

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee  
Held in Shrewsbury Room, Shirehall  
At 6.00pm on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

**PRESENT**

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), P Moseley (Vice-Chair), R Dartnall, J Dean, N Green, A Phillips, D Vasmer and R Wilson

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Gary Farmer (Head of Operations), Stuart Farmer (Project Manager), Ruth Jones (Office Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

**35/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**RESOLVED:**

**That apologies be accepted from Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager) and Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk)**

**36/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Shropshire Councillors | Those twin-hatted members declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council. |
| Councillor Nat Green   | Declared a prejudicial interest in Item 45/22 Markets.   |

**37/22 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022 were submitted and circulated as read.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.**

**38/22 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

There were no matters arising.

### **39/22 PAYMENT SCHEDULES**

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 2<sup>nd</sup> July to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

Councillor Dean asked what position the Town Council was in with regard to energy price hikes and guarantees from Government. The RFO said that the forward contracts that the Council had with its supplier, West Mercia Energy, meant that the price was considerably lower than for other businesses. Further details from the Government on pricing was awaited.

#### **RECOMMENDED:**

**That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 2<sup>nd</sup> July to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022 be approved.**

### **40/22 ECARGO BIKE BUSINESS CASE**

Mr Mark Fermor, Chairman of Shropshire Cycle Hub, was invited to the meeting to put forward his business case for an Ecargo Bike Library for Shrewsbury. A Business Plan was submitted to members prior to the meeting with a request to the Town Council to fund 50% of the project ie £27.5k, after which other stakeholders would be approached for the remainder. An additional slide presentation was also given at the meeting. It was expected that the venture would break even at the end of the year.

Mr Fermor added that going forward with the Ecargo Bike proposal quickly would give extra support for the bid in November for funding towards a Mini-Holland project for the town. Councillor Wilson agreed that the scheme would give a positive boost to this bid and added that 4-5 families were benefitting from using these types of bikes already but that they were very expensive. He thought that business use of Ecargo bikes would be in the Shrewsbury BID's field. Councillor Wilson asked if the project could be scaled down. Mr Fermor replied that it could start smaller but that some of the costs would remain the same either way eg marketing. He confirmed that he was in discussions with the BID regarding their support and that the investment sought from the Town Council was for the domestic side of the project.

Councillor Phillips enquired about a similar business that had once been set up in Shrewsbury but that was no longer operating. Mr Fermor replied that it was still operating elsewhere but that he believed that its transference was not due to lack of demand.

Councillor Green asked if Ecargo bikes would be used more in the summer months and whether the current economic environment might impact on the potential take-up. Mr Fermor said that the rickshaws that operate in the town were used in all seasons and that, for businesses, it would save money.

Councillor Mosley pointed out that the request for funds was akin to the Community Grant Scheme where applicants show that a substantial grant had already been obtained before the Town Council considers the request. He was concerned that in this case the other half of the investment had not yet been obtained. Councillor Mosley added that a visioning

exercise was imminent and that decisions on the direction the Town Council would take would be made then. He was also worried that funding half of the Ecargo Bike project would set an unwelcome precedent despite the Council wanting to be an exemplar on climate issues. The Council would also have to enter into a procurement process before any funds were released.

The Town Clerk confirmed that any funding in excess of £25k would have to go through the national procurement process to ensure best value. She also pointed out that there was no mention of the reduction in the carbon footprint in the proposal information, which was key given the proposal was to utilise The Carbon Reduction Reserve.

Councillor Dean said that this project might find itself as part of the Town Council's visioning but as two reports had been received by the Committee with no decision having been reached, he suggested that further discussions with Mr Fermor should take place with a view to returning the item to Full Council.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (i) That further discussions between officers and the Shropshire Cycle Hub take place.**
- (ii) That the Ecargo Bike Business Case be referred to the next meeting of the Full Council.**

#### **41/22 BUDGETING TIMETALE FOR 2023/23**

The RFO circulated a report on setting the 2023/24 Budget to all members in advance of the meeting which included the timetable and procedures involved in setting the budget.

Councillor Mosley asked if the rises in the costs of living would be included in the budget, and this was confirmed.

Councillor Dean asked if there would be a public consultation on setting the budget. The Town Clerk reminded members that the budget needed to be set by the end of January 2023. Councillor Phillips asked if the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting set for 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 could be publicised as a mechanism for consultation. This was agreed and Councillor Mosley added that this would complement the Community Engagement Policy.

