

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Meeting of the Recreation & Leisure Committee  
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House, 7 St John's Hill  
At 6.00pm on Wednesday 8 November 2023**

**PRESENT**

Councillors: P Gillam (Chair), B Bentick, A Mosley (Substitute for E Roberts), K Pardy, B Wall and R Wilson (substitute for D Vasmer).

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager), Ruth Jones (Office Manager), Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager) Danny Powell (Acting Operations Manager), Michelle Farmer (Committee Officer), Inspector Ben Tanfield (Shrewsbury Safer Neighbourhood Team - West Mercia Police), Acting Sgt Phil Parke (Shrewsbury Safer Neighbourhood Team-West Mercia Police).

**53/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**RESOLVED:**

**Apologies received from Councillors Lemon, Roberts, Vasmer and Wagner be accepted.**

**54/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (PECUNIARY & NON-PECUNIARY) IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

Shropshire Councillors	Those twin-hatted members declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council.
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**55/23 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting held on 6 September 2023 be submitted as circulated and read.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting held on 6 September 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.**

**56/23 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**Min 45/23 – Team Shrewsbury** – The Town Clerk had raised at the last meeting about the ability for the Town Rangers to utilise the PSPO powers. She was pleased to report that the

powers would now be extended to the Rangers, and they would undertake their training on Friday 10 November. The Town Clerk had met with Seb Slater from Shrewsbury BID to make comment on the proposed Memorandum of Understanding that both organisations would be required to sign.

*Councillor Mosley joined the meeting.*

## **57/23 POLICING IN SHREWSBURY**

Inspector Ben Tanfield and Acting Sergeant Phil Parke thanked Members for allowing them to attend the meeting to provide an update on Policing issues and resources.

He commented that there was a better multi-agency grip on the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) issues within the town centre and elsewhere. They were thankful for the work and involvement of Team Shrewsbury facilitated by the Town Council supplemented by Shropshire Council-led meetings.

There were relatively few individuals causing disproportionate harm/ASB. They were keeping track of these individuals and focussing on the top five with multi-agency meetings each week. The Inspector commented that some partners were still not engaging as fully as they would like and there was a need to try and engage them to join. If the Town Councillors had any influence to get them involved, it would be appreciated.

The Police cannot solve all the problems of troubled individuals i.e., who have long-term drink, drug and mental health problems. They were making better use of the powers they had and had increased the issuing of Community Protection Warnings (CPW), Community Protection Notices (CPN) as well as Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBO). For Shrewsbury Anti-Social Behaviour offenders, they had issued 9 CPWs with 4 to be issued, 1 CPN, 9 CBOs with 10 prepared for court.

PSPO powers had expanded, and they had continued to issue PSPOs (4 had been issued for October). They were grateful that the Town Rangers were being given PSPO powers and the police would provide some training/guidance. They continued to use dispersal notices e.g., when The Ark closed, and four were issued during 'nuisance week' i.e., Halloween and Bonfire Night.

The Multi-agency problem-solving approach was the way forward. Frontline resources were few and stretched. They needed solutions which would still be effective after hotspot patrols had moved on.

There was a meeting planned this week with the trustees of The Ark to negotiate a list of things the Police wanted to see them implement/consider and what it would look like when it reopened. By the 10 November they hoped to have an agreement in writing with the Ark. He added that the town is better with a charity like the Ark.

There were ever changing Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) priorities and responsibilities. They now had a big focus on shoplifting, and SNT were doing all the CCTV enquiries and

investigations for the prolific shoplifters. Shoplifting was proving a big impact on lives and livelihoods and thefts were often committed by those who commit ASB/drug offences, especially in the town centre. Sadly, this action would lead to other things receiving less attention.

He reported on the recent County Lines Intensification Week where Shropshire outperformed every other policing area with 26 charges, 2 county lines closed, 29 safeguarding visits, £70k in cocaine seized, £10k of crack and £4.5K of heroin.

The Inspector confirmed they would be flexing resources to cover the Christmas events of Lights Switch-on and Carols in the Square.

***Councillor Bentick joined the meeting.***

Councillor Bentick enquired as to whether the Police were covering activities in the suburbs and not just the Town Centre to which the Inspector confirmed that Meole and Sundorne were getting Police attention but as the Town Centre was a busier area there would be more visible police presence in the town.

Councillor Bentick also asked if the 101 service could be made more user friendly. Inspector Tanfield agreed he would feed this back to the PCC as it was not something he could change as it was a nationwide service.

Councillor Mosley asked if residents/officers should report to 101 as well as Team Shrewsbury. The Inspector confirmed that crimes/ASB must be reported on 101 as it logs the issue, and the more incidents logged the more resources be allocated. Sadly, they were not able to action every incident recorded and they were in a difficult position with regards to resources, but the reality was they needed to adapt to the current workings and staffing.

Councillor Wall enquired as to whether the paperwork/report writing that officers had to complete was an issue with why there were less on patrols. Inspector Tanfield advised that report writing was dictated by what the courts requested and government requirements on general statistics. This was a national issue, he appreciated it may be time consuming, but it needed to be completed.

