

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
Meeting held at 6.00pm on Monday 22nd April 2024
at the Council Chamber, Shirehall

PRESENT – Councillors Becky Wall (Mayor), Alan Mosley (Leader), Rosemary Dartnall, Mary Davies, Phil Gillam, Chris Lemon, Kevin Pardy, Alex Phillips, Elisabeth Roberts and David Vasmer

IN ATTENDANCE – Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Tim Pritchard (Shrewsbury Programme Manager – Shropshire Council), Seb Slater (Executive Director – Shrewsbury Business Improvement District) and 1 Member of the public in Person & 1 member of the press

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bernie Bentick, Julian Dean, Nat Green, Kate Halliday, Pam Moseley & Rob Wilson

01/24 INTRODUCTIONS

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Meeting, both present at Shirehall but also online. She outlined the role of the Annual Town Meeting. It wasn't a meeting of the Town Council, though the Mayor did chair the meeting and Councillors and Officers were in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to give electors of the Parish of Shrewsbury an opportunity to raise any matters of interest or concern to the Council. She advised that where those in attendance did not live in the town, their resident Parish Councils held similar meetings.

02/24 MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held 24th April 2023 had been circulated.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 24th April 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

03/24 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising or updates from those minutes

04/24 SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL OVERVIEW

(i) General Overview – Councillor Mosley (Leader of the Council gave a general overview of the Council.

Shrewsbury Town Council, serving a population of over 70,000 residents, is one of the largest and most influential in the country. However, we are first and foremost a council that is firmly rooted in the community it serves.

With its motto of “Putting Shrewsbury First”, the Town Council prides itself in being the voice of Shrewsbury, supporting local communities and local initiatives, providing good quality play and recreation areas for all, maintaining green spaces throughout the town, providing facilities and activities for the young and generally promoting the town as a great place to live, work and visit.

We work very closely with other organisations; namely Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Business Improvement District, the Emergency Services and Healthcare providers to ensure joined-up services.

Throughout the year members have been working with senior staff to establish a long-term vision for the Town Council. This has included thinking about our values and aspirations over the next 5, 10 and 20 years and what do we need to do to make them happen. We have undertaken public consultation of those values and generally all were supportive which has led us to preparing our Action Plan, much of which is being put into place.

Much of our Vision work ties into the Big Town Plan work and the development of a Movement & Public Realm Strategy as well as other documents including a Design Code for the Town which will help to inform Town Council comments about planning but hopefully the final planning decisions. We have also undertaken a lot of work around developing our Place Plan aspirations to ensure that all of the development opportunities for the town are captured in one place.

This year will see changes to the parliamentary boundaries to Shrewsbury, but we will see changes to the local electoral boundaries. We have fed into the Electoral Boundary Commission changes to the Shropshire Council Divisions which has seen virtually all of our suggestions taking place. Currently Shropshire Council is undertaking a Community Governance Review which will see the Town Council’s internal and external boundaries change. What we have been clear on is to avoid any confusion particularly during voting that the Shropshire Council Divisions need to be the same as the Town Council Wards and we have general agreement on this. This will mean that the outer boundary of Shrewsbury will expand meaning that where the development boundaries are expanding the administrative boundary will also increase meaning we will become responsible for any open space on new sites in the same way we are responsible on established estates.

This year saw the Town Council working with the Greenfields Community Group to look at ways to return the parcel of land which was sold into the Greenfields Recreation Ground.

The Group Leaders alongside Senior Officers of the Town Council have finally negotiated an agreement which will see that land returned.

The Town Council throughout the year has had a key advocacy role which has been seen by the number of motions which have been presented to Full Council for consideration. These have included:

Future Fit – The Town Council has expressed its grave concerns about the business model for only having one critical care centre spanning Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin and have questioned the reliability of the data in which this single model was determined. We have continued to make representations to all levels of the NHS.

Swimming Pool – The Quarry Baths have been the focus of swimming in Shrewsbury and our position has always been clear that it should remain. Whilst we applaud the proposals to develop a pool at the Sports Village and that are of the town will benefit hugely from such an improvement to active lifestyles, the need for a pool with a different focus based in the town centre adjacent to the Quarry Park is also essential.

