

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
at 7 pm on Thursday, 9th November 2023

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

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, Revd Matthew Stafford, eight further members of the public.

1. Mayor's Welcome

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

As ever a lot has happened in our town, with Councillors busily engaged in matters, much of which, as we know, goes unnoticed.

I attended the AGM of the Wenlock Festival and listened with interest to the proceedings when keen new residents were invited to join the committee. Their finances are sound and in due course the unkempt area in the corner of the church green will be transformed into a garden of contemplation with funds partly provided by the Festival Committee.

We experienced yet another rainstorm and subsequent flooding on 20th October. Sadly, I was not able to help with clearing as I was at a most interesting presentation in Shrewsbury hosted by the Bridgnorth company Good2Great, with guest speakers on the subject of re-using and re-purposing our High Streets. This is a very pertinent subject in these difficult times which are dominated by internet-based retailers.

The same evening I attended a Flood Group meeting here in this chamber, chaired by Arthur Hill, where experiences of the recent flood were aired by members of the public so the Flood Action Group could acquire more knowledge of problem areas needing closer attention.

Councillor Tyler and I met with two representatives of the consultancy AECOM to discuss design issues for the Neighbourhood Plan. This involved what seemed like a five mile walk around the town showing them the varied nature of the town's architecture, open spaces and some of the potential sites for development.

I am pleased to report that the recently re-opened Edge Arts Centre at William Brookes School is going from strength to strength, under the guidance of the new school Manager, Peter Neale, and assisted by Paul Hanafin and Councillor West. Attendances for the Monday night films are numbered in the seventies. In November, and in addition to Monday cinema showings, the Edge will begin special screenings on Thursday nights, which will include live streaming from the National Theatre. We are told to look out for posters around the town advertising all the screenings.

I can report that plans are now finalised for the Christmas Lights switch-on event for Thursday, 23rd November. Can as many Councillors as possible turn out please and assist with traffic and possible crowd control. It will be an evening for all the family.

On Saturday morning there will be a short service of Remembrance outside the Corn Exchange at 11.00 am and all are welcome to attend. This Sunday morning is the traditional drum-head church service outside our church and Councillors are encouraged to participate by meeting in the Guildhall passage at 10.35am on Sunday for an 10.50am start. Wear poppies please.

And finally, not forgetting of course, many congratulations to Dan and Sara on the birth of their new baby Penelope Rose.

2. Apologies for Absence

None – all Councillors 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

Several members of the public expressed views on matters on the agenda:

- a. A member of the public stated that despite the High Street being flooded on 20th October, the gullies had not been cleared before the subsequent flooding on 4th November.

Councillors shared the concerns of the resident and commented that there seemed to be some turmoil within Shropshire Council. The gully clearer had been in town but had not dealt with all drains needing attention. Sometimes parked cars prevented access. Two drains were blocked at the Smithfield Road junction and one outside 31 High Street.

The Chair of the Flood Group advised that changes in responsibilities and personnel at Shropshire Council had caused some of the confusion. Some drains had been cleared of debris but they also needed flushing through. The contractor did not always give the work sufficient time and attention.

- b. A resident of the High Street reported that when it had started to rain heavily the previous weekend, he had gone to the Gaskell corner to check the drains. Every drain had been covered with leaves and very quickly there was a foot of water coming down Bourton Road. As the drains in the middle of the road could not take the water, it went down the gully instead. The Aco drains in Bridgnorth Road were of no use. If volunteers had not unblocked the drains, the water would have flooded the High Street again.

Councillors replied that this reinforced the point that attenuation ponds in Bourton Road were of the utmost priority and advised that the Council was continuing to press Shropshire Council. Volunteers should not need to be clearing drains and moving cars. The Council was also pushing the Flood Officer at Shropshire Council on powers to stop cars in the event of a flood, but there had been no progress with this. Enquiries had been made of Shropshire Council about powers to close the road but there had been no response. Shropshire Councillor Dan Thomas was asked to follow up these matters with the relevant Shropshire Council officers.

