

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
 held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
 at 7 pm on Thursday, 11th April 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, PCSO Mal Goddard, Revd M Stafford, two members of the public remotely.

1. Mayor's Welcome

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

“Good evening councillors, welcome to our April Town Council Meeting and indeed my last as Mayor, and can I take this opportunity to thank you for your support over the last year.

The highlight of this month's activities in the town has undoubtedly been the Neighbourhood Plan community event held in the Priory Hall, which was well attended and a success in my opinion. Lots of views, opinions and general advice notes were offered which will be most useful to the enabling committee. A further meeting of the committee has been held and jobs have been allocated to the members.

As Mayor, I attended an Olympian Committee Live Arts event at William Brookes School on Mother's Day. I enjoyed watching the youngsters performing for a couple of hours and I then handed out medals. The children's general confidence is built up by their performances and I can tell you that the youngest performer there was only four years old.

I was invited by the Mayor of Church Stretton to join him with other Mayors and Chairmen of Councils in South Shropshire this week to join him for supper at his house and discuss matters relating to our relationship with the County Council. Mayors there were from Ludlow, Church Stretton, Clun, Bishops Castle and Shifnal. Views and concerns were expressed with the overriding emphasis being on shortage of funds and reduction in services.

Although I wasn't there, I hear that a fund-raising day held at Ludlow racecourse was a success and a healthy sum was raised for the Cavalier Centre just outside the town.

Councillors may have noticed the hard work put in by volunteers, including myself, to the flower beds at the rear of the Guildhall and the planting has now been completed. It's looking good and will be more so when the plants have grown over the summer. Other projects are planned.

I attended the Priory Hall AGM and was pleased to hear that their finances are in sound order and the maintenance of the building is in good hands. Without doubt there is a strong and very capable committee running the hall. I entered the meeting as an observer and left as a committee member.

And finally, Councillors will be aware that our Annual Town Meeting is to be held in the Priory Hall at 7.00pm on Thursday, 18th April. Would Councillors please be there for 6.30 pm to help with the setting up of tables and chairs.”

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Duncan White – 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

Members noted with thanks the written report provided by PCSO Mal Goddard. In addition, PCSO Goddard advised that a white Toyota HiLux had been seen in town offering left over tarmac; the vehicle had no insurance.

Councillors raised the following concerns:

- Vehicles were speeding down the Bullring to the Priory with horns blaring.
PCSO Goddard replied that the registration numbers of certain vehicles had been provided to the police and these were being monitored.
- Youths were sheltering under the old railway bridge where they had already set fire to two trees. Shropshire Council had been asked to fence off the area but had done nothing. Could the police raise this with Shropshire Council or was it better that the police knew where the youths were gathering?
PCSO Goddard replied that it was helpful to know where youngsters were congregating. If they were moved on, they might disappear from view.

PCSO Goddard was thanked for attending and left the meeting.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

“Transport Update: dare I say it, but this last month appears to have been a good one for the various projects that this Council and I have been pursuing for our town. I will start with the road crossing between Oakfield Park and the MW Primary School, which we hope to deliver before September 2024. We have pushed for this work since being elected in 2021, and I'm delighted to see it come to fruition.

Following a productive meeting held with Shropshire Council Officers and their external consultants, WSP, on the 5th of April, it was determined that the draft of the Feasibility Study would go forward for public consultation together with the Transport Routing Order (TRO) parking (double yellow lines map) proposals. The TRO plans include vital parking improvements on Sheinton Street, Queen Street and Bridge Road, which has been frustratingly slow. This is the first time two such important projects have been combined by Shropshire Council, and it will shorten the time and inconvenience of holding two separate consultations. With respect to the Feasibility Study, WSP confirmed that the pedestrian crossing of Smithfield Road, while not signal-controlled, would be improved.

Neighbourhood Plan Review: the Town Council's review of the Neighbourhood Plan continues at a pace; a Steering Group has been set up to review the existing plan. I've been asked to Chair the Steering Group and lead a working group looking at Objective Two and Five: The Economy & Jobs and Community well-being. I will be part of the Transport/Traffic and Flooding Objectives in my capacity as Unitary Councillor.

The town council's website will provide more information on how members of the public can get involved in helping review the plan and there will be a separate column in the Wenlock Herald.

