

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
OF MUCH WENLOCK**
Held at the Priory Hall, The Bull Ring
7.30 pm on Thursday 8 March 2018

IN ATTENDANCE:

Cllr. Graham Edgcumbe Venning – Town Mayor
Cllr. Adam Davy
Cllr. Herbert Harper
Cllr. Mary Hill
Cllr. Allan Walter
Diane Barlow – Assistant to the Town Clerk
Members of the public

1. WELCOME

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. MINUTES

The minutes from the Annual Town Meeting held on 9 March 2017 were considered for approval.
It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and AGREED that the minutes be APPROVED and ADOPTED as a true record.

3. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor gave the following report:

“The Town Council has unanimously agreed to increase the precept for 2018/2019 by 2% to take into account inflation and to support library services for the next eight years. The precept has therefore been agreed at £187,605 which equates to £158.05 per Band D household per annum, a small increase of £2.67. The precept includes reserves for the Guildhall and other property refurbishments and improvements, future costs for the library (although this will not come into effect for 18 months).

A second interim audit has just been completed by SDH Accounting, and their overall findings support that we have made considerable progress in meeting key objectives. We have updated our investment strategy and are examining possible investment sources that will meet the Council's security, liquidity and yield criteria. Our auditors are encouraging us to find additional sources of investment. We have a legal obligation to maintain a minimum level of reserves.

The public library has been refurbished at the expense of Shropshire Council in return for the Town Council supporting library services for the next 8 years and now offers its users comfortable and fresh surroundings and, in addition, provides us with a Customer Service Desk to assist all members of the community. The Customer Service Desk will be open to the public every Wednesday morning between the hours of 10:30 and noon. At other times when the library is open we will maintain the Service Desk with council leaflets and notices and provide Enquiry Forms for the public's use. These will be actioned daily. The Council offices remain open to the public as usual. This Customer Service Point now provides comfortable accommodation for the Council Surgery to be held on the first Saturday of every month.

The Management Committee have published the 10-year plan which includes ambitious plans for the drainage of the field to maximise its usability and enjoyment, the installation of an all-weather and all ability perimeter pathway, all ability access and egress from the academy car park to the field including disabled parking, installation of all ability training and exercise apparatus on sites around the field and in later stages the provision of a new all-purpose recreation building enhancing the usage potential of the field. Demolition permission of the old toilet block will be applied for, upon the appointment of the successful main works contractor, to improve safety and enhance the surroundings. Grant application and contractor appointment is at a very senior stage.

Much Wenlock boasts the ownership of the Guildhall and Corn Exchange and other historic assets, but like all assets they require regular maintenance and regular expense. At this moment in time there are no maintenance programmes in place. Work therefore being carried out as a result of a problem occurring. This is not considered proper or professional management. The Guildhall in particular is looking very tired. The Council has decided, with professional advice, to create a short, medium and long-term maintenance and

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improvement programme. To this end we have consulted with the Conservation Officer at Shropshire Council, who has, in turn, recommended a number of professional companies to professionally oversee the projects. We are in early process of determining which company we will instruct to assist us to create a programme, contractor appointment, project management, QS services and fund raising. Arrol and Snell and Ratcliffe Associates are amongst those we are talking to. The Council will keep the community updated on progress.

Following the termination of a lease an office in the Corn Exchange has become vacant. Rather than seek to re-let the office the Council has adopted the office as a committee room. To reinstate rental that would have been received the Council has determined to offer it as a meeting room to local professionals, charities, institutions or other groups who have a need for daily hire. Re-decoration has been completed and completion as a meeting room is imminent. We will shortly be mailing possible users and advertising this facility.

As a result of plans to restrict usage of roads between Much Wenlock and Broseley road junctions at Sheinton Street and the Gaskell corner are being/will shortly be modified. The result of modification will be the enlargement of pavement areas. We will take advantage of these new areas with the installation of new planters (12 in total). This will provide very attractive entrances to the town. It has been agreed that Shropshire Council will absorb the cost of these planters. Much Wenlock will be responsible for their planting and care. Provision has been made in the precept. In addition to the new planters the Council is proposing to re-site the William Brookes artworks almost hidden under trees and poorly sited adjoining the Gaskell ground on these new paved areas and in the town square. They will be more greatly appreciated and easier to clean in their new sites.

As a result of two applications and two approvals, permission has been granted for the refurbishment of this [Pinefields] house of high historical interest and for the development of its rear garden to provide 4 new homes. The building and sale of the new homes was made legally dependent upon the satisfactory refurbishment of Pinefields. No move appears to have been made and the house continues to deteriorate. Time may have come to strongly lobby Shropshire Council to exercise its powers to enforce refurbishment works.

These new [affordable] houses [Callaughton Ash] are approaching completion. Shropshire Housing advise that there has been considerable interest from would be tenants and their next stage is to determine the local status of applicants.

Our thanks go to the 'Friends of the cemetery' who have worked very hard to maintain and enhance the surroundings. It has benefited from Tesco Bags of Help funding to commission 2 very special benches, additional tools, bug and bee hotels, with the help of primary school children. The assistance of Caring for Gods Acre is greatly appreciated.

Much Wenlock has enjoyed a number of occasions of special merit during 2017. The celebration of the renovation of the minute book. The book was bought by the Burgesses of Wenlock Borough in 1495 to record the minutes of their meetings. On 9 September 2017 we celebrated the completed renovation. The dedication of the new nave roof [at Holy Trinity Church] by the Bishop of Hereford overcoming his fears of riding a cherry picker.