A lot of Officer time can be taken looking and downloading CCTV footage. They were looking at the possibility of a team of newly recruited Community Support Officers (CSO) to make a team who deal with CCTV footage to enable Police Officers back on patrols.

No further questions were asked by Members. Inspector Tanfield and Acting Sergeant Parke were thanked for their time.

***Inspector Tanfield and Acting Sergeant Parke left the meeting.***

## **58/23 BUDGET 2023/2024**

### **58.1 Fees & Charges for 2024/25**

The Town Clerk reported that the Responsible Finance Officer had prepared his usual schedule of Fees & Charges for the committee to comment on. In the past they had raised charges in line with inflation but that was currently in double figures. They were proposing to increase the standard charges by 2% but those that had particular costs attached that were subject to above inflation increases were to be increased to 6% for the Market (reflecting increased utility costs) and 9% for sports pitches (reflecting increased fuel and fertiliser costs). They did monitor their costs against other providers of similar services in the area and did generally offer very favourable rates. It was also noted that these fees and charges (other than Market Hall fees which did add to their core budget) barely covered the costs of maintaining these facilities.

Councillor Wilson asked if there had been any feedback from the traders regarding the fees and charges. The Town Clerk commented that this was the starting process, the fees & charges would have to go to Finance & General Purposes and Full Council to be approved, but they would liaise with all traders.

Councillor Wilson also enquired as to whether the Town Council could advertise the facilities they were responsible for i.e., tennis courts, bowling greens etc. He commented that there were a lot of facilities on offer to the town but not all residents were aware of them. It was agreed that this would be done.

### **58.2 Items for the 2024/25 Budget setting process**

The Town Clerk reported that it was the time of year that they started to consider their budget proposals for the 2024/25 financial year and that process would start at Finance & General Purposes Committee in December. Currently the Responsible Finance Officer was looking at their forecast out-turn and reviewing the inflationary pressures of their budget lines. This would give them the baseline budget. If there was anything that this Committee would wish to include, they would need to start thinking of detail and costing.

Councillor Wilson asked that the Town Council be mindful of the Market stallholders who were already stretched with costings.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the rationale for proposed increases in line with Bank of England proposed inflation targets be noted;**
- (ii) That the Fees & Charges as presented by recommended to the Finance & General Purposes Committee for approval;**
- (iii) That Officers notify Allotment Management Committees, Clubs and Market Traders of the proposed charges ahead of implementation.**

## **59/23 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

The Town Clerk reported on the following:

- Beaver project was progressing well, and this would be discussed later in the meeting
- Kynaston Drainage had started but it hadn't helped that they had received a month's worth of rain in 24 hours.
- Kynaston Play Area had been delayed until the ground dried out.
- War Memorial repairs would have to take place after Remembrance as they couldn't guarantee they would be finished in time.
- County Ground Pavilion was back on the radar, and they had already had a meeting with the Cricket Club
- Wakeman Sports Field looked like a non-starter as the College wished to retain the land for their own use.

Councillor Wilson commented that Shorncliffe was still ongoing, waiting for the lease to be signed over. He would like to start an informal engagement with the community over the winter period as the process was dragging.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Capital Programme report be noted.**

## **60/23 FOOTFALL**

Stuart Farmer, Acting Operations Manager, updated the committee on footfall in the Quarry, providing comparison graphs. Quarry visitors had remained stable during September and October but were down on previous year's numbers. It was worth mentioning that it was focusing solely on the Quarry and did not include the counters in the Square or Market Hall. It should also be noted that Summer 2023 was not as warm and dry as Summer 2022 which had been reflected in footfall numbers.

The Acting Operations Manager had also met with the installers of the footfall counters to check the figures were accurate and they confirmed they were confident with the figures being provided.

The Town Clerk stressed that the figures shown reflected the activity in the park and these had reduced, hugely down to the dreadfully wet summer they had. She was aware that the press had picked up on the reduced footfall and that the report seemed to suggest that this reflected the town footfall. Town Centre footfall remained exceptionally buoyant, and their increases were above the average for towns like Shrewsbury.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Footfall Report be noted**

## 61/23 FISHERIES

### 61.1 Shrewsbury Town Fisheries

The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager updated the Committee on Shrewsbury Town Fisheries.

**Monkmoor Fishery:** With the new river platforms completed and the Environment Agency grant funding received they would like to renew the gate of entry. The current standard bar gate was temporarily repaired as it was constantly getting damaged by people climbing over it and also lifting motorbikes over it too. They would replace it with a gate of similar design to Oxon Pool entry gate. The Monkmoor gate would look the same, a foot higher than the existing gate, a single not double gate, was stronger and anti-climb. This would be completed in the next month. Public access for pedestrians and dog walkers would still be available.

