

# MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the  
**TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**  
 held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock  
 at 7 pm on Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**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.

**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:

This month the Neighbourhood Plan review enablement committee have held two meetings, with Councillors and community members taking part, ably chaired by Dan Thomas, our County Councillor. There is a Plan presentation drop-in event being held this Saturday in the Priory Hall from 10 am until 4.00 pm when people in the town are invited to examine the proposals on display and offer their comments. Councillors and members of the Planning Committee are cordially invited to make an appearance and assist during the day if they can.

The Guildhall is opening for its summer season on the same Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> March and further information is available on the Council's website.

There is another HSBC pop up banking session in the church tomorrow.

Another date for your diaries is Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> March at 7.00 pm when the Priory Hall is holding its AGM. If you have any questions for the committee, this is your opportunity.

Last Friday afternoon the police Safer Neighbourhood team were on call at the Priory car park to answer questions. I was unable to be there due to a prior commitment, but maybe we will hear from the police how successful that was. Finally, some councillors may be aware that a local resident, at my request, has taken on the task of coordinating work to tidy up the town where needed. The first job he has identified is to replant the flower bed at the rear of the Guildhall. Green fingered Councillors and others are invited to make a start on this worthwhile endeavour tomorrow morning.

## 2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Duncan White – away, Councillor 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.

## 4. Dispensations

None requested.

## 5. Public Session

There had been no requests to speak.

## 6. Policing

- a. Members noted with thanks the written report provided by PCSO Mal Goddard.  
 Councillor Tylor stated that a complaint of racial abuse had been reported to the police a few weeks ago. The police had attended the incident. The individual now wanted to pursue the complaint but no response had been received from the police. The Clerk was asked to press the local policing team for a response.
- b. Councillors reviewed the policing priorities for the parish. They noted it was difficult to compartmentalise the priorities due to the mixed urban and rural nature of the parish. **It was RESOLVED that the revised policing priorities should be theft from dwellings and farms, speeding and drugs.**

## 7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

**Talks with Rail Minister Huw Merriman:** Stuart Anderson MP, the Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for South Shropshire, invited the Rail Minister Huw Merriman MP to Shropshire, so that he could find out more about plans to ensure that the Ironbridge Power Plant redevelopment is well served with strong transport links. Together, alongside Cabinet Member for Highways Councillor Dan Morris and Severn Valley Councillor Claire Wild, we explored options for Revolution Very Light Rail (RVLR) to serve as a passenger line for residents travelling in the area. RVLR is a joint collaboration between Eversholt Rail and Transport Design International. They are working in partnership to bring a first-of-a-kind product to the market that provides a high-quality passenger experience.

I was keen to discuss what impact a Rail Park & Ride would have on Much Wenlock, as vehicles would travel specifically to the site rather than the other travel route they would have used instead. I will update you all as this progresses.

**Flood meeting with Philip Dunne MP:** last week, our MP Philip Dunne chaired a meeting about flooding in Wenlock. Representatives from the Town Council, Much Wenlock's Flood Action Group, the Environment Agency, Shropshire Council and Severn Trent were there. There were frank discussions about the lack of progress in some areas whilst acknowledging the successes that have happened and are planned for this year.

**Swimming Pool:** the Leisure Centre pool contractors have now taken delivery of the new pool filters, and work has started to remove the old ones and fit the new one. This work is scheduled to take approximately a week to complete, and then a further week will be required to get the pool back up and running. Therefore, the pool should be open by the end of the month, which I think all of us would welcome.

**Wenlock Olympian Live Arts:** the much anticipated Wenlock Olympian Live Arts starts this weekend, including Music, Dance and Drama at Holy Trinity Church and William Brookes School. Attendance is free, and people are encouraged to attend. The complete list of events and times is on their website and social media.

