

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
at 7 pm on Thursday, 3rd April 2025

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

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, Revd Matthew Stafford, PCSO Helen Scott, PCSO Mal Goddard, two members of the public in person and three remotely.

1. Mayor's Welcome

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

"It is normal for Town Council activity to be quieter in the run up to elections. That doesn't mean that we're not still busy with ongoing projects.

The Guildhall restoration project's first phase of the National Lottery Heritage Fund application is moving on and will meet its May deadline.

Much Wenlock experienced chaos when the contractor repairing the Gaskell Corner closed the road two hours early, coinciding with rush hour traffic. This reinforces the need for strong community, Town Council and Shropshire Council liaison.

There are strong indications that a number of applications for the development of solar "farms" will be forthcoming in the near future. It does feel as though the town is at a critical moment with the changes that will be experienced through all the proposed developments in the area. I'm sure this council will be closely involved with all consultations.

The Guildhall reopens to the public this weekend and a Made in Shropshire market takes place on 19th April; let's hope for lively trading in the town this spring.

I had the honour of attending and presenting medals at the Wenlock Olympian Live Arts Festival, a very enjoyable couple of days. It was wonderful to see such talent, enthusiasm and dedication in local young people.

Another eye opener for me, when attending the Lady Forester Care Home tea party, was to look round the recent new build and extension of the home, a very impressive facility and one that is not fully appreciated.

Finally, this is the last Council meeting before the elections on 1st May. It is the last one of this Council and, sadly, we will be losing five Councillors. I would like to record thanks to all of you for your co-operation, hard work, dedication and friendship and wish you all the best in your next chapter. The good news is that all six Councillors seeking re-election plus two new nominees have been accepted, thus leaving three vacancies. This will lead to a co-option process, which the Town Clerk will detail later."

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Toon – work commitment, Councillor White – other engagement, Councillor West – caring responsibility.

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

The Mayor welcomed PCSO Helen Scott and PCSO Mal Goddard. Councillors noted the written update from the local policing team. In addition, PCSO Goddard reported that West Mercia Police had proposed earlier in the week that the working day for PCSOs should end at 20.00 hrs instead of 22.00 hrs. A review of how policing was delivered across West Mercia was being undertaken and this proposal was currently at the consultation stage. However, this change would have an impact on operations, including attendance at Parish Council meetings. Members noted that the proposal would not improve the service offered and appeared to be purely a cost saving measure. The earliest the change could take effect would be in the summer.

The local team were asked to provide a written briefing on the proposals for consideration at the next full Council meeting.

The police officers were thanked for attending and left the meeting.

7. Wenlock Forester Trust

- a. The Mayor welcomed Mr Mark Laws to the meeting. Mr Laws provided a short update on the Wenlock Forester Trust, formerly known as the Much Wenlock Forester Charitable Trust.

The Trust was formed in February 2011 following the sale of the the Lady Forester Nursing Home by ExtraCare to David and Jennifer English. ExtraCare made a contribution of £250,000 back to the Much Wenlock community to recognise the money and effort local residents had invested in the facility in 1996. The Town Council facilitated the formation of the Trust by way of a working group composed of local residents and Councillors. Currently there are six Trustees who meet four times a year.

The Trust's Objectives read: to relieve financial hardship, sickness and poor health amongst elderly people resident in the area of benefit, including the funding and/or provision of specially designed or adapted housing and items, services or facilities calculated to relieve the needs of such persons. NB: the "area of benefit" is Much Wenlock and surrounding areas and the county of Shropshire.

The original £250,000 was invested and now stands at just over £360,000 which includes two legacies received amounting to £120,000. There have been 80 grants given since the Trust's formation to the value of £151,655, an average grant of £1,896. This included by far the largest grant of £50,000 recently given to the Friendly Bus at Broseley to help them purchase a replacement minibus.

Mr Laws gave an overview of the many donations made to organisations in Much Wenlock and further afield, including £10,000 towards the tarmac path around the Gaskell Recreation Ground, as well as a small number of individual grants. Councillors were encouraged to let the Trust know if they were aware of any need among elderly people locally.

Mr Laws confirmed that he would very much like to continue as the Town Council Trustee for a further four years.

- b. Members noted that the Town Council has the right to nominate one Trustee to the Wenlock Forester Trust for a four-year term. **It was RESOLVED to nominate Mr Mark Laws as the Council's Trustee on the Wenlock Forester Trust for a further four-year term from May 2025.**

Thanks were expressed to Mr Laws for his work to date and continued service.

8. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, presented the following report:

"Repairs to the surface at the Gaskell Arms Junction: the Gaskell Arms Junction has been repaired free of charge by the Council's Highways Partner Kier, as it was under guarantee. I have placed a complaint regarding the contractor starting two hours earlier than was agreed upon and await an update.

Double Yellow Lines: Sheinton Street has had its double yellow lines re-marked to reflect the results of December's public consultation. These changes reduce parking but are designed to improve traffic flow, meaning vehicles won't mount the pavement as much. Bridge Road and Southfield Road improvements have been delayed and I have chased for an update.

High Street Drainage: work to replace the wrongly fitted gully cover is taking place on Sunday. Shropshire Council changed the wrong one, which opened up the Severn Trent Water sewer. The correct cover, designed to take in more water to help in flood events, will be placed on the correct drain.

Thank you: I just wanted to place on record, in my capacity as Shropshire Councillor, my thanks to the Town Council for an excellent working relationship over the past four years.

In response to a question about double yellow lines in St Mary's Lane, Councillor Thomas replied that the lining work was being carried out in stages due to financial constraints and there was further work to complete.