**RESOLVED:**

- (iii) That the report and dates be noted.**
- (iv) That the F&GP Committee of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 be publicised for public engagement.**

#### **42/22 POLICIES**

The following policies updated by the Deputy Town Clerk were circulated to all members prior to the meeting pending Finance & General Purposes recommending adoption to Council in November:

- Asset Disposal Policy
- Complaints Procedure

- FOI Publication Scheme
- Vexatious Complaints Policy
- Data Protection
- Business Continuity Plan

**RECOMMENDED:**

**That a Working Group consisting of Councillors Dean, Moseley, Phillips and Vasmer be established to meet and consider these policies prior to the next meeting of the Full Council.**

## **43/22 UPDATE ON COMMITTEE & WORKING GROUP ACTIVITY**

The minutes of the last meetings of the Climate Change Standing Committee and the Youth Services Group were circulated prior to this meeting.

### **43/1 Climate Change Standing Committee**

The Climate Change Standing Committee met on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022. Councillor Vasmer added that a new apprentice had been appointed to the Town Council's Admin Team. Part of the post's role would support the work of the Climate Change Standing Committee.

### **43/2 Youth Services Working Group**

The Youth Services Working Group met on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2022. No further updates were reported.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the updates be noted.**

## **44/22 TENDER WORK**

Prior to this meeting, a report on Tender Works, together with information on Tender Progress, was circulated to members. The Project Manager updated members as follows:

**Bus Shelters** – 3 tenders had been received. The preferred tender was over budget, but the Council was working with the company to bring it in line with the budget set for the works. Members were also reminded that the project was still likely to be held back by the current lead times for suppliers and installers.

Councillor Moseley asked if all the tenders were over budget. The Project Manager confirmed that this was the case but that the one chosen was the closest.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

*Councillor Green left the meeting.*

#### **45/22 MARKETS**

The Town Clerk updated members in the absence of the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager that the market was currently at 100% occupancy. Also traders had formed a working group, together with the Deputy Town Clerk, to plan a collaborative campaign for Christmas.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

*Councillor Green re-joined the meeting.*

#### **46/22 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

The 2022/23 Capital Projects Action Plan update was circulated prior to the meeting.

The Town Clerk updated members as follows:

- **Greenacres Play Area** – work complete
- **Stanley Lane Rec and footpath lights** – works complete
- **Abbey Gardens** – drainage work begun
- **St John's Hill office** – quotes for alterations had been received via tender process run by the architects
- **Quarry War Memorial** – there was currently an impasse between Shropshire Council and the War Memorials Trust over specification of repair works; officers were hopeful of a resolution
- **Kynaston Road Rec** – parallel tenders were to be sought for the play area, drainage works and wheel game facilities
- **Upton Lane** – officers were working with the local member to discuss location on specification of a play area
- **Moston Road Rec** – work on enhancements to the grounds was in progress
- **Beaver Project** – obtaining a Beaver Licence was a long process and lots of community engagement was necessary to evidence the environmental benefits. Members were invited to view a similar project set up in Cheshire.
- **Shorncliffe Drive** – no progress as yet on feasibility of future use of area.

Councillor Mosley commented that since the Capital Plan was set up a few years ago, lots of projects had reached their fruition. He added that the Plan was a good reminder for members, as well as the population of the Town, about how committed Shrewsbury Town Council was to open spaces and the environment; there was much to be proud of.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

#### **47/22 EXTERNAL AUDITOR – 5 YEAR OPT OUT OPTION**

The RFO circulated a report on External Auditor 5 Year Opt-Out Option 2022-23 – 2026/27 prior to the meeting which offered smaller authorities the chance to appoint its own external auditor. Councils were automatically opted in but were obliged to consult members when there was an option to opt out of central procurement. The RFO recommended that the Town Council does not opt out for two reasons: it was unlikely to cost less; and, no smaller authorities had opted out in recent years.

##### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the report be noted.**
- (ii) That no action be taken and await notification of appointed auditor.**

#### **48/22 END OF YEAR AUDIT**

The External Auditor Report and Certificate 2021-22 was circulated prior to the meeting. The RFO reported that an unqualified audit had been received.

##### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the conclusion of the Annual External Audit for the 2021/22 Annual Accounts be noted.**
- (ii) That the RFO arrange for publication of the completion of the Annual Audit.**

#### **49/22 DITHERINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE**

The Ditherington Community Centre accounts for year-end 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 were circulated before the meeting and showed a very small surplus. The Community Centre is owned by the Town Council. The RFO explained that the Centre's activities used to be run by a local community group but when that ceased the Town Council had taken on this responsibility. Since the Coronavirus Pandemic, several clubs that used the Centre regularly had not restarted. The RFO recommended that the Centre be considered in the visioning exercise.

Councillor Mosley added that Ditherington Community Centre's decline was not helped by its physical condition and location.

##### **RECOMMENDED:**

- (i) That the accounts be noted.**
- (ii) That Ditherington Community Centre be incorporated into the forthcoming visioning exercise.**

## 50/22 MOTIONS FROM FULL COUNCIL

### (i) Warm Rooms Initiative

A report on the Warm Rooms Scheme was drawn up by Councillors Dean and Lemon and circulated prior to the meeting. The motion had been presented and discussed at Full Council on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and deferred to the next meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee. Briefly, it was an initiative aimed at people who were struggling in the current economic climate. It proposed to support public spaces to open and provide warm rooms with a welcoming atmosphere, and to provide refreshments and some form of activity. The Committee was asked to commit £5,000 to help publicise the Shropshire Council scheme to residents of the town.

It was suggested that the £5,000 be better used as a fund for community groups (to provide heating, refreshments, etc) to access in order to open their doors for people in their community for a few hours more ie an expansion of their usual groups. The Town Clerk said it could be set up and operated in a similar way to the Coronavirus Battle Fund overseen by herself and the RFO. Councillor Mosely added that groups could also seek funds via the Local Councillor Grant Scheme.

Councillor Mosley raised a concern for the supervision and safeguarding of the people spending time in these 'warm spaces.' Councillor Phillips said that community groups could be presumed to have the relevant safeguarding in place. Councillor Dean said that most community groups operated without bureaucracy and were relatively straightforward.

Councillor Dean added that it might be an opportunity for some groups that had not yet restarted since Covid to come back.

Councillor Dartnall advised that she had 2 community halls in her ward and that she could approach the groups operating from these spaces (eg the Women's Institute) about this initiative. She was in agreement that the funds be offered to community groups rather than used for promoting the Scheme. Councillors Vasmer and Phillips had groups in their wards that could be similarly approached. Councillor Moseley added that the Communication Team at Shropshire Council had the means to advertise. She also believed that local church halls might be even better suited to this project. The Town Clerk said that St Chad's had had a meeting with Churches Together to discuss what support they could offer.

### RESOLVED:

- (i) **That the report be noted.**
- (ii) **That the £5000 allocated be best used providing seed funding to groups wishing to create initiatives to support people.**
- (iii) **That the Town Clerk and RFO establish a fund and the necessary paperwork to develop a fund and publicise accordingly.**

## 51/22 ENERGY EFFICIENCY SCHEME CRITERIA AND FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

A report on the Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency Scheme was circulated prior to the meeting. This item had been discussed at Full Council on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2022 but deferred to the next meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee with a view to reconsidering the following amendments:

The scheme will be open to the following householders in Shrewsbury:

- Available to owner occupiers and landlords / tenants but not social housing. Social landlords had a parallel programme they can access called SHDF – Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. SHDF1 was currently live also through Shropshire Council. SHDF2 was expected over the autumn at some point
- Beneficiaries were to be Band A-B Council Tax properties with an Energy Performance Certificate and a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of C-G (the average SAP in the UK is rating D).
- Funds were to be released to the MEA in three tranches of £25,000 each to allow a fair distribution of grants available.

Councillor Dean expressed his strong support of the scheme.

### RESOLVED:

- (i) **That the report be noted.**
- (ii) **That the Committee approve expenditure of up to £75,000 from the Climate Change budget to support the scheme.**
- (iii) **That responsibility to draw up a full agreement for the scheme with MEA be delegated to the Deputy Town Clerk.**

## 52/22 GREENFIELDS

Councillor Mosley presented a paper at the Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022 regarding the sale of land at Greenfields Recreation Ground. Two main issues have since arisen:

- (i) The barrister (Killian Garvey) advised that no mediation nor negotiation should be entered into with the developer until after the Supreme Court ruling. He added that it was right and appropriate that a barrister was appointed.
- (ii) A valuation of the land on the basis that 15 houses be built had been received.

