

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Extraordinary Meeting of Council
Held at the Walker Theatre, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury at
6.00pm on Wednesday 8 June 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors E Roberts (Mayor), B Bentick, R Dartnall, M Davies, J Dean, P Gillam, N Green, K Halliday, P Moseley, A Mosley, K Pardy, A Phillips, D Vasmer, A Wagner, B Wall & R Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Ruth Jones (Office Manager), Michelle Farmer (Committee Clerk), Michael Redfern QC and 55 members of the public in attendance.

18/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from Councillors C Lemon and Gary Farmer (Head of Operations).

19/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Shropshire Councillors	Twin hatted members declared personal interests in matters relating to the Town Council’s relationship with Shropshire Council.
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20/22 MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 9 May 2022 were submitted as circulated and read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 9 May 2022 be approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

21/22 MATTERS ARISING

There were no Matters Arising for consideration.

22/22 INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO THE SALE OF LAND AT GREENFIELDS RECREATION GROUND

- i. Introduction from the Leader of the Town Council on the terms of reference for the Independent Review into the sale of land at Greenfields Recreation Ground.**

Councillor Mosley introduced Michael Redfern QC to the meeting. He had been appointed following a procurement process. He stated that the Town Council was not asked to appoint a QC, but as a Council, they decided to go a step further. Terms of Reference were developed for examining the process thoroughly.

ii. Independent Review into the sale of land at Greenfields Recreation Ground from Michael Redfern QC including the methodology, process and findings.

Michael Redfern QC provided a summary of his report to the Council and members of the public.

Greenfields Recreation Ground was first registered with the Land Registry in 2005 by SABC (Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council). The site plan was not determinative as to the full extent of Greenfields Recreation Ground.

In 2009, the Shropshire Unitary Authority was created, and Shrewsbury Town Council took over from Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council.

In 2010, Shrewsbury Town Council registered Greenfields Recreation Ground with the Land Registry, again with a site plan which was not determinative as to the history and the legal status of the whole site and in particular the portion of Greenfields Recreation ground which was subsequently sold. The whole site means the land designated for public recreation as shown on the plans within the full report on Pages 12 & 13, exhibits 4 & 5.

In March 1935, the Borough Surveyor drew up a plan of proposed land for new senior schools on the Broomhill site which appears on Page 18 of the report, exhibit 8. Beyond doubt it shows the whole of Greenfields Recreation Ground including the site marked for public recreation.

In 1942 under the Dig for Victory campaign, Local Authorities were empowered to allocate temporarily, land for allotments including land forming part of a park or open space. This temporary power was revoked in 1953. It did not appear that Shrewsbury Borough Council resolved to make those temporary arrangements permanent. Allotment use continued.

The demand for allotments waned to the extent that in the mid to late 1970's, the visionary Parks Superintendent, Mr James Beardall, (Mr Redfern apologised for inferring in his report that Mr Beardall was no longer alive) created a tree nursery on the site and subsequently, significantly improved the tree stock in Shrewsbury for which he was to be congratulated. The tree nursery wound down in the late 1990's and the site became overgrown and was used as something of an adventure area for children and possibly dog walkers. The period from 1942 onwards sowed the seeds for a collection of anecdotal evidence over a 60 - year period which seduced STC officers and members into concluding that the site was and remained a separate entity from Greenfields Recreation Ground.

In 2010, the site was identified as being suitable for a proposed eco-housing scheme. In 2012, Shrewsbury Town Council made a planning application for eight dwellings including allotment space and means of access. Outline planning consent was granted in 2016 but not without a significant number of planning objections. None of these referred to the history and legal status of the site.

Shrewsbury Town Council sold the site to CSE Developments (Shropshire) Limited for £550,000 for housing development with an overage agreement which was wise as in the end, detailed planning consent was granted for 15 dwellings. The sale was completed on 4 October 2017 and an application was made for detailed planning consent on 30 October 2017. On 8 November 2018, Shropshire Council granted full planning permission to CSE Developments for the erection of 15 dwellings including two affordable dwellings, a new access road and associated parking.

