



**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
FULL COUNCIL
16 NOVEMBER 2020**

Agenda No

18

Responsible Officer: Helen Ball - Town Clerk

UPDATE ON COUNCIL WORK SINCE SEPTEMBER 2020

Purpose of Report

To inform members on council work since the last Full Council meeting in September 2020 and particularly in light of the current lockdown.

(i) Staffing & locations of workforce

Staffing currently remains a problem.

We have three members of staff who have been off on long-term sick leave with conditions non-related to COVID.

We have 4 members of staff who have been sent instructions to shield. Some of these posts are critical to the organisation, therefore some staff have had to be displaced from their routine roles to provide cover.

A number of staff have been required to self-isolate as they or their family members have come into contact with COVID cases.

A new member of staff has been appointed to work in the countryside team to take up the maintenance of a number of development sites open spaces that are due to be transferred over imminently.

The majority of admin staff are working from home, with minimal staff working from Riggs Hall.

Some Riggs Hall staff have relocated to Weeping Cross, but facilities there are not ideal for permanency.

Staff mental wellbeing remains a cause for concern throughout all tiers of the organisation with many staff having faced some significant personal issues which have been impacted by COVID. This has already been flagged to the Group Leaders. This latest lockdown has been a real dampener to staff morale. Senior Management Team are looking at measures that capacity and resilience can be improved to support staff.

(ii) Operational Functions

Quarry and Dingle

The Quarry continues to be a well-used facility and footfall is relatively high. The Dingle has been open during core hours with a one-way system in place and has generally worked well; this will continue through the winter.



The Quarry hosted Remembrance Day commemorations on the 8th November. A much scaled back event than normal, focussing on wreath laying, organised to meet new regulations. It still attracted some 500 observers but was well received by those in attendance. The proceedings were filmed and broadcast live with viewers from all over the UK and into Europe.

No other events are scheduled for the remainder of the year. Parkrun has been suspended, albeit many still run the course independently.

Castle Grounds

Staff continue to maintain the Castle Grounds. To date we still do not have any progress on the installation of a path through from the Dana.

Toilets

All toilets have been revisited and revised COVID RA have been carried out with the assistance from external H&S consultants. The following facilities are open:

- **Butcher Row** – only one unisex cubicle open. DDA toilet remains closed due to experience of past usage. Changing Places facility is available to those that genuinely need it.
- **Lower Quarry** – Gents (1 cubicle/1 urinal); Ladies (1 cubicle) & Disabled open
- **Upper Quarry** – Gents (1 cubicle); Ladies (2 cubicles) & Disabled open
- **Abbey Foregate** – Gents (1 cubicle/urinal trough); Ladies (2 cubicle) & Disabled open
- **Sydney Avenue** – Disabled open by the café
- **Hills Lane** - has been closed pending transfer of lease to 10 & 6 on the condition of accessibility of public conveniences to anyone.

Play Areas

All play areas remain open and social distancing guidelines apply.

Sports Facilities

The following facilities are closed under the Lockdown Regulations

- Meole Brace Golf Course
- Grass and Hard Surface Tennis
- Bowling Greens
- Croquet Lawn
- MUGAs
- Skateparks
- BMX Tracks



- Football Pitches (including changing facilities)
- Cricket Wickets (including pavilions)

Radbrook Recreation Ground has been handed back from the contractor and had its first cut in October. This is a priority area for feeding, aerating and mowing this winter to get it into a playable position by August 2021.

The delay in the start of the football season, exacerbated by the month long delay in the season due to Lockdown 2 is likely to have significant maintenance implications in 2021 with the season unlikely to be completed until May/June at which time, grass growth is at a maximum and the summer sports (cricket, bowls, croquet) will have begun. Depending on the seasonal growth there may be a need to prioritise some of the low use areas to meet sports fixture requirements.

Open spaces

- All open spaces and Recreational Grounds remain open
- Monkmoor Recreational Ground is operating on Dawn-Dusk hours given significant ASB on site
- The Monkmoor River Bed project is nearing completion albeit awaiting for 2 structures to arrive. 1000 trees/hedgerow are to be planted in the autumn/winter period. A grant of £7000 has been awarded by the EA for landscape/hedgerow/tree planting further upstream. This will see 2500 trees being planted. The current arrangements are such that group tree planting sessions are unlikely to take place. This means that staff and the current group of volunteers will be relied on to plant trees. If any members wishes to help, their assistance will be greatly appreciated.
- The Tranche 2 of the Footpath works have started with Hillside Drive, Mousecroft and Summit Close (Reabrook) complete. This leaves White Hart & Kenton Drive and the Old Cana at Sundorne to finish. Staff have been impressed with quality of work and the level of finishing. There is about £20k of the £100k budget remaining. A further tranche of works is being prepped for tender.
- There are four parcels of development land that are due for transfer imminently.
- There were only two bonfires on Town Council Lane; Kynaston Road and Wingfield Garden, which both require SFRS attendance. Staff are picking up the detritus. A lot of ASB was reported at both sites and there has been damage to both residential property and council gates and fencing.
- Hedge cutting and shrub bed maintenance has begun.
- It is intended to construct a drain between the Frankwell Carpark and the County Ground to prevent flood water run-off from the carpark and ponding in the car parking area in the County Ground.
- Winter bedding has now been completed



- The Information Boards for Reabrook have now been produced and will be installed over the Autumn/Winter period. This will hopefully be the first set of a number across the countryside estate.

Ash Die Back

All the Ash trees have been inspected and have been scheduled High-Medium-Low priority. The Tree Team have been working on the High Priority Schedule and will move onto less priority. Staff are also working on the next phase of the Action Plan and plans for replacement planting.

