

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
at 7 pm on Thursday, 5th December 2024

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

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, Selina Graham DL

1. Mayor's Welcome

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and reported the following:

I will start by, sadly, reporting the death of ex-Councillor Mike Norrey; serving the council 15-20 years ago, he was instrumental in saving the town's windmill. I offer our condolences and thanks to his family.

The first weekend of the last month was dominated by remembering the fallen in the World Wars. Much Wenlock showed great dignity, and that it won't forget, by the primary school children laying crosses on the war graves at the cemetery, through services held here and at Bourton, and the town's armistice Remembrance by the Corn Exchange honours board.

Also on that weekend was the launch of the public consultation on the first draft of the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan. I urge everyone to read it and comment.

The lantern parade and beacon lighting celebrating the anniversary of English Heritage opening the Priory to the public was received very well by a good crowd who enjoyed the amazing light show on the church and priory ruins.

We were blessed again with good weather for the Christmas lights switch-on. It was a fantastic party with hundreds of happy people seeing the town at its finest. We also saw the first official Town Cry from our new Town Crier. Thanks must go to the Councillors who organised it and also for the co-operation of the town traders - I hope you did really well!

Particular thanks must be expressed to: Julie and Brendan Quinn for making and donating the Town Crier's coat, Potters Electrical, Zara Bowden, the Wenlock Smoothie. Also to the Christmas tree sponsors: Northwoods, Cuan Wildlife Rescue, the George and Dragon, Much More Books and Stentons.

It was great to see The Cavalier Centre with ponies as our chosen charity and I welcome its founder Selina Graham here tonight.

Sadly, the Christmas Fayre has been cancelled due to Storm Darragh. This is bad news for the town's traders who are taking the bulldog spirit and are determined to make the best of the day. Let's all support them this weekend!

It's not all fun being a Councillor and the news of Shropshire Council's threat to close the Leisure Centre has come as a blow, albeit an expected one - we will discuss this later.

Finally, I would like to welcome a new business to the town: "Pogi" on the High Street, run by Siobhan and Colin, will be offering pilates, yoga and wellness services; we wish them well.

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor John O'Dowd – 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. Police Matters

- a. Members noted a written update from the local policing team.
- b. Members noted the Police & Crime Commissioner's West Mercia Safer Communities Plan.

7. Shropshire Community Foundation

The Mayor welcomed Selina Graham DL, Chair of Trustees of the Shropshire Community Foundation, who gave a short presentation about the charity. Key points were:

- A Community Foundation provides place-based funding, connecting people who care with causes that matter. Income and capital growth from endowments goes into the charity sector.
- There are Community Foundations in nearly all counties around the country but there was not previously a dedicated Foundation in Shropshire.
- The Shropshire Community Foundation was set up in 2022, largely run by former High Sheriffs. The organisation has just advertised for its first paid CEO.
- Formerly Shropshire was supported by the Staffordshire Foundation as there was no Shropshire Foundation. However, no member from Shropshire sat on the board and they did not know Shropshire well. Funds were distributed in Shropshire through the pandemic and for flood relief but there was no endowment built for Shropshire. The Staffordshire organisation has recently renamed itself the Staffordshire & Shropshire Community Fund.
- Representatives of the Shropshire Foundation are seeking support for a dedicated Community Foundation for Shropshire in Shropshire, rather than a combined Staffordshire/Shropshire Foundation, and will be writing to all Parish Councils.
- The most important job of the new Shropshire Foundation is to create an endowment. Some Foundations have very large endowments and most are worth around £20m.
- The Shropshire Foundation has raised around £750,000 so far and is talking to different organisations to increase that. There are many dormant trusts in Shropshire and the Foundation offers an opportunity to bring such trusts under one umbrella. Each trust would be ringfenced for its original purpose, but management would be handled by the Community Foundation.
- The Foundation also provides a channel for flow-through funding to make an immediate impact. For example, Telford & Wrekin Council gave £15,000 to spend on loneliness and isolation in their area.
- The Foundation administers applications to the fund from individuals and organisations and distributed money from the first two endowments last year.
- The Shropshire Foundation is applying for Trust Mark accreditation. UK Community Foundation accreditation requires an endowment of several million pounds before application and the Shropshire Foundation hopes to be able to apply in the next three to five years.