CSE Developments Ltd are without fault in what has happened with regards to the conveyancing and detailed planning consent. Subsequent events have led them to abandon development plans and they will not develop the site. Despite behaving with complete integrity, CSE Developments and family have been subject to offensive abuse which must stop. CSE Developments had been an innocent party who has and continues to run up considerable debt as a result of immediately deciding not to develop the site once they knew and understood the complexities of the situation.

The dispute arose because the site was sold contrary to the relevant statutory provisions. It had taken the granting of detailed planning permission for 15 houses to alert and ignite the interests of the Greenfields Community Group in 2018. Their research and enquiries into the history and legal status of the site are first class and decisive. The Bagley ward Councillor carefully balanced his duties to residents with his civic duties with skill and judgment, often himself under considerable pressure. In hopeful resolution of this dispute, he would be able to contribute significantly.

Never again must Shrewsbury Town Council, its officers and members, be slow to respond to communications from the community or appear to be paternalistic or bunker down in the face of pressure. They should refrain from refusing to engage with the community. Mr Redfern understood the pressure and insults to which officers and members had been subjected. The allegations of illegality, if not criminal activity, made against them on behalf of the Greenfields Community Group were without substance and were offensive. Officers and Members are entitled to respect for their health and wellbeing at work, particularly when under coercive pressure even if self-induced. This pressure had reasserted itself recently but had been resolved by way of a sincere apology.

The criticisms of Shrewsbury Town Council officers and members undoubtedly contributed to the dispute and caused anger, frustration and consternation to the leaders and members of the Greenfields Community Group. That in no way justified the serious allegations of misfeasance/criminality against Shrewsbury Town Council Officers and members or the reporting of professional experts to their regulatory bodies, all of which were perfunctorily dismissed.

Mr Redfern understood the pressures to which both sides had been subjected. He commented that if Shrewsbury Town Council's policies and procedures had been fit for purpose, it would possibly have tempered things down. He knew that immediate attention would be given to the imperative to rework Appendices 1 to 6 inclusive relating to the relevant Shrewsbury Town Council's policies and procedures.

Shrewsbury Town Council was only set up in 2009 and no doubt recourse was had to off-the-peg proforma policies and procedures rather than independent creation of precise documentation to meet the specific needs of the Town Council. New policies and procedures must include an audit of all land owned by Shrewsbury Town Council. It must include its current use, history and legal status and should also include any impediment upon the use or sale of that land. The audit must also be available for public scrutiny.

Mr Redfern commented that had Shrewsbury Town Council known the history and legal status of the site, it was unlikely it would ever have been designated for sale or housing development. Rumour released to the national press that Shrewsbury Town Council were planning to or even considering sale of the remainder of Greenfields Recreation Ground was without foundation. In any event, enormous legal and practical obstacles would have to be overcome before recreational open space could be sold for housing development.

The Court of Appeal referred to an obvious route being to transfer the site back to Shrewsbury Town Council (paragraph 72). This would probably involve claims for compensation which would be considerable plus the burden of legal costs. The court of Appeal summarised the overall situation as follows:

- (i) Until the disposal of the development site, the whole site was held by the Town Council under a statutory trust for public recreation.
- (ii) The Town Council did not put the developer on notice and the developer did not know that there was or even might be such a trust attached to the land.
- (iii) Although the site was advertised as being for sale, the Town Council sold the freehold of the development site to a developer without following the required statutory procedure for disposal of land subject to a trust, namely advertisement for two consecutive weeks in a local newspaper and the subsequent consideration of any objections; and, in disposing of the site as it did, the Town Council acted unlawfully.
- (iv) However, as a result of the statutory scheme, the disposal of the freehold to the developer is still valid. The developer will take the land without the burden of a section 10 trust unless he has actual knowledge that the requirements have not been met. CSE Developments Limited had no such knowledge.

The current situation is that Greenfield Community Group would only re-consider re-purchase of the land unencumbered. Shrewsbury Town Council have to date refused to contemplate re-purchase of the site. CSE developments are not developing or selling the site until the question of appeal to the Supreme Court has been determined now that permission has been granted and there will be a hearing in December 2022.