Parking Charges – The Town Council does recognise the parlous state of Shropshire Council's finances, but to increase parking charges in the town, with some sites potentially seeing a 60% increase in charges would prove a long term disaster for the town centre, local residents who work in the town and visitors and tourists. Our members have played a significant part in impressing on Shropshire Council the need for a better strategy for parking and one that times with the Movement Strategy whereby alternative means of transport infrastructure are put in place before penalties are put in place.

We have a very special team at the Town Council with members and staff working harmoniously together to do what is right for the town and long may that continue.

(ii) Finance & General Purposes Committee – Councillor Mosley (Chairman of the Committee) outlined some of the key areas of work this year.

This Committee is responsible for overseeing the general running of the organisation, setting policy and managing finances and is the driving force behind the direction of travel of the Council.

One of our key roles is to manage the finances of the organisation and our Senior Management Team operate within the budgets that we set in January each year. The Committee keeps an oversight of those finances by receiving quarterly updates and we also review any actions and recommendations from both our Internal and External Auditors. Our procurement work is overseen by this Committee and they have a regular review on our tendering arrangements. Our Tendering Policies have changed to become more robust ensuring value for money as well as being very conscious of the need to become climate change aware. All tenders have to pass various climate change tests to be in a position to submit competitive tenders.

The Shrewsbury Market remains one of the best in the country, in fact for the second year running it was named Britain's Best Market following a national poll. This market, run alongside Shropshire Council benefits from 100% occupancy with a wonderful mix of stalls providing a very varied offer and with late night opening it is a place that is becoming a visitor destination in its own right.

Our capital programme has been an adventurous programme with many projects coming to fruition including new play areas at Mary Webb Road, Upton Lane and Kynaston Road Recreation Ground, a second phase of bus shelter renewals, drainage works on recreation grounds and the beaver compound at the Old River Bed. Some of these projects are costly and time consuming but we are fortunate to have a great officer teams who have managed these projects to fruition.

Our Visioning Exercise and the Action Plan is paving the way for a new Capital Programme and we look forward to engaging with the public on what they wish to see.

This year has seen us very supportive of minority groups and our need to ensure that our equality policies are broad and robust. This has seen us sign up to the National Association of Local Councils Civility and Respect Campaign stamping out bullying in local government, White Ribbon addressing violence against women, Safe Ageing No Discrimination Embrace a Culture of Inclusion Covenant supporting the LGBTQ+ community as they age. We have continued with our City of Sanctuary Working Group supporting refugees and we have currently developed a Neurodiversity Working Group looking to support those who suffer across the neurodiverse spectrum.

Grants has been a focus of the Finance & General Purpose Committee with a number of groups receiving money for fabulous projects:

- Millingtons Charity received £750 towards a defibrillator
- Severn Hospice received £766.67 to improve their Café
- The Hive received £750 for their Under 5s Workshops
- Shrewsbury & Oswestry Crucial Crew benefitted from £1000 for their awareness raising activities
- Community Resource were awarded £2000 to support two groups – Dementia Care & Share and Musketeers & Maidens
- Makespace Arts & Well Being CIC received £2000 to improve the entrance to the English Bridge Workshop
- Shrewsbury Ark benefitted from £1000 for their Make Sport Work Activity with rough sleepers
- Shrewsbury Summer Season were awarded £880 to put on the Martin Wood Exhibition celebrating 40 years of the Town Crier
- Cricket Shropshire were granted £550 to provide activities for refugees
- Foodbank Plus were given £1000 to buy Air Fryers and Electric Blankets to support those in financial crisis

On top of this Councillors have used their grant funds to provide very local support in their communities.

Public Sector Finances remain difficult with Shropshire Council announcing the need to reduce budgets by £62m. Members and staff are in discussions with the Council to ascertain the effects of these cuts at the very local level in Shrewsbury and you have our commitment that we will do everything to protect those services locally. It may mean local precepts have to go up but we will seek community views.

