

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
Meeting held at 7.00pm on Monday 19th May 2025
at the Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury

PRESENT – Councillors Alex Wagner (Mayor), Bernie Bentick (Deputy Mayor), Rob Wilson, Alan Mosley, Rosemary Dartnall, Julian Dean, Emma Micklewright, Ben Jephcott, Rhys Gratton, Adam Fejfer & David Vasmer

IN ATTENDANCE – Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Clare Turner (Deputy Town Clerk), Ruth Jones (Office Manager), Max Ball (Communications Officer & 8 Members of the Public and 5 online

01/25 INTRODUCTIONS

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Meeting, both present at the Guildhall and online. He 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.

02/25 MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held 22nd April 2024 had been circulated.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 22nd April 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

03/25 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising or updates from those minutes

04/25 SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL OVERVIEW

(i) Town Clerk's Report

The Town Clerk gave a presentation on the work of the Town Council outlining the Town Council's key activities and its achievements over the last year.

Town Council

- Stepping Up Campaign Success - Launched in April with overwhelming public support (92%) for a £15/year council tax rise to maintain key local services like waste management and street cleanliness.
- Strong Financial Management - Achieved a clean 2023/24 audit, forecasted a surplus, and committed to reinvesting in priority projects while enhancing transparency and exploring remote meeting access.

- Environmental & Climate Leadership - Earned Gold in Heart of England in Bloom, advanced the Movement & Public Space Strategy, adopted plant-based catering, and explored sustainable waste solutions like biochar.
- Infrastructure Progress & National Recognition - Celebrated Shrewsbury's win in the Academy of Urbanism Awards and progressed vital projects like the Dana Footpath, while demanding an inquiry into the North-West Relief Road.
- Community Engagement & Civic Pride - Delivered successful events (Remembrance Sunday, Carols in the Square, Mayoral fundraising), and deepened support for groups like the Neurodiversity Working Group and City of Sanctuary.
- Future Focus: Resilience & Accountability - Committed to effective delivery of the Stepping Up campaign, transparent oversight of major projects, and strategies to enhance community resilience amid ongoing county-level challenges.

Finance & General Purpose Committee

- Strategic Planning & Bold Decisions - Delivered the majority of the long-term Capital Plan and launched a new 5-year Strategic Vision, backed by strong public support, to guide future service improvements.
- Stepping Up for Shrewsbury Initiative - Responded to county-level service cuts with a £15 Council Tax increase (Band B), generating £530,000 to fund a new Town Team for public realm maintenance and essential services.
- Community Backing & Implementation - Over 90% of residents supported the Stepping Up proposals; recruitment is now underway for a dedicated team to manage local infrastructure and environmental care.
- Financial Resilience & Forward Budgeting - Maintained financial stability through prudent budgeting for 2024–25, absorbing reduced county payments and rising costs while continuing to invest in key services.
- Support for Local Groups & Initiatives - Awarded grants to diverse projects, including youth mental health, environmental efforts, arts and heritage—such as the Royal British Legion's Armistice plaque.
- Youth Engagement & Future Focus - Expanded youth clubs, reintroduced the Youth Council, and built partnerships to support young people, while keeping service delivery, community engagement, and local pride at the heart of next year's priorities.

Recreation & Leisure Committee

- Capital Projects & Recreational Developments - Progress made on key projects including the Dana Footpath (targeted for completion in summer 2025), the successful introduction of beavers at the Old River Bed SSSI, and strong event delivery at Quarry Park despite weather challenges.
- Enhancing Public Spaces & Water Quality - Achieved Bathing Water Status for the River Severn, offering environmental and recreational benefits; worked with Shropshire Council to implement a town-wide dog fouling PSPO.
- Town Centre Engagement & Visitor Activity - Stable footfall in areas like The Square and Market Hall; focus on increasing town centre activity through more events and support for local traders.
- Fisheries Growth & Environmental Initiatives - Record permit sales and infrastructure upgrades at Radbrook and Sydney Avenue; addressing pollution issues at Springfield Pool in partnership with the Environment Agency.
- Community Outreach & Mental Health Support - Expanded coaching through the Fisheries team, with partnerships providing outdoor mental health support and skills training via angling initiatives.

- Safety, Policing & Future Planning - Strengthened collaboration with West Mercia Police; continued visible security presence in town; considering hostile vehicle barriers and planning future enhancements to leisure, safety, and environmental efforts.