**Radbrook Pool:** Water oxygen and water quality problems had been an issue at Radbrook Pool, of which was the worst pool out of their three pools, Oxon Pool being second and Mousecroft Pool being the best. Dangerous levels had needed attention during the hot summer weather to avoid a mass fish loss and had involved fisheries water keepers attending a spell of 24 hours over 7 days to man pumps. It was so critical that the Environment Agency were contacted to help with a power booster pump to gain ground and resolve the problem quickly. A meeting had been arranged for early November to discuss measures to open a wind tunnel area or areas to get air movement regularly on the pools surface. This had been problematic, as all their pools were totally surrounded by tree growth. The canopy effect suffocates the pools aquatic habitat. There were other measures that they could do to add to the biodiversity of the pool that could also reduce the impact of problematic rodents etc. This work could include removal of some of the dense canopy growing over the pool. The build-up of organic matter can absorb oxygen and create habitats that vermin enjoy, and additional light on the canopy floor can stimulate the growth of wildflowers which attract pollinating insects. Ornamental Water Lilies had grown in front of a fishing platform, rather than attempt to move the lilies, they would like to move the location of the platform slightly to one side so that the platform can be used without the risk of hooking the lilies. In addition, new smarter looking fishing platforms would be installed over the winter period to enhance the look of the pool.

**Fisheries Coaching Round Up:** Coaching sessions for junior members had concluded for this year and was met with great positivity and success. Lots of happy faces and youngsters caught fish with their parents and in some cases for the first time. With the help of fisheries coaches supervised by Ian James, their head coach, who reports back to Andy Jones. A new series of events were planned for next year. In addition, they also organised a number of coaching sessions this year in association with the Shropshire Recovery Forum for adults. The Forum received funding from Shropshire Council for equipment and they helped providing coaching sessions for free to help make a positive difference to people's lives and help give some positives with fishing. It had proved very successful and more of these events with the forum were planned for next year. Another plus from this was that two adults from these sessions had got so engrossed into the events that they wished to be coaches for future events. With the help of Angling Trust, Andy Jones had booked them onto coach training courses in November and once completed the individuals would become qualified certificated coaches with full DBS check certification.

**Water Testing:** Volunteer water testers were continuing with testing on eight locations on the River Severn and the Reabrook. A full up to date report would be available soon from the Angling Trust for Shrewsbury.

The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager also reported that they were due to hold the first competition in October but due to the high river levels this had to be cancelled. Some fishing pegs had also been damaged due to the weather and these would be repaired.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

### **61.2 Rowley & Fenemere Angling Association**

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that Officers continued to liaise with the Rowley & Fenemere Angling Association. The Town Clerk along with the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager had worked with Councillors Mosley & Vasmer to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding which they hoped might give residents some assurance that they would continue to manage the Castlewalk Recreation Ground for the wider benefit of the local community. The Club were still reviewing how this fishery would work and they were awaiting proposals of where they would like to place pegs, recognising the discussions they had around pathways, nature trails and the public's general enjoyment of the area. They would like to place a throwline board in the area, and this was something that the Town Council could and should assist in accommodating, providing it matched the existing boards elsewhere and operated in the same way.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted**

## **62/23 TEAM SHREWSBURY**

### **62.1 Update on the work of Team Shrewsbury**

The Office Manager provided an update on Team Shrewsbury activities. From the comparison chart provided, over the past few months Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) issues seemed to be declining. Quarry Security, Town Rangers and Taxi Marshalls continued to engage with individuals on a regular basis. They had also reported a decline in ASB; however, they had noticed an increase in mental health issues. Discussions were therefore taking place with the relevant partners including RESET and Shropshire Recovery Partnership (SRP).

As the Town Clerk had already advised, PSPO training for Quarry Security and Town Rangers would be taking place on Friday, allowing staff to have the ability to enforce when required. The Security played a valuable role within the Town.

As the Inspector advised a number of partners including the Town Council, Police & the Shrewsbury BID were to attend a meeting with the ARK to discuss their thoughts on the future.

This week was "National Youth Work Week", Young Shrewsbury would be launching its "Stay Safe" campaign and their new "Youth Council" throughout this month. Over the coming weeks, they were looking to attend local schools and colleges. The "Stay Safe" campaign covered subjects such as rail line danger, river safety and staying safe and well (drugs & alcohol).

They were also looking to create the Youth Council to champion the voice of young people which would represent the views of young people at a local level. It would enable young people to have a chance to discuss relevant issues, engage with decision makers and contribute to improving the lives of young people within their communities.

It was raised to the Inspector about reporting to the Police, this was very much encouraged and if members required anything chasing from Team Shrewsbury, then please forward to the Office Manager the Incident Number and she would look to liaise with the Police.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted**

## **62.2 Policing Priorities**

The Office Manager informed members of the Committee that the next quarter which started last month and would run from October to December had been submitted to the Police. A number of issues related to 'parking' however, the Police had advised that parking on the pavement wasn't actually illegal outside London and all parking issues needed to be referred to Shropshire Council. Police would use their powers re obstructing the highway in emergencies, for example where the road was completely blocked after a collision, otherwise the council were the most appropriate agency.

