



**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL  
FULL COUNCIL  
14 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Agenda No

**10**

**Responsible Officer:** Helen Ball - Town Clerk

**UPDATE ON COUNCIL WORK SINCE 29 JUNE 2020**

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***Purpose of Report***

To inform members on council work since the last Full Council meeting on 29 June 2020.

**(i) Staffing & locations of workforce**

The Library is now open to the public and staff have been using Riggs Hall to work from. Admin staff continue to work from home maintaining normal opening hours access to phones, website and social media.

The Senior Management Team continues to have a Teams Meeting daily to catch up on matters affecting the staff and operations across the workforce. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk are predominantly home based which works well given the large number of Teams meetings they take part in; the Head of Resources is predominantly based at Riggs Hall and the Head of Operations is based at Weeping Cross.

Depot staff continue to follow stringent guidelines regarding use of buildings, canteen, vehicles and have been provided with the necessary PPE. Plans are being drawn up to determine whether staff could work in Bubbles during the autumn/winter period.

Staffing levels continues to be a problem with both physical and mental health issues both directly and indirectly related to the Covid Crisis. This has been raised with the Group Leaders.

Staff are being kept updated on council activities via their direct line managers and a number of other routes including weekly updates, a staff newsletter, virtual meetings and Frequently Asked Questions.

**(ii) Grounds Maintenance Functions**

**Quarry and Dingle**

The Quarry continues to be a well used facility and footfall has increased on last year where there were weekends with no specific events. This underlines the importance that parks have played during lock down.

The Dingle has been open during core hours with a one-way system in place and has generally worked well.

There are no events programmed in the Quarry for 2020 other than the two wreath laying events for Battle of Britain and Remembrance Day.



Victoria Avenue is closed to traffic between 11am-11pm; whilst potentially impacting on patrons of the Quarry every effort has been made to ensure any vehicular access.

The Quarry Play Area has been open since 4<sup>th</sup> July but the Splash Park has remained closed.

Only the disabled toilets are open but all COVID Risk Assessments are being reviewed to determine any further opening.

### **Castle Grounds**

Staff continue to maintain the Castle Grounds. The Grounds have been opened for picnic areas for the town hospitality businesses. To date we still do not have any progress on the installation of a path through from the Dana.

### **Toilets**

The lower & upper Quarry DDA cubicle Toilet facilities are now open as are the Abbey Foregate DDA facilities. Butcher Row Toilets remain closed due to wider social issues in the area and staff are revisiting COVID Risk Assessments to determine any changes in opening.

### **Play Areas**

Following direct representations to MHCLG by the Town Clerk, guidance was amended to reflect the national anguish in opening play areas with very prescriptive guidelines. Lines of engagement with the Association of Play Industries were opened. The Town Clerk has continued engagement with Government on play area opening, representing the Society of Local Council Clerks nationally.

All play areas are open and despite signage to promote the government safety guidelines, there is little evidence of people adhering to such guidelines. Emphasis is placed on the user/parent/carer to follow guidelines rather than the Council to enforce rules.

### **Bus Shelters**

The majority of town centre facilities have been deep cleansed. A number of repairs have been commissioned to bus shelters in the Radbrook, Oxon area of town.

### **Sports Facilities**

- Meole Brace Golf Course is open and being well used, play has increased now from a two ball to four ball game. The quality of the course has received many favourable comments.
- Grass and Hard Surface Tennis Courts are open and the Key Holding Scheme has been offered freely and the take up is good
- Bowling Greens are all open with strict guidelines on usage
- Croquet Lawn is open with strict guidelines on usage
- Five-a-side football is running at the all-weather pitch
- All football is cancelled until at least September/October
- Cricket is starting low-level training

**Countryside open spaces**

- Open spaces continue to be well used by the public, the teams are focusing on areas that have been identified as litter hot spots.
- The Monkmoor River Bed project tender has been awarded to Lowther Forestry and is scheduled to start in September
- The second Tranche of the Footpath works is due to start with Tranche 1 works completed

**Ash Die Back**

Staff have been undertaking an Ash Die Back Survey. So far 10,000 Ash Trees have been assessed so we have a good understanding of the spread of the disease and the necessary works to be delivered. A plan for treeworks for the winter season is being drawn up

**Grass Cutting**

- Amenity grass continues to grow after the recent wet spells but generally speaking the teams have kept in track
- Wildlife Meadows on grass verges have been very well received. Most of these have now been mown and the arisings removed to ensure the best growing medium for this type of operation. There have been many more requests for these sites but this comes at an operational cost as they are far more labour intensive than the public think
- Increased household waste dumped on highway verges is on the increase.

**(iii) Fishing**

Both river and pond fishing are open and take up of licences is significantly up on this time last year. Plans are still in place for the national competitions under strict COVID restrictions. The competition is a sellout.

**(iv) Capital Works**

The following works have been undertaken since Lockdown

- Work had been commissioned on a number of bus shelters in the Oxon, Gains Park, Radbrook area of town. These were considered in very poor condition but were salvageable
- Ash Die Back Risk Assessment had started. All Countryside Sites (where the majority of Ash was present) had been completed and the rest of the estate was being inspected
- Climate Emergency Advisory Group had been set up and had met
- Bowbrook Open Space had works to improve access
- Meole Play Area Fencing had been commissioned
- Sweetlake Play Area Tender had been awarded
- Upton Lane Recreation Ground – Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk have had meetings with Cornovii to discuss potential developer contributions
- Barge Gutter Japanese Knotweed on the September schedule of treeworks. Surveyors had visited the site to prepare a plan for disposal of the old building on site
- Heathgates Allotments quotes have been agreed



- Monkmoor Allotment fencing quotes are being finalised
- Tranche 1 of Footpath improvements completed
- Tranche 2 of Footpath improvements have been commissioned
- Solar Lights for the Quarry have now been manufactured and works on site scheduled to commence in 2 weeks
- Mardol Quay resurfacing completed
- LED Streetlight conversion project completed
- Monkmoor Riverbank Country Park Project has been commissioned
- Castlewalk more detailed discussions with EA on logistics of re-levelling the site

#### **(v) Markets**

The Market Hall is operating fully and working well with social distancing measures. Generic COVID Risk Assessments have been developed by both the Town Council and Shropshire Council and all stall holders have undertaken their own separate assessments.