**Neighbourhood Plan drop-in:** as everyone in this Council Chamber will know, the review of Much Wenlock's Neighbourhood Plan launches on Saturday. I chaired a meeting of Town Councillors, Representatives from the Civic Society and the Refresh Group, and our external Consultant Alison Eardley, where we planned out the day. Alison was impressive, and I feel confident she can support this Council whilst making the most of the expertise in the town.

**Budget Update:** the financial pressures on councils across the country are immense and are only getting worse, with many struggling to balance their budgets. Demand for many services, particularly social care, continues to soar. This is made harder by rising prices from high levels of inflation over a long period of time. The situation is even more acute for reasons unique to our county:

- 25.7% of Shropshire's population is aged 65 and over. In England, the average is only 18.6%. By 2043, this gap is forecast to grow.
- We have seen a growth in the number of children looked after which has increased by more than 80% since 2020.
- Shropshire is the largest inland county in England and is sparsely populated. We have less than one person per hectare compared to a national average of more than four. Travel and fuel costs make services more expensive to deliver.
- For comparison, Nottingham has a population (c. 330k) similar to Shropshire's (c. 324k). Shropshire is 1,234 sq miles, Nottingham is 29 sq miles. A vastly different service delivery model.

In February's Shropshire Council meeting, we approved a budget that builds on the savings we made last year while exploring less-than-ideal options. These include putting 300 staff members at risk of redundancy, charging for green waste, and selling unrequired council assets.

**6<sup>th</sup> Form Closure:** as a former pupil of William Brookes School and its 6th form, I am saddened to learn that a consultation is in place to formally close its 6th form. This means the existing Year 12 students will be allowed to finish their studies there, but no new students will be admitted in September. This is on the agenda for later and in Councillors Christian Toon and Linda West we have school governors on the council so I won't say much more, other than that I have spoken to the Business Manager at the school and passed over my concerns.

**Surgery Change:** due to an unforeseen circumstance, I need to postpone the Advice Surgery for Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> March. Therefore, my next advice surgery will be Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> April, between 10.30 a.m. and 12 noon at Much Wenlock Museum. No appointment is necessary. I'll be joined by Town Councillor Linda West and a representative from the Police.

Councillors raised the following matters with Councillor Thomas:

Q: How hard would we be hit by Shropshire Council's cuts?

A: Councillor Thomas had reservations about charging for green waste, as this would increase fly tipping in the countryside. Last year Shropshire Council had saved c. £34m but the impact had probably not been noticed outside of that council. Cuts would be felt this time with redundancy of 300 staff expected. This was unlikely to affect those working in highways or planning as Shropshire Council had recently received £136m from central government for highways. However, if a section 114 notice were to be issued due to bankruptcy, Shropshire Council would deliver only statutory services.

Q: When would the green waste charge be introduced and how would this operate?

A: This would probably be in 2025. Arrangements for operation had not been finalised yet. It was noted that similar schemes operated in other areas, such as Cornwall.

Councillor Thomas stated that the measures needed would be very challenging but Shropshire Council should manage with the savings expected. He noted that it had been helpful to have external consultants to address some matters with objectivity and independence.

## 8. Minutes

- a. **It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024.**
- c. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023.**

## 9. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the written and verbal report from the Town Clerk. She explained that a cash payment option had been re-installed in the right hand unit of the toilets at St Mary's car park and an update was awaited from Healthmatic regarding the left-hand unit. The Clerk had attended a webinar on 'Martyn's Law' but did not envisage that this would be applicable to the Town Council's premises.

## 10. Nominations for Mayor 2024/2025

Councillor Wilf Grainger proposed the nomination of Councillor Marcus Themans as Mayor. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Christian Toon.

**It was unanimously RESOLVED to nominate Councillor Marcus Themans as Mayor for the civic year May 2024 to May 2025.**

## 11. Nominations for Deputy Mayor 2024/2025

Councillor Chris Tyler proposed the nomination of Councillor Daniel Thomas as Deputy Mayor. It was noted that Councillor Thomas had been Mayor previously, during Covid. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wilf Grainger.