The cost of this dispute for all parties concerned continues to escalate and the value of the site with planning permission is also increasing. Shropshire Council seek to justify the integrity of the planning consent. However, the High Court and Court of Appeal have criticised their failure to investigate the history and legal status of the site. All four parties remain at risk of incurring substantial further costs with the overriding burden of who is to pay damages and the legal costs, which will continue to mount each day as a resolution of the dispute is awaited in a form acceptable to all four parties.

Mr Redfern hoped that his Independent Inquiry Report had taken a good deal of heat out of the dispute and that common sense would prevail. From the outset, he had suggested mediation, but this gained no traction. Now the dispute had been comprehensively unpicked, he remained of the view that with goodwill from all four parties, a sensible outcome would be a probability. Mr Redfern referred to Lord Chief Justice who supported mediation routes as intending to increase their use to rid society of a devilish burden in adversarial burdens of the loser paying the costs. Mediation process is confidential. No matters raised at a mediation could be used in subsequent litigation without the consent of all the parties. A mediation agreement is only binding when all parties sign a settlement agreement with which each of them is content. The cost is minimal in comparison to adversarial legal costs. This matter needs to be resolved at the earliest opportunity and it would take two days at the most.

Mr Redfern thanked all present for their attention.

iii. Statement from the Greenfields Community Group on the Independent Review into the sale of land at Greenfields Recreation Ground.

Alyson Lanning, Representative of Greenfields Community Group provided the following statement:

The Greenfields Community Group welcomed the report and thanked Michael Redfern QC for his time. It had been a long two years waiting for the outcome of the inquiry and its final publication on 23 May 2022. The report is 167 pages, and the contents were summarised as:

- (i) The failure of Shrewsbury Town Council to adhere to and acknowledge the legal status of public land, despite incontrovertible evidence to support the fact. To continue with the sale of the land is an unbelievable dereliction of duty and in breach of its own Code of Practice. The auditors had found Shrewsbury Town Council guilty of 'serious governance failings'
- (ii) The refusal to engage with the community most affected by their own negligence. To prevaricate, obstruct and treat with belligerent disdain, legitimate query with reference to Shrewsbury Town Council's incorrect legal decision to sell the land which is unquestionable public open space. This had resulted in a fundamental breach of trust between officers and members of Shrewsbury Town Council and the Greenfields Community Group.

Since 2017, the Greenfields Community Group had been involved with a war of attrition with officers of Shrewsbury Town Council. It was worthy of note that the community had raised over £60,000 in the five years to pursue the route for justice, both at Judicial Review and at the Court of Appeal. A community should not need to take this action or the current case at the Supreme Court in December 2022.

Shrewsbury Town Council failed to acknowledge that whilst the residents of Greenfields were objecting to the sale of the recreation land and having to raise considerable funds to challenge an incorrect decision by its own town council, its officers remained silent and can be described as obdurate and obstructive.

As Mr Redfern states on P95 entitled what lessons does the Council need to learn (p96 (k))

Shrewsbury Town Council refused to contemplate reassessing the situation in the face of overwhelming and powerful documentary evidence.

Members of the Greenfields Community Group would welcome a public apology – to be placed on record – from the officers and members of Shrewsbury Town Council.

There are many pages of OS maps, detailed reference boundaries over the last century – from point 47 – 50 and a section titled Anecdotal Evidence. An employee of Shrewsbury Town Council is quoted as the source of all the following mistakes.

The notion that a gardener (an employee of Shrewsbury Town Council whose long service in various jobs developed into the role of Operations Manager) was responsible for the sale of part of Greenfields recreation Ground was absurd. A gardener is not a lawyer and had produced no tangible documented evidence and is not liable for its lawful decisions nor responsible for ensuring the Town Council act legally or its advisors (Redfern p34 (50)).

