

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
at 7 pm on Thursday, 4th September 2025

Present: Councillors Susan Crooke-Williams, David Fenwick, Paul Madeley, Paula Sivertsen, Marcus Themans, Daniel Thomas (in the chair), Chris Tyler, Cherie Whiteman and Duncan White.

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk.

1. Mayor's Welcome

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

In the past month, we've seen two new shops appear in Much Wenlock; on Barrow Street, we have The Peach Poodle, a friendly, family-run dog grooming business. We also have the Cheese and Cracker on the High Street as the industrious Ryan family expand. We welcome both businesses and wish them well.

The Town Council's community grants scheme is now open for applications. Local voluntary and charitable organisations are invited to apply for grants from the Town Council. The closing date for applications is 30th September 2025.

It was a scaled-back Wenlock Olympian Games this year, with the athletics track not being signed off by England Athletics for competition. However, a slimmed-down version of the Games took place with non-track events, including the inaugural Much Wenlock mile, which was set up by the Wenlock Olympians in conjunction with the Town Council's Gaskell Recreation Ground Management committee. As with previous years, it was great to see Town Councillors volunteering to help with the set up and take down of the games. I personally enjoyed giving out medals before shooting off to man a water station for the 7-mile road race.

The community spirit of Much Wenlock saved an end-of-year colour run at Much Wenlock Primary School after the ordered paint failed to arrive. After the headteacher, Rachel Howell-James, was forced to cancel the event, the community rallied together, sourcing the paint and getting donations to cover the cost. Their efforts allowed the event to go ahead as planned, and it was fantastic to see the community work together to make it happen.

Wenlock Parish Church (Holy Trinity) rang a special peal to commemorate 80 years since the end of the war in Japan, as well as putting a special VJ Day flag on top of the church. The ringers were also remembering Graham Heywood, the son of Col. and Mrs. Gerald Heywood, who lived at The Grange in Stretton Road, Much Wenlock. Graham was a meteorologist and, in 1932, joined the Royal Observatory, Hong Kong. In 1942, his wife and two young daughters sailed back to England and went to live at The Grange. Graham was captured by Japanese soldiers and imprisoned in Sham Shui Po. He remained a prisoner until 18 August 1945. He sailed for home in September 1945. The old clock of 1706 at the church had become unreliable, and in thanksgiving for their son's safe return, Col. and Mrs. Heywood gave a new clock, which is the one we hear striking the hours in the town today.

Last year a young, local boy named Theo Reeves was thanked by this Council for clearing up litter and leaves around the town. BBC Radio Shropshire has picked up the story and he has been nominated for an award at their ceremony this month, good luck, Theo!

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Jill Robinson and Daisy Whiteman – holiday.

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 Report

Councillors noted written reports for July and August from the local policing team. Police officers had sent their apologies.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, gave the following report:

William Brookes School: the 20 mph speed zones have been installed on Farley Road, alongside the newly configured double yellow lines. This paves the way for the speed cushions to be put in place in the October half-term; however, I, the Town Council's Planning Committee and residents are pushing back on the speed cushions. We hope to have a meeting imminently to discuss this and agree a way forward.

Much Wenlock Leisure Centre: we are awaiting the outcome of the 3-18 Education Trust's Community Infrastructure Levy application; they were originally told that half of the money could come from CIL, and the other half could come from Shropshire Council's budget. However, since then, Shropshire Council's overspend has been so significant that the Trust has had to submit a new application, meaning their bid couldn't be considered on the 29th July as scheduled. It won't ease Councillors' concerns to learn that Shropshire Council and the external provider have failed to secure the future of Cleobury Mortimer's leisure centre, which is now closing, at least for the short term.

Tourism in Much Wenlock: last week, Town Councillors and I volunteered as models, or perhaps props, for a Shropshire Council-organised photoshoot, funded by the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, which aims to promote tourism in the county. We hope the new images of Much Wenlock will help in future tourism promotions of the county and sell us as the excellent tourist destination we are.

