would be helpful to talk through ideas with the Town Council's Planning Committee and the Flood Group to work out what the best scheme would look like. That wouldn't mean that everything was achievable, but it would help with funding applications.

Councillors and Shropshire Council representatives agreed that a dialogue and partnership should be maintained and to work towards a comprehensive solution to the problems.

The Shropshire Council representatives were thanked for attending and left the meeting.

Councillor Linda West left the meeting to deal with an emergency.

9. Minutes

- a. **It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 8th June 2023.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 2nd May 2023.**

10. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the written and verbal report from the Town Clerk.

11. The Guildhall Project

A meeting had been held with Greenwood Projects the previous week. Councillors noted that the consultant was performing very well. In addition to the £12,000 AHF Fund, the Council's application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund had been successful and the Council had been offered £25,250 towards the Guildhall Project. This was very welcome and also gave encouragement that it would be possible to access further funding for the next stage of project. **It was RESOLVED to accept the grant offer of £25,250 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.**

12. 'Climate Champion' for the Town Council

Members were asked to review the role of Climate Champion, currently held by Councillor Christian Toon, and confirm the appointment of a Councillor to the position. No firm decision could be taken as Councillor Toon was absent and his view was not known. Councillor Toon was to be asked whether he wished to continue in the role. Responsibility for environmental matters would continue to come under the Planning & Environment Committee meeting.

13. CCTV

At the recent SALC meeting it had been reported that funding for CCTV might still be available through the Police and Crime Commissioner's office. The Clerk was asked to check this and report back as it had been stated previously that there was no such funding available from the PCC for 2023/24.

14. Shropshire Council Place Plan

- a. Councillors considered information about the review of the Much Wenlock Place Plan by Shropshire Council. Shropshire Council were trying to rationalise their approach to addressing issues raised to help prioritise and move projects forward. It was noted that the Place Plan was for projects arising from development, not maintenance issues. Town and Parish Councils were invited to submit achievable projects for consideration.
- b. Members reviewed projects already included in the Place Plan and considered projects for submission by the Town Council, including those recommended by the Planning & Environment Committee.

It was RESOLVED to submit the following projects to Shropshire Council for inclusion in the Much Wenlock Place Plan:

- Strategic flood provision (details to be confirmed with Shropshire Council’s Drainage & Flood Risk Manager) (priority 1)
- Gaskell corner traffic management scheme (priority 1)
- Introduction of a 40mph buffer zone near to the primary school on the A458 to include an upgrade to the crossing (priority 1)
- Road safety improvements on the A458 near to The Edge Adventure Centre, such as moving the 30mph speed limit to the other side of Newtown Farm, and proposals from the responsible highways engineer of the introduction of red tarmac and road markings (priority 2)
- Introduction of a 40mph buffer zone on the Stretton Road (priority 2)
- Improvements to the junction of Southfield Road with the A458, Victoria Road (priority 2)
- 20mph zones by the schools in the town (priority 2)
- Improving the heavily trafficked footpath between the town centre and Gaskell Ground/school (priority 2)

Members noted that the Rights of Way officer at Shropshire Council had advised that the kissing gate at the entrance to the footpath could be replaced with a more accessible gate and that around 10m of stone could be laid on the ground. Councillors welcomed this news and Councillor Dan Thomas agreed to follow this up.

It was noted that the crossing by the primary school was already in Shropshire Council’s list of works as well as a 30mph speed limit at Callaughtons Ash.

The Clerk was asked to circulate the above to all Councillors in case there were any additional, last minute proposals.

15. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre

Members expressed concern about the condition of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. The leisure centre was sorely in need of maintenance and repairs with problems such as broken lockers, showers that didn’t work and changing rooms that didn’t lock as well as ageing paintwork. Members thought the poor standards and service arose from poor leadership. Councillor Dan Thomas had also received a complaint about the condition of the leisure centre from Northgate Swimming Club. It was understood that much of the maintenance was the responsibility of William Brookes School and it was hoped that the new business manager at the school would be able to improve matters.

It was RESOLVED to speak to the business manager at William Brookes School about the condition of the leisure centre and to send a letter outlining the Council’s concerns to Councillor Robert Macey, the portfolio holder at Shropshire Council.

16. Future Fit / Hospitals Transformation Programme for Shropshire

Members considered a motion to support the retention of fully functioning accident and emergency departments at both Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and Princess Royal Hospital, Telford.

Councillor Croke-Williams expressed the view that there were not enough specialists in Shropshire to run effective accident and emergency departments at both hospitals. It was not possible to recruit sufficient specialists as they were drawn to the larger hospitals elsewhere.

It was RESOLVED to fully support the retention of Accident and Emergency departments at both Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and Princess Royal Hospital, Telford.

A recorded vote was requested: Councillors William Benbow, Wilfred Grainger, Marcus Themans, Daniel Thomas and Duncan White supported the motion, Councillor Croke-Williams voted against.

17. Consultation

Members considered a response to the following consultation:

- a. Statement of Licensing Policy 2024 – 2029. Deadline for response: 27th August 2023.

Councillors noted comments from a member of the public regarding caravan site licensing. Street market licensing and waste licensing should also be considered. Councillors were asked to review the draft policy and submit comments to the Clerk by 14th August.

- b. Town and Parish Council survey from the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia. Deadline for response: 14th August 2023. **It was RESOLVED that Councillor Duncan White should respond on behalf of Council.**

18. Correspondence

Members noted the following items, which had been emailed to Members:

- 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. VCSA newsletters
- h. News from Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust
- i. Advertisement for Carbon Literacy Course from Save our Shropshire

19. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

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

For the next Planning Committee meeting, the Clerk was asked to include on the agenda possible projects to improve biodiversity and a review of what had already been done.

20. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 7th September 2023 at 7.00pm at the Guildhall, Much Wenlock.

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.

21. Consultants for Neighbourhood Plan Review

Members considered proposals submitted by consultants to support a review of the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan.

It was RESOLVED that discussions should be held with a shortlist of three consultants following which Councillors would select a consultant to support the review of the Neighbourhood Plan. Councillors David Fenwick, William Benbow, Wilfred Grainger and Chris Tyler would be involved in this process (subject to availability) and would report back to Council.

22. Correspondence

Councillors were advised of recent correspondence.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

Signed Mayor Date