The key document, the Title Register SL177571 Greenfields Recreation Ground held at land registry is missing. This document contains all the lawful deeds, maps and the application to Change the Register (14.09.2010) map signed by the Town Council in 2010. Why was this missing from the report as it is a legal document and needs to be reviewed by the inquiry. Additionally, the AP1 (14.09.2010) is a legally binding document that was omitted. This was a missed opportunity to put the disposal of the land into a legal context and lawful timeline. The

AP1 has a map in 2010 showing the extent of Greenfields Recreation Ground. It outlines the liability of trust on the land. Greenfields Recreation Ground was registered by the Town Clerk, in 2010 shortly after being vested in 2009 to the town council as Greenfields Recreation Ground at the Land Registry. This is recent legal history and post-dates the subjective anecdotal narrative of the report by employees or ONS maps.

The Town Council were aware of the status of the land and knew it held this land in trust for the community from 2009 onwards. This information is in the public domain, fully available to anybody, including the developer. A copy of the AP1 and Title Register were provided to all Councillors present at the meeting.

The developer knew or should have known the correspondence between the solicitors for the Town Council and the solicitor for the developer reveals they had access to the Title Register SL177571. It was mentioned in many of their emails so they knew or should have known that the land is in Greenfields Recreation Ground and held in trust. Both the town council's solicitor and the developer's solicitor cannot and should not rely on anecdotal evidence. None of the correspondence exchanged mention anecdotal evidence as this is not a legally binding condition.

iv) Response from Michael Redfern, members or officers to matters raised under item 6.iii

Michael Redfern responded to the comment made by the Greenfields Community in response to the gardener. Mr Redfern stated that it was not his information that was relied upon as the only source of evidence and not legal advice and that it was unfair of the Group to extend criticism to him. Mr Redfern had interviewed 15 people, the Operations Manager being one of them.

He was concerned that allegations being made that Members and officers knew about the land. They had a genuine belief that the land, from 1942, was not part of the Greenfields Recreation Ground. The anecdotal evidence was wrong.

He went on to say that the Community now needed to work with the Town Council and stop the battle between both parties and restore the land, if possible, for the enjoyment of the community.

23/22 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

The Town Clerk reported that standing orders had been followed in seeking questions ahead of the meeting, but she had accepted questions up until 4pm on the day of this meeting. Proposed by Councillor Alan Mosley, seconded by Councillor Wilson.

RESOLVED:

That standing orders be suspended to allow the public to take part in the meeting.

24/22 PUBLIC QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

David Kilby (Secretary Shropshire Playing Fields Association)

On behalf of the Shropshire Playing Fields Association, we ask the author of this independent review how extensive he believes the investigation has been and did it include the involvement of any of the following individuals or organisations:

- Sport England
- Shropshire Playing Fields Association
- The (late) Parks Superintendent specifically referred to by name in the report
- Local Shrewsbury Town Councillors in post during the period 2009-2012
- Individuals from the local community who have made use of the recreation ground from the late 1920s, through the 1930s onwards, able to provide eyewitness accounts from their use of the park area.
- Open forum opportunity allowing anyone to contribute if they had so wished.

As part of his investigation did the author of this report consider any other cases of public open space that have been disposed of during the period 2009-2021 involving STC, and if so, how many have there been and where have these occurred?

Finally looking forward have STC identified any other pockets of public open space sites that they are considering disposing of in the future, or that they have earmarked for potential sale, and if so, could I request they ensure they include and inform the Shropshire Playing Fields Association at the earliest possible time as part of any future process.

Answered by Michael Redfern QC

Michael Redfern answered the points raised in this public question. He did not consider any other cases of public open space in his report and he was not aware of any other cases. Sport England were not contacted as it was not within the Terms of Reference, which he had answered faithfully.

Mr Redfern did indicate that he had chaired the Alder Hey children's Inquiry which involved 24 staff. He agreed to do this report because he had relatives that lived in the Greenfields area, and he used to play on the Greenfields Recreation Ground. He was not in this to make a profit and hoped he had served the community and the interests of the Town Council. There was no criminality or divisive behaviour, only delays in requests. He commended the Town Council for doing the independent review.

Paul Hollington

I'd, first of all, like to thank Michael Redfern for this report, and also to all those who have participated in giving evidence, for the report.