The Mayor expressed support for the venture and looked forward to hearing more.

It was noted that Mrs Graham had invited Councillors to visit the Cavalier Centre in the new year and she thanked the Council for choosing the Cavalier Centre as their charity for the year.

Mrs Graham was thanked for attending and left the meeting.

8. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

TRO Map: at last month's meeting, I said that the consultation for the double yellow lines map was imminent and whilst not quite true, it has gone live today! The plans are designed to ease congestion in the town's streets whilst making it safer for pedestrians. However, due to financial constraints, the map has some errors. Changes to Queen Street and Wilmore Street are in the map but are not something the Town Council's Transport working group or I, support. However, it was quicker and cheaper to go to consultation knowing we had some errors rather than delay making more amendments.

Please support the much-needed safety measures for Sheinton Street, Bridge Road and St Mary's Road, whilst ignoring or even objecting to many of the others. The consultation will end on 5th January.

Much Wenlock Leisure Centre: despite my objections at Shropshire Council's Cabinet Meeting yesterday, Shropshire Council voted to go ahead with a public consultation on how Much Wenlock Leisure Centre is funded. One of the options outlined in the consultation is a proposal to serve notice to the 3-18 Education Trust which runs William Brookes School. This would potentially mean that the subsidy goes to community use.

The notice period to the Trust is 12 months. As a result, in the event the proposal is eventually approved, the cost savings of around £280,000 per annum are not predicted until the financial year 2026/27. We have this as an agenda item, so I won't say anything more until then.

Local Plan: at our last meeting I reported that the Local Plan hearings scheduled for November had been cancelled and the reasons why would be in a letter sent to Shropshire Council. This letter has still not been received.

Advice Surgery: my next Advice Surgery is on Saturday, 11th January, between 10:30 a.m. and 12 noon at Much Wenlock Museum. No appointment is necessary. I'll be joined by Town Councillor William Benbow and a representative from the Police.

Councillors asked why the consultation on parking restrictions had taken so long to commence. Councillor Thomas responded that there had been delays with Covid and errors in the draft. There was no support for some of the proposals still included in the scheme, but it was thought important to move forward with the consultation rather than wait for these to be changed and delay further.

Councillor Thomas also advised that the work to the pedestrian lights on New Road were due to be completed the following day.

9. Minutes

- a. It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 7th November 2024.
- b. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 1st October 2024.
- c. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 22nd October 2024.
- d. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the HR Committee meeting held on 27th August 2024.

10. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the written report from the Town Clerk. The Clerk reminded Councillors of the importance of liaising with officers regarding events and markets to ensure arrangements were in good order and everything ran smoothly.

11. Christmas Closure of Town Council Office

It was RESOLVED to approve the closure of the Council office for the Christmas period between Friday, 20th December 2024 and Friday, 3rd January 2025 inclusive.

12. Neighbourhood Plan Review

A well-attended drop-in event had been held the previous month and there had been positive feedback from many attendees. Consultation had commenced on the first draft of the Plan and responses were being submitted. Councillors and members of the community were urged to express their views.

13. Shropshire Local Plan Review

The Local Plan Review was in abeyance and Shropshire Council was awaiting a letter from the Inspectors to explain why they had stopped the hearings. Further details were expected mid-December.

14. Christmas Lights Switch-on 2024

Members reviewed the Christmas Lights Switch-on event held on the evening of 28th November. Thanks were expressed to Councillor White for leading on the event. The evening had been successful with good attendance and there had been no complaints about the placement of stalls. The Cavalier Centre had been pleased to have the opportunity to talk to visitors and raise their profile.

