

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
Meeting held at 6.00pm on Monday 25th April 2022 at Theatre Severn

PRESENT – Councillors Julian Dean (Mayor), Elisabeth Roberts (Deputy Mayor), Alan Mosley (Leader), Bernie Bentick, Mary Davies, Julian Dean, Phil Gillam, Nat Green, Pam Moseley, Kevin Pardy, David Vasmer, Alex Wagner, Becky Wall and Rob Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE – Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Ruth Jones (Office Manager), Seb Slater (Executive Director Shrewsbury Business Improvement District), Tim Pritchard (Shrewsbury Programme Manager Shropshire Council), PC Nathan Puplett (West Mercia Police) and 7 Members of the Public

APOLOGIES - Rosemary Dartnall, Kate Halliday & Chris Lemon

01/22 INTRODUCTIONS

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Meeting, both present at the Theatre 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.

02/22 MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

The Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held virtually on 1 June 2021 had been circulated.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 1 June 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

03/22 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising or updates from those minutes

04/22 SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL OVERVIEW

- (i) General Overview** – Councillor Mosley (Leader of the Council gave a general overview of the Council. It had been a busy year and one that both members and officers could be proud of. The Council remained on of the largest and most influential Town Councils in the country representing more that 70,000 residents.

It prided itself at being in the heart of the community and being a Voice for Shrewsbury, both locally, regionally and nationally. It continued to provide good quality services, play, recreation and green spaces as well as a strong youth service offer. This all helped to ensure that Shrewsbury continued to be a great place to live work and visit.

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

This Committee was charged with the general running of the organisation, setting policy for the Council, and managing the Council's finance, so whilst the other Committees do more of the exciting stuff this Committee was the driving force behind the direction of travel of the Council.

The town's recovery from COVID had been a focus of this Committee. Not only had its grant funding pots helped community groups address the impact of the pandemic, the Town Council had been a key player in the work of the Shrewsbury Recovery Taskforce which had met fortnightly throughout this last year. The Town Council had been able to influence how government funding had been spent and how it could benefit the town centre in particular. COVID Lockdown had meant that some of those aspirations, like pedestrianising the High Street had been tested and long-term plans accelerated.

One of the key work streams of late had been the commissioning of a Movement and Public Realm Strategy. The Big Town Plan Masterplan commissioned jointly by the Town Council, Shropshire Council and the Shrewsbury Business Improvement District looked at movement but did not go into the detail required and this Committee was able to stress the need for a more in-depth review of how people move around the town. As the Town Council's representative on both the Big Town Plan Board and the Movement Strategy Board Councillor Mosley had been able to stress this Committee's wish that the consultants look into both scenarios of what would movement look like with and without the North West Relief Road; the Town Council had been forthright in its opposition for the road and its wish to see measures to reduce car usage and improve active travel across the town.

COVID Lockdown had seen lots of projects in our Capital Programme come to fruition; from new and improved play areas to new electric vehicles and machinery. The Town Council had made improvements to Cycling and Walking infrastructure and had installed new LED lighting and Solar Lighting. One of the biggest challenges the Town Council continued to face was the increased construction costs as well as longer lead in times for projects to be started and completed. The Town Council's mantra wherever possible continued to be shop local and also procure from organisations that had strong climate emergency credentials.

This Committee continued to oversee the Council's grant giving. Councillors had £750 available to spend on local projects in their wards and everything from buying defibrillators to helping fund Shrewsbury & Oswestry Crucial Crew have been supported. This fund allowed Councillors to give a few pounds to organisations to kickstart some local activity. The Community Grant Fund had been exceptionally popular and organisations offering support to the young and old had benefitted. Of late efforts had turned to supporting those community groups co-ordinating Shrewsbury's support for the refugees. All had been touched by the devastation in Ukraine.

This Committee would be busy over the next year as the Town Council starts to develop its Long-term vision for the Town Council to ensure that it remained relevant and able to do everything it could to support the town.

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

This year the remit of this Committee had been very broad with a huge focus on maintaining and improving our parks and open space. Over the last two years, the Town Council had seen that green spaces being exceptionally well used as residents had used these areas during lockdown and had preferred to stay local rather than going away. Some of these areas had suffered from wear and tear but plans were in place to make sure they stay at the good standards people have become accustomed to.

Lockdown had also allowed the Town Council to carry out improvements to play areas as well as build new play areas on new developments. The Town Council had also upgraded many of its BMX facilities to create more robust multi-wheeled tracks catering for all types of wheel sports.

