

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
OF MUCH WENLOCK**
held at the Priory Hall, The Bull Ring
7.30 pm on Thursday 12 March 2015

PRESENT:

Cllr. Mary Hill (Chairman)
Cllr. Bert Harper
Cllr. Yvonne Holyoak
Cllr. Paul Laming
Cllr. Robert Toft
Cllr. David Turner

IN ATTENDANCE:

Sharon Clayton - Town Clerk
Approximately 18 members of the public

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that she intended to go through the minutes from the last meeting and update members of the public about what was discussed at that meeting and how the Council had dealt with it.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

COUNCILLOR	REASON
Milner Whiteman OBE	Holiday
Robin Bennett	Work commitments

3. MINUTES

The minutes from the Annual Town Meeting held on 27 March 2014 were APPROVED following the correction of a minor error to change the word "son" to read "children" on the second line of the last paragraph on page 1.

It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and AGREED that the amended minutes be ADOPTED as a true record.

4. MARKETS

The Chairman invited members of the public to discuss the town markets and footfall.

One member of the public said that she is quite happy that Rod Hall has moved from the Corn Exchange to the Buttermarket but was rather concerned that the Buttermarket was left untidy at the end of trading. She also said that, following Mr. Hall's re-location, the Corn Exchange is empty. The Chairman said that when Mr. Hall traded from the Corn Market and there were charity stall holders at the same time, he had to move and trade from the car park at the rear of the Corn Exchange, which was not ideal. He does not have to do that now because he has his own space.

Concern was expressed about Mr. Hall's wooden tables and that they may pose a fire risk. The Town Clerk explained that a fire risk assessment had been carried out and said that the whole building was a fire risk since the Guildhall is built from wooden timbers. The Town Clerk said that she would investigate the fire risk for the wooden tables and whether they should be stored away from the Buttermarket.

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A member of the public said that the town is not as vibrant as it was following the change over with the markets.

The Chairman explained that Town Council staff had tried to attract other stall holders but without success.

One member of the public asked what had happened to the charity stalls which seem to have disappeared, and suggested that the Town Square could be turned over to charity stalls, perhaps twice a year.

Cllr. Bert Harper explained that some charity's had moved to the church because it was cheaper to rent space there than at the Corn Market. However, the Town Council had consequently reduced its fees and is trying to attract them back. He said that the Town Council is trying to organise a monthly food market at the Corn Exchange in an attempt to enliven the town.

The Council was asked whether it had experienced a fall in income. Members of the public were informed that it was not possible to determine whether there was a fall in income at that time since the financial figures were not to hand. Members of the public expressed concern about the loss of the charity stalls.

The Chairman said that the Council was open to suggestions and is willing to listen to anything that people have to say that will help to revitalise the town and its markets.

5. OPEN FORUM

As stated at the beginning of the meeting the Chairman announced that she would go through last year's minutes and update members of the public on what the Town Council had done since the last Annual Meeting.

○ The Youth Club building at Station Road

The Chairman explained that the Town Council's decision concerning Shropshire Council's offer of the youth club building had been dragging on. She said that the Town Council has been negotiating very hard and has now made a decision to take over the youth club building and associated land. The Town Council does have some misgivings about certain aspects of the offer but Shropshire Council is not willing to give any leeway. She said that the Town Council has not yet signed any contracts, and the Town Council will be seeking views from members of the public about usage of the youth club building.

Cllr. Bert Harper explained his concerns about drainage issues and the responsibilities associated with taking over the footway used by William Brookes school students. Cllr. Yvonne Holyoak also expressed her concerns about taking on the youth club building and the impact it may have on the Town Council's finances and the precept.

The Chairman explained that if the Town Council does not take on the building Shropshire Council will sell it. She said the Town Council can see its potential and has undertaken a building survey which has revealed that it is sound.

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One member of the public said that the drainage from the pavilion runs into the school grounds, and another member of the public asked whether the Town Council has any plans to undertake a thorough drainage survey. Cllr. Harper explained that Shropshire Council has refused to pay for a drainage survey so the Town Council has agreed to have a survey carried out to reveal any underlying issues.

One member of the public said that it is not truly a burden but could be an asset. He also said that he has a full set of drainage plans for the full layout of the ground which he offered to let the Town Council have sight of.

One member of the public said he was very pleased that the Town Council has agreed to take over the building and suggested that the Town Clerk could be moved there which would solve the issue of accessibility because the Corn Exchange is not accessible to those with mobility problems. He also suggested installing outside toilets onsite which could service the Gaskell Recreation Ground.

One member of the public said she is also pleased that the Town Council will take over the building which, if it is mothballed, will still be an asset for the town. She hoped that the Town Council can find a good and proper use for the building and suggested that the developer contributions sitting with Shropshire Council can be used on the building.