- c. A resident of Sheinton Street drew attention to the areas of work of local Councils: to represent the local community, deliver services to meet local needs and strive to improve the quality of life and community wellbeing.

He referenced the increase in housing in Much Wenlock, which had risen by around 750 dwellings since the Edwardian period, with further housing planned. However, the drainage and sewerage systems had not been improved to meet the additional demand and when the drains were unable to cope with heavy rain, sewage flooded out of the system and into the roads and gardens. This had been reported to Severn Trent and Shropshire Council but continued to occur during flood events.

The Water Industry Act 1991 stated that every sewerage undertaker has a duty to improve and extend the system of public sewers to assure that the area is and continues to be drained, but this had not happened in over 100 years in Much Wenlock. Severn Trent guidelines stated that in the event of a sewerage escape, hard surfaces should be disinfected and gardens should be quarantined for an appropriate period. These guidelines had not been followed in Much Wenlock. The speaker had contacted Philip Dunne MP about the drainage problems and asked how to raise the matter with the Secretary of State but had received no satisfactory response so far. The Town Council was asked to support the community by making a formal complaint to OFWAT and the Secretary of State.

Two questions were posed: What was the Town Council doing to ameliorate the sewage contamination issue? What was Philip Dunne's plan to deal with the drainage problems in Much Wenlock?

Councillors replied that they were doing their best to help solve the flooding issues but there was no quick fix. The Town Council could only direct problems towards the authority responsible, whether that be Severn Trent or the Environment Agency. A meeting had been held recently with those organisations and Shropshire Council and a further meeting would take place in January. Progress was being made. In addition, concerns had been raised with the Head of Water Quality at Severn Trent but there had been no response so far.

Councillors would give further consideration to the issues raised by the member of the public.

- d. A member of the public urged refurbishment of the public toilets at Queen Street and the installation of new sanitary ware and hand driers. These facilities were well used and functional but not in good order.

Councillors replied that they were aware of the condition of the Queen Street toilets but that the current year's budget was committed to reconfiguring the toilets at St Mary's car park. Measures for Queen Street would be considered for next year's budget.

6. Policing

Members noted with thanks the written report provided by PCSO Mal Goddard. Police officers were otherwise engaged and had sent apologies.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

“Flooding: Heavy rainfall on Friday, 20th October had a very negative impact on different parts of the town, with some homes flooded, particularly those on the High Street, which are likely now the worst affected in the town after the works last year on Hunters Gate seem to be working well. The town then again experienced heavy rainfall on Saturday, 4th November. It was down to able volunteers unblocking drains that saved neighbours, and I'd like to thank them all publicly.

The drain on Oakfield Park reached capacity, and my attempts with Town Councillors West and Benbow to unblock it were in vain; after some persistent chasing by myself and the national Flood Forum group, the work was completed.

On Friday, 13th October, I attended a meeting of the Town Council's Strategic Flood Group, chaired by our MP Philip Dunne. Shropshire Council's Deputy Leader, Councillor Ian Nellins, and Town Councillors were present, as were local residents with a background in hydrology, along with responsible officers from Shropshire Council, the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water. The meeting was part of the Town Council pressing for funding after solutions and data had been captured by our local Flood Group, residents and WSP.

Solutions to flooding issues on the High Street have been identified as upgrading drains and putting in mini attenuation ponds on land around Bourton Road; it's hoped WSP will continue this work quickly. For Victoria Road we hope to put in new drains to drop the water straight into the attenuation pond, before the end of the financial year.

Works on the Gaskell Arms Junction: the work continues at the Gaskell Corner with two more nights of the road closure. Some good progress has been made so far and I'm looking forward to everything being completed. The new white lines will help with safety, as will the replaced bollards. It won't be long until the Town Council's eagerly awaited Christmas Lights Switch-On, a committee I have enjoyed being on, and that part of town will look excellent this year.

Dog Fouling and Stray Dogs: Public Space Protection Order (PSPO): Shropshire Council could soon be granted powers to issue fines for dog fouling if plans to introduce a countywide 'public spaces protection order' (PSPO) are agreed.