**It was unanimously RESOLVED to nominate Councillor Daniel Thomas as Deputy Mayor for the civic year May 2024 to May 2025.**

## 12. Annual Town Meeting – 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Members noted that the Annual Town Meeting would be held on Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> April at the Priory Hall.

**It was RESOLVED that the format of the Annual Town Meeting would follow that of previous years and that the meeting would include a report from the Mayor (Councillor Fenwick), a report on Planning and the Neighbourhood Plan (Councillor Benbow), a County Councillor's Report (Councillor Thomas), to include flooding and the Local Plan, and a Gaskell Ground report (Councillor Themans). The police would also be invited to attend and give a report.**

It was noted that 2024 was an Olympic year. Councillor Thomas would liaise with Wenlock Olympians regarding any local plans to mark this.

## 13. The Guildhall Project

Councillors noted an update on the Guildhall project. The Mayor and Clerk had met with a storyteller from Get a Word in Edgeways to discuss a proposal to create an online access trail starting and ending at the Guildhall and including information about the Guildhall and the town. This would be a lasting resource for use by the Guildhall. It was also proposed to hold a storytelling activity day at the Guildhall and to engage with older people at a local residential home and Carers Café. This activity and engagement programme would be funded from the National Lottery grant.

The latest National Lottery Heritage Fund grant payment request had been submitted and Greenwoods were helping with the report required.

## 14. Flower Bed at the Rear of the Guildhall

The Mayor reported that a small group of people had been set up to help improve the appearance of the town. The first project was to tidy up the flower bed at the rear of the Guildhall. Harley Nursery had provided a planting scheme and agreed to provide plants for the bed free of charge in return for a notice and acknowledgement of the donation. The initial work on the flower bed would commence the following day. It was noted that the plants might need to be lifted when work commenced on the Guildhall.

### 15. Neighbourhood Plan Review

- a. Councillor Thomas had chaired the meeting held to plan the launch event. The Council's consultant, Alison Eardley, had wide experience of creating and reviewing neighbourhood plans and Councillors were confident that she could support the Council whilst making the most of the expertise in the town. Preparations for the launch event on 9<sup>th</sup> March were in hand. There would be a mix of posters and rolling Powerpoint presentations to cover the objectives of the current Neighbourhood Plan and to stimulate discussion and gather ideas. The key questions the event would cover were:
- Do you agree with the existing vision and objectives?
  - Is there anything missing that we should add?
  - Have any new challenges arisen that we need to include here?
- For people who were not able to attend, there would be plenty of opportunities to contribute their views and join the steering group or one of the working groups.
- b. Next steps would be considered following the launch event.

### 16. Shropshire Local Plan Review

Members received an update on the Shropshire Local Plan Review. A letter from Shropshire Council responding to the Inspectors questions had been posted on the Local Plan Examination website. There was likely to be a further 6-week consultation, forming part of Stage 1 of the Examination, in relation to key documents and the Inspectors concerns about sufficient space for the 1500 homes and 30 hectares of employment land being provided for Black Country. It now seemed unlikely that the Local Plan would be in place until at least 2025.

### 17. Windmill Hill – Local Nature Reserve Designation

- a. **It was RESOLVED to formally declare Windmill Hill a Local Nature Reserve and to sign the declaration:**  
In pursuance of Sections 19 and 21 of the above-mentioned Act, and all other powers enabling them in that behalf, Much Wenlock Town Council hereby declares that the land containing 2.83 hectares or thereabouts situated in the Parish of Much Wenlock in the County of Shropshire and shown edged red on the attached plan is the subject of a Nature Reserve Agreement entered into with the Council under Section 21 of the above-mentioned Act, AND in pursuance of Section 19(2) of the above-mentioned Act and all other powers aforesaid the Town Council hereby further declares that the said land is being managed as a Nature Reserve.
- b. **It was RESOLVED to issue the public notice of the formal declaration of Windmill Hill as a Local Nature Reserve.**
- c. **It was RESOLVED to liaise with the Windmill Trust to make arrangements for a celebratory event in the summer.**