Charging for Green Waste / Recycling Centres – Consultation Now Live: until 20 May, Shropshire Council is asking for your views on a proposed annual subscription fee of £52 for the collection of garden waste. That's the equivalent of £1 a week. 80% of councils in England already charge for collecting garden waste, with many having been doing so for several years. The average annual fee across the country is £55 a year.

They're also asking how we can reduce the cost of running our five household recycling centres. Questions in the consultation, which is online, include: would you be willing to pay more than £52 a year for a garden waste collection if the additional money was used to keep all the centres open? Should the opening times be reduced? Should a permit scheme be introduced?

We must make £62m of savings in 2024/25 - mainly due to growing demand for social care – and we need to make some difficult decisions. I've already made my comments known about reducing hours and having a booking system for the recycling centres (which I think is better than closing) and expressed concerns about fly tipping in rural areas when having to charge for green waste.

Roads: the recent announcement by the Government of £136.4m extra to spend over seven years is welcome news. Shropshire Cllrs and MPs will have a say in how that money is spent, and I envisage a process whereby the Town and Parish Councils can feed into that process.

We are finally coming out of the main pothole season, but since May 2021, the number of outstanding potholes in our county has declined; it was at 8,000 in May 2021, and it's now at 5,000, and we aim to get this number towards half over the spring and summer.

Stretton Road: the vitally important Stretton Road drainage upgrade will take place during a full closure on 22nd July – 15th September 2024. The work will include the construction of a new highway drainage system that will divert water into the Shylte attenuation basin, which was constructed by Shropshire Council in 2017. The connection of the highway drainage system to this basin will ensure these highway water flows are reduced and alleviate flooding around the town, especially Havelock Crescent, during intense rainfall events. Postponing has allowed the Council to explore diversion routes and allows for more daylight and a longer working day.

Pool Open: our wonderful swimming pool is back open with its term timetable in full flow, which you can find with a quick Google search or online here: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/shropshire-leisure-time/much-wenlock-leisure-centre/>

Surgery May: my next Advice Surgery is on Saturday, 13th April, with Cllr Linda West, and the subsequent one is on Saturday, May 11th, between 10:30 a.m. and 12 noon at Much Wenlock Museum. No appointment is necessary. Town Cllr Marcus Themans, our new mayor, and a representative from the Police will join me.”

Councillor Thomas responded to queries regarding consultation on recycling green waste and the closure of recycling centres as follows:

He was not aware that closure of the library or leisure centre was under consideration.

There would be no special recycling scheme for the elderly.

Changes to all five recycling centres in Shropshire were under consideration, although it was unlikely that Shrewsbury or Oswestry would close. If a booking scheme were introduced the centres could be staffed according to demand.

The consultation would be on the agenda for the Town Council meeting on 16th May but Councillors could also respond individually.

8. Minutes

- a. It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 7th March 2024.
- b. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 6th February 2024.
- c. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 23rd January 2024.

9. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the written and verbal report from the Town Clerk. The Clerk was asked to confirm that membership of Visit Shropshire had been paid for the 2024/25 financial year and to ensure that Much Wenlock was promoted on the Visit Shropshire website.

Members offered ideas for items for the Town Council piece for the next Wenlock Herald.

10. Annual Town Meeting – 18th April 2024

Members noted that the Annual Town Meeting would be held on Thursday, 18th April at 7.00pm at the Priory Hall.

The Mayor explained that he would be calling on different Councillors to speak where relevant during his presentation.

11. The Guildhall Project

Councillors noted an update on the Guildhall project. ‘Get a Word in Edgeways’ would be providing a story telling activity at the Guildhall on Saturday, 20th April as part of the audience engagement work funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The audio story trail for the Guildhall had been completed by Get a Word in Edgeways and this was now available on the Town Council website. A printed version of the trail with a QR code link to the website was also being prepared and printed. In addition, members of Get a Word in Edgeways had attended a ‘Carer Connect’ event to gather stories from a different group of people about the Guildhall.

The Clerk was asked to arrange for a counter on the story trail page on the website to monitor visits.

The Clerk was asked to send a copy of the Guildhall feasibility study completed by Lathams to all Councillors.

