

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

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

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

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, PCSO Mal Goddard

1. Mayor’s Welcome

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

“This month our thanks go to Councillor Themans, and Councillor Thomas and his father for the work they put into cutting back the hedge adjacent to the playground on the Gaskell Field. Despite some criticism, it’s an important annual job that has to be done.

Still on the Gaskell Field, we now have a new bench outside the Cricket Club, expertly created and carved by Joffrey Watson in a very modern style, in memory of Steve Perks, a long-standing member of the Cricket Club.

It’s always good to welcome new businesses to the town and this month we have a new bread seller on Saturdays in the Guildhall Market operating under the name of Flour Power. I have bought some of the excellent merchandise from him and will continue to do so, so many thanks and good luck to our very own Councillor Duncan White. With his French connections, of course, he is now ‘un Boulanger’.

The Civic Service in church was held on September 24th and, despite a minor mishap with the mayoral chain, it went down well. It was expertly conducted by the Reverend Matthew as ever, and thanks go to Councillors who were able to attend.

The same afternoon the Mayoress and myself attended the High Sheriff’s Tea Party in the Cosford Aerospace Museum, held with the theme of Shropshire Heroes.

Preparations are well under way for the annual Christmas Lights switch on, to be held on Thursday 23rd November, and Councillors are invited to don yellow vests to marshal the event if you are available.

The final ‘Made in Shropshire’ market of the year will be held in the town on Saturday, 28th October.

Behind the scenes, work is progressing for a Neighbourhood Plan review group to be chaired by Alison Eardley, the consultant we have chosen to provide expert advice, and meetings are already arranged with other consultants to take advice on how to proceed with a housing needs survey in the town.

Regarding the Local Plan, Stage 2 of the Examination in Public is nearing commencement and arrangements for a meeting of Councillors and associates are about to be made.

Work on the Guildhall renovation project proceeds and, with the grants already obtained, we have been able to choose two separate firms of consultants. Lathams will conduct a viability study into the soundness of the building and what can be done to accommodate all the uses suggested. They are making an appointment for the building to be fully measured and surveyed. Focus, who are Audience Development consultants, will assist us in organising resident surveys and consultations. We await confirmation of dates for first meetings with these consultants.”

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Christian Toon – work, Chris Tyler – family commitment, Linda West – 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.

Councillor Dan Thomas declared an interest in agenda item 24 due to a family connection.

4. Dispensations

None requested.

5. Public Session

There had been no requests to speak.

6. Policing

Members noted the written and verbal report provided by PCSO Mal Goddard. PCSO was questioned about recent agricultural thefts. He reported that there had been a number of arrests, with trials awaited and it was thought that the same gang was probably linked to the recent crimes. The stolen tractors had been recovered but no evidence had been found. It was noted that tracker devices were sometimes fitted on large machinery and that thieves often parked the vehicles for a few days to see whether they were recovered before moving them on.

PCSO Goddard was thanked for attending and left the meeting.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

“Traffic and Parking Drop-In Session: Shropshire Council’s Traffic Engineer, Nick Newton, and I held a successful drop-in session on Saturday, 23rd of September, in the town square. We received valuable feedback from members of the public and we will be editing the map off the back of this. The big focus is improving road safety at junctions and supporting traffic enforcement with double yellow lines.

Works on the Gaskell Arms Junction: works to replace the street furniture, which is the bollards and pedestrian safety ironwork, on the Gaskell Arms Junction is to take place in early November. This will include two road closures 8pm until 5am on 8th, 9th and 10th. I am sure all Councillors will welcome these safety improvements which will also make the entrance to the town look excellent in time for the Town Council’s Christmas lights display there.

Boundary Update: the Electoral Boundary Commission have updated their proposals for the County Councillors areas and I am pleased to say this Town Council’s submissions were directly referenced in keeping our neighbouring parish of Easthope, Shipton and Stanton Long as part of the Much Wenlock Division. Harley Parish is being proposed to join the Wenlock Division, and Broseley Wood is set to return to Broseley, with Jackfield joining Much Wenlock too. The next stage will look at the Much Wenlock Town Council boundary, but we are expecting no changes as yet.

Potential of Development in Benthall: at last month’s Barrow Parish Council meeting, local residents, parish councillors, and I questioned Boningale Homes regarding their speculative plans to build homes on land off Floyer Lane in Benthall. Please note that this is not a formal planning application, simply “testing the water”. I can see several concerns with these plans, not just access from Floyer Lane but also from Spout Lane. All other matters apart, this is outside any development boundary, as well as being almost entirely within the Broseley Conservation Area. The development could be up to 100 homes, doubling the size of Benthall, which is noteworthy to this Council based on traffic, school places and affordable housing, which could be 35%.

Surgery: my next advice surgery will be held on Saturday, 14th October, between 10.30am and 12 noon at the museum. No appointment is necessary. I’ll be joined by Town Councillor John O’Dowd and a representative from the Police. The subsequent surgery will be on 11th November.”

Members welcomed the news that the Gaskell pedestrian refuge was to be repaired and thanked Councillor Thomas for his work on this.

Councillor Thomas was questioned on the High Street flooding mitigation and drainage improvements. There seemed to be an assumption that proposed flooding attenuation on Bourton Road would alleviate flooding in the High Street. Councillor Thomas replied that evidence from WSP indicated that the attenuation would help flooding in the High Street but work for the High Street had also been considered, which, it was hoped, would be included in the implementation plans.

With regard to the Boundary Commission proposals, Councillor Thomas explained that these were largely influenced by population. The return of Broseley Wood to the Broseley division, based on community identity, made that division too big. As Jackfield was adjacent to Linley Brook, which was within the Much Wenlock division, it was proposed to move Jackfield into the Much Wenlock division.