The next quarter would start January 2024, these would be collated in December and would be submitted accordingly, however they would be presented to the Committee in January following submission at the end of December. It was requested to provide as much information to the Police as possible including locations, times, what the ASB was and if details were available of vehicles/individuals.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted**

## **62.3 Town Ranger Project**

The Town Clerk reported that the Ranger project had been a godsend. It started out with more ambassadorial aims but the activity they had become involved in had grown. Hugely important was the reassurance they gave to everyone. From visitors to the park who felt safer when they were around, the young people who hung around – they did often provide that parental role with them, to the retail staff in the town centre who often had to deal with aggressive Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and shop lifting, to the rough sleepers who they



did regular welfare checks on and also to individuals who did find themselves in difficulty, case in point were the Taxi Marshals and the number of vulnerable women who they had to look after and help get taxis and following last weekend, they helped pull an individual out of the river and provided him with medical assistance until such time as the emergency services arrived.

The project had been greatly funded by Safer Streets 4 funding and changes to criteria meant that they couldn't apply for Safer Streets 5, but Officers have had conversations with the Police & Crime Commissioner who had seen first-hand their value and had expressed a willingness to contribute to a wider partnership project. They had also spoken to the Director of Public Health in her capacity as the Community Safety Partnership Lead and the Team Shrewsbury Partnership would sit down and look at what could be achieved from a partnership perspective, but it would still mean that the Town Council would need to make a sizeable contribution towards the project.

Councillor Wilson praised the Town Rangers, Quarry Security and Taxi Marshals as they all supported the Police indirectly. The long-term future of the Rangers needed to be ensured and funding to be looked at.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted**

**63/23 QUARRY**

**63.1 Quarry Events Programme**

The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager updated the Committee on the Quarry Events for 2023. Since the last meeting they had received a number of small community bookings. Some of these were free family workshops who were returning to the Quarry having had successful previous visits. Other events tended to be fund raising walks or annual school runs.

Due to the nights drawing in, they had to ensure they had risk assessments and measures in place to ensure everyone enjoyed the event safely. The new solar lights had proven extremely positive with events of this nature as the darkest part of the Quarry was now lit up.

A draft list for 2024 events had been provided to Committee with some of the regular large events returning to the Quarry next year i.e., the Food Festival, Lets Rock and Oktoberfest.

Councillor Wilson commented on the play area in the Quarry being closed during the Flower Show and asked if it could be left open.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the contents of the Quarry Events report be noted;**
- (ii) That the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager liaise with the Flower Show to see if it would be viable to keep the play area open.**

### **63.2 Quarry Working Group**

The notes of the Quarry Working Group meeting held on 20 October 2023 were circulated as read.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the notes of the Quarry Working Group meeting held on 20 October 2023 be received and adopted**

### **63.3 Long Term plan for Quarry**

The Town Clerk reported that further to the Quarry Working Group discussions which had recognised the importance the park was as a community asset which attracts upwards of 1.5m visitors. But with high footfall came high wear and tear and of later increased flooding. The need to keep on track with its maintenance was so important.

It was also important to set the Quarry in those wider Big Town Plan discussions. The Big Town Plan Masterplan covered the majority of the river loop, yet the recreational quarter which covered the park and the swimming baths was not only so vital for active lifestyles and general well-being but was also very important for the connectivity of residents with the town centre and the river.

The Quarry was a heritage asset, and other heritage assets in the town like the Castle and now Rowleys House were having Conservation Management Plans to look at how they could be actively and effectively maintained, reflecting the history but also providing those modern-day facilities that the public come to expect; in the case of the Quarry those expectations included covered shelter, mobile phone connectivity, good toilets, safe routes and good play.

The Town Clerk had started to review the feasibility brief that she had written back in 2014, but they needed that overall plan. This would help in infrastructure planning, would help when funding streams became available to bid for and help with maintenance costs. If members were happy, they would amend the brief and forward proposals to the Quarry Working Group and then Finance & General Purposes for budget consideration.

Councillor Bentick enquired if there were any other towns who had achieved a high level of funding that could be used as a guide. The Town Clerk replied stating there were a number of towns that had either undertaken major refurbishment of existing parks or developed new parks and the Town Council needed to be ready when these 'pots' became available, but evidence and consultation was needed.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the update be noted;**
- (ii) That a Brief for the development of a Management Plan be submitted to the Finance & General Purpose Committee.**

## 64/23 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

Danny Powell, Acting Operations Manager, provided a report to Committee on how the Grounds Maintenance operations had been influenced by weather conditions during 2022 and 2023.

In 2021 the Head of Operations provided a report to this Committee on the impact changes to climate were having on grounds maintenance operations. This report went into the more extreme condition the grounds maintenance operations had faced since then, echoing the real impact the climate emergency was having at local level.

In 2022 and 2023 the weather conditions had been opposites. One hot and dry, the other wet and mild. At times this had placed significant strain on being able to maintain the estate in terms of impact on staff, excessive use of machinery and changes to planting conditions.