At their meeting on 18th October, the Council's Cabinet approved a consultation into the introduction of a PSPO for the geographic area of Shropshire. The PSPO would enable Shropshire Council to issue fixed penalty notices of up to £100 to those who allow their dogs to foul pavements and public spaces.

Under the PSPO, dogs would also be excluded from play and sports areas and would be required to wear a lead on the public highway. County Council Officers would also have the power to ask for a dog to be put on a lead where they aren't under the control of their owner or are acting aggressively.

I will be publicising the link for people to get involved via email and social media: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/dog-fouling-and-stray-dogs-public-space-protection-order-pspo/>

Surgery: my next advice surgery will be held this Saturday, 11th November, between 10.30 am and 12 noon at the museum. No appointment is necessary. I'll be joined by Town Councillor Willian Benbow and a representative from the Police. There will be a break as we head up to the Corn Exchange for the short service for Armistice. The subsequent surgery will be on 13th January 2024.

Baby Penny: lastly, on a personal note, I'd like to thank everyone for the good wishes and cards after the birth of my daughter, Penelope Rose Thomas. I'm pleased to say that both the baby and mother are doing well. I am technically on paternity leave as a Shropshire Councillor. However, I will continue to work and support my wife and our young family.”

Q: Councillor Themans requested road sweeping in the town to clear the fallen leaves that would be washed into the drains again in the event of heavy rain, including the whole of Bourton Bank, and would immediately block the Gaskell corner.

8. Minutes

- a. It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 5th October 2023.
- b. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 5th September 2023.
- c. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 26th September 2023.
- d. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the HR Committee meeting held on 25th July 2023.

9. Town Clerk's Report

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

In relation to the scheduled meeting with the Business Manager at William Brookes School regarding the Leisure Centre, Councillor Toon advised that he had been appointed as a Governor at the school and asked to be kept informed.

10. The Guildhall Project

Councillors noted an update on the Guildhall project. Consultation was under way to gather views from the community on their experiences and expectations of the role of the Guildhall. Focus Consultants would be holding a pop-up event in the Square on 18th November and leaflets were being distributed to promote the consultation. There was a chance to win £50 in a prize draw on completion of the survey. Those at the meeting were urged to complete the survey and encourage others to do so. Information gathered would help the Council to progress to the next stage of the project to upgrade the building and extend its use.

11. Neighbourhood Plan Review

- a. Members received an update on the Neighbourhood Plan review. The consultant, Alison Eardley, had prepared a desk-based study, which highlighted areas where changes were required and recommendations for next steps.
- b. Members had not had sufficient time to review the desk-based study due to its recent receipt.
- c. **It was RESOLVED to arrange a meeting between members of the Planning & Environment Committee and Alison Eardley in early January.**

12. Recent Flood Event

Members had nothing further to add to comments made earlier in the meeting regarding flooding caused by Storm Babet on 20th October and the subsequent heavy rainfall on 4th November.

13. Traffic Management

Members received a paper prepared by Councillor Tyler on the availability of funds from the cancellation of the HS2 project for alternative highways projects and considered whether the Council should issue a one question survey to residents to gauge support for a bypass for Much Wenlock. With sufficient support, the Council might request that this project be submitted for consideration for a share of the HS2 funds.

It was noted that the Planning and Traffic survey carried out in Spring 2022 had indicated support for a bypass. However, Members queried whether the question had been expressed appropriately in the previous survey and stressed the need to provide sufficient explanation of the possible implications of a bypass such as environmental, economic and developmental impact, in order to generate a meaningful response from members of the public. As well as a bypass, other viable options should also be presented to the community.

Members noted that WSP had now completed a traffic management study for the Gaskell corner and would likely be carrying out consultation on proposals for highways measures in the new year. Considerable traffic modelling had been undertaken to inform this report, including future projections.

It was understood that if funding were to be available, Shropshire Council was more likely to support a bypass for Craven Arms than for Much Wenlock.