On the whole whilst times are difficult; they also provide opportunities. Opportunities for the Town Council to continue to support the local community and make Shrewsbury a place that we are all proud of.

(iii) Recreation & Leisure Committee – Councillor Gillam (Chairman of the Committee) outlined some of the key areas of work this year.

This Committee has quite a large remit in maintaining the majority of our estate as well as providing recreational assets and services for the community.

We regularly receive updates on how things are being maintained and even more so the impact on the climate is starting to shape how we operate. In 2022 we were complaining about the intense heat and lack of rain and the fact that we really should be looking at drought tolerant planting. 2023 has been the entire opposite and never a week has gone by since summer last year when it hasn't rained. This together with very high river levels and intense flooding has meant that simple things like cutting grass is proving exceptionally difficult.

Last year we took the decision to not enter Britain in Bloom. Loss of key members of staff and changes to staffing structures meant that we had other more pressing activities. Saying that, the floral features in the town were no different last year than other years when we have entered Britain in Bloom. I'm delighted to say that we are back in the competition and planting is going very well for 2024.

As ever the Quarry is our Jewel in the Crown. It is the focus for many events and visitor numbers remain buoyant. The Play Area and Splash Park are well used; in fact they are tourist destinations in their own right. We have worked with colleagues at Shropshire Council to be part of a regional bid to Government for funding to improve 5G connectivity to the Quarry to assist both the public but also traders at our large events with Point of Sale connectivity. This bid was successful and we are confident the infrastructure will be in by the time the new events season starts.

We are conscious of our responsibilities to keep people safe and we had a stark reminder last summer when the Flower Show was evacuated due to a bomb threat. Our Town Clerk has been part of a national Working Group looking at Martyn's Law and the need to put in place measures to protect the public. This has meant that our counter terrorism measures are very good and should give the public great comfort.

Shrewsbury Town Council has been the lead partner in Team Shrewsbury, a multi-partner approach to addressing crime and anti-social behaviour. We managed to secure Safer Streets 4 funding to develop the Town Ranger Programme alongside the Business

Improvement District and we have worked with Shropshire Council to expand the Public Space Protection Order powers. Our Councillors have also actively fed into the West Mercia Police Policing Charter which has seen many acts of criminality and antisocial behaviour addressed.

This Committee has had a number of Working Groups reporting to it:

The City of Sanctuary Group is looking at our submission to become a Town of Sanctuary. The Group is working closely with Shropshire Supports Refugees. Members have been to their Hub to build relations with people who have settled into the town as well as those who are still seeking refugee status.

The Clean River Working Group have been focusing on achieving Bathing Water Status. The Group has a wide membership including the Environment Agency, anglers and Severn Trent. We supported the publicity for the application to DEFRA and we are hopeful that we will receive designation in due course.

The Active Travel Working Group has met to look at walking and cycling initiative including Shropshire Councils LCWIP document and the Big Town Plan Movement Strategy, both of which we have been happy to promote.

And finally, this isn't a committee that looks at the here and now, it is one that plans for open space and how we use it into the future. With negotiations with developers for the adoption of open space and play on new development sites to developing tree strategies that will outlive our children and grandchildren it is about making sure Shrewsbury continues to be a great place to live work and play.

My thanks as ever goes to the members of the Committee as well as the staff who operationalise our policies.

(iv) Planning Committee – The Town Clerk read out Councillor Moseley's (Chairman of the Committee) report.

The Planning Committee remains the busiest of the Council's Standing Committees meeting every three weeks throughout the year. The Committee considers over 1000 planning applications annually, virtually a quarter of the planning applications submitted to the Shropshire Council Planning Authority. With applications ranging from pruning trees in a Conservation Area to major development sites, the Committee uses its expertise of being local to the community to assess the merit of development. We generally look to the local Councillor to give us a flavour of local feeling and whilst I would always advocate registering comments on the Planning Portal in the first instance, do keep your local member informed.