**Weather for 2022/23** - The two years could not have been more different. 2022 had some of the highest annual temperatures, with some days above 40c. There was little or no rain during July and August. The year started with New Years Day being 16.3c. Then every month of the year had above average temperatures, with January and February having wet spells. During February they had 3 major storms, Dudley, Eunice and Franklin. 2023 started very similarly, with January and February being mild and wet. During both 2022 and 2023 they saw exceptional flooding episodes with both the Quarry and County Ground suffering the greatest open space impact.

Then the weather changed, with March being the wettest since 1981 and April being a cold month. May started with heavy rain, before the rest of the month became fine and dry. This carried on into June which was warm and humid becoming hot for two weeks. After which the summer became wet with average temperatures. September and October had carried on in a similar vein, being wet and warm and no frost yet.

### **Floral Maintenance - Plants.**

During summer 2022 they found that certain plants struggled with the high temperatures and did not flourish. To combat this, they started to look at drought tolerant plants and to carry out more sustainable planting (using herbaceous/perennial planting). This year, the work on the plants had to change massively. Plants that performed well last year, had been poor or failed (particularly Begonias, Salvias & African Marigolds). This was because of the wetter and duller growing conditions; this would be an on-going problem as they could not foretell the weather for the year ahead. They could overcome this problem in the floral infrastructures by planting with a cross section of plants, some which liked dry/hot conditions and others which liked wetter conditions. If one died out the other would flourish. Every year the staff reviewed the success of the planting programmes, to ensure optimum floral benefit.

**Watering** - The floral infrastructures during summer 2022, dried out rapidly. Because of this they had several operatives out watering every day. The very high temperatures on several days caused the water in the planter/basket reservoirs to get so hot that it scorched the plant roots, so killing the plants. This year it had been just the opposite. They had only used two members of staff to carry out all watering duties but had found that some of the tubs/baskets had again died off. This time reservoirs had over filled because of the rain, and

this had drowned the plants meaning staff had to go round emptying the water out to keep the plants alive.

**Grass Growth** - Grass maintenance had changed in the last 25 years. In the past come October, all mowers were put away and did not reappear till the following March. Now with milder winters the grass did not stop growing all year round. This was because grass growth was governed by the soil temperature and not the air temperature. Because our winters were now milder, with little frost, the soil temperature stayed at a range which kept the grass growing.

Grass maintenance was carried out by a wide range of machines, on many different surfaces with many different sub-surfaces. The difference between one side of the town to the other was hugely significant. It was not unknown for areas like Sundorne to not have started cutting while places like Meole would already be on first, second or third cut.

**Verge Mowing (Batwing mowers)** - In 2022 this started in late March and was full time by a three-man team until end of June. During July, August and September only areas where the grass was growing were cut. This was by a single member of staff, rising to two with the last cut of the season. Verge mowing stopped at the end of September.

In 2023 they started mowing in February, when the ground conditions allowed and stopped in March because of the weather. They restarted in April, with a four-man team and had mown every month until October. Some days had been lost, because the ground had been too wet and during October, they had reduced to a two-man team. With the warm and humid conditions this season, they had at times struggled to keep on top of the grass growth. Some areas had looked uncut, but the grass had grown so quickly, they could have cut it more often. The varying geological conditions across the town also impacted greatly on areas which could and could not be cut. The eastern side of the town had a large clay core, whilst the west was more porous. Therefore Meole, Radbrook and Copthorne could be cut sooner than Sundorne and Harlescott areas.

**Large Area Tractor Mowing** - During the 2022 cutting season, the tractor was out cutting, when ground conditions allowed every month. Jan-Feb, sports pitches March -June, full time. July-August where required Sept-Nov, sports pitches and certain areas.

In 2023, they had again cut in January and been out every month. Some months they had cut only sports pitches, but since March they had tried to cut the whole round every fourteen days. This had been difficult as the sports pitches and schools they maintained had to be cut more often. This was because the grass had been growing so quickly. They had complaints about the amount of lying grass after each cut. On sports pitches they had used a cut and collect to remove any lying grass, but the amount of grass collected could be several cubic meters. This made it too expensive to carry out on all areas. They had tried lifting the height of cut, but all this achieved, was the length of sward became too long and the height of the cut must be lowered back and the amount lying grass was worse.

**Fine Turf** - Cutting took place all year round, to different frequencies, depending on fixtures. They had aerated more, to let the rain into the soil profile and to reduce the amount of standing water on playing surfaces and to reduce water runoff, in heavy rain. The timing of work was now more weather dependent and had to change daily because of the weather. Wet ground they had to keep machinery off, the long hot periods of 2022, did they cut or not to protect the sward. Both had led to complaints from users.

**Mobile Round and Rural Mowing** - These were cut to the same time frequency as the verge mowing.

**School Mowing and Private Contracts Mowing** - Across the two seasons, these were cut to the specification the client had set. They did reduce the number of cuts during the summer of 2022, then reducing the cost to the client. This year a number of schools had asked that the frequency of cutting be increased and paid accordingly.