Putting aside the nuts and bolts of who, where when etc, it is clear to me that Shrewsbury Town Council has been shown to have clearly failed in both the process to sell this piece of land that is part of Greenfields Recreation ground, in other words, it should never have been sold as it was clearly part of the park, as the local community group quickly determined its long status history, something clearly STC had not.

The report also details the failure of STC to follow its own complaints procedure, which has been described in the report as being Complex and Wooley.

Are any councillors/officials here today, able to offer an apology personal or otherwise to the Greenfields Community Group (GCG) for the delay, irritation and frustration they caused the group and also to recognise that they implemented a policy described in the report as "raising the drawbridge and bunkered down and refusing to have anything to do with the GCG". (Page 73 paragraph 117)

Answered by Councillor Alan Mosley

Councillor Mosley explained that there was now a new recommendation from the Town Council which replaced the original shown on the agenda. The Town Council have offered apologies to the Greenfields Community Group and the wider community and further recommendations were shown.

Celia Macintyre

Please can we have clear and evidenced reasons why the Council, until now, steadfastly refused to meet with the Greenfields Community to hear our case and respond to our questions and (as the Redfern report makes abundantly clear) fully justified anger at the unlawful sale of part of our park, which we want returned to the community in order that this injustice is fully rectified.

Answered by Councillor Alan Mosley

Councillor Mosley referred to item one of the new recommendations, stating that the priority was to see the land return to public open space. The Town Council will arrange to meet with the community as soon as possible to discuss the situation further. He commented that there had been difficulties and he had regretted the lack of consultation and this would be an issue that would be rectified.

Mr Redfern outlined the fact that at the time the Council was newly created and the pressures of running a new council weighed heavily on senior officers. They were overworked and their health and wellbeing was affected. The email traffic from the community was repetitive and at times aggressive. It should also be noted that the community didn't identify this parcel of land as part of the Recreation Ground at the outline application stage in 2010, nor did they identify it at sale stage in 2017. So, by the time this was raised with the council the horse had bolted. The outcome of this meeting should now be noted, and the apology should be received. Both parties have been in the wrong during this process and he encouraged the community group to now work with the Town Council.

Mark Phillips

The 23.05.22 Redfern Report concerning a part of the Greenfields Recreation Ground, (the site), contained few surprises for my wife, Barbara, who, almost three years ago researched (for Shrewsbury Friends of the Earth and the Greenfields Action Group), a documented timeline of local authority dealings with the site. The greatest disappointment was not the Council's failure to open its own book of records (in its own professionally supported archive) before selling the site for development, but their delay in engaging with clear evidence presented by the Greenfields community.

The documented history of governance and accountability failures in relation to the site, constitutes reason to be anxious that other sites may have been and/or remain liable to disposal contrary to the health and recreation interests of communities in the town.

The first part of my question is consequently: what level of priority will be given by Shrewsbury and Shropshire Councils to returning the site to public access and ownership? It may be that the would-be developer could be offered land at an alternative location.

The second part of my question concerns the possible development of a Shrewsbury Community Land Trust. There is a statutory definition of such a trust, which could be initiated by a local authority or members of the community (UK examples of both are available on-line). On the basis that the purpose of such a trust could be to discover, tabulate and protect the public interest in pieces of land in the town where established recreational uses exist,

might the town council be willing to initiate such a trust, or else co-operate with a community steering group with the same object?

Answered by Councillor Alan Mosley

Councillor Mosley stated that he couldn't speak for Shropshire Council, but he accepted that errors had been made and the return of the land is now a priority for the Town Council. In answer to the possible Shrewsbury Community Land Trust, he would investigate this and consider a proposal.

Stephen Lubell

1. What are the implications for traffic in the Greenfields area should the proposed housing be built on this site?
2. What are the implications for the public open spaces on the recreation ground should the proposed housing be built on this site?
3. Has due consideration been made for the need for increased need for local shopping, transport, schools etc should the proposed housing be built on this site?
4. Access to the site for construction would presumably be through Greenfields and Falstaff Streets which would negatively impact the quality of life and safety of existing local residents. In addition, students from the Greenfields Primary School might be impacted by the increased traffic in the area and on the Ellesmere Road. Have these concerns been factored into the planning for the site?
5. Has due consideration been given to the trees on the proposed site and whether there are orders on any of the existing trees? It would be a shame to lose trees particularly in a built-up area.

