

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

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

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

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, one member of the public remotely.

1. Mayor's Welcome

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

“Good evening Councillors. Another busy month in Wenlock culminating in last week's Christmas Fayre which was, as ever, a great success. I spoke to a number of traders in the town who said they had done well with good sales. The weather was perfect, if cold, but it added to the Christmas feeling of the event.

The week before we held the Christmas Lights switch-on event, which was said by some to have been the best ever. A few niggles were expressed but we learn by experience.

Members of the Town Council's Planning Committee attended a site visit at Farley Quarry with members of Shropshire Council's Southern Planning Committee on 14th November, prior to the full meeting held that afternoon at the Shirehall. Much Wenlock represented itself very well, objecting to the application by the site operator to run a waste recycling plant on the site. Our objections are based on disturbance to neighbours, a suggested 100 lorry movements a day, AONB issues, and the proposal being contrary to our Neighbourhood Plan. Councillor Benbow spoke very well with his objections on behalf of the Council and Councillor Thomas' excellent statement on traffic matters was read out. A local resident also spoke with his objections. As Councillors will know, the committee found in our favour and the application was refused. We now await the next move from the applicants.

I am pleased to say that the Cricket Club held a very successful fund raising event at the Priory Hall, which will certainly bolster their financial position. I am told they need a new mowing machine.

Elsewhere we learn that the Cavalier Centre in Farley has been awarded a prestigious King's Award for Voluntary Service in 2023, so many congratulations to them.

Councillors Benbow, Crooke-Williams and myself braved the elements for 3 hours to hold a community consultation event in the Square one Saturday morning to ask residents what they would like to see incorporated into plans for the Guildhall refurbishment. More on that later in the agenda.

I was asked to speak to about 150 schoolchildren in year 7 at William Brookes School and hand out certificates to 30 of them for participating in the 'Get A Word in Edgeways' competition. I also attended the Remembrance event at the Cemetery with children from the Primary School who laid crosses on the graves of fallen soldiers from our town in the two World Wars.

Excellent news from Shropshire Council who, after pressure from our County Councillor, have scheduled drainage work to be carried out in the new year along Stretton Road, which they say will divert flood water into the attenuation pond and Shylte Brook, thereby reducing flooding onto the High Street. Again, more on that in the County Councillor's report.

In conclusion, I looked at the Christmas trees in the church today and the council's one in particular. Apart from myself and Councillor Tyler, who I have known for a long time, it was not obvious who any of the others were in their baby photos. So many thanks to Lorna and Trudi for putting that together.

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Tyler – family engagement, Councillor Grainger – work commitment.

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 were no members of the public present.

6. Policing

- a. Members noted with thanks the written report provided by PCSO Mal Goddard. Police officers were otherwise engaged and had sent their apologies.
- b. Members noted correspondence from the West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner's office regarding the Town & Parish Council Survey.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

Shropshire Council's Financial Position: the leader of Shropshire Council, Councillor Lezley Picton, has been on Radio Shropshire this week setting out the Council's financial position. The administration has now made £41m of the £51m savings, and a further £6m is expected by the end of this financial year. We expect to be £4m short of our savings target, which reserves will cover. Next year, we face another gap of £24m, which will need to be met; I would be surprised if anyone outside the Council has noticed what will be £47m saved, but the £24m will likely change this.

Drainage work on Stretton Road, Much Wenlock to help reduce flooding: highways drainage work is to be carried out on Stretton Road, Much Wenlock from Monday 22nd January to mid-April 2024. The work will include the construction of a new highway drainage system which will divert water into the Shylte attenuation basin, constructed by Shropshire Council in 2017. The connection of the highway drainage system to this basin will intercept this water and reduce flooding around Havelock Crescent and High Street during intense rainfall events. To ensure the works are delivered as efficiently and safely as possible, a 24-hour road closure will be in place, with a signed diversion route. Access will be maintained for properties within the closure.

I'm delighted to see these works being scheduled to go ahead after pressing for them to be prioritised ever since I was elected. They will be an essential part of flood resilience in that part of Much Wenlock and protect many residents and their homes. The closure of the B4371 Stretton Road isn't ideal, but the long-term benefits will be worth the relatively short inconvenience.

Farley Quarry: most people in Wenlock will be pleased to learn that the Farley Quarry application for "the recycling of construction, demolition and excavation waste" was turned down at Shropshire Council's Planning Committee. The refusal was based on its impact on:

- the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan
- the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- its proximity to Much Wenlock and local dwellings

My statement focused on highway matters, which was also considered. Special mention to Town Councillor William Benbow and local residents for their efforts in speaking at the committee.

Dog Fouling and Stray Dogs: Public Space Protection Order (PSPO): I'd also like to remind everyone that Shropshire Council could soon be granted further powers to issue fines for dog fouling if plans to introduce a countywide 'public spaces protection order' (PSPO) are agreed. There have been some concerned comments passed my way by dog owners so I would urge all residents to take part in the consultation which ends on 21st December 2023.

Christmas Fayre: as the Mayor said, it was good to see so many visitors to the town at Much Wenlock's Christmas Fayre. Among them were several Shropshire Councillors, including the leader, Cllr Lezley Picton. As it was nationally 'small business Saturday', they couldn't have picked a better day to showcase our town, which is full of small businesses, with others visiting that day. My thanks to the Fayre committee, who organised a brilliant event.

Surgery: my next advice surgery will be held on Saturday, 13th January, between 10.30 a.m. and 12 noon at Much Wenlock Museum. No appointment is necessary. I'll be joined by Town Mayor, Councillor Fenwick, and a representative from the Police.

Finally, I'd like to wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year.

8. Minutes

- a. It was **RESOLVED** to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 9th November 2023.
- b. It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 3rd October 2023.