**Hedge and Shrub bed maintenance** - The hot dry summer of 2022 reduced the growth on both the hedges and shrubs. This then reflected in the amount that had to be trimmed off that autumn. 2023 had seen growth return to normal and in places, hedges had grown more. In places this excessive growth had seen hedges needing to be cut as a matter of urgency and the volume of growth could extend the cutting season into December.

**Trees** - Erratic climate conditions were beginning to have an impact on tree stock especially with sudden changes in short periods. In times of hot arid weather, limbs were more prone to failing and the Tree Team had to undertake emergency work to make huge branches safe. Last year saw many trees go into stress. As an example, the harvest of acorns was immense as all Oak trees sought to provide new growth.

As conditions changed further and the council's tree stock matured further, more inspections would be required. In areas like the Quarry, the presence of deadwood in the trees and the extremely high footfall, meant that the trees needed to be managed carefully.

### **Pests and Diseases.**

We were seeing more pests and disease affecting trees due to the warmer climate. There were many species of invertebrate pests which could not survive in the UK previously but were now settling further north each year. Many of their trees were not resilient to these pests due to lack of exposure, so maybe hit harder than the same species living in more southern countries. Coupled with other stresses such as drought and flooding occurring more frequently, this was taking a toll on their survival. This had resulted in more tree problems and the trees would need to be inspected regularly.

### **Conclusions**

**Planting and watering** - They had developed a plan to plant more sustainable and drought tolerant plants across their sites. The poor growth of some bedding plants had always been an issue because of the weather. Each year was different and their displays, to the public looked good. They changed our watering policy, depending on the weather conditions each year and now purchase planters with a water reservoir and capillary matting to combat the hot weather.

**Grass Mowing** - Mowing had now become a twelve month of the year operation. The only time it stopped was when the ground conditions were too wet and damage to the surface would happen (muddying and rutting). To not mow through the autumn/winter months, whilst the climate was ideal for grass growing, would cause excess wear on the machines, when mowing restarted. Large amounts of lying grass, would kill the sward underneath. The long grass would trap litter and other debris, the litter would be cut up and any other debris would damage mower blades. The mowing of long grass caused the machine to work harder, so using more fuel and oil. The cut grass got carried on to footpaths and roads and long

uncut grass looked untidy. The continuation of mowing through the autumn/winter had the detrimental effect, that the staff carrying out this operation were usually deployed to shrub bed and hedge cutting work during autumn/winter. It also came at a cost to the Town Council as they were only paid by Shropshire Council to mow from April-September.

**Hedge and Shrub maintenance** - The amount of growth was influenced by the climate, because of this the length of time to carry out the operation, fluctuated from year to year. In 2023, shrub and hedge pruning was going to be a longer season. This also increased the amount of green waste they produced.

**Staff Welfare** - During summer 2022, they had some staff absent through headaches and other minor illness symptoms following days of extreme heat. Many of their operatives worked on uncovered ride on machinery or out on playing fields, for the whole day. Whilst they wore hats and sun protection and took regular breaks in the shade, the heat from machine engines meant they were working in air several degrees higher than the ambient temperature. The summer of 2023 had found these operatives working out in the rain all day. They were issued with waterproof PPE, but they still returned to the depots at the end of the working day soaked through.

**New Technology** - The Grounds Maintenance Industry continued to embrace new technology. Staff kept abreast of new ways of working through continued engagement with sector bodies including the Midlands Park Forum and the Grounds Management Association. Staff regularly attended sector shows like Saltex to review new initiatives and the Team regularly had the opportunity to test new machines.

Staff had recently been testing white-lining machines that were able to mark out sports pitches using GPS technology. Whilst the equipment was not cheap to purchase, the time taken to mark out a pitch was significantly less and given that staff mark out sixty-four football pitches alone, the return on investment made the consideration of purchase a very viable option.

### **Matters for Consideration**

Over this winter season the Operations Managers would look to undertake the following work:

- (i) Review how grass verges were maintained with Highways Colleagues with a view to leaving some verges to grow wild;
- (ii) Review the Town Councils Tree Management Plan and in particular the tree inspection regimes in prime locations;
- (iii) Review the choice of planting to develop more sustainable and resilient planting schemes;
- (iv) Review the impact on machinery particularly taking note of repairs and servicing, fuel used and the replacement/depreciation period of kit;
- (v) Review new technology to potentially free up staff and improve efficiency;

- (vi) Review the effect on staff of climatic conditions and to maintain an estate in ever changing adverse conditions.

The Town Clerk reported that in 2019 she had brought a report to committee to look at how the Council's approach to grounds maintenance had changed in the first 10 years of operation which at the time was quite startling and really brought home that climate emergency was not just affecting the rain forests in Brazil, it was affecting Shrewsbury.