As a recently arrived local resident I am extremely concerned by the potential detrimental impact of these proposals for this site.

Stephen Lubell commented that he would withdraw his questions as they had now been answered in the recommendation.

Ben Jephcott

Given the findings of this report, does the Council accept that this is not just a case of the Town Council not following its own procedures to consult correctly, although it is clear that it did not, but a situation where a manifest injustice has occurred. Shrewsbury is now heading to the Supreme Court as an example of what Must Not Be Done. People in Greenfields and in Herongate nearby where I live, are just astonished. How are you going to put this right? Do you accept that any process of mediation should not compromise the first requirement to ensure this land is returned to public ownership as a park?"

Answered by Councillor Mosley

Councillor Mosley gave assurance that the Town Council will undertake the implementation of the recommendation to the best of their ability. There were various aspects that needed to be put in order and he apologised to the community.

25/22 RECONVENING OF STANDING ORDERS

RESOLVED:

That standing orders be reconvened to all the meeting proper.

26/22 TOWN COUNCIL TO CONTINUE DISCUSSION IN RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO THE SALE OF LAND AT GREENFIELDS RECREATION GROUND

The following comments were made by Town Councillors in response to the independent review.

Councillor Rob Wilson:

Michael Redfern's report had not only identified numerous failings, but also numerous opportunities to change course and correct those failings.

His over-riding question was why, whether those involved thought this land was part of Greenfields Recreation Ground or not, considered that selling it was in the best interests of the community, rather than incorporating it more fully into the park? The root cause could be the decision 10 years ago to seek outline planning permission for the site.

What followed was a catalogue of errors which has led to the situation we find ourselves in today.

Shrewsbury Town Council relied on anecdotal evidence, when the proper evidence they needed was mere metres away in the Shropshire Archives. When it was pointed out to Shrewsbury Town Council that an error had been made, instead of responding positively, it doubled down on its position. The more evidence that was presented, the more the Council closed ranks.

As is pointed out on page 80 of the report, the antipathy between Shrewsbury Town Council and the Greenfields Community should have been nipped in the bud.

Councillor Wilson was especially disappointed to read on page 101 that "Shrewsbury Town Council have always and still do refuse to contemplate repurchase of 'the site'". In his view this was a gross error.

He thanked Michael Redfern QC for his detailed and thorough work on the independent inquiry. It is a miserable read for the residents of our town, but he was optimistic that it points to a way out of this mess for everyone involved.

This evening Shrewsbury Town Council needed to apologise unreservedly to all its residents, especially those in Greenfields.

The Council needs to work collaboratively, openly and transparently on how the Site could be returned to public ownership and made available as a public amenity. The Council needs to, and encourage others to, enter into a process of mediation without pre-conditions. It needs to address the failures of policy and process that caused and exacerbated the situation; and to deal with the issues identified in the post-script that were not part of the terms of reference.

This Council can and must do better. But on this occasion, it had failed. We must all work together to resolve this situation for all involved.

Councillor Julian Dean:

Councillor Dean started by saying that all Councillors would be adding their names to the public apology to the Greenfields Community. He stated that there are big differences between Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council regarding development. He was not making any excuses but said that Shrewsbury Town Council is an organisation that does put green spaces first. On the budget they have and the work they complete within the

Capital Programme, they do lots of positive work on the green spaces within Shrewsbury. He hoped that Councillors and staff want to re-engage with the Community and there is a commitment to resolve procedures.

Councillor Alex Phillips:

Councillor Phillips fully agreed with the previous statements made by Cllrs Wilson and Dean. He also agreed with and backed the apology and recommendation proposed by the Leader of the Town Council.

Councillor Phillips stated that we should never have been in a position where a Community felt that they had no option but to take their own Town Council to Court. He was disappointed that formal and informal attempts he made to resolve this dispute in 2018 before legal action was formally started, were not taken up. It would be a missed opportunity if the section of park under debate was just returned to public ownership. He also agreed with Cllr Dean's Comments about the excellent horticultural resources and talent that Shrewsbury Town Council have and that these could be used to develop a world class park, underlying the green aims we have as a Town Council.