One member of the public asked whether there is a caveat with the offer and was told that there is a claw-back of 50% if the Town Council sells the building within the first 12 years of taking it over.

One member of the public said that there is an opportunity to revitalise local government and parish councils can be more pro-active. If plans for future use of the youth club building are not successful then the building can be sold.

○ The Gaskell Recreation Ground

The Chairman said that as far as the administration is concerned the Ground is now being managed by the Charity. The Town Clerk explained the new management structure.

One member of the public expressed concern about the termination of the Joint Use Agreement and that no legal advice had been sought by the Town Council. He said that legal documents are still in force and yet decisions have been made without proper termination of the Joint Use Agreement. He expressed concern that the Town Council is the trustee of the charity and wondered why representatives of Wenlock Estates are also trustees.

Cllr. Harper explained that the Joint Use Agreement does not apply to the Gaskell Recreation Ground itself.

Another member of the public expressed concern that the 1975 Agreement still exists and concern was expressed about the original title deed of the donor.

The Town Clerk explained that Shropshire Council no longer recognises the Management Committee established as part of the Joint Use Agreement. She said it should have remained in place when the County became unitary. Shropshire Council will not formally terminate the Joint Use Agreement until the Agreement with the Town Council concerning the offer of the youth club building and associated land has been finalised.

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Another member of the public said that things would fall into place once the offer between the Town Council and Shropshire Council had been formally agreed. He said that the recently established Gaskell Recreation Ground Management Committee was liaising with users of the Ground and the Committee was acting in the best interests of the community. He said that an exit strategy should deliver a positive outcome.

Cllr. Harper referred to the Playdell Smithyman consultation which included a management plan that outlined costs expected from users of the Ground. He said that the Committee has had very positive meetings with users of the Ground including the Tree Forum.

One member of the public asked whether the Management Committee would have regular meetings with users. Cllr. Harper assured the meeting that there will be regular meetings.

The Town Council was asked if there would be a public meeting. A member of the Management Committee explained that a management plan should be drawn up before any consultation with the local community.

One member of the public said that the Town Council's budget assigns the same amount of money to the cemetery as it does to the Gaskell Recreation Ground and said that he hoped the Council would spend more on the living than on the dead.

○ Christmas lights

The Chairman apologised for the Christmas lights going out over the Christmas period but said that it had been a better display than previous years. Cllr. Holyoak thanked the traders for raising the funds to have a better display and encouraged people to work together to make the Christmas lights a bigger attraction. She said that the Town Council will liaise very hard with the Chamber of Trade and other traders in the town.

One member of the public said that a group of people had got together to put Christmas lights on the Gaskell corner and would continue to do so.

○ Town attractions including the markets

Cllr. Holyoak said that the Town Council had set up a working group to look for grant funding to help fund the Council's projects. She said that it was expected that the railings at the Buttermarket would cost in the region of £30,000 to refurbish. She encouraged interested members of the community with any bright ideas to join the group.

○ The Great War Commemoration

The Chairman said that the event put on in June last year was extremely successful and lots of people turned up for it. The schools did a lot of work too. A tree had been planted in the cemetery and a commemorative stone installed in front of it. This year there was going to be an exhibition in the town on the impact of WW1 on Much Wenlock. There would be various themes around the hospital, Belgian refugees, and how people had suffered. The exhibition would also include how Much Wenlock fitted in with the national theme. There would be a speaker at the exhibition in the Guildhall which was to be opened by the Mayor. The exhibition will run for the whole of July. The Edge will put on a testament of youth in July too.

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○ The Neighbourhood Plan referendum

The Chairman said that the referendum had been successful and assured everyone that the Planning and Environment Committee referred to the Neighbourhood Plan when responding to all planning applications. She said that a panel had recently been established to monitor and review the Plan.

She said that the Council is working hard for the community.

Members of the public were invited to ask questions.

One member of the public asked what the Council's finances were. The Town Clerk explained what reserves would be left with the budget set for 2016/2017 and concern was expressed that the reserves would fall to a dangerously low level.

Cllr. Holyoak explained that the Council had kept the precept down because Shropshire Council was not passing on the Council Tax Support Grant.

Concern was expressed about the proposed move of the Post Office and asked if there had been any consultation with the Town Council. One member of the public said that only two people had expressed any interest in taking it on and without sufficient interest it could close. Cllr. Turner said that once the Post Office had decided who would take it over there would be a public consultation. He said that once the Town Council had more details they would be conveyed to members of the public. Cllr. Laming explained that Barclays Bank would reconsider its revised opening hours pending the outcome of the Post Office.

One member of the public asked is the Council doing anything to support the businesses and what is being done to encourage Much Wenlock to grow.

One member of the public suggested that the Town Council should put a notice on the notice board giving details of how people can complain concerning Barclays Bank revised opening hours.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 21:00.

Signed:Date:
Chairman