Support for Biochar at July's last meeting: Shropshire Council is developing a new Energy, Biochar and Carbon (EBAC) plant on the outskirts of Ludlow, at the Coder Road Business Park. The council meeting on 17th July 2025, was significant because it approved a substantial increase in the project's budget. The original budget was around £2m, but the council approved an additional £1.3m, bringing the total cost to £3.3m. As your Shropshire Councillor, I was keen to support this important initiative as it increases revenue to the Council and helps tackle the climate emergency.

Continued funding for the HAF (Holiday Activities & Food) Programme: Shropshire Council has announced that funding has been confirmed for the HAF Programme for the next three years. Many Councillors will know that securing a half-term club in Much Wenlock was a key achievement for me and this Council last term.

Shropshire Council's 'Call for Sites' process remains ongoing until 2nd October 2025: the 'Call for Sites' provides an opportunity to promote land for consideration as a potential allocation for development in the next Local Plan for Shropshire. It is open to landowners, site promoters, businesses, organisations, developers and any other interested parties who can promote sites for a wide range of uses. The next Local Plan for Shropshire will need to respond to the Government's new mandatory housing targets. At some point in 2026, the preferred sites will come forward and be considered by Town and Council Parish Councils based on what their communities want.

Shropshire Council Children's Services: I'm delighted to say that Shropshire Council is proud to announce that following a recent visit by Ofsted, inspectors have rated its children's services 'outstanding'.

Financial Emergency: Shropshire Council has declared a financial emergency, announcing that emergency action needs to be taken to reduce all non-essential spending in Shropshire to prevent a 114 Notice being issued and the Government stepping in. More would be known about this following the forthcoming Cabinet meeting.

Advice Surgery: my next advice surgery is on Saturday, 13th of September, between 10:30 a.m. and 12 noon at Much Wenlock Museum. No appointment is necessary. I'll be joined by a Town Cllr and a representative from the Police.

It was clarified that the Council's Planning Committee had supported speed reduction measures along the Farley Road but objected to the introduction of six pairs of speed cushions and had asked for other options to be considered.

8. Minutes

- a. It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 10th July 2025.
- b. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 19th June 2025.
- c. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 10th June 2025.
- d. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 1st July 2025.
- e. It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the HR Committee meeting held on 29th April 2025.

9. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the written report provided by the Town Clerk.

10. Neighbourhood Plan Review

- a. Members were informed that as part of the review process an external examiner would need to be appointed. The examiner would carry out a desk top review, visit the town, then submit any questions to the Town Council. Modifications might be suggested, then a final version for referendum would be prepared.

This process would be funded by central government. The examiner would be independent of Shropshire Council and would be formally approved by the Town Council.

It was RESOLVED to approve the appointment of Mr Timothy Jones as Examiner for the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan Review.

- b. It had been hoped to appoint the examiner earlier in the year. The review was now in the hands of the examiner and it was likely that the referendum would take place early in the new year.

11. Shropshire Council – A New Approach to Partnership with Town and Parish Councils

Members received a report on the 'Shropshire Together' conference held on Friday, 25th July, attended by Councillors Paula Sivertsen, Daniel Thomas, and Daisy Whiteman.

Councillor Sivertsen reported that the conference had focussed on how Town and Parish and Councils (T&PCs) in Shropshire could work together to undertake projects and provide services independently of Shropshire Council. It was important to be prepared to take on more responsibilities from Shropshire Council. Bridgwater Town Council in Somerset had contributed to the conference with information on how they coped with taking on services from their principal authority. It was noted that changes could be for the better, saving money and covering neglected areas. Neighbourhood committees for different parts of the town had been suggested, with perhaps an award for the best maintained areas.

Councillor Thomas added that Shifnal Town Council was in negotiation to take on street maintenance from Shropshire Council. There would be no financial contribution from Shropshire Council but Shifnal Town Council thought they could provide a better service to their community. Last year Church Stretton Town Council had increased their precept by c. £70,000 to maintain their leisure centre. T&PCs were tired of waiting so long for Shropshire Council to undertake work and were taking matters into their own hands. It was likely that more asset transfers would take place. There was no consistency across the county with each Council doing something different, but Shropshire Council would need more support and there was an expectation that T&PCs would take on more responsibilities. It would be up to each local Council to decide what they might do.