### 18. D-Day Commemoration – 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Members received a report from the D-Day working group regarding arrangements to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day in June 2024. The working group had met and appointed Councillor Crooke-Williams as Chairperson. It was proposed to hold a short, half hour service in the grounds of the Priory on 6<sup>th</sup> June, starting at 8.45pm, with a beacon to be lit at 9.15pm. It was hoped that the church bells could be rung at 6.30pm, but this was dependent on the date scheduled for the planned restoration of the bells. The working group would be contacting local cafés in the hope that they would offer light meals before the event. A commemorative flag and 'lamp light of peace' would be purchased to mark the event and a further meeting of the working group was planned.

### 19. Bowling Club Matchroom Floor

Members noted that the refurbishment of the Bowling Club matchroom floor had been completed, satisfactory invoices had been provided and the Council's agreed financial contribution had been transferred. A letter of thanks had been received from the Bowling Club.

### 20. William Brookes School Sixth Form

Members received correspondence and a consultation document concerning the proposed closure of William Brookes School sixth form at the end of the 2024/25 academic year. Councillor Toon, as a school governor, explained that it was no longer economical to run the Sixth Form and that it would not meet the current criteria for operation of a sixth form. The closure was disappointing but necessary.

Councillors raised concerns about the opportunity for local pupils wishing to go on to Sixth Form study and the lack of public transport. What would the options be?

It was noted that the serious behavioural issues in the school had impacted on the sixth form and on the school in general. This year many children due to go up to secondary school from Much Wenlock and Broseley had applied to Bridgnorth schools, rather than William Brookes, but the Bridgnorth schools had been oversubscribed.

Members noted that the sixth forms in both Bridgnorth schools had closed and that this was indicative of financial problems and a trend towards pupils moving to sixth form colleges for their 16-18 education. It was not known whether any alternative sixth form provision would be made for local residents and Councillors were disappointed for those living in Much Wenlock and nearby.

Members discussed the £4.4m contribution allocated to William Brookes School from the Ironbridge Power Station development, which would be paid when building work began. The closure of the sixth form could be seen as a premature decision with more pupils expected from this development and from the additional housing planned for Much Wenlock. It was noted that the loss of sixth form pupils would free up space within the school. Members queried whether it might be possible to use some of the Power Station funding contribution to support the leisure centre at the school, which could be under threat due to Shropshire Council cuts.

Councillor Toon offered to raise the matter of the financial contribution from the Power Station with school governors.

**It was RESOLVED to send a letter to William Brookes School expressing dismay and disappointment at the proposed closure of the sixth form. Councillors expected to see a plan outlining how it was intended to address transport and educational opportunity for pupils aged 16-18 from Much Wenlock and Broseley. Councillors also wished to query whether the school had considered that the intake of pupils was likely to increase in the coming years with the housing developments planned for the area.**

## 21. Correspondence

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

- 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. Listing of events at The Edge Arts Centre
- i. Notification of Priory Hall AGM on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024.
- j. Information from Homes Plus about rent increases 2024/25.
- k. South Shropshire Climate Action Newsletters January and February 2024
- l. Lezley's Leader's Update 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024
- m. Friendly Transport Service March 2024 newsletter
- n. March edition of Our News, the newsletter for Neighbourhood Watch supporters
- o. Shropshire Spring/Easter Holiday Activities & Food Programme
- p. Information on support available for May 2024 Police & Crime Commissioner elections.
- q. Zero Carbon Shropshire Green News
- r. Invitation to Affordable Warmth & Energy Efficiency Retrofit Event at Shirehall on Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2-4pm

## 22. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

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

## 23. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 7.00pm at the Guildhall, Much Wenlock.

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## **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.**

## 24. 10 High Street

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

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

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