8. Minutes

- a. **It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 7th September 2023.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 1st August 2023.**
- c. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 25th July 2023.**

9. Town Clerk’s Report

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

10. Date of 2024 Mayor Making

Members noted that the Priory Hall would be in use for the election of the Police & Crime Commissioner on 2nd May 2024, the date scheduled for next year's Mayor Making. **It was RESOLVED to move the date of Mayor Making to 9th May and the Annual Town Council Meeting to 16th May 2024.**

11. Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

- a. Members noted that the external audit had been concluded. In the opinion of the auditor the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR was in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters had come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements had not been met. **Councillors were pleased with the positive outcome of the AGAR and RESOLVED to express their thanks to the RFO for her diligent work.**
- b. Members noted that the relevant public notice of the conclusion of the audit had been displayed.

12. The Guildhall Project

Members noted a verbal update on the Guildhall Project. The consultant Lathams had been appointed to produce the Project Viability Appraisal for the Guildhall and Focus Consultants had been appointed as Audience Development Consultant for the project. The surveyor from Lathams would be visiting the Guildhall the following day to carry out a condition survey and meetings were being arranged with the consultants.

13. Neighbourhood Plan Review

- a. Members received an update on the Neighbourhood Plan review. Alison Eardley was currently carrying out a desk-based review of the Plan for the Council and dates had been provided for an online meeting with members of the Council's Planning & Environment Committee. Members noted that the Council had been awarded Technical Support by Locality for the review of the Neighbourhood Plan including Design Codes and Housing Needs Assessment support. The consultancy AECOM would be engaging in this work with the Council. An initial, online meeting with the consultants had been arranged for the afternoon of Monday, 9th October.
- b. It was envisaged that the steering group would comprise a maximum of nine members and be Council led. Sub-groups would deal with specific issues, such as flooding, design or traffic. A broad range of views and expertise would be sought from different members of the community, in order to capture varying opinions. Those Associates already working with the Council on the Shropshire Council Local Plan Review would be given the opportunity to contribute where they had specific interests.
- c. Once the desk-based study was completed, Members would decide on next steps.

14. Gaskell Recreation Ground

Members received an update from the Gaskell Recreation Ground Management Committee. A new bench had been provided by the Cricket Club in memory of Steve Perks. With the permission of the family, the plaque from the previous memorial bench had been moved onto one of the picnic benches overlooking the playground.

The AGM of the Gaskell Charity was coming up in December and, as Trustees, Councillors should make every effort to attend. The Management Committee had lost some members and new members would be selected at the AGM.

A recent tree report for the Gaskell Ground had highlighted no actionable issues.

There was a new user on the field - Wenlock Old Students football team – which had previously played on the field in around 2012/13. Goal posts should be moved after games and this message was being reiterated to teams.

The registration of Linden Lodge had been completed to protect this asset.

15. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre

Members considered the response from Shropshire Councillor Robert Macey, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Digital, to the Town Council's letter regarding concerns about Much Wenlock Leisure Centre. They were dissatisfied with the response, which did not seem to address the need for routine maintenance and cleaning, such as locks on changing room doors and storage lockers. It was noted that swimmers now took their bags to the poolside as so many lockers were broken. Members felt that the community was being let down.

It was RESOLVED to write a response to Councillor Robert Macey, with a copy to the Business Manager at the school, stressing that the measures requested were relatively cheap maintenance issues which would significantly improve the experience for users, and asking what were the larger, more expensive items referenced in the letter.

Members noted the engagement of Peter Neale, the new Business Manager at the school, and **RESOLVED to request a meeting between Peter Neale and Councillors Benbow, Fenwick and Grainger.**

It was RESOLVED to write to Wenlock Olympians to notify them of the Council's actions and ask for their views on the Leisure Centre.

16. SALC AGM

- a. Members noted that the SALC AGM would be held at 6pm on 3rd November 2023 at the Wroxeter Hotel.
- b. **It was RESOLVED that Councillors Crooke-Williams, Fenwick and Thomas would attend.**

17. D-Day Commemoration – 6th June 2024

Members received correspondence regarding the D-Day 2024 commemoration on Thursday, 6th June 2024.

It was RESOLVED that the Council should be involved in the commemoration.

It was RESOLVED to set up a working group to take this project forward comprising Councillors Crooke-Williams, Fenwick, Themans, Thomas and White.

Members would consider allocating a budget to the event as part of the budget setting process.

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. VCSA newsletters
- g. News from Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.
- h. September 2023 Green News from Zero Carbon Shropshire
- i. Invitation to STAR Housing AGM on 12th October 2023
- j. Police Neighbourhood Matters
- k. STAR Housing Bulletin
- l. Zero Carbon Shropshire Green News October 2023
- m. Shropshire Lieutenancy Newsletter September 2023
- n. Friendly Bus newsletter October 2023

19. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

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

20. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 9th November 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. Office IT Equipment

Members considered a report on office computers and file storage.

It was RESOLVED to delegate authority to a working group comprising Councillors Fenwick and Grainger and administrative staff to identify the best options for office IT and file storage and to purchase the agreed equipment within the available budget.

22. Public Toilets

Members considered the report from the Clerk and recommendations from the Finance & Asset Management Committee regarding the public toilets at St Mary's Lane and discussed requirements and options.

Members wished to investigate a card payment option to accompany the cash payment facility as well as consider the implications of making use of the toilets free.

It was RESOLVED to accept the recommendation from the Finance & Asset Management Committee to progress refurbishment of both units at St Mary's toilets as per the quote from Healthmatic.

The Clerk was asked to clarify the lead time for the work and time necessary to carry out the alterations. A formal meeting with the Healthmatic technician should be requested to discuss the work.

