

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
OF MUCH WENLOCK**
Held at the Priory Hall, The Bull Ring
7.30 pm on Thursday 9 March 2017

IN ATTENDANCE:

Cllr. Herbert Harper
Cllr. Robin Bennett
Cllr. Graham Edgcumbe Venning
Cllr. Mary Hill
Cllr. Yvonne Holyoak
Cllr. Dafydd Jenkins
Cllr. David Turner
Cllr. Joffrey Watson
Cllr. Milner Whiteman OBE
Sharon Clayton – Town Clerk
Rev'd Matthew Stafford
Lesley Durbin – community representative on the Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring and Review Working Group
Approximately 22 members of the public

1. WELCOME

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Rev'd Matthew Stafford to say prayers.

2. PRESENTATION

The Mayor explained that he was wearing the Mayoral Chain this evening because it was a special occasion at which he wanted to present a limited edition Civic Gift to Eric Humphries in honour of his services to the community. Eric had served as a Town Councillor in Much Wenlock for over 30 years and had been Mayor on four occasions, in 1987, 1993, 1999, and 2007. He had also served on the Executive Committee of the Shropshire Association of Local Councils for many years and, although now retired as a Town Council, he was still an active member of the Association. The Mayor then presented Eric with a Civic Gift on behalf of the Town Council.

Eric thanked the Mayor and the Town Council for thinking him worthy of the gift. He said he had enjoyed being a councillor over the past 30 years and advised anyone who was thinking about standing for election in May that they should do the job to the best of their abilities and endeavour to do what is right for Much Wenlock. During his Mayorship Eric recalled two of the most memorable events that he and his wife had been invited to. One of these was a cocktail party hosted by the Duke of Edinburgh at Windsor Castle, and another was the Sounding of the Retreat at Horse Guards Parade in London to attend a reception in the banqueting hall.

The Mayor said that, after being Mayor for 10 months he had come to realise what support was necessary from the Mayor's wife and on behalf of himself and his own wife, the Mayor then presented Eric's wife, Val Humphries, with flowers in recognition of the role she played as Mayoress during Eric's Mayorship.

3. MINUTES

The minutes from the Annual Town Meeting held on 17 March 2016 were APPROVED.
It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and AGREED that the minutes be ADOPTED as a true record.

4. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor gave a report as follows:

The Town Council had agreed a precept of £183,926 for the fiscal year 2017/2018 which equates to a 2.01% increase for a Band D property.

The Council continued to meet with Shropshire Council concerning services which Shropshire Council wanted to devolve. The Town Council had declined the museum since it was considered beyond its capacity and had been asked if it could make a financial contribution towards the leisure centre. However, this would have meant a significant increase to the Town Council precept and Shropshire Council was exploring other options.

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Having heard that the library faced closure and, after due diligence, the Town Council had agreed to make a financial contribution to retain the service rather than manage it directly. As a result, the library was to be refurbished to include a customer service point for the Town Council which would be available at times when the library was open and would be much more accessible for people to contact the Town Council.

The Council was still in discussions with Shropshire Council concerning open space. Areas located at Havelock Crescent, Hunters Gate, the area between Sheinton corner and the footway from Station Road leading to the Priory, and parts of the old railway line were being considered. However, the Council had some concerns about issues that may result from taking over responsibility for some of the land. The Town Council had expressed an interest in taking on the car parks although Shropshire Council had declined to transfer. The Town Council had also expressed an interest in land at Stretton Road which was designated as employment land in the Neighbourhood Plan. However, the council was concerned that a recent planning application intended to pass this land into the hands of a local business as a car park with no indication that any employment would be created.

The attenuation ponds at Stretton Road and Sytche Lane were under construction, and the Callaughton Lane development of 10 dwellings for social rent and 2 intermediate dwellings had been granted permission, although with a number of conditions as there were still some issues relating to drainage and the protection of trees.

Ironbridge Power Station, just outside the parish boundary, was to be demolished pending planning permission. It was owned by Uniper (part of the Eon group) who intended to sell the site. The Town Council was concerned about the removal of debris should it be necessary to pass through the parish of Much Wenlock.

The Gaskell Recreation Ground Management Committee had continued to manage the Gaskell Recreation Ground and was intent on progressing forward with ambitious long-term plans for future development. However, there were some drainage issues that needed to be resolved, especially the borehole in the children's playground, which had recently been inspected, and a recommendation was awaited from engineers, which could have financial implications for the Town Council.

The Much Wenlock town catchment has been designated as a Flood Rapid Response Catchment in the highest category. Surface water flooding can develop very quickly and the Town Council's Planning & Environment Committee was very keen to see the continuation of the Community Flood Action Group which had not been active in recent months. The Flood Prevention Plan for Much Wenlock needed to be updated, including the functionality of the volunteer flood wardens, and flood wardens were asked to confirm whether they still wanted to act in that role. New volunteers were also needed.