9. Minutes

- a. It was **RESOLVED** to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 6th March 2025.
- b. It was **RESOLVED** to approve and adopt the minutes of the Extraordinary Town Council meeting held on 6th March 2025.
- c. It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of a Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 4th February 2025.
- d. It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of a Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 21st January 2025.
- e. It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of a HR Committee meeting held on 12th November 2024.

10. Error in Meeting Schedule

The Clerk advised that there was an error in the published meeting schedule and that the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting scheduled for 22nd May would not take place until a later date.

11. Town Clerk's Report

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

12. Internal Audit Report

Members reviewed the interim internal audit report 2024/25 and noted the responses proposed by the Finance & Asset Management Committee. **It was RESOLVED to approve the responses to the interim internal audit 2024/25 recommended by the Finance & Asset Management Committee.**

13. Local Council Elections 2025

Members noted the Statement of Persons Nominated for the Town Council. Eight persons had been nominated for the Town Council so there would be an uncontested election. The Council would need to co-opt to fill the remaining three vacancies.

There were five nominations for the Shropshire Council election, which would be contested.

14. Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan Review

Councillor Thomas introduced the Steering Group's second draft Neighbourhood Plan, which was based on the extensive consultation and drop-in sessions held and had been altered to reflect the views of the community. He stated that the Neighbourhood Plan was a crucial opportunity for the community to shape the future of the town, giving the community and the Council a stronger say, particularly in light of increasing national targets. The Council's external consultant, Alison Eardley, had been fantastic in guiding the Steering Group through the legal challenges and Councillor Thomas wished to place on record his thanks to the members of the Steering Group and the community for engaging with the Neighbourhood Plan review.

Members reviewed the Submission Version of the draft Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan 2024 to 2038 prepared by the Steering Group. It was noted that there were some minor errors in the draft.

It was proposed by Councillor Tyler, seconded by Councillor O'Dowd and unanimously **RESOLVED, subject to minor alterations of fact, to submit the draft Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan 2024 – 2038 to Shropshire Council for the next stage of the review process.**

Councillor Thomas thanked Councillors for their support. He advised that the draft Plan would now go to Shropshire Council for review and further consultation before a referendum in the early autumn.

15. Shropshire Local Plan Review

There had been no changes with regard to the Shropshire Local Plan Review. Due to the pre-election purdah period, it was not possible for Shropshire Council to withdraw the Plan until after the elections. One of the first items of business for Shropshire Council after the local elections would be a decision to withdraw the Local Plan.

16. The Guildhall Project

Councillor Themans gave an update on progress with the Guildhall project. Several meetings had been held during the last month, including with Greenwood Projects earlier in the day. The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) application process was complicated, and the projected budget was increasing. Other sources of match funding would be explored. Letters of support were being garnered from various stakeholders. The working group would be engaging with the NLHF support officer in the next few weeks to seek advice and the application would be submitted by the end of May, after presentation to full Council for agreement.

17. Loss of Electricity to STAR Housing Homes in Much Wenlock during High Winds in December

There had been no further response from STAR Housing to contact from the Clerk regarding the provision of emergency support to residents during the power outage in December and future emergency provision. The Clerk had sent a reminder to STAR Housing.

18. Signage for Windmill Hill

Members considered the provision of small signs to mark the entrances to the Local Nature Reserve at Windmill Hill. **It was RESOLVED to agree a budget of £200 for the purchase of signage to mark the entrances to the Local Nature Reserve at Windmill Hill.**

19. VE Day Celebration 2025

Councillor Crooke-Williams updated Members on plans for a VE Day celebration in May 2025. A church service would be held on Thursday, 8th May, starting at 8.45pm, with a beacon lighting at 9.30pm on the church green. A flag would be erected on the church at 9am and the bells would be rung at 6.30pm, in accordance with instructions from the Bell Ringers Council. A special flag would be flown for 24 hours and the peace lamp from last year would be lit.

On the afternoon of Sunday, 11th May there would be a family celebration on the church green, with Caroline Crystal singing, a children's disco and a children's fancy dress competition. Traders would be asked for prizes. There would also be a fish and chip van on site, as fish and chips were not rationed during the war. All was in hand and the next planning meeting would be held on 8th April.

20. Consultation

Members considered consultation on the removal of BT payphones across the county, including the payphone located in the Square in Much Wenlock. Members noted that this payphone was surrounded by shops and residential properties and in case of emergency, shopkeepers or residents could be asked for help with a phone call.

It was RESOLVED to submit no objection to the removal of the public payphone and the phone box in the Square.

The Clerk was asked to enquire about possible retention of the electricity supply to the box by the Town Council.

21. Devolution

Members received a briefing note on Devolution issued by Shropshire Council on 18th March 2025. It was noted that Shropshire Council would not be affected by devolution proposals in the next two years but that the authority was already considering options for the future with its neighbours.

22. 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 newsletter
- h. Selected Neighbourhood Matters alerts
- i. Mailings from The Edge Arts Centre
- j. Correspondence from Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust
- k. Friendly Bus Newsletter
- l. Mailings from Visit Shropshire
- m. Neighbourhood Matters police mailings
- n. Helicopter Liaison Group Newsletter from RAF Shawbury
- o. Invitation to Shrewsbury Moves Festival and Conference

23. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

Members were invited to suggest items for inclusion on the agenda of the next meeting: Police proposals for PCSO working hours.

24. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be Mayor Making, to be held on Thursday, 15th May 2025 at 7.00pm at the Guildhall, Wilmore Street, Much Wenlock.

25. Library Lease

There was no further information to hand on proposals for renewal of the lease for the Library premises.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm.

Signed Mayor Date