There were concerns about the snow machine which had made the steps slippery and could have been better placed. The sound was also variable, and it had been difficult to hear the Town Crier and Mayor during the speeches. For next year, it would be helpful to have a rota for stewarding, with specific tasks allocated to Councillors and volunteers. Additional road signs such as 'road ahead closed' would help with traffic management in Sheinton Street and Barrow Street and temporary lighting for Wilmore Street would improve visibility. Better control of fund raising was needed and the Council's Finance & Asset Management Committee would consider arrangements for stallholders for next year.

15. 'Made in Shropshire' Markets 2025

It was RESOLVED to approve proposed dates for 'Made in Shropshire' markets in 2025 as 19th April, 21st June, 16th August and 25th October.

Councillor White was in discussions with other market providers to see whether different markets could be arranged in between the above dates.

16. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre

Members considered the situation with regarding to funding for Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and support for its future operation. Shropshire Council was about to begin an eight-week consultation on future funding arrangements. Much Wenlock Leisure Centre was the most expensive one in Shropshire that was 'subsidised' by Shropshire Council. Shropshire Council was dangerously close to bankruptcy and had to find further cost savings.

Councillors discussed the operation of the Leisure Centre. They considered it was poorly run with insufficient maintenance. Costs were shared between Shropshire Council and William Brookes School. The general public could not access the Leisure Centre during school hours as there was no separation between the school and Leisure Centre. Capital expenditure was required to alter this and facilitate greater public access.

Councillors queried whether the £4.5m of Community Infrastructure Levy allocated to the school from the Power Station development to make provision for additional pupils could be used to support the Leisure Centre. Greater understanding of the process and arrangements was needed.

The Mayor and Councillor Thomas had arranged a meeting with the school and 3-18 Trust to discuss the leisure centre. Next steps could be considered following that meeting. The Mayor was optimistic that a solution could be found to fund the Leisure Centre.

17. Shropshire Lieutenancy Garden Party at Orleton Hall, 4th June 2025

Members received correspondence regarding nominations for attendance at the above. **It was RESOLVED to nominate Daniel Thomas for his personal contribution to the community, plus a guest of his choice, to attend the Shropshire Lieutenancy Garden Party at Orleton Hall on 4th June 2025.**

18. Consultation

Members considered a response to the following consultation:

- a. Review of Shropshire Banners, Bunting and Festive Lighting Policy and Process, deadline for responses 18th December 2024. **It was RESOLVED to support the proposal to devolve the administrative function/process to town and parish councils.** The Clerk was asked to complete the consultation questionnaire.
- b. Members noted the Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan 2025 – 2028, deadline for responses 27th December 2024.

19. 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. Selected press releases from Shropshire Council
- d. Rural Bulletins from the Rural Services Network
- e. VCSA Shropshire newsletters
- f. The Rural Services Network Bulletins and Rural Funding Digest
- g. Marches Energy Agency November newsletter
- h. Selected Neighbourhood Matters alerts
- i. Friendly Transport Service newsletter
- j. Mailings from The Edge Cinema
- k. Correspondence from Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust
- l. Future Ready Homes newsletter
- m. Shropshire Climate Action News

20. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

Members were invited to suggest items for inclusion on the agenda of the next meeting: VE Day celebration. The Clerk advised that she would be issuing the agenda for the January meeting prior to the Christmas break.

21. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 9th January 2025 at 7.00pm at the Guildhall, Wilmore Street, 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.**

22. Guildhall Project

Members received an update on the Guildhall project and considered consultancy support.

It was RESOLVED to appoint Greenwood Projects to support the Council in its application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund for funding for the Guildhall Project.

23. 10 High Street

Members received an update and considered options for 10 High Street.

It was RESOLVED to move forward with the preferred potential tenant.

It was RESOLVED to suspend standing orders to allow the meeting to continue past 9.00pm.

24. Much Wenlock Library

Members received a verbal report and considered proposals for service support and the premises lease.

It was RESOLVED to agree to the proposed contribution to Much Wenlock library running costs over the next 10 years.

25. Much Wenlock Museum

Members received a verbal update on discussions with Shropshire Council. The Clerk was seeking clarity on costs. A further meeting was scheduled for 12th December.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm.

Signed Mayor Date