Of interest to the Committee this year has been further work to develop a Design Code specifically created for the town of Shrewsbury. This concept came out of the Big Town Plan Vision; the creation of a Shrewsbury Test to ensure that future design reflected the Shrewsbury vernacular and gave a sense of the county town. The Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership sought funding for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to

develop a Design Code; funding allowed for a dedicated officer post as well as the appointment of LDA Design (who created the original Shrewsbury Vision Document) to develop the code. A number of the Committee have been involved in the workshops and the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk have worked closely with officers to ensure that our views are reflected in the evolving document. We are hoping that the code will be finalised and implemented soon.

The Town Council has also recently developed a Planning Appeal Procedure, designed to be utilised to ensure that the Town Council's view is included and considered in any planning appeal. We have always relied on the fact that our objections form part of the Planning Authority's Defence bundle. From now on we will make separate submissions to the Planning Inspectorate so that we can continue to make the representations we feel are in the best interests of the town.

When a major or significant development is planned, the Committee will often receive representations from applicants and/or agents, who wish to present their proposals at an early stage to the members, prior to formal submission of their planning application. This is a useful, two-way process, whereby the applicant can explain their plans, and members can ask questions or raise issues with them about their scheme.

We also continue to have much discussion about Conservation Areas within the town. Much of Shrewsbury sits within a Conservation Area, but there remain pockets of the town that do not but still have a very distinctive and special character. Some are protected by Article 4 Direction but some are not and development has been permitted unchecked which has changed the nature of those areas. It is a long process but worth working on with local residents and planning specialists.

In addition, the Committee continues to concern itself with issues related to climate change and nature recovery and is always keen to ensure that local developers do everything they can to mitigate against carbon emissions when building in our local town. Our comments and suggestions can have a very real impact upon this important issue and how it is addressed locally.

(v) Climate Change Committee – The Town Clerk read out Councillor Dean's (Chairman of the Committee) report.

The Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery Committee is unique for the Town Council in that it is the only Standing Committee that has outside representatives who have a genuine seat at the table. We have members of the Environment Agency, Shropshire Council's Biodiversity Team, the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth, the Shropshire Climate Action Partnership which is striving for the county to be carbon zero by 2030, the Civic Society and transport specialists from Gfleet, a local company with a national reputation.

Climate emergency and nature recovery continue to have an impact upon everything that we do as a town council and many of our discussions have been around how the routine projects and every day activity can be rethought to maximise our carbon neutral agenda.

One of the first things we did this year was to change the name of the committee from Climate Change to Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery Committee. We really wanted to focus our attention on the urgency around addressing climate change but also ensure that we prioritise our ability to restore habitats and protect wildlife throughout the town. An example of this is demonstrated through our continued efforts, along with Shropshire Wildlife Trust, to introduce a pair of Beavers to the new compound at the Old River Bed, a Site of Special Scientific Interest in north Shrewsbury. Beavers are known to be hugely beneficial to our eco system and will greatly enhance the Old River Bed's capacity to capture carbon. Public feedback on the development of the site has been hugely positive and we look forward to completing this project soon.

We have been working towards achieving Carbon Literacy status for the Town Council and have been working closely with Save Our Shropshire to attain this award to demonstrate our continued commitment to develop an awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis. In addition to a number of our members and officers becoming Carbon Literate this year we have also partaken in a Climate Fresk workshop. Climate Fresk is an exciting new way to understand climate change works and empower ourselves to take effective action.

The Town Council has also been collaborating with the Shropshire Cycle Hub to make available two e-cargo bikes to be used by residents as they see fit. This is a great initiative as Cargo bikes will really come to their own as Shrewsbury, hopefully, moves towards adopting 'Shrewsbury moves'. I'm really pleased the Town Council has been able to support this scheme. It can be a game changer providing quicker, cleaner logistics and deliveries in the town. If you are interested in hiring one of these bikes please do contact the Cycle Hub based in the town centre.

