

MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
held at The Guildhall, Much Wenlock
at 7 pm on Thursday, 10th July 2025

Present: Councillors Susan Crooke-Williams, David Fenwick, Jill Robinson, Paula Sivertsen, Marcus Themans, Daniel Thomas (in the chair), Chris Tyler and Daisy Whiteman.

In attendance: Trudi Barrett – Town Clerk, Police Inspector Damien Kelly, Sergeant Stephen Mason, Revd Matthew Stafford, one member of the public.

1. Mayor's Welcome

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

It's been a fantastic month for Much Wenlock, with the successful festival and other events happening in the town. The festival featured a range of performing arts events, including a family fun day and open gardens. My thanks go to the organising committee volunteers who gave up their time to make such a successful event, as well as to the local businesses that sponsored the event; without their generosity, the event wouldn't have happened.

Our Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Claire Brentnall, as part of the Wenlock Olympian Society, organised an excellent 10-mile charity walk, raising money for the Society. It was a well-attended event in our fantastic countryside, with Lord Lieutenant Anna Turner also taking part. As Mayor, I was invited to present certificates to competitors, and I was delighted to support the society.

Last week marked 25 years since Reverend Prebendary Matthew Stafford was ordained to the priesthood. On behalf of this Council, I'd like to thank Matthew for his service and hard work in our community and congratulate him on this achievement. I am sure all of us would agree that Matthew has had a big impact on our community.

A Wenlock resident, Lieutenant Colonel Joanne Patrice D'Arcy, of the Royal Army Medical Service, was awarded an OBE in the King's Birthday Honours list. Congratulations to Jo, and well done.

This morning, our PSCO Mal Goddard formally retired after 19 years' service in our local policing team. Mal has been a stalwart of the team and is a familiar face in the town. To mark the occasion, the Council and the Church presented him with a St Milburga award for outstanding service to the community, and we wish him a happy retirement.

On Saturday, our Town Councillors were invited to view the Cavalier Centre. The centre offers inclusive horse-based activities such as riding, carriage driving, vaulting (gymnastics on horseback), hippotherapy (physio on horseback) and horse care, all supported by volunteers and team members. The visit was very much enjoyed and Cllrs were impressed by the centre and its team of volunteers.

Lastly, as a Council, we'd like to welcome our new staff members: Kevin Carter, our handyman, and Emilie Cleary Sullman, our additional Admin Assistant. Kevin has already started to make a difference around the town, and Emilie will be joining us on Monday, working 15 hours per week, Monday to Wednesday. Welcome to them both.

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Paul Madeley, Duncan White and Cherie 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

The Mayor welcomed Police Inspector Damien Kelly and Sergeant Stephen Mason to the meeting.

Inspector Kelly gave an overview of recent policing activities. He reported that, upon his retirement, PCSO Mal Goddard had been presented with a West Mercia Force shield by the Assistant Chief Constable. PCSO Goddard had been a staple in his communities and Inspector Kelly was pleased to hear how much he had been valued.

When Inspector Kelly had previously visited the Council, just over 12 months ago, he had promised that there would be no vacancies on the local policing team. However, now PCSO Goddard had retired. There was an ongoing recruitment drive for PCSOs with a course scheduled for October. There were some local candidates and good talent coming through the system. PC Emma Strangwood and PCSO Helen Scott continued on the local team.

As a result of restructuring within the force, the size of some neighbourhood policing teams had been increased. This did not directly affect the Broseley and Much Wenlock team, but there were two extra police officers for Bridgnorth, which would alleviate some of the pressure on PC Strangwood's time outside of the Broseley & Much Wenlock area. An additional Sergeant for South Shropshire would also allow Sergeant Mason to spend more time out of the office.

Following an internal consultation, changes had been made to the working times of PCSOs. This would save the police force money as the cost of PCSO time increased after 8pm. Statistics showed that anti-social behaviour reduced significantly at around 8pm. Police visibility after this time would have to be taken on by police officers who would be working more late shifts in future.