Councillor Themans noted that Much Wenlock Town Council already contributed to the library costs, provided the museum building at a low rent, was responsible for the public toilets and maintained areas of the Gaskell Ground that belonged to Shropshire Council. He believed that other towns should step up before Much Wenlock took on more.

12. Bridgnorth & Shifnal Area Committee of SALC

Members received a verbal report on the meeting of the Bridgnorth & Shifnal Area Committee of SALC, held on 1st September 2025. Councillor Fenwick had attended the meeting which covered similar themes to the 'Shropshire Together' conference. Councillor Alex Wagner, Deputy Leader of Shropshire Council, had been unable to attend, and another officer from Highways had stood in. Shropshire Council wanted to find out what T&PCs thought were the most important Shropshire Council functions affecting them. Those attending were informed that there would be a two-year period of consultation and negotiation, following which services such as street cleaning, litter picking, verge maintenance, pothole repairs, dog waste collection, etc. would become the responsibility of T&PCs. This would not result in a reduction in council tax charged by Shropshire Council, but T&PC precepts were not capped. T&PCs might be able to acquire second-hand equipment from Shropshire Council or neighbouring parishes might share.

Members noted that this situation was similar in areas where other principal authorities had issued 114 notices.

13. Christmas Lights Switch-on

A meeting of the working group would be held the following week to make plans for the switch-on event on 27th November.

14. Allied Air Forces Memorial Board in the Guildhall

Members considered relocation of the Allied Air Forces Memorial Board, currently in the Guildhall, which Members thought should be given more prominence in a different location, possibly under the Corn Exchange. Councillor Crooke-Williams was taking advice on care and relocation of the board. It was agreed to consider the matter further at the next meeting.

15. Consultation

- a. Members considered a response to the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's Town and Parish Council Survey 2025 which would close at midday on Tuesday, 14th October 2025. **It was RESOLVED that Councillor White should complete the survey on behalf of the Council.**
- b. It was noted that a response to the Shropshire Council Youth Offer questionnaire had been prepared by Councillor Daisy Whiteman, with input from other Councillors, and submitted to Shropshire Council.

- c. Members noted that the deadline for response to consultation on the new five-year plan for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape had been missed but that Councillor Jill Robinson had submitted an individual response.

16. 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. VCSA Shropshire newsletters
- f. News from Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust
- g. What's On at The Edge Arts Centre
- h. Friendly Transport Service Newsletter
- i. Climate Action News for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
- j. The Rural Services Network Rural Funding Digest
- k. Future Ready Homes Newsletter
- l. Selected Neighbourhood Matters alerts
- m. Severn Trent Councillor Newsletter – Summer 2025 edition
- n. Press release 21.08.25: Call to help preserve hidden gem near Corndon Hill (wildflower meadow)
- o. Invitation to attend Wenlock Olympian Society Celebration Evening on Friday, 19th September.

17. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

Members were invited to suggest items for inclusion on the agenda of the next meeting: update on memorial board, Christmas lights.

18. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 2nd October 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 and due to the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted, it was **RESOLVED** that the public and press should not be present.

19. Security at Corn Exchange and Guildhall

Members reviewed arrangements for security monitoring at the Corn Exchange and Guildhall. **It was RESOLVED that Councillor Paul Madeley should be the additional named contact.**

20. Honorary/Voluntary Positions

- a. Members considered the appointment of a new Mace Bearer, following the retirement of the former post holder. **It was RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Duncan White to be Mace Bearer for the Town Council. It was RESOLVED to review the position of Mace Bearer on an annual basis.**
- b. Members reviewed the position of voluntary Archivist. **It was RESOLVED to review the position of voluntary archivist on an annual basis. It was RESOLVED to seek information from the current voluntary archivist by 25th September for consideration at the next full Council meeting.**
- c. Members reviewed the voluntary position of Town Crier. **It was RESOLVED to confirm Mr Joffrey Watson as Town Crier for the next year.**

21. Lease of Library Premises

No further information had been received on the lease of the library premises, which had now expired. **It was RESOLVED to write to Paula Mawson, Service Director for Communities & Customer, to complain about the lack of response from the responsible officer and lack of progress with renewal of the lease for the library premises.**

22. Leisure Centre

Members received an update on the situation with the Leisure Centre.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

Signed Mayor Date