Climate & Nature Recovery Committee

- Carbon Emissions Reduction & Energy Efficiency - Achieved Bronze Carbon Literacy Status, progressing towards Silver; transitioned Council vehicles to electric and alternative fuels; switched to 100% renewable energy for Council operations.
- Nature Recovery & Biodiversity Initiatives - Planted over forty new trees, expanded the 'No Mow' wildflower initiative, supported beaver reintroduction, and collaborated on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy with Shropshire Council.
- Pesticide Reduction & Alternative Weed Control - Advocated for reduced pesticide use on Council land and explored environmentally friendly weed management methods.
- Public Engagement & Climate Education - Hosted 17 events during Great Big Green Week with 500+ attendees, ran a youth Climate Change Competition, and supported the 'Green Open Homes' retrofit initiative.
- Sustainable Waste Management Efforts - Explored alternatives to Shropshire Council's green waste charges, promoted home composting, and improved access to green waste solutions in community spaces.
- Future Priorities & Goals - Plan to expand electric vehicle charging, further reduce pesticides, aim for carbon neutrality by 2030, and push for cleaner waterways and enhanced flood prevention.

Planning Committee

- Major Planning Applications Reviewed - Assessed key proposals including Red Barn Lane, Oteley Road, Whitehall Monkmoor Road, and Lord Hill Hotel—securing improvements in design, affordability, and sustainability.
- Transport & Highway Improvements - Supported speed reductions on Oteley Road and Featherbed Lane, a permanent one-way system on New Street.
- Environmental & Conservation Focus - Backed several Tree Preservation Orders and pushed for replanting and tree protection in conservation areas to safeguard green space and heritage landscapes.
- Parking Policy & Economic Impact - Objected to proposed parking charge increases and Pay & Display plans at The Gap Car Park due to concerns over economic and accessibility impacts in the town centre.
- Community Engagement & Sustainable Policy - Prioritised resident feedback in decision-making, supported Biodiversity Net Gain integration, and closely reviewed schemes like Tannery East to align with community needs.
- Future Planning Priorities - Committed to sustainable development, improved active travel routes, biodiversity enhancement, and careful monitoring of large housing and transport projects.

She commended the Annual Town Report to the Meeting for approval

(ii) Leader's Report

Councillor Wilson began by proposing a vote of thanks to Cllr Alan Mosley, who had led Shrewsbury Town Council selflessly for the past twelve years. He had been a leading voice for the community, speaking up for the betterment of our town, driving the restoration of the Flaxmill, advocating for the Big Town Plan, taking the bold decision to save the town's youth service when it was closed by

Shropshire Council, making the Climate Emergency declaration in 2019, and possibly most importantly, leading the Town Council through the Covid-19 pandemic. The role of Leader of Shrewsbury Town Council is one of pure public service, one that is taken on purely voluntarily out of duty, not for personal gain. Councillor Mosley was a stickler for detail, didn't suffer fools, and was a steadfast champion for Castlefields and Ditherington. Councillor Wilson had absolutely no doubt that he would continue to do all three.

Councillor Wilson continued. Shrewsbury Town Council was a well-respected organisation, that wasn't to say that it was infallible, and that it couldn't aspire to be better. This was a general theme that he hoped the Council would be guided by over the next four years.

He spoke about three areas: "stepping up", "investing in our communities", and "leading on change with others".

The principle of "Stepping up" had already been established. There had been too many occasions in the past where residents and councillors had been frustrated that nothing could be done about a particular issue. At the heart of the town council's intention to 'step up' was to act on the concerns of residents, where it had the ability to do so, even if it was not explicitly its responsibility. Initially this would centre on working to clean up our streets. The internal team would grow throughout the year from two to eight, and all should start to see the impact, especially as the Council invested in the equipment necessary to do difficult jobs more efficiently. The intention to 'step up' could extend further over this council term. As Shropshire Council faced financial headwinds, the Council would need to stand ready as a reliable partner to protect services for residents. Aside from this, it was Councillor Wilson's belief that services were best delivered locally where possible.

Secondly, Councillor Wilson wanted to see the Town Council ambitiously invest in its own estate. This meant not only developing a long-term plan for improvements to the Quarry over the next twenty years when the town would celebrate the centenary of Percy Thrower's appointment as park superintendent in 1946. But also, other recreational and countryside spaces. The Council needed to be focused on providing a range of opportunities for residents across the town of all ages, genders and abilities – especially outside the town centre. For example, when looking at playgrounds, Councillor Wilson had been vocal about the need to move away from the model of a swing a slide and a bench within a small fenced off area in every estate. The Council needed to champion variety, creativity and collaboration and be alive to potential disparity in provision, ensuring it appeals to girls as well as boys. The Council needed to do what it could to enhance the pathways which criss-cross Town Council land, in terms to accessibility and safety. This meant looking at barriers, surfaces, lighting, new routes and connectivity.

Finally, Councillor Wilson spoke about how the Town Council worked as a partner, leading discussion on bigger issues which stray beyond its immediate remit. There were too many to mention, but at the forefront had to be its membership of the Big Town Plan Partnership alongside Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury BID. This project was now over a decade old and was on the precipice of delivering real change. It was a structure that gave the Town Council influence beyond the wildest dreams of other town and parish councils. The council had also led, and would continue to lead, on matters relating to the cleaning up the Severn, climate change, nature recovery, community cohesion, town centre safety, and so on.

Shrewsbury was a fantastic place to live, and it was increasingly being recognised further afield. Winner of the Academy of Urbanism's Great Town accolade, named that weekend by the Guardian as one of the happiest places to live in the UK, selected by the Times as one of the best places to live in the country, home of Britain's Favourite Market three times in a row. The Council should be

rightly proud of the town and extol its virtues to friends near and far. But the council couldn't rest on its laurels, Councillor Wilson believed it to be the best county town in England, but the more the Council could do to solidify Shrewsbury's local, national and international reputation the better!

RESOLVED:

- (i) That a vote of thanks be given to Councillor Mosley for his leadership of the Town Council since 2013;**
- (ii) That the Annual Report for 2024/25 be approved.**

05/25 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING QUESTIONS

(i) Fay Easton – Chairman of Greenfields Community Group

For the last 2 years the Group had raised funds for an outdoor gym and solar lighting, and it had to return the money to the funders due to lack of support and refusal of permission. She felt like giving up. She asked why the town council was not supportive of these projects?

She also asked why the Annual Town Meeting was not publicised to the local community?

Councillor Wilson reported that Annual Town Meetings had not been well attended despite publicity, and he planned to look at ways of re-invigorating it more.

Councillor Wilson commended the Group for its work. The land had been repurchased. He acknowledged that the Town Council have done better hence why he had written to Ms Easton very soon after the elections. He didn't want to dwell on the past and looked forward to his meeting on the 27 May with the Group.

(ii) Mr Harper – Treasurer of Greenfields Community Group

Followed on from Ms Easton. He believed the Town Council was totally resistant to anything being done on the site and asked why the Town Clerk always refused permission. He said that nothing had been done on the site in 2 years.

Councillor Wilson recognised that Greenfields wasn't the whole of the town and the Greenfields Community Ground wasn't the sole group that represented the interests in that area.

(iii) Steven Darwell – Greenfields Resident

Criticised the bus service on Ellesmere Road and there was a need to improve public transport in that area.

Councillor Wilson reported on the MP's campaign to improve bus transport; he would raise this with the MP later in the week. He also pointed out that 22% of households in Shrewsbury didn't have access to a car, so the Shrewsbury Movement Strategy was crucial to improving people's mobility.

Mr Darwell went further to question Government pressure for more housing and the lack of infrastructure to meet demand.

Councillor Wilson pointed out that the Town Council was only a statutory consultee and it was Shropshire Council that was the Planning Authority. That said he did report that Councillor Dean, in his capacity as Chairman of the Planning Committee had plans to reach out more to the community on planning matters.

(iv) Stan Sedman

Mr Stedman has over the years taken groups on tours of the town and had seen first hand some of the fantastic work the Town Council did, particularly given their level of finances. He was thrilled with the Stepping Up Campaign, and he wished to thank the Town Council for giving him a great place to live.

06/25 CLOSING REMARKS

The Mayor paused the live feed so that the workshop could begin. He thanked those online for attending. He felt that meeting had been very productive and showed the scale of work taking place in the town

07/25 WORKSHOP

Those attending were given an opportunity to comment on the six pillars of the Town Council's Vision.

- Building Resilient Communities for Shrewsbury
- Supporting Shrewsbury Residents to Live Active and Healthy Lives Through the Provision of Quality Services
- Preserving Shrewsbury's Heritage
- Creating A Greener and Better-connected Shrewsbury
- Maintaining A Sustainable, Resilient and Efficient Organisation
- Taking Positive Action to Tackle Climate Change

08/25 CLOSING REMARKS

The Mayor thanked those for attending. He duly closed the meeting