As well as working on internal projects, the Town Council remains committed to supporting residents to address climate change. Our carbon footprint is little more than that of 40 domestic dwellings, yet the Town has 35,000 domestic dwellings. So, we recognise that we have a duty to promote good practice, celebrate where people have done great things locally and provide opportunities to learn from others. One of the ways we have done this has to work closely with Marches Energy Agency by funding a grant scheme to allow residents to make carbon efficiencies within their homes.

The Town Council remains fully committed to achieve our resolution to become carbon neutral by 2030 and much of this Committee's work is to understand its own carbon footprint and what we can do to reduce it. Our Action Plan has helped to keep the whole Council focused on Climate Change and we look forward to taking forward new developments in the forthcoming period.

05/24 TOWN POLICING

In the absence of Sgt Lansdale, the Town Clerk read out the policing report for the Central Safe Neighbourhood Team.

Shrewsbury was policed by 5 patrol teams which provided 24/7 response cover. As well as specialist departments such as CID, the town was also covered by Central SNT which comprised of 3 PCs, 1 PCSO supervised by PS Gary Lansdale and Inspector Ben Tanfield. As well as patrolling on foot in the town centre Central SNT Officers also cover Monkmoor and Sundorne and work on the top three issues that local councillors are asked to detail which are recorded on the Local Policy Charter.

It was recently announced that extra police officers will soon be out on patrol in Shrewsbury as the police introduce a new town centre team. The team will see officers and PCSOs with a specific focus for Shrewsbury and this would be funded through the Police & Crime Commissioner. Extra Officers were on patrol 21st March – 14th April and resulted in 30 arrests, 169 Neighbourhood Community Matters, 76 Intelligence Logs, 41 Stop Searches, 19 PSPO Orders.

ASB continued to be a major concern in the town and between January 2023 and April 2024 23 Community Protection Warnings, 5 Community Protection Notices and 8 Criminal Behaviour Orders were issues.

Councillor Parry commended the work of the police in Sundorne. Councillor Mosley reported on a recent meeting to discuss policing issues in Castlesfields in which 75 people attended.

06/24 SHREWSBURY BIG TOWN PLAN

Tim Pritchard and Seb Slater gave an overview of Big Town Plan work in the town centre

(i) Design Code – The Partnership had received DLUHC funding to pilot a new approach to Design Coding. The initial project focused on a town-wide code together with separate codes for the West End and Riverside and was a tool to incentivise better development in the town, empowering the local authority to set standards and create tangible links to the local economy. The code has gone through consultation and engagement with key stakeholders and has been reviewed by Officers at DLUHC. Once adopted it will form material consideration in the planning system.

Councillor Mosley questioned the Code particularly in light of the Travel Lodge application in Barker Street.

Councillor Wagner saw the enormous potential of the code rolling out across the town.

(ii) Riverside Development – The design team had been working on a multi-phase plan of developing the site which include outline permission for the various planning buildings as well as development of Roushill Park, creating significant public realm.

Councillor Roberts questioned the amount of concrete. Tim advised that there was an Environmental appraisal of the site and areas like the Park improved the environmental credentials of the site.

Councillor Wagner saw this as an optimistic direction of travel.

(iii) Shrewsbury Moves – Seb Slater detailed the recent work in developing the Movement and Public Places Strategy. The strategy was not anti-car but was designed to change the local thinking about using the car in favour of walking and cycling. The Partnership had been successful in securing £343k of UK Shared Prosperity Funding matched against £147k of partner funding to develop a programme of Active Travel measures including Cycle Hire Schemes, E-Cargo Bikes, Cycle Storage, Electric Bus Trials, Rickshaws and a River Taxi together with a programme of monitoring.

So successful had been the project that the Partnership has won the VISA Lets Celebrate Town Award.

All were supportive of the initiative but were keen to see active travel arrangements extending into the residential wards to facilitate better access to the town.

07/24 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no questions from either those present in the room or online.

08/24 CLOSING REMARKS

The Mayor thanked those present and on line for attending. She felt that meeting had been very productive and showed the scale of work taking place in the town.

09/24 NEXT MEETING

The next Annual Meeting of the Town was scheduled for Monday 14th April 2025.