Councillor Mosley proposed that the Council takes the advice of the barrister and does not enter into discussion regarding the re-purchase or otherwise of the land until *after* the Supreme Court ruling. The hearing is set for December 2022. He added that the Preface to the Redfern Report also tends to this advice albeit without reference to the Supreme Court specifically.

Councillor Wilson disagreed with Councillor Mosley's proposal and urged members to consider resolving the matter *before* the Supreme Court ruling due to fears of possible further litigation.



Councillor Dean doubted that further litigation would be forthcoming and could see no reason not to follow the barrister's professional advice. There seemed to be no strong argument that delaying action would result in a huge loss. Councillor Phillips agreed with this but was also concerned about the potential costs of litigation. He added that the public had waited long enough and that he could not accept the barrister's advice without full evidence.

Councillor Vasmer also voiced his concern about possible litigation from the developer for losses incurred and added that the barrister had said that he was not qualified to comment on losses. Councillor Vasmer added that the Council had given its commitment to residents that it would get the land back as soon as possible and that any delay would be breaking its commitment.

Councillor Moseley questioned why a barrister was commissioned if members were not going to take their advice, especially as the wait time would only be a few months more in what had been a very long process.

Councillor Dartnall said that members should wait until the legal action completes as it was agreed that things are done absolutely properly. She added that it would not be that members were changing their minds but that they needed to give it careful attention.

Councillor Dean said following the advice of the barrister would ensure that the Council would be as accurate as possible in its actions.

Councillor Green said that there would be no harm in initiating mediation and that this could run parallel with the activities of the Supreme Court. This would also show a willingness to negotiate. Councillor Phillips agreed and referenced the commitment made to residents.

Councillor Mosley concluded the matter and proposed that no land deals be made until after the Supreme Court ruling, adding that this would not mean that no activity was taking place in the background. This proposal gained the majority of votes from councillors present with Councillor Mosley having the casting vote.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Council takes the advice of the barrister and does not enter into discussions regarding the re-purchase or otherwise of the land at Greenfields Recreation Ground until *after* the Supreme Court ruling.**

## **53/22 LAND MAPS**

At the last meeting of the Full Council on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Councillor Bentick proposed that Shrewsbury Town Council (after the issues of Greenfields Recreation Ground), accepted the recommendation from Michael Redfern QC, to create a detailed inventory of all its recreational sites together with a check on all adjacent land. The Town Clerk said that all land was transferred to Shrewsbury Town Council under the Vesting Order of 2009 and was available on its website. Some parcels of land went to Shropshire Council. The Head of Operations and the Town Clerk were part of the working group that considered all these parcels of land; a visit was made to them all to check that Land Registry paperwork matched the actual land, its boundaries and its assets. It transpired that some deeds were missing

from the Land Registry and that some were pre-1836; it may never be known what agreements were made at the time as for what purpose the land could be used.

The Town Clerk was concerned about the amount of time it would take for officers to search through the minutes in the archives, back to 1836, to when a specific piece of land was acquired. She referred members to the Asset Disposal Policy and the Local Government Act, Section 123, for information on the disposal of open space procedures.

Councillor Wilson proposed that lands owned by Shrewsbury Town Council, together with parcels of land adjacent to them be added to the website via a live link to Shropshire Council's GIS map which would make this information accessible to all members and residents. The Town Clerk said that this would have to be discussed with Shropshire Council.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Town Clerk requests permission from Shropshire Council to add a live link to its GIS map from the Shrewsbury Town Council website.**

#### **54/22 COSTINGS FOR ST JOHN'S HILL OFFICE**

The Town Clerk reported that the Working Group for this project (made up of Councillors Dean, Dartnall, Moseley and Vasmer) met on site with Base architects to go through all the options required for the tender process. Five tenders were received ranging from £109,006 to £154,588 for the works. Tender A at £123,103 was chosen as it was the most realistic and cost effective.

A number of repairs to the ground floor were required as well as minor initiatives on the upper floors. The green initiatives for the secondary glazing and other works to make the building more energy efficient amounted to approximately £40k. The build cost inflation was £25k but this could rise.

The Town Clerk requested that a budget of £130k be set and that delegated authority be given to officers and the working group to progress the project and appoint a contractor. Work was set to start in November with a view for completion at the end of February 2023.