- c. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 24th October 2023.**
- d. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the HR Committee meeting held on 24th October 2023.**

9. Town Clerk's Report

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

10. Completion of ILCA qualification

Members noted that Lorna Dexter, Admin. Assistant, had successfully completed the Society of Local Council Clerks 'Introduction to Local Council Administration' course. Councillors expressed their congratulations.

11. The Guildhall Project

Councillors noted an update on the Guildhall project. A meeting had been held with Greenwood, Lathams and Focus consultants the previous day. A survey had been carried out to gather views from residents and visitors and Councillors were thanked for helping with a stall in the Square on 18th November. The overall response to the survey had not been as good as hoped but the results were still meaningful and showed that the community valued the building. The viability report was nearing completion and included four possible design/reconfiguration options, to incorporate flexibility in the use of the building and improve accessibility and energy efficiency.

There were currently two pieces of work underway: audience development, incorporating consultation on attitudes towards the building and its place in the town, and the larger viability study. It was noted that the consultant from Focus was also contacting stakeholders directly to seek their views. There would be further consultation and community engagement in due course.

12. St Mary's Public Toilets

Members noted that work had commenced on the reconfiguration of the facilities at St Mary's car park. However, there had been a delay with delivery of the new doors and the work would not be completed until just before Christmas.

Members noted that Councillor Toon had drafted a letter seeking sponsorship to upgrade the Queen Street toilets, as agreed by the Finance & Asset Management Committee. The draft would be passed to the Clerk for issue. The Clerk advised that work to upgrade the electrical installation had already been commissioned.

13. Neighbourhood Plan Review

Members received an update on the Neighbourhood Plan review. A meeting had been arranged with the consultant, Alison Eardley, at 5.30pm on 4th January 2024 for members of the Planning & Asset Management Committee. Councillors were currently considering the consultant's desk-based review and the Design Codes report prepared by AECOM.

14. Windmill Hill - Local Nature Reserve Designation

- a. Members noted that consultation had been completed with Natural England on the designation of Windmill Hill as a Local Nature Reserve and that Natural England had issued a letter of support with regard to the designation.
- b. **It was RESOLVED to make the necessary arrangements for the formal declaration of the reserve early in 2024.** It was noted that Councillors White, West and Grainger were members of the Windmill Hill committee.
- c. Members noted that a celebratory event could be held in the late spring/early summer to promote the nature reserve.

15. Bowling Club 'Matchroom' – Possible Allocation of Monies from Community Levy Allocation

- a. Members considered information about the history and ownership of the former railway station building, now used as the 'matchroom' at the Bowling Club.
- b. Members considered options for supporting the refurbishment of the matchroom at the Bowling Club, including spending a portion of the Community Levy monies held by the Town Council, already allocated for use on the Gaskell Recreation Ground.

It was RESOLVED to provide funds of £2,000 from the S106 reserve towards the refurbishment of the matchroom at the Bowling Club on completion of satisfactory work and provision of relevant invoices.

16. National Grid Work in High Street

- a. Members noted that the essential National Grid electrical work in the High Street had been scheduled for 15th January to 7th February 2024 and that this would involve a road closure for the duration of the work.
- b. Assurances had been received from National Grid that if power to properties was lost during the work, it would be restored within four hours. Network Plus on behalf of National Grid had booked a stall under the Corn Exchange for a drop-in session on Friday, 14th December between 10am and 12 noon. The event would be publicised in advance.

17. Stretton Road Drainage Work

- a. Members noted that the capital drainage works connecting the B4371 Stretton Road to the attenuation pond would be undertaken between 22nd January and 12th April 2024 and would involve a 24 hour road closure.
- b. There were no issues arising from the planned work and road closure at this stage.

18. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre

Members received a report from the meeting held with the business manager at William Brookes School on 5th December regarding the poor condition of the Leisure Centre. Those Councillors attending had also met the pool manager. It was clear that the Leisure Centre management knew what was required and would be trying to remedy all matters of concern during the coming year. However, there might be further changes in the light of Shropshire Council's financial position.

19. 'Visit Shropshire'

Councillors considered Town Council membership of 'Visit Shropshire'. This tourism promotion organisation used to be part of Shropshire Council but was now separate entity. Visit Shropshire was approaching town councils to help promote the towns, offering wider publicity in magazines, etc. It was noted that the organisation had access to extensive data about visitor numbers, travel and shopping habits.

Councillors were keen to encourage engagement from traders in the town. It was understood that there were moves to set up a new traders group for Much Wenlock.

It was RESOLVED to take out silver membership of Visit Shropshire for the next financial year at a cost of £1,500.

20. Correspondence

Members noted the following items, which they had received by email between meetings:

- a. SALC information bulletins and other information.
The Mayor advised that he had recently attended the SALC area committee meeting where town and parish Councils had expressed dissatisfaction with Shropshire Council's Planning Enforcement. A joint letter to Shropshire Council from the local Councils had been proposed.
- 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. Listing of events at The Edge Arts Centre
- i. Details of a webinar on local level food strategies
- j. Notification from the Marches Energy Agency of webinars in December
- k. Invitation to Church Stretton Neighbourhood Plan drop-in consultation on 5th and 9th December
- l. Notification of the Community Carol Sing at Holy Trinity Church at 5pm on 8th December
- m. Friendly Bus Newsletter December 2023/January 2024
- n. South Shropshire Climate Action Newsletter December 2023
- o. Zero Carbon Shropshire Green News December 2023
- p. Neighbourhood Matters December edition of 'Our News'
- q. Neighbourhood Planning Newsletter December 2023 from Locality.

21. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

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

22. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 11th January 2024 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.**

23. 10 High Street

Members received an update on progress with letting 10 High Street to a commercial tenant.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm

Signed Mayor Date