Much Wenlock statistics were positive with quite a low crime rate.

The police had carried out at least 35 operations in the last 18 months to tackle drug dealing, had conducted several speeding and anti-social driving initiatives and had addressed rural thefts. An organised crime group had been stealing farm equipment and some of those concerned were now in prison, with others out on bail awaiting trial. The police were continuing with Operation Whitebeam, including high intensity engagement with the rural community, and another operation was planned shortly.

The Mayor stated that the local team was excellent: they attended Councillor advice surgeries and dealt with any relevant issues following those meetings. He noted that attendance at Council meetings might be affected by the change in working times for PCSOs. Inspector Kelly replied that attendance at Much Wenlock Town Council meetings was likely to continue as the PCSOs would still be able to return to Bridgnorth station by their finish time of 8pm.

The Inspector urged Councillors to report any suspicious activity. The theft of a camper van from Farley Road the previous night had been reported and the police were investigating.

Inspector Kelly was asked about a recent incident when youths were seen on the roof of a building at the rear of the High Street. The Inspector agreed to speak to PC Strangwood to ensure that this had been followed up as far as possible, including informal conversations with those concerned, if appropriate.

Inspector Kelly and Sergeant Mason were thanked for attending and left the meeting.

7. Shropshire Council Report

Shropshire Councillor, Daniel Thomas, gave the following report:

Much Wenlock Leisure Centre Update: I recently attended a meeting with Shropshire Councillors in our local area, discussing the ongoing work to secure the necessary funding for the 3-18 Education Trust, which runs William Brookes School. The Trust has put in an application for a significant sum of CIL money, which will be considered on Tuesday, 29th July, by the internal CIL Committee at Shropshire Council.

North West Relief Road: Shropshire Council's leadership met with the Government's Transport Minister, Lilian Greenwood MP, to discuss the Council's proposed North West Relief Road scheme, where they failed to get the required funding. For all intents and purposes, the scheme is dead in the water. It remains to be seen whether the £38m already spent needs to be paid back to central Government; if so, then the Council is bankrupt. This will be considered by Shropshire Council in September.

Gaskell Arms Junction Study Update: the Gaskell Arms junction study, involving Shropshire Council, WSP Consultants and Much Wenlock Town Council, is currently on hold due to Shropshire Council's financial situation. The junction has been modelled extensively by Shropshire Council's external partners WSP, who have designed a potential improvement scheme, and this draft report will remain confidential, pending further testing related to the Tasley Garden Village planning application. This review, expected to take three months, is crucial because the existing traffic model for Gaskell Corner accounted for 1,000 houses at Tasley Garden Village, while the current application is for 1,500, necessitating additional VISSIM model testing by WSP. The Town Council's Transport Working Group and I emphasised the importance of this testing to prevent operational failure at the Gaskell corner. Furthermore, it was clarified that a £350,000 contribution from the Ironbridge Power Station, previously thought to be a Section 106 trigger, is actually part of the Community Infrastructure Levy, potentially allowing an earlier application for Gaskell corner improvements. Much Wenlock is also due similar contributions from the Tasley Livestock Development of 550, as well as the potential Tasley Garden Village development.

Issues with the Buildwas Traffic Lights: Cllr Susan Coleman (Severn Valley) and I have been working extensively with Shropshire Council around the issues we've had with the lights put up near Buildwas as part of the Power Station development. After we expressed concerns about the lack of signage, more signage has been installed, making the area safer.

Changes to Farley Road around William Brookes School: Shropshire Council is consulting on some changes to Farley Road around William Brookes School. The proposals include changes to the road markings to prevent cars dropping off students on Farley Road, a 20-mph speed limit around the school and speed cushions to slow down traffic. The Town Council's Planning Committee will consider this at their next meeting but all can get involved and share their views by visiting Shropshire Council's website.