The lighting of the special Olympics flame to celebrate the start of the Special Olympics. The Council presented Special Olympics GB with a commemorative plaque to mark the occasion and the special relationship with them and the Wenlock Olympian Society.

Much Wenlock was granted a Royal Charter by Henry IV as a Borough in 1468. The town used to celebrate 'Charter Day' but like many traditional celebrations 'Charter Day' lost its purpose and was finally abandoned. The Council plan to celebrate the 550th Charter Day anniversary by staging various events. A special committee was established to plan the celebrations and at this point I would like to ask Cllr. Mary Hill to outline the planned events."

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Cllr. Mary Hill said that we are very fortunate to have as our Patron, Katherine, Lady Forester, and she has attended one meeting. She has agreed to give a talk on the Charter Day, which will be on 17 November 2018, about the Forester family of Wenlock. We are very glad that she is keen to support us. Mary McKenzie from Shropshire Archives will be talking about the 1468 Charter which she is bringing to the Charter Day for display and she will also bring the old minute books because there was so much interest when they were on display during the Minute Books celebration. There will be a guest speaker from the University of Birmingham who will talk about the life and times of medieval Much Wenlock. We hope to have displays in the Guildhall, the museum and Holy Trinity Church all relevant to the medieval time. We want to establish a family treasure hunt with relevant clues for the period, for example, spotting a particular artefact in a shop window, in liaison with shop keepers. There will also be a walk around the town with guide leaflets. We are hoping to have an evening concert of words and music in the church reflecting the times of the Charter.

The Chairman thanked Cllr. Hill and continued with his report.

“Owing to the very recent resignation of two councillors, David Gibbon and Trevor Childs, there are two vacancies on the Town Council and elections have been called for by members of the community. A bye election is planned to be held on 10 May 2018.”

After concluding his report the Chairman invited members of the public to ask questions.

4. OPEN FORUM

Question: The Housing Monitoring Working Group established to monitor housing development in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan has since been dissolved. Was monitoring still ongoing?

Reply: Shropshire Council was in the process of updating the Local Plan. We will have to wait and see how we fit in in terms of development and the Council is working with Shropshire Council.

Question: The Council was congratulated on the Gaskell Recreation Ground Management Plan and was asked what the Council was doing with developer funds that were due from recent development sites, such as Callaughton Ash. It was suggested that funds could be used to address traffic concerns expressed when the planning application for Callaughton Ash was being consulted on.

Reply: Funds of £62,000 have been received and ring-fenced for enhancements to the Gaskell Recreation Ground. The Council is seeking Leader funding for the balance of costs.

Question: Why has the Council spent significant amounts of money on legal/professional advice?

Reply: The Council is not able to disclose this information due to ongoing events.

Question: Why is the Council not more transparent with how public money is spent.

Reply: All payments over £500 are published on the Town Council website.

Statement: It's a shame that so few people are in attendance at this meeting.

Reply: The Council is trying to bring down barriers through holding Town Council surgeries, and a community desk at the library. It's a pity that younger people are not getting involved and a shame that the turnout this evening is poor.

Statement: Disappointed on the current state of the Gaskell Recreation Ground.

Reply: The Management Plan for the ground is intended to improve the ground in many ways.

Question: Why are the public toilets at Queen Street closed? They are in a disgusting state.

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Reply: The Council is trying to find a plumber to repair the toilets and the Council will be reviewing its current maintenance contract.

Statement: The public toilets at Queen Street used to be locked around about 5pm and this prevented vandalism. Latterly the toilets are not locked.

Reply: The Council will look into having the toilets locked at night.

Statement: A lot of information relative to the Charter used to be kept in the Archives at the Corn Exchange.

Reply: The Council will ask the volunteer archivist to check where the information is being held because much of it has been deposited at Shropshire Archives.

Question: There has not been sufficient advertising of this meeting. What was the cause of the recent resignations of councillors?

Reply: This meeting was published on the Town Council's website, the Council's notice boards, Facebook, and discussed at previous Town Council meetings and therefore would be minuted, and advertised at last Saturday morning Town Council surgery. The number of people attending these meeting fluctuates year by year.

With regard to resignations of councillors, Robert Toft left just 6 weeks after joining the Council, and he left for personal reasons. David and Trevor gave no reasons for their resignations. There is no underlying war between councillors. We set out to be community representatives, we set out to have thorough discussions, and our objective is to get on with one another in the interests of the community; full stop.

Councillor resignations is a problem countywide and nationally. A councillor's role is quite demanding and some individuals are not aware of how much work and pressure is involved in the role. Market towns especially have a lot of responsibility.

Question: Is there something wrong with the way the Town Council is managed?

Reply: No.

Statement: The Council is not a happy place.

Reply: It is far happier now. People can put their name down for an election if they want to.

Question: Will the resignations of David and Trevor have an effect on the Management Plan for the Gaskell Recreation Ground.

Reply: No. They represent Wenlock Estates on the Management Committee and not the Town Council.

Question: Should the Council look into the legal situation with regards to spending money allocated for the Gaskell Recreation Ground? There could be possible conflict of interests if the Council is to invest large sums of taxpayers money to be controlled or spent by the nominees of Wenlock Estates present on the Management Committee and who are not Town Councillors. Furthermore, could the trustees of the ground comment on forthcoming planning applications by Wenlock Estates, a property developer, when the management of the ground have been in receipt of funding from Wenlock Estates?

Reply: There is no conflict of interest.

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: _____
Chairman

Date: _____