Residents were reminded that local elections would take place on Thursday 4 May 2017 and present councillors would cease to be a councillor 4 days later, although they could become Members of the newly elected Town Council should they put themselves forward for election.

The Town Council had received £6,100 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project to conserve, transcribe and digitise the first two minute books of the Borough of Wenlock covering the period 1495 to 1810, and a further £4,410 from the "Tesco Bags of Help" scheme for a project to develop the old cemetery into a wildlife haven and place of calm and rest.

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR MUCH WENLOCK

Lesley Durbin, a community member of the Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring and Review Working Group, gave an update on the Plan, which covers the period from April 2013 to 2026, and was currently under review. The Plan was meant to deliver 130 dwellings within the town over the Plan period. To date 73 dwellings had either been completed or proposed and therefore the town met the required number of dwellings by the first review date.

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The delivery of development on the land earmarked for employment at Stretton Road was on hold due to the installation of the attenuation ponds. Shropshire Council would support starter units as a contribution to small business growth and the Working Group had noted that, without this employment site coming forward, it might be difficult to establish the viability of a sustainable community.

It was not known what would happen as a result of Shropshire Council rolling forward its Local Plan to 2036 as a result of changes in the government's White Paper and how Much Wenlock would fit into the future needs of Shropshire as a whole. Neither was it known what impact this would have on Neighbourhood Plan areas. However, Shropshire Council was committed to working with the Town Council to identify an appropriate guideline for growth in Much Wenlock as further national guidance became available.

Shropshire Council had suggested that a new housing needs survey should be carried out in the town by the end of 2017, and there would be an open day during the coming months to explain how the Plan was meeting community aspirations.

6. FLOODING ISSUES

Cllr. Mary Hill informed the meeting that she had been nominated as the Town Council's representative on the Community Flood Action Group although, unfortunately, it had not met. However, she was trying hard to find former members of the Group so that it could be reinstated to deal with flooding issues.

7. OPEN FORUM

The following questions from members of the public were discussed:

- The new traffic signals at Sheinton Street did not seem to be working to slow the traffic. As soon as drivers saw the traffic lights turn green they accelerated. It was suggested that "walling" could be installed in each gateway to the town to warn traffic that they were entering a town and therefore reduce their speed. Concern was also expressed about vehicles parking on the single yellow line while they pop into the Spar and no-one seems to be carrying out any enforcement. Cllr. David Turner offered to take up these issues.
It was **AGREED** that these issues should be referred to PC Jane Cowen.
- Can the Town Council report any progress concerning the S106 contributions for the old Catholic Church site? The Mayor explained that the Town Council had agreed that the monies should be used towards the drainage issues on the Gaskell Recreation Ground. Concern was expressed that the money was time limited and that the underground stream running from the Windmill Hill and through the Gaskell Ground would make drainage issues difficult to resolve.
- Why did the Town Council vote for 12 dwellings on the Callaughton Lane development when the Neighbourhood Plan only supported 10 affordable dwellings? Cllr. Robin Bennett, who was a substitute representative for the Town Council on the Project Board, explained that he voted in favour because he thought it could either be 12 or zero, and he felt that having social housing for the town was better than none. The Mayor said that he thought the site chosen was in the wrong place due to flooding issues that could cause problems and, therefore, he voted against the application. However, he supported social housing but only in the right place. Concern was also expressed about what contamination was running into the Farley Brook and whether the sewage farm had the capacity to deal with water run-off especially with new development.
- With hindsight, is Callaughton Lane the best choice for development in view of drainage issues? The Mayor explained that the Project Board put forward several sites for development and these were rejected by Shropshire Council due to access issues. It was Shropshire Housing who finally approached the landowner of the site and exception sites unfortunately come with problems. Affordable housing could only be provided if the development site was affordable.
- How much money does the Town Council have in reserves, how much is in the balances, and how much has been spent on complaints? The Chairman of the Finance & Resources Committee explained that the finances were healthy.
It was **AGREED** that the Town Clerk would provide the requested information later since she did not have it to hand at that time.

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- When was the Guildhall last architecturally checked?
It was **AGREED** that the Guildhall should be architecturally checked.
- Concern was expressed about the decline of the markets. The Mayor explained that new craft markets were due to start in April.
- What has happened about the Persimmon site? The Mayor said that nothing further had been heard.

The Mayor thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and said he hoped it had been beneficial. He then closed the meeting at 21:02.

Signed: Date:
Chairman

DRAFT