Advice Surgeries: my next advice surgery is on Saturday, 12th July, between 10:30 a.m. and 12 noon at Much Wenlock Museum. No appointment is necessary. I'll be joined by a Town Councillor and a representative from the Police. There will no advice surgery in August.

8. Minutes

- a. **It was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 5th June 2025.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Asset Management Committee meeting held on 25th March 2025.**
- c. **It was RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 29th April 2025.**

9. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the written and verbal report provided by the Town Clerk. The Clerk advised that Councillor Heather Kidd, Leader of Shropshire Council, would be visiting on 6th November. Councillor Kidd would meet selected community groups first and then attend the Town Council meeting at 7pm. Receipt of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return had been acknowledged by the external auditor. Energy Performance Certificates for the Library and Corn Exchange would be considered by the Council's Finance & Asset Management Committee.

The Clerk was advised that there was no need for continuing checks of the Local Plan Examination in Public website.

10. Policies

- a. Members reviewed the Lone Working Policy. **It was RESOLVED to approve the Lone Working Policy.**
- b. Members reviewed the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. **It was RESOLVED to approve the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and to review its operation after six months.**

11. Terms of Reference for Finance & Asset Management Committee

- a. **It was RESOLVED to rescind the decision taken at the full Council meeting held on 22nd May 2025 to approve the Terms of Reference for the Finance & Asset Management.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED to approve the revised Terms of Reference for the Finance & Asset Management Committee incorporating an increased delegated authority to award contracts of up to £15,000.**

12. Guildhall – Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) Grant

Members were advised that the Expression of Interest to the AHF for funding for the Guildhall project had been accepted and the Council had been invited to submit a full application for a development grant. Members noted that an application for the development phase had already been submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the outcome of this application was awaited. Greenwood Projects were providing consultancy support to the Council.

It was RESOLVED to approve the submission of an application to the Architectural Heritage Fund for a development grant of £60,000 for the Guildhall project from the Architectural Heritage Fund's Heritage Revival Fund.

13. Neighbourhood Plan Review

Councillor Thomas provided an update on the Neighbourhood Plan Review. Consultation was ongoing until 25th July. However, the Government had halted funding support for Neighbourhood Plans. The Town Council had already received all funding available for review of the Much Wenlock Plan so would not be affected in that regard. What was not clear was whether the grants payable to local authorities to fund the examination and referendum were impacted or not. Shropshire Council was awaiting clarification on whether they would receive funding for the referendum and examination for the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan. The authority had a legal obligation to pay for this work and the Government was legally obliged to provide funding, as the legislation placed an 'additional burden' on local authorities. Shropshire Council was awaiting confirmation of whether funding would be provided before appointing an inspector for the examination. It was not known when this information would be received and, therefore, when further progress would be made with the review of the Neighbourhood Plan.

14. Future of Neighbourhood Planning Support Services

- a. Members considered information from SALC and other County Associations on the implications of Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government funding changes to Neighbourhood Planning support.
- b. It was **RESOLVED** to:
 - i. **Call upon His Majesty's Government to provide increased and sustained funding to support the development, review, implementation and maintenance of Neighbourhood Plans.**
 - ii. **Request the Government ensures funding is accessible to all communities, to promote inclusivity and fairness in the planning process.**
 - iii. **Write to Stuart Anderson MP and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government to communicate this resolution and advocate for enhanced support for neighbourhood planning.**
- c. Members reviewed the draft letter to the MP provided by SALC. **It was RESOLVED to approve the draft letter to Stuart Anderson MP regarding changes to funding for neighbourhood planning and to add a request for clarity on the situation and that funding support for principal authorities should be retained.** Councillor Thomas would also raise this in his capacity as Shropshire Councillor for Much Wenlock.

15. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) - Neighbourhood Fund

- a. Members reviewed information from Shropshire Council on the Community Infrastructure Levy, Neighbourhood Fund collected between 2012 and 2024 by parish, and Neighbourhood Fund payable to Towns and Parishes in 2025. The Clerk was asked to clarify whether the 2012 – 2024 figures included the 2025 payment to the Town Council.
- b. Members noted that the Neighbourhood Fund payment of £7,401.98, due to Much Wenlock Town Council in 2025, had been received.

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

- a. Members noted a letter from Shropshire Council dated 3rd June 2025 regarding a new approach to partnership with Town and Parish Councils.
- b. Members noted a letter from Shropshire Council dated 17th June 2025 regarding a Call for Information in relation to a new approach to partnership with Town and Parish Councils. Members were pleased to see that Shropshire Council was seeking a better relationship but expressed concerns about Shropshire Council's approach to planning matters and the lack of enforcement and compliance with statutory duties.
- c. Members reviewed the 'Call for Information' survey. In considering a response, they referred to Shropshire Council's secrecy about the allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy funds and the slow response to enquiries and action on matters raised.
It was RESOLVED that Councillors Susan Crooke-Williams, Marcus Themans, Daniel Thomas and the Clerk should review the 'Call for Information' survey and compose a draft response. The draft should be circulated to all Councillors for any further comments before submission to Shropshire Council by the requested date of Monday, 18th August.
- d. Members noted that a 'Shropshire Together' conference for Clerks and Councillors would be held on Friday, 25th July, 9.00am – 3.30pm at Shrewsbury Town Football Club. **It was RESOLVED that Councillors Susan Crooke-Williams, Paula Sivertsen and Daisy Whiteman and the Clerk should attend.** It was noted that Councillor Daniel Thomas would be speaking at the conference in his capacity as a Shropshire Councillor.

17. Register of Electors for Town Councillors

Members noted information from Shropshire Council's Elections team regarding the application process for Town Councillors requiring copies of the Register of Electors for Much Wenlock for the performance of their duties.

18. Christmas Lights Switch-on

- a. **It was RESOLVED that the date of the 2025 Much Wenlock Christmas Lights switch-on would be Thursday, 27th November.**
- b. **It was RESOLVED that the Tourism and Events Working Group would take forward arrangements for the Christmas Lights Switch-on event.**

19. Shropshire Council Youth Offer Questionnaire

- a. Members noted correspondence from Shropshire Council regarding future youth provision in Shropshire.

- b. **It was RESOLVED that Councillor Daisy Whiteman should respond to the questionnaire on youth provision, with input from Councillors Paul Madeley, Daniel Thomas and Cherie Whiteman, by Friday, 18th July.**

20. Consultation

Members noted the following consultation:

- a. **Public Consultation on a new five-year plan to set the direction for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape,** open until the end of July 2025.

Councillor Jill Robinson had reviewed the draft plan and already submitted a personal response on climate implications. Members noted the plan made no reference to areas bordering the National Landscape and there was no suggestion of expanding the currently designated area. Farley Quarry was close to the National Landscape boundary and Councillors expressed concerns about ongoing activities there and the lack of engagement from the Shropshire Hills National Landscape officers. This point could be raised as part of the Council's response to the consultation.

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Jill Robinson would seek input from other Councillors and draft a response to consultation on the new five-year plan for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, to be submitted by the end of July.

- b. **Shropshire's Great Outdoors Annual Public Survey 2025, 30th June to 14th September 2025.**
Councillors were encouraged to reply individually.

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. 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. Events at the Cavalier Centre.

22. Agenda items for next Town Council meeting

Members were invited to suggest items for inclusion on the agenda of the next meeting: Christmas lights switch on.

23. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 4th September 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.

24. Staffing Matters

Members received further information about the appointment of new Council staff.

24. Lease of Library Premises

No further information had been received.

25. Leisure Centre

Members received an update on proposals for the future operation of Much Wenlock Leisure Centre and considered the Town Council's position. **It was RESOLVED to await further developments.**

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

Signed Mayor Date