Councillors were concerned about raising expectations by proposing traffic management options that it was not within the gift of the Town Council to offer. It was noted that even if a bypass were to find support and funding, it would be at least 15 years before any construction would begin.

The Council had already begun a review of the Neighbourhood Plan and, in due course, residents would be invited to contribute their views through a consultation process. This would be an appropriate mechanism for seeking the views of residents in relation to traffic management in the town.

It was RESOLVED to leave the matter in abeyance but to ask the Council's Transport Working Group to arrange for modelling of the effects a bypass would have on the town.

14. Allocation of Monies from Community Levy Allocation

Members considered spending a portion of the Community Levy monies held by the Town Council, and already allocated by the Town Council for use on the Gaskell Recreation Ground, for refurbishment of the floor of the 'matchroom' at the Bowling Club. This building had been the original ticket office at the railway station in Much Wenlock.

Members noted the criteria for the allocation of community infrastructure funding, which was intended to address the demands that development placed on an area.

It was RESOLVED to seek further information to clarify the ownership of the ‘matchroom’ building at the Bowling Club and its terms of use, prior to making a decision on funding.

Once further information was to hand, the matter would be considered again by the full Council

15. Boundary Review

Members noted the final recommendations for future electoral arrangements for Shropshire from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. It was noted that the Town Council’s submission to the Boundary Commission had been included in the report.

16. Remembrance Events 2023

Members received information about Remembrance events in the town this year.

17. Christmas Lights Switch-on

Arrangements for the Christmas Lights Switch-on event on Thursday, 23rd November 2023 had been finalised. Councillors were asked to make themselves available to help steward the event. The event would begin at 5.30pm with the lights switch-on at 6.30pm.

18. 2023 Much Wenlock Christmas Tree and Nativity Crib Festival

It was RESOLVED to participate in the Holy Trinity Church Christmas Tree and Nativity Crib Festival from 2nd to 10th December 2023 along similar lines to the previous year.

19. Christmas Office Closure

It was RESOLVED that the Council office would be closed for the Christmas period between Thursday, 21st December 2023 and Monday, 1st January 2024, reopening Tuesday, 2nd January 2024.

20. ‘Made in Shropshire’ Markets 2024

It was RESOLVED to approve the following dates for ‘Made in Shropshire’ markets for 2024: Saturdays, 20th April, 15th June, 17th August and 26th October.

Members noted that feedback from shopkeepers had been positive and that Councillor Duncan White was also exploring the possibility of attracting a farmers’ market to the town.

21. SALC AGM

Members received a report from Councillor Susan Croke-Williams, who had attended the SALC AGM, held on 3rd November 2023. The meeting had been held via Zoom due to lack of support for a face-to-face meeting. 52 people had joined the meeting. Darren Edwards, a motivational speaker, had spoken about the accident that had left him tetraplegic and what he had done to combat adversity. There had been long service presentations to Clerks and the usual AGM business. Issues raised by those attending had included the problems of extremely long diversions for roadworks. The Mayor thanked Councillor Croke-Williams for attending the meeting on behalf of the Council.

22. STAR Housing AGM

Members received a report from Councillor Linda West, who had attended the STAR Housing AGM, held on 12th October 2023 at the Wroxeter Hotel. There had been a speaker from the Oswestry Food Bank and an update on activities, but no mention of Much Wenlock. The annual accounts were awaited, pending approval at the board meeting. There had been no question-and-answer session but a visit was awaited from STAR Housing to review local issues in Much Wenlock. Councillor West was thanked for attending the meeting.

23. HSBC Pop-up Bank

Members considered correspondence from HSBC Bank regarding further pop-up banking sessions in Much Wenlock. A venue was needed for the sessions as the library was too small. Councillor Croke-Williams was checking whether the church could accommodate the pop-up sessions.

24. Consultation

Members considered a response to the following Shropshire Council consultation:

- a. Dog Fouling and Stray Dogs: Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), from 26th October to 21st December 2023
Members noted that enforcement would be key to the success of the order.

It was RESOLVED to support the introduction of the new Dog Fouling and Stray Dogs: Public Space Protection Order.