Councillor Rosemary Dartnall:

Councillor Dartnall thanked Michael Redfern for accepting Shrewsbury Town Council's request to carry out an independent inquiry and for the decisive report he had delivered and for his clarity in addressing all who attended the meeting. There are many opportunities for Shrewsbury Town Council to learn and move forward based on the report's findings. Councillor Dartnall added her own unreserved apology to those of my colleagues for the errors made by Shrewsbury Town Council regarding the sale of the land that is the subject of the report and all subsequent events.

There are many reasons to regret the sale of this piece of land, including the fact that had its legal status been recognised by the council at a more timely point, it was likely to have already been incorporated into the Greenfields recreational ground.

Councillor Dartnall commented that she had been a councillor since May 2021 – just a year. The first task she undertook in her ward was to convince other councillors to take ownership of a large piece of land that was under developer ownership – broadly the opposite of what is being discussed at this meeting. The land is on the east of the town and forms a wedge between what will be 735 new homes and the River Severn. All councillors were readily able to see the advantage to residents of having available this swathe of wild land and were keen to preserve it, in perpetuity, for everyone to use by putting it under Shrewsbury Town Council management.

The Council has committed a large sum within its Capital Plan with the hope of acquiring the former Wakeman Playing fields to develop as new public open space as part of our Countryside initiatives comprising, meadow, woodland and wildflower areas. Although there have been delays in pursuing these plans, it is further evidence of their commitment to improve the richness of public land in our town.

There exists a keen will on the part of this council to maintain, retain, maximise and increase public open space, to protect our natural assets and manage our green spaces for today and for the future for the benefit of the people of Shrewsbury.

Councillor Vasmer

Councillor Vasmer gave his personal, unreserved apology to the Greenfields Community. He said that he had been calling for mediation since the first meeting with Michael Redfern as he felt this was the best way to resolve the issues that everyone could get behind and that the land be returned to the community. He commented that Shrewsbury Town Council does good work and improves Shrewsbury. The council must now amend the wrongs and implement the recommendation.

27/22 RECOMMENDATION:

Councillor Mosley reported that the four group leaders had met and come with a consensus approach. Councillor Mosley said that he greatly regretted the position the Town Council was in. He was proud of the very significant progress the Council had made over the last 7/8 years in providing amenities, services and representation for residents throughout Shrewsbury. However, the Redfern Report confirmed that serious mistakes were made in their evaluation of the land which were compounded over time by inadequate communication and consultation. The events exposed in the Report were a blot on an otherwise excellent record and they must right the wrongs in their performance.

Councillor Mosley would start that process by unreservedly apologising to local residents, the Community Group and the wider Shrewsbury community for the errors made and the lack of communication.

The Council would resolve to find means of returning the land to its ownership and restoring it as a public amenity and to seek resolution through mediation with all parties involved. They would also review policies and procedures to ensure that they incorporate advice in the Report and are fit for purpose. They will also seek expert advice in an internal inquiry around accountability and performance to ensure such issues can never occur again.

RESOLVED:

That Shrewsbury Town Council accepts the findings of the Redfern Report and in doing so unreservedly apologises to the residents of Greenfields, members of the GCG and the wider Shrewsbury community for our failure to properly identify the legal status of the land referred to as "the Site" and for our failures to adequately communicate and consult with them.

In doing so we instruct the four group leaders to make recommendations to our next meeting on June 27th on:

1. means by which the Site can be returned to public ownership and made available as a public amenity;
2. the establishment of a process for mediation as referred at paras (e) and (f) of the Report;
3. an appropriate process for dealing with inadequacies in our policy and procedures recognised within the report; and
4. establishing an internal process, supported by expert advice, to identify those issues not dealt with in the Report as noted in the Post-script (Page 103).

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Mosley and seconded by Councillor Wilson.

28/22 CLOSING REMARKS

In closing the meeting, the Mayor thanked Michael Redfern, all Councillors and members of the public for attending, and also thanked all staff involved in the meeting.