Councillor Mosley asked if the secondary windows to the shop front were agreed and that the sloping step at the front door of the building could be altered to allow accessibility. The Town Clerk confirmed that these issues were part of the works.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That a budget of £130k be set for the alterations to the office at 7 St John's Hill**
- (ii) That Tender A be selected to progress the project.**
- (iii) That Working Group members and officers work with the architect in realising the project.**

## **55/22 SHROPSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

The Town Clerk reported she had met with Shropshire Wildlife Trust to discuss a partnership agreement for its joint arrangements in developing a Beaver compound in the Old Riverbed. Previously both parties had acknowledged the need for a partnership agreement, but this had been exacerbated by the urgency of submitting a Stage 2 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Members agreed to the principle of a Partnership Agreement.

### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That Council accepts the principle of a Partnership Agreement between Shrewsbury Town Council and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust in relation to managing the Beaver Project on the Old Riverbed.**
- (ii) That the Town Clerk finalise the details with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust with a view to formal acceptance by Council in due course.**

## **56/22 BIG TOWN PLAN & MOVEMENT STRATEGY**

Councillor Mosley updated members on the development of the Movement Strategy. Turnout at the recent member session had been disappointing, but there was a drop-in session planned in the coming days and members would have further opportunities to review and comment on the full strategy; it was hoped at that stage the devil would be in the detail.

## **57/22 VISIONING PROGRAMME**

The Town Clerk reported that little progress had been made on the Visioning work. She and the Deputy Town Clerk had been distracted by Operation London Bridge and both had subsequently been laid low by COVID. It was hoped to review plans and set dates accordingly.

Councillor Mosley detailed the prominent role that the Town Clerk and Council staff had played in not just the Town activities but the County activities supporting the Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That thanks be recorded to Town Council staff in the role they played in Operation London Bridge.**

## **58/22 NAMING OF A CYCLE WAY**

Members received a motion from Councillor Gillam to name a cycle way *Mansel Williams Way*. Councillor Moseley said that Mansel Williams had been a councillor for Belle Vue Ward for 25 years and was very well respected by councillors and residents during that time. He was also a keen cyclist. Councillor Gillam proposed that a sign reading *Mansel Williams Way* be put at each end of the cycle way that runs along the old Shrewsbury to Bridgnorth

railway line. The cost was £1,600 and the Mansel Williams' family offered to contribute half the funds.

Councillor Phillips proposed that the family be thanked for the offer of £800 but that the Town Council would be willing cover the full cost. Councillor Dartnall added that Mansel Williams' contribution had been significant and that she supported Councillor Phillips' proposal. She also suggested that when the signs were installed that councillors should cycle the route to publicise the cycle way's new name.

Councillor Wilson added that it must be added to the cycle route maps.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (i) That Shrewsbury Town Council supports proposals to name the cycle way from Reabrook (at Pritchard Way) to Oteley Road *Mansel Williams Way*.**
- (ii) That the Council funds the full amount of £1,600 for the project.**

## **59/22 RIVER SAFETY REPORT**

The Town Clerk reported that the River Safety Report had only just been received and ownership of actions and financial implications needed to be considered by the officer team (involving Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council officers) before it could be presented to Council for consideration. It was hoped this could be done by the next Full Council meeting.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**That the River Safety Report be deferred to the next meeting of the Full Council.**

## **60/22 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

The Chairman thanked members of the public that had logged in. All papers relating to this meeting could be found on the website [www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk) and the minutes would appear in draft on the website within the next month.

**RESOLVED:**

**That in accordance with s1(2) Public Bodies (Admission of Meetings) Act 1960, members of the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following items being considered involve the disclosure of confidential information.**

*Live streaming of the meeting was ended.*

## **61/22 GREENFIELDS RECREATION GROUND**

Councillor Mosley reported that the valuation of the land at Greenfields Recreation Ground had been provided on the basis of building 15 homes, not 8 as in the original planning

application from the developer. Clarification had been sought with the valuer as to valuing a site with outline permission and no clear plan or assumptions to work from.

Councillor Phillips said this was prudent use of public money as this would show any uplift in value from approving an 8-home scheme to a 15-home scheme.

Councillor Vasmer felt the valuation needed to be done ahead of the Supreme Court decision to allow negotiations to take place promptly.

**RESOLVED:**

**That a valuation is obtained for building 8 homes on land at Greenfields Recreation Ground.**