12. Neighbourhood Plan Review

- a. Members received a verbal report from the successful public launch event for the Neighbourhood Plan review, held on 9th March. Around 130 people had attended the event, representing about 10% of households. The Council’s consultant had also been present. Many visitors had contributed their views, which had been collated for consideration as part of the review process.
- b. Members noted that a meeting of the enablement team had been held on 3rd April and received an update on progress. The group had discussed membership of the steering group and allocated roles as follows: Councillor Daniel Thomas – Chair, Mrs Lesley Durbin – Deputy Chair, Mrs Mary Phillips – Secretary, Mr David Turner – Communications.

The different objectives in the Neighbourhood Plan had been allocated to groups or individuals to lead on:

Housing (Objective 1): Mrs Durbin, with input from the consultant, Alison Eardley

Economy & Jobs (Objective 2): Councillor Thomas

Reducing Flood Risk (Objective 3): Councillor Benbow and the Council’s Strategic Flood Group

Traffic Management & Accessibility (Objective 4): Councillor Tyler and the Council's Transport Working Group
 Community Wellbeing (Objective 5): Councillor Thomas
 Good Quality Design (Objective 6): Mrs O'Dowd
 Green and Open Spaces Objective 7): Mrs Durbin
 Local Landscape and Wildlife (Objective 8): Mrs Durbin
 Sustainability and Climate Change (objective 9): Councillor Grainger

There would be plenty of opportunities for members of the community, Councillors and local experts to become involved in the working groups and it was hoped that fairly rapid progress could be made.

Members considered how to administer communications with those individuals who had provided their contact details for updates on the Review. The importance of confidentiality and protecting personal details was stressed.

It was RESOLVED that Mrs Phillips and Mrs O'Dowd, both members of the steering group, should collate the email addresses provided at the launch event on 9th March for the purpose of providing information about the Neighbourhood Plan Review.

- c. Members reviewed draft Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.
It was RESOLVED that the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group should be a working group, not a committee of the Town Council.
It was RESOLVED to approve the Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, as amended.
- d. Members considered the composition of the Steering Group.
It was RESOLVED that the Neighbourhood Plan Review Steering Group should comprise 10 members, those members currently being Councillors Daniel Thomas, Chris Tyler, Will Benbow, Wilf Grainger and Mrs Lesley Durbin, Mrs Susan O'Dowd, Mrs Mary Phillips, Mr David Turner, Mr Jim Orves and one free place.

13. Shropshire Local Plan Review

There was nothing new to report on the Shropshire Local Plan Review.

14. Shropshire Council Car Parking Charges

Members considered the response received from Councillor Lezley Picton, Leader of Shropshire Council, to the Town Council's letter of objection to the proposed increase in Shropshire Council car parking charges. Members noted that the report to Shropshire Cabinet had been presented on 17th January, then called in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February. The proposals had been put on hold and were going back to Cabinet, with changes, on 17th April. However, the changes did not relate to Much Wenlock. The decision would be taken by Cabinet and Councillor Thomas would not have the opportunity to vote.

15. Electric Vehicle Charging Points Proposed for Southfield Road

Members considered correspondence from Shropshire Council regarding consultation on the installation of on-street electric vehicle charging points in Southfield Road and received a recommendation from the Planning & Environment Committee.

It was RESOLVED to support the installation of electric vehicle charging points in principle, but to recommend that Shropshire Council use the government funding to install new parking spaces in Southfield Road by creating a layby in the grass verge closer to High Causeway (Victoria Road junction) where residents could make greater use of the electric vehicle charging facility.

Members were concerned that the existing electric vehicle charging points in the town were not adequately publicised by Shropshire Council and those planned for St Mary's car park had not yet been installed.

16. D-Day Commemoration – 6th June 2024

Members received a report from the D-Day working group regarding arrangements to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day in June 2024. It was intended to have a parade from the church and to carry the Lamp of Peace to the Priory. There would be a short service in the Priory and the beacon would be lit at 9.15pm, as would happen across the country. The Lamp of Peace would then be brought back to the church and placed in front of the war memorial. The traders in the town had been invited to set up displays in their shop windows and the High Street would be decorated with bunting. A D-Day flag had been purchased and would be flown from the Guildhall on 6th June. It would hang in the church for a short period thereafter. Members of the working group were considering whether to arrange for a mobile refreshment van to attend.