COVID had meant that many of the Town Council's sports facilities hadn't been used as much as normal years. While they had not been used, staff had been able to undertake essential maintenance and this in turn had seen these facilities returning to use to a better standard. This year the Town Council had a specialist inspect all of its facilities to carry out a Performance Quality Standard looking at ground conditions, the type of grass sward used, the current maintenance regimes and making recommendations as to how they need to be improved. This work allowed the Town Council to work in partnership with colleagues at Shropshire Council to submit an Expression of Interest to the Football Foundation to access government funding to improve those pitches. The Town Council was delighted that they had made it through to the next stage and officers would be working on plans to submit for the investment needed.

The Committee had focused strongly on trees this year. The Town Council had planted around 5000 trees this year on its land and it had been thankful for organisations like the River Trust and the Environment Agency for granting funds

to purchase trees but also for the many volunteers who had helped to plant them. Tree Officers had been working with the Tree Officers at Shropshire Council to develop a Community Tree Nursery at Weeping Cross Depot. With the help of DEFRA Trees Outside Woodlands Funding, the infrastructure had all been funded from elsewhere and the Town Council was starting to see the benefits of the scheme with members of the public dropping off unwanted trees from their gardens to the depot and staff in turn looking after them and planting them in more suitable locations. Staff had also been working with the Shropshire Lord Lieutenancy on promoting the Queens Green Canopy and with the help of a legacy donation had distributed 750 free trees to residents across the whole of Shropshire.

Whilst much work had been done to plant new trees staff had worked tirelessly to maintain the existing 100,000 stock of trees. Ash Die Back Disease had been witnessed in its tree stock and members had been delighted by the approach staff had taken to minimise the impact. Another big work programme had been to prune the 300 Lime trees in the Quarry; last done over 20 years ago, all the deadwood had been removed from the trees and would help to expand the lifespan of those trees that were planted by Percy Thrower after the Second World War.

Whilst COVID had seen a downturn in the use of some assets, there had been an upturn in others including allotments that were all fully occupied and fishing with membership doubling in 2 years.

All of this goes to show how valuable the spaces that the Town Council looked after were important to people locally.

- (iv) Planning Committee** - Councillor Green (Chairman of the Committee) outlined some of the key areas of work this year.

The Planning Committee remained the busiest of the Council's Standing Committees meeting every 3 weeks. The Committee considered over 1000 planning applications every year, 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 used its expertise of being local to the community to assess the merit of development.

Clearly the most controversial of applications had been the North West Relief Road. The Committee dedicated a whole meeting to considering this application back in May, not long after the local council elections where the message on the doorsteps was a clear rejection of the scheme, preferring to see more effort placed on reducing car usage and encouraging active travel.

The Committee continued to receive requests from Developers who wished to share their plans with the Town Council early on the planning process. This often

meant that local issues could be ironed out before planning decisions had to be taken. It also meant that discussions could take place about what would happen to vitally important community infrastructure on these sites. The Committee had been able to influence how sites were laid out, what play areas would look like and how open space will be managed.

Tree management continued to be a focus of the Committees work. With the majority of Shrewsbury falling within a Conservation Area, any serious tree pruning required planning approval. The Committee also had a large number of mature Victorian trees which were protected by Tree Preservation Orders. There was a concern that as trees age and fail there could be significant changes to vistas and street views should many have to be felled. The Committee had over the last few years looked favourably on selective felling of trees to pave way for new trees to be planted to keep the tree stock flourishing.

This Committee didn't just consider planning applications. The Committee had a pivotal role in helping to shape the Shropshire Local Plan, looking at the direction of development in the town for the period up to 2036 but also the policies by which planning applications in the future would be tested against. The Town Council had been a strong advocate of ensuring that policies were introduced that stressed the need for sustainable development on new housing developments, looking at more efficient ways of dealing with foul and surface water on site but also renewable energy sources were looked at to heat and power new houses. The submission of the Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate recently had meant that those management development policies had material consideration in the planning system and the Town Council was able to use those climate change policies to force the hand of a developer wishing to seek outline planning consent to have to accept a condition to develop plans at Reserved Matters stage to combat climate emergency

- (v) **Climate Change Committee** - Councillor Vasmer (Chairman of the Committee) outlined some of the key areas of work this year.

This year the Town Council made a radical decision of adding to its list of Standing Committees by creating a Climate Change Committee. Previously it had set up an Advisory Group which helped shape decisions of the Council in its efforts to reduce its carbon footprint. Having a full Committee with a strong remit and a £250,000 budget to look at projects had really set the Council's seriousness in tackling this global issue at a local level. The Committee was also different to the Town Council's other standing Committees in that it had representatives from outside the Council sitting on that committee; these included representatives from lobby groups like Friends of the Earth and Xtinction Rebellion, specialists in Transport Planning and Biodiversity, organisations with key environmental responsibilities like the Environment Agency and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and representatives from the Shropshire Climate Action Partnership who are charged with developing an Action Plan to reduce the carbon footprint of the county as a whole.

One of the biggest actions of this Committee had been developing a Climate Emergency Action Plan. This was designed to help the Town Council reach its commitment of being Carbon Neutral by 2030. One of the earliest actions of the Committee was to understand the Council's own carbon footprint. This equated to the carbon footprint of 40 domestic dwellings. Given that Shrewsbury had over 30,000 domestic dwellings it had become more apparent that there was more we could do to encourage others to reduce their carbon footprint than reduce our own.

This wasn't to say the Town Council hadn't been making great strides to become carbon neutral. This year had seen the Town Council move completely away from peat based growing medium so now all hanging baskets and planters were planted using more sustainable medium. The Town Council had started to develop a plan for converting its fleet to electric and the new Mayor's Car was one of the first to arrive. This year had seen the completion of the solar lighting scheme in the Quarry; this had proved hugely successful with residents and had attracted a lot of publicity nationally. Inspired by this the Town Council was working on a new solar scheme in the Meole Ward.

One of the startling reports considered this year was a report that officers presented on how Climate Change was impacting on they managed parks and open spaces. In 10 years, officers had to take a very different approach to managing green spaces. Growing seasons were longer with wetter, milder winters and longer, drier summers. Over the last 3 years the Town Council had seen successive Februarys suffering terrible flooding and staff had to address the fact that land stays waterlogged for far longer. When people said that Climate Change was somewhere else the stark reality was that it was affecting how the Town Council looked after Shrewsbury here and now.

This Committee would continue to be busy for the future as the Town Council accepted that it had a responsibility locally to save our planet.

05/22 TOWN POLICING

PC Nathan Puplett attended the meeting; he offered Superintendent Bill's apologies who was otherwise engaged.

This had been a challenging year for policing coming out of COVID. The Police & Crime Commissioner was keen for more visible and accessible policing and had instigated the Policing Charter and Neighbourhood Matters. The force was engaging more with social media.

There had been an increase in the number of student officers in Shrewsbury. The Prevention & Problem Solving Hub was also key to gathering intelligence in an attempt to offer more proactive than reactive policing.

In Shrewsbury the Public Space Protection Order had been well used as were various Behaviour Orders. Community Support Officers had been visiting schools to engage with young people and the force generally was working well with its external partners including the Town Council, the BID and the Ark.

The Force was looking to submit Safer Streets Funding applications to support efforts to combat ASB, help the night time economy and address a recent number of river deaths.

06/22 SHREWSBURY BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Seb Slater, Executive Director of Shrewsbury BID gave an overview of the work of the Business Improvement District Locally. The BID looked after some 500 businesses working together to support the local economy. The BID held its second ballot in 2018 and received overwhelming support. It gathered £330k in levy income but looked to attracting grant income. It worked closely with Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council on three key themes:

- Promoting and Animating
- Supporting Businesses
- Representing Businesses

Key Highlights included:

- Presenting Vacant Windows to attract tourists
- Reassurance & Safety Campaigns
- Promotional Videos
- Mural Trail on BT Boxes
- Shrewsbury's Open Campaign
- Banners on the High Street
- Wayfinding System
- Alternative Giving
- Low Traffic Weekend Scheme closing off the High Street
- Transformation of Public Spaces

Looking ahead to new projects:

- Cocktail Week in September
- Podcast Series on Heritage of the town
- Shrewsbury Rangers Project to support a safer town centre
- Heritage Map & Trail

07/22 BIG TOWN PLAN WORK

Tim Pritchard (Shrewsbury Programme Manager – Shropshire Council) provided an overview of work in developing the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan.

- **Masterplan Vision** – this was expanding on the initial vision work and looking at delivery. It was acknowledged that the Movement Piece within the commission was lacking and further had been commissioned ahead of the Masterplan being signed off.
- **Smithfield Road** – In the spirit of the Big Town Plan Vision, Shropshire Council had commissioned a Conceptual Masterplan and resources had been agreed to take it to the next stage. At this stage the plan was not definitive, more testing the principle. The plan looked at a better use of Pride Hill, creating a multi-agency community hub, places that were more flood resilient and raising the confidence levels of town centre development.
- **Shrewsbury Movement Strategy** – Phil Jones Associates had been appointed to develop the joint movement and public realm strategy. A Steering Broad and a Delivery Group had been established amongst the three key partners.
- **Design Code Pathfinder Programme** – Shropshire Council had been awarded £120k to develop a Design Code for Shrewsbury on the basis of the Shrewsbury Test in the original Big Town Plan Vision Document. This would be developed in the partnership space with dedicated officer and consultancy support.
- **Big Town Plan Priorities** – there would be a prioritisation Review to understand the best fit, but it was envisaged that the West End, Station Quarter and Northern Corridor as key areas for development

08/22 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING QUESTIONS

Those present answered questions either from those present or ones which had been submitted electronically

Q. A number of road closures have been brought in for the Town Centre which is increasing the traffic along Town Walls. What measures are being considered to mitigate this and why haven't any of them been tried out? There is a lot of discussion about pedestrianising the High Street but will the issues on Town Walls be sorted out first?

A. (Seb Slater, BID) These issues are all being considered as part of the Movement Strategy for the town. The trials that have taken place so far have been largely positive but not perfect. The Movement Strategy will consider where changes need to be made.

Q. With the plans for development of the Riverside area being published recently by Shropshire Council, there is an opportunity to have as much permeable landscape as possible. The plan also shows lots of trees – will they actually be planted as they weren't when Pride Hill was developed.

A. (Tim Pritchard, Shropshire Council) The development of Riverside is intended to be a low/zero carbon build. This will come at a premium, but it is important that the

development leads by example for the town. A more detailed environmental assessment will take place to ensure sustainability for the development. And, yes, the development will include lots of trees.

Q. In view of the terrible events over the last few weeks in the town centre, please could the Town Council inform the public what is the plan and timescale to repair any non-working CCTV cameras in the town centre and what plans are there to enhance coverage, both of the river area and areas that have no coverage but suffer from continuous anti-social behaviour.

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) Shropshire Council rather than the Town Council operate the CCTV throughout the town except in the Quarry where we have our own, though operated via the Shropshire Council system. Hence questions should be addressed to them and the police regarding enforcement.

However, at a recent Team Shrewsbury meeting the head of the CCTV reported that significant work was underway on both extending the coverage of the cameras, the quality of the images and the hours of staff who monitor them to make them 24/7.

Q. It is appreciated that the Town Council are planning to employ Town Rangers and we very much hope they will carry out the activities that the Quarry Security staff did last year. These will only cover into the late evening as we understand.

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) At STC we have not yet decided whether it wishes to go ahead with the Rangers and if we do what should be their function and operations.

Q. Most of the terrible things happen in the early hours so 24 hour monitored CCTV is essential. The Council seem to like having nightclub activities in the town, therefore security and protection for both clubbers and residents needs putting in place with urgency. Appreciated that this costs money, but surely the Council cannot stand by and allow these types of things to happen again.

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) This was addressed under the previous question. We take public concerns seriously and will pass these onto Shropshire Council.

Q. As a parent living in the west of the town with 2 children and shortly having to apply for secondary schools, I am concerned when I see that in the most recent admissions there were a total of 816 places available but more 1st choices of 829.

Also, across Shropshire as a whole 93.7% achieve their 1st choice. In Shrewsbury that is considerably less at 79%, and 39 children get none of their preferences.

There is also a huge increase in the number of houses being built which will make the problem worse, should the young people of Shrewsbury and their futures deserve better and what can be done?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) Education is a function of Shropshire Council rather than the Town Council. We will, however, the points you make and pass your comments to them.

Q. At least two documented complaints since July 2021, submitted via our new Councillor into whatever system he could discover, have thereon been ignored. These were about the conduct of official(s) managing Church Rd Recreation Ground. They asked firstly to be told the process by which they would be treated, but even that has not been given. In campaign literature the Lib Dems proposed to “make Shirehall more accessible to residents and set up an effective complaints system”. For Shrewsbury Town Council (STC) - Is the Complaints Procedure being considered by the Redfern Enquiry into STC Governance? A policy of silence may be strategic.

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) Yes it will be.

Q. Have such complaints been passed for the Redfern Enquiry to consider what they illustrate?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) Michael Redfern has been passed a large number of the complaints regarding Greenfields.

Q. There has been no refutation or offer of alternative facts or attempt to apologise for assumptions or mistakes. In one case (still requesting actions) an acceptable apology was virtually written for them - if its guesses are true. So experiences at Church Rd Rec still indicate official(s):-

making changes to suit their whim or to indulge those personally favoured; dismissive or regardless of the established expectations of others._

knowingly disregarding (since 2015) a STC Agreement until it might be overlooked.

If such attitudes influenced the management of Greenfields Recreation Ground (in 2012 and still in 2017) that could underlie the expensive legal troubles when STC, without advertisement, sold to a particular developer land that was held in trust for public enjoyment.

Following Judicial Review of Greenfields, Councillors decided to set up the Redfern Enquiry into STC governance. Conclusions are very much delayed from the hopes in Minutes 18/05/2020.

What are the current expectations for when the Redfern Enquiry will “report back at a publicly accessible meeting” and “on the website”?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) We have been informed by Michael Redfern that the report is complete and is being printed although we have yet to receive a copy. We are intending to

call a special meeting ASAP after our Mayor Making. This will be a normal public meeting with all papers being published with due notice.

Q. Has it been awaiting investigations elsewhere, by which it might be guided?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) We have been guided by Michael Redfern and he has advised at various times that reference to and awaiting judgements has impacted on his work and timing of his report.

Q. A Court of Appeal, published Feb 1 2021, exonerated Shropshire Council, which had granted planning permission, but only on the basis that the purchaser and Shropshire Council were ignorant of information that should have come from officials of Shrewsbury Town Council which made the unadvertised sale. Having ruled on the case as presented, the judges chose to go on to advise what should happen if the disponee did take the land with actual knowledge of STC's non-compliance. Then the disponee would be "saddled with land which remained subject to the statutory trust for public use" whatever they had paid for it. They speculated about constraints that should prevent collusion. STC and the disponee had no representative who could be questioned at that hearing. When, and by what facet of governance, have the relationships between individuals involved with Greenfields Rec been examined?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) Michael Redfern is independent investigator and has been given all the information required.

Q. Had the reason for STC not indicating any suspicion of a trust not been rigorously investigated prior to the remarks of the Appeal Court judges?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) I believe that the report from Michael Redfern will address such matters.

Q. A Court of Appeal, published Mar 9 2022, ruled that a "claim in knowing receipt [of trust property], where dishonest assistance was not alleged, would fail if...". It used various scenarios to demonstrate distinctions. It concluded that "It was not the receipt that had to be unconscionable; ... for example where he received property in ignorance of any trust and was only later informed of it while still in possession: at that very moment of after-acquired knowledge, when possession and knowledge coincided, the duty as a constructive trustee immediately arose notwithstanding that the recipient had at that stage done nothing unconscionable." The recipient/disponee at Greenfields has permission from the planning authority to proceed if he has what he otherwise needs to make his desired changes. He now does have knowledge and corresponding duty so it would be "unconscionable" not to abide by the trust. As the judges speculated in the

Greenfields Appeal, one course might be to transfer the land back to STC. Are Shrewsbury taxpayers still at risk of paying for costs and/or recompense by STC to aggrieved Greenfields residents or to aggrieved purchaser?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) I am not aware of any claims having been made and if they were we would obviously seek expert legal advice.

Q. Ockenden, and commentaries e.g. by Hunt, remind us what a complaints system should seek to achieve and to avoid. Those imply a system that constructively engages rather than ignoring or dismissing; is open with explanations and information; is constructed to guard against prejudice or defensiveness and closing-ranks; aligns with and is facilitated by a no-blame culture. There may thus arise the best resolution of or adaptation to mistakes; without wasted time and effort; and without dependency on the precise, but incremental, slow and expensive, adversarial steps of litigation. Without presuming what Redfern might discover and recommend: Do Councillors think that STC treatment of complaint or challenge should meet the above criteria?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) We will be fully discussing our complaints procedure and changes proposed, if any, from Michael Redfern.

Q. Could the Town Council use its influence with Shropshire Council regarding cuts in bus services across the town.

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) The Town Council is very concerned about these cuts and has already supported a strong objection against them from one member.

Q. Is the Big Town Plan dependent on the North West Relief Road?

A. (Tim Pritchard, Shropshire Council) There has always been the view that the Big Town Plan will go ahead regardless of whether or not the NWRR takes place.

We have tried to future proof the Big Town Plan regardless of the NWRR. We are cognisant that we don't want to displace problems elsewhere.

(Councillor Alan Mosley) The STC view is that we don't want the NWRR and that any potential plans for the future must consider it not necessarily going ahead.

Q. There is significant sewerage pollution in Shrewsbury. What plans have STC drawn up to minimise the pollution to the River Severn and the brooks? How will you let the town know about this?

A. (Councillor Alan Mosley) We did want Severn Trent to come along this evening as we are aware of the concerns about pollution in the river. We will try and arrange this as soon as possible.

09/22 CLOSING REMARKS

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

10/22 NEXT MEETING

Monday 24th April 2023