Grass Cutting

- Shropshire Council grass cutting was scheduled to finish at the end of September but teams were out cutting grass into October.
- Some high profile Town Council sites are still being cut as grass is continuing to grow.
- Rural Team have now reverted to Winter Tree Maintenance.
- Verges are being identified for locations to reduce cutting to improve the natural habitat. Rather than being completely left they will have a strip mown at the edge of paths and highway to keep sites tidy.
- Four locations are being found to prepare for wildflower management.
- Many residents are asking for various areas to be left. Officers are encouraging those residents to liaise with their local neighbours and their ward members to determine whether there is an appetite for change. Officers have previously reported that opinion on grass cutting is divided between those that want grass left and ones that want it cut.

Cemetery

Because of the mild autumn, grass is still being cut in the new part of the cemetery. The old cemetery is having its annual strim. Staff are being supported by two sets of volunteers; a regular friends group and a Probation Service Group of people and a supervisor doing 3 days a week.

Bus Shelters

Two bus shelters are being prepped for installation of sedum roofs.

Christmas Lights

Lights are in the final stages of installation and are scheduled to be switched on in the latter half of November. This year will be a mix of old lights and new lights from the new scheme. Lockdown 1 restricted construction capacity and supply of materials. The revised scheme has been agreed and costs have been amended to reflect this change.

**(iii) Shrewsbury Town Fisheries**

Both river and pond fishing are still open and operating to social distancing rules. All competitions have been cancelled. Membership is approaching 1000, a three-fold increase in 18 months. A considerable amount of peg work has been carried out this year with the help of funding from both the Angling Trust and the Environment Agency.

(iv) Capital Works

The following works have been undertaken since Lockdown:

- Improvement works to bus shelters in the Oxon, Gains Park, Radbrook area of town.
- Ash Die Back Risk Assessment are complete and work to High Priority Trees is underway
- Climate Emergency Advisory Group has been set up and met twice
- Bowbrook Open Space works to improve access
- Sweetlake Play Area completed
- 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.
- Structural Surveys to Barge Gutter and Quarry Depot
- Heathgates Allotments Shed works commissioned
- Monkmoor Allotments fencing works commissioned
- St Marys Church gate works commissioned
- Tranche 1 of Footpath improvements completed
- Tranche 2 of Footpath improvements commenced
- Solar Lights for the Quarry installed
- Mardol Quay resurfacing completed
- LED Streetlight conversion project completed
- Monkmoor Riverbank Country Park Project nearing completion
- Castlewalk Topographical works completed and specification for levelling commenced

A number of capital items have been suspended pending further review of the impact of COVID on these projects. These include toilet refurbishment in the Quarry and the Pavilion improvements at the County Ground. Officers have spoken to the beacon Cricket Club who are supportive of the need to review plans. That said there are a number of improvements that need to be made to the Pavilion to allow it to be useable for next year. These however are not wasted as the existing pavilion shell will be retained. Works have been costed out at approximately £20k.

(v) Markets

- The General Market is operating for the sale of essential goods only. Revenue is down by about 75%
- The Cattle Market is unaffected by closure regulations



- The Sunday Market is operating for the sale of essential goods only. Car Boot Sales are not operating. Revenue is down by about 75%

(vi) Youth

All Open Access sessions have been cancelled. Only one-to-one Alternative Curriculum sessions are operating. Youth Workers are using social media platforms to keep in touch with young people.

(vii) Partnership Matters

Team Shrewsbury

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

Big Town Plan

- Thinking Place are due to report back on the Place Narrative Marketing Strategy
- Glenn Howells are nearing completion of the Big Town Plan Master Plan
- LDA Design have published the Castle Street Feasibility Plan
- PJA have completed the COVID Movement Review and officers are working up the plans for a Low Traffic Zone for the Town Centre including Town Walls
- 2020/21 will be the final year of the 3-year commitment to £50k a year contribution to the work of the Big Town Plan. Some very valuable plans have been produced over this period and remaining funds have been used to fund recovery work. The partnership members will need to consider continued commitment to help deliver the outcomes from these plans.

(viii) Finances

The Responsible Financial Officer has reported on Q1 & Q2 Accounts where worse case projections for end of year balance was no worse than the £100k deficit originally projected. This is being reviewed in relation to the current lockdown measures and an up-to-date projection will be presented to Finance & General Purpose Committee in December. Officers have already flagged that some income lines should not be anticipated in 2021/22 as members begin to set the budget for next year.

(ix) 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 ceased as Shropshire Star have stopped production. Staff are looking at creating a virtual newsletter that can be promoted through social media channels. This will be expanded further when the new website comes on stream.

Tendering for a new website has been ongoing and 21 submissions are currently being evaluated.

(x) Civic Matters

The Mayor

The Mayor has undertaken no engagements in lockdown other than Remembrance. He held the last of his three virtual Awards sessions on Facebook. They have been well received and recipients have been touched by their awards.

Christmas 2020

Christmas Lights Switch On and Carols in the Square have been cancelled. Lights are being installed and will be switched on towards the end of November. Further illuminations had been planned for the Market Hall frontage; these have been put on hold as access to install the projection equipment is restricted due to shop closures.

(xi) 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.

As reported at a recent meeting with members, road closures have been lifted during Lockdown and plans are being drawn up to implement a Low Traffic Zone covering areas within the River Loop.

The BID has revised its Autumn/Winter campaigns to promote those businesses that are open and those which are offering a Click & Collect service.

Operational staff have once again been asked by the RSH to transport cancer treatment to residents who are now shielding and cannot get to the hospital to pick up medication.

Staff have continued to promote both government guidance and Public Health Shropshire's Step Up Shropshire campaign material on our social media platforms.

Some signage is being refreshed in sites to avoid any complacency from users.