The Acting Operations Manger's revised report was showing a significant shift in what staff were having to do compared to four years ago. The seasons were so unpredictable – after last summer they would be converting to drought tolerant plants, but if they had for this summer, the plants would have rotted. Mowing Teams were still cutting grass in the middle of November and the only thing stopping them at the minute was the effect of a 4-tonne tractor would have on waterlogged grass (which was still growing). Trees still had their leaf and that posed a huge risk at this time of year with storms.

The Council had good kit which did give them options, but they didn't have enough staff to run grass cutting 365 days a year – they had always held over jobs in the summer to do in quiet times in the winter but that didn't always go to plan. One of the big areas of resource was around the cross over from winter sports to summer and back to winter. She commented that Acting Operations Manager's suggestions of reviewing various aspects of the Grounds Maintenance Operations was a very sensible one and she commend his excellent report to committee.

Councillor Wilson commented that the Town Council staff should be commended as he was unaware of the issues staff faced each season.

He also commented that as the Town Council was a large controller of land, could there be more tree planting/shaded areas etc. What could the Town Council do more as a landowner.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) That the contents of the report are noted;**
- (ii) That Officers report back to the Committee on plans for the 2024 Growing Season;**
- (iii) That Officers feed into the Finance & General Purposes Committee budget process any operation needs.**

## **65/23 COMMUNITY ALLOTMENT**

The Town Clerk reported that she had continued to liaise with Officers at Shropshire Council about their Community Allotment process. They were liaising with the Estates Team at Shropshire Council about their Community Allotment Programme which was being treated as a Community Asset Transfer, but it appeared the onus on what was expected of the Town Council to review proposals on their land was a bit excessive. It started as just supporting an application to now undertaking reviews of proposals and more recently considering other locations where the originally proposed location was not appropriate. Officers were supportive of community allotments which was reflected by the fact that there was already community allotments on Town Council land but was it for the Town Council to be overburdened by the bureaucracy of another authority in relation to activity on land that was not owned by the Town Council.

It was agreed by Committee that further recognition of the role was required and a report on the practicalities. An evaluation of time and effort would be needed and further discussions with Shropshire Council required regarding possible costings and charges.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the update be noted;**
- (ii) That the Town Clerk continue to monitor requests and report back to the Committee**

**66/23 CHRISTMAS**

**66.1 Christmas Events**

It was reported that the usual Christmas Lights Switch-on event will take place on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November and Carols in the Square will take place on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> December. The Town Council were very appreciative of the role that BBC Radio Shropshire played in both events. There was a great programme and was lovely to get into the festive spirit.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

**66.2 Christmas Lights invitation to tender.**

The Acting Operations Manager, Stuart Farmer, reported to Committee that there was currently a live tender for Christmas Lights 2024-2026. To date there had been a lot of interest and he had held several meetings with prospective tenderers. He could not go into more detail as it was currently a live tender. The closing date was the 19 January 2024. After this date he would be looking to form a Working Group to discuss the application received.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

**67/23 BEAVER PROJECT**

The Acting Operations Manager, Stuart Farmer, reported to Committee on how the Beaver Compound Construction was progressing and to update members on any issues that the contractor had made officers aware of since starting construction.

The Old Riverbed was situated along side Hubert Way in the Bagley Ward and borders Harlescott Ward. This site was identified as potential release site for Eurasian Beavers. Following a competitive tender process, a preferred contractor was identified and working in partnership with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, licences were granted for works to begin at



the end of September 2023. It had been hoped to have started this work during the summer months when the weather would have been more favourable, however due to issues with getting the licences and agreements with Natural England this was not possible.

Works began on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023 with the commencement of the fencing installation towards the Ellesmere Roadside of the Old Riverbed. The exact style and design of the fencing was identified with the tender specification and included 'anti pedestrian climb designs' as well as a buried or pinned skirt of approx. 1 metre inside the compound to prevent burrowing under the fencing. On the eastern side of the site a new path had been installed along the new fencing to aid pedestrian access alongside the compound. This had been completed with gravel and timber boarding and again this fencing had the 'anti climb' and skirt attachments.

A boardwalk would connect the eastern side back to Hubert Way, initially, due to the time of arrival of the contractors, they thought it would be best to come back during the spring and install this board walk, however they had since discovered that the water levels do not alter a great deal during wetter or drier conditions. Since they had made this discovery, they had decided to install the boardwalk as part of the main works. This boardwalk would be approximately 1.5-meter width to allow for DDA compliance. Alongside this boardwalk would be the continuation of the beaver fencing as well a trash screen situated in the standing water section nearest the eastern side.

The fencing that runs along Hubert way had proved a challenge, as approximately halfway along the site the fencing was required to be situated at the top of the Old Riverbed boundary due to unfavourable conditions along the ORB itself. This had posed a problem due to the location of a gas main running along the area, initially it was thought that the fencing could incorporate the gas main inside of it, however following talks with Cadent the contractor had identified a solution that prevented the main being enclosed but would require hand digging and would need to be completed under Cadent supervision.

During the construction period the weather had been extremely wet, this had caused a loss of several days of construction. This had also caused significant water pooling in areas that had been worked. The contractor had found solutions to this and would ensure areas of pooling were rectified on completion of the project.