Members of the Grounds Maintenance Team continue to cover the Markets due to staff absence, but it is hoped that matters can be resolved so that those staff can return to their day-to-day operations.

The Sunday market at Battlefield is open for food and non-food items and the car boot sales have re-commenced.

#### **(vi) Youth**

The Youth team continue to explore and trial a variety of different activities aimed at maintaining contact with the young people they would normally work with.

The take up of regular youth clubs via Zoom has been limited so the youth workers are now visiting spaces we know young people are congregating. This work is going really well and allows an open dialogue with young people to take place.

The funded music project has been able to continue successfully online via Zoom. Working closely with The Hive and their musicians, weekly support has been provided to the regular members via Zoom. Equipment has been lent to participants to ensure that they can continue to engage.

Support such as weekly cooking classes continues and this programme remains popular with the young people who have been referred to the Alternative Curriculum programme. With support from The Food Hub these families have been provided with the ingredients and since doing so all of the young people have taken part.

The Team has successfully bid for £42313.48 of funding to support expansions to the Alternative Curriculum Project.

Shropshire Council has now commenced its recruitment process. It is hoped that there will be a complementary youth offer in the town.

**Partnership Matters****Team Shrewsbury**

Continues to meet regularly and engagement with partners is on-going. Police are patrolling key hotspots for ASB.

**Purple Flag**

The Association of Town Centre Management has confirmed the town's re-accreditation for Purple Flag. This is a collaborative effort between STC/SC/BID.

**Place Narrative**

Councillors Gillam, Dean, Halliday, Green & Moseley and the Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk took part in a Place Narrative Workshop with John Till from Thinking Place feeding in to the Big Town Plan Place Narrative Marketing Strategy Work. An imaginative session teasing out ideas around:

- If the Good Ship Shrewsbury was sinking and you had to swim to a desert island what would you keep and what would you discard
- If Mr or Mrs Shrewsbury Potato Head came knocking at your door what would they look like
- What were the opportunities & barriers for Shrewsbury
- What is the Big Town Plan really for
- Describe Shrewsbury in 2030

**(viii) Finances**

The Responsible Financial Officer is reporting better than expected Quarter 1 Accounts, so it is anticipated that pending no second wave, the forecast outturn will be better than projected.

**(ix) Lobbying for Improved Finances**

Government remains resolute that direct funding to Parish & Town Councils would not be available, but extended the provisions of the business grant funding to the local council sector very late in the day that bids to the fund were not able to be submitted. Legislation to exempt business rates from toilets has now finished its first reading in the house and is scheduled for the House of Lords debate. Government has confirmed that exemptions will be backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.

**(x) Communications & Social Media**

The Town Council are continuing to maintain good traction on all of its sites (Facebook, Twitter & Instagram) as have the Young Shrewsbury Sites.

The website and public noticeboards are regularly updated with announcements regarding Council services along with any special rules that have to be adhered to. Wraparounds in the Chronicle have now recommenced.



## Civic Matters

### **The Mayor**

The Mayor has undertaken a number of engagements primarily to show his support for businesses and communities in light of the COVID crisis. He has joined forces with the High Sheriff on recent visits to local retailers.

The Mayor is due to disburse his Mayoral Charity money to his nominated Charity the Shrewsbury branch of the Samaritans. He is still on track to do his skydive on behalf of the Samaritans.

The Mayors Awards Ceremony will take place virtually over two evenings in September and a final evening in early November to distribute his Special Awards ahead of him standing down at the Council meeting in November.

### **Remembrance**

Battle of Britain and Remembrance Day Wreath Laying will go ahead but not on the scale of previous years and social distancing will be a requirement. Discussions are ongoing with the Church and RAF Shawbury.

### **Christmas 2020**

Christmas Lights Switch On and Carols in the Square have been cancelled. Lights will still be installed and will be switched on towards the end of November. Discussions are ongoing with the BID and the Shopping Centre about other Christmas Activities that will encourage visitors but will not create gatherings.

## **(xii) Recovery**

The Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, & Head of Operations have been active participants in the Shrewsbury Recovery Task Force alongside Officers from the Business Improvement District and Shropshire Council Highways, Economic Growth and Public Health developing a collective COVID Action Plan to bring about recovery.

Work has involved:

- Implementing Highway Works to allow for temporary road closures to improve public space
- Installing Flags/Banners/Bunting
- Developing a Bounce Back Brand
- Creating Open Space for us by Food & Beverage Establishments in conjunction with Public Protection
- Using Planters and Safeguarding barriers
- Floor Stickers
- Animation Activities to encourage footfall

This work has been on top of the continued Big Town Plan work on creating a Masterplan and Movement Strategy and a Place Narrative and Town Marketing Strategy.



The Recovery Task Force meets weekly as does the Town Council's own Recovery Working Group (Cllr Mosley, Moseley, Burgess, Phillips, Dean and Green); notes are circulated to all Councillors for information. The Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk meet weekly with the BID Manager to look at those animation activities.