Several progress meetings had taken place during construction with officers and the contractors. These had proved valuable from both parties and ensured delays were kept to a minimum. The Shropshire Wildlife trust had also attended these meetings to ensure the terms of the licences were adhered to. Currently the contractor had indicated that they intended to have completed the programmed works by mid-November however, this was prior to the recent heavy rains and flooding. This would likely cause the completion date to slip slightly.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted**

## **68/23 SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL DOG CONTROL PSPO CONSULTATION**

The Town Clerk reported on the Shropshire Council Consultation on the use of a PSPO (Public Space Protection Order) to address various dog related matters. The Borough Council had various Dog Control Orders; these were renewed at the time of local government reorganisation and officers worked with the Dog Control Team at the time to ensure all Town Council assets were included. The Police Crime and Disorder Act 2014 established the Public Space Protection Order as an enforcement tool and all Dog Control Orders were automatically given PSPO status. The legislation however required the PSPO to be renewed every 4 years but for some reason they were allowed to lapse.

The Town Clerk said that they needed to have conversations with Shropshire Council Officers about the continuation of Play Areas and Sports Facilities belonging to the Town Council and such special designation areas like the Dingle to still be included in the new PSPOs. PSPOs were great tools but it was down to enforcement and how the issuing of a PSPO Crime Report could and would manifest into potential prosecutions. Enquiries would need to be had around who might be the enforcement officers on Town Council land.

Currently the consultation in the link was more about what individuals/parish council/groups general views were on the PSPO. The Town Clerk said they needed to have more in depth discussions so if Committee were happy that herself and the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager took an action from this meeting to respond in the positive to the proposals for Dog Control PSPOs but sought assurances that this included not just Shropshire Council land but public land in its broader sense.

Councillor Wilson commented that the wording in the statement were unclear and vague, and clarification was required.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- (i) That the update be noted;**
- (ii) That the Council generally support the development of Dog PSPOs;**
- (iii) That the Town Clerk & Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager contact Shropshire Council to clarify the detail in any new Dog Control Public Space Protection Orders.**

## **69/23 WORKING GROUPS**

### **69.1 City of Sanctuary Working Group**

The notes of the City of Sanctuary Working Group meeting held on 18 September & 30 October 2023 were circulated as read. The meeting had not been quorate, so no decisions were made at the meeting.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the notes of the City of Sanctuary Working Group meeting held on 18 September & 30 October 2023 be received and adopted**

## 69.2 Clean River Working Group

The notes of the Clean River Working Group meeting held on 11 September & 11 October 2023 were circulated as read.

The Town Clerk also added that the application for Bathing Water Status had been submitted to DEFRA and they were awaiting the outcome.

### RESOLVED:

**That the notes of the Clean River Working Group meeting held on 11 September & 11 October 2023 be received and adopted**

## 70/23 COMMUTED SUMS

The Town Clerk gave an update on negotiations with developers and transfer arrangements:

- (i) **Copthorne Barracks Play and Open Space** – offsite contributions to play (£30,498 - £20,498 for Shorncliffe Drive & £10,000 for Silks Meadow – to be paid on 75% occupancy) and open space (£115,000 for sports pitches & associated facilities at County Ground – paid on 50% occupancy) - [funds in relation to landscaping at the County Ground have been drawn down.](#)
- (ii) **Barratt Homes/Bovis Homes – Mytton Oak Road** – Phase 1 adopted; Snagging Phase 2/3 commenced. No identified date for transfer. [Developer has requested early transfer, but certain works need to be completed ahead of transfer.](#)
- (iii) **Shrewsbury South Urban**
  - 1. Sutton Grange site – ongoing – likely transfer in 2023/24 – [recent meeting with Taylor Wimpey to discuss logistics for transfer.](#)
  - 2. Bellway Homes site – discussion on land adoption and adoption of acoustic fencing
  - 3. Galliers site – early discussions on land adoption
  - 4. Community Centre – location on the site
- (iv) **Crowmoor House** – s106 agreement for offsite play & open space contribution to be used for Upton Lane & Monkmoor Recreation Ground – two-staged payments on trigger on percentage occupied properties. Council to bankroll work at Upton Lane Rec – [forms received for drawn of funding.](#)
- (v) **Harlescott Infants/Juniors site** – Offsite contributions to sport. Approvals for use of the funds at Kynaston Road Recreation Ground for drainage works – [form received for drawdown of funds.](#)
- (vi) **Radbrook College site** – Open space adoption – officers met with Floreat Homes on site – [likely adoption once all phases are complete.](#)

**(vii)** *Weir Hill* – Agreements to adopt the land at a future time have been signed -meeting with Taylor Wimpey looking at the possibility of the countryside land to be transferred ahead of the POS on the development site.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

#### **71/23 CLOSING REMARKS**

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked Councillors for attending and taking part in this Town Council meeting and thanked the staff involved in this meeting. All papers related to the meeting could be found on the website [www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk).