

## SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

### Meeting of the Recreation & Leisure Committee Held Virtually on Microsoft Teams At 6.00pm on Wednesday 27 January 2021

#### PRESENT

Councillors K Pardy (Chair), Mrs G Burgess, N Green, Mrs K Halliday, I Jones, Mrs P Moseley, K Roberts & D Vasmer & Mrs R Wall.

*Due to personal reasons Councillor Green left the meeting at 6.37 pm*

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Head of Operations), Stuart Farmer (Projects Manager), Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager), Matt Wilcoxon (Countryside & Greenspace Manager), Jim Goldsmith (Countryside Ranger), Ruth Jones (Office Manager) & Carol Pullen (Committee Clerk).

#### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Ms J Mackenzie.

#### 33/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (PECUNIARY & NON-PECUNIARY) IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Shropshire Councillors	Those twin-hatted members declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council.
Councillor N Green	Declared an interest in the Item relating to the Indoor Market as his wife was on the waiting list for a stall.

#### 34/20 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting held on 25 November 2020 were submitted as circulated and read.

#### RESOLVED:

**That the minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting held on 25 November 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.**

### **35/20 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

There were no matters arising.

### **36/20 PRESENTATION – WEST MERCIA POLICE**

The Chairman welcomed Sgt Becky Thomas, the Safer Neighbourhood Sergeant for Shrewsbury & the surrounding rural areas; she worked closely with the Sergeant who covered the town centre.

Sgt Thomas gave an update on policing in Shrewsbury and issues that had continued to be dealt with proactively during the last year. There was a targeted proactive approach to dealing with the increasing amount of intelligence around drugs issues particularly in the Harlescott/Sundorne area. To date there had been around 10 search warrants obtained under the Misuse of Drugs Act in the Harlescott/Sundorne area; some had resulted in arrests and ongoing investigations, some of which have led to convictions in Court.

The Safer Neighbourhood Teams operate both car and foot patrols in the areas and are requested to target persons who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation particularly from drugs gangs. Covert patrols had also been taking place as well in relation to child exploitation issues which have also been raised by members of the public and councillors. There is a lot of multi-agency work going on with key partner agencies around children that have been identified as being vulnerable to the risk of exploitation and a number of those children have been dealt with by those agencies to reduce the risk of harm.

Although there had been a focus on activity in the North of the town, drug related issues were elsewhere in the town and also in the rural area.

Coronavirus has had an impact and brought fresh challenges to the Police as teams try to deal regulations under current lockdown legislation.

Cllr Vasmer was aware there had been anti-social issues in other areas of the town and asked whether the problems with drugs were specifically in the North of the town.

Sgt Thomas said the North was predominantly where the majority of the intelligence information and anti-social behaviour was coming from but there had been issues elsewhere and members may have seen through communications with the Police and through the local media that there had been a lot of work in other areas of the town as well. Patrols focussed on wherever the demand was.

Councillor Jones expressed concerns about the Harlescott area, where over the years there had been continued issues on bonfire night. Despite the Town Council banning bonfires on its land, these continued to happen. These incidences of anti-social behaviour over the years had caused a huge financial cost to the Town Council, apart from clearing up and disposing of the rubbish afterwards, money had been spent on fencing to protect properties from having their fences ripped out and burned.

Sgt Thomas said that a CCTV car had been deployed during the evening of bonfire night and the car had been utilised at a number of locations throughout the evening to gather evidence and there had been a number of staff out and about. In general, there had been

fewer calls to the Police relating to bonfire night and there had been a total of three calls to the Fire Brigade during the evening. Bonfire night had been during lockdown 2 and the Police had been encouraged to use the four E approach as set out by the Government – Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce as a last resort. Numbers had been a lot smaller compared to previous years and people had been encouraged to go home but the unruliness of some individuals was recognised.

Councillor Jones felt the Police should engage in much more publicity particularly around successful prosecutions so that local people were aware that things were happening.

Sgt Thomas said that any good news was alerted through the Command Team and the Communications so it was hoped that in the future more would be publicised about the proactive work and good work that was being done not just in Harlescott but throughout Shrewsbury and she would make sure Councillor Jones' comments were questioned.

The Chairman thanked Sgt Thomas to attending the meeting and for the information she had given members.

### **37/20 BEAVER PROJECT – OLD RIVER BED**

The Chairman welcomed Matt Wilcoxon, the Town Council's Countryside and Greenspace Manager and Pete Lambert the River Projects Manager from Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Mr Wilcoxon gave an overview of the developing Old River Bed project running through the practicalities and history of the project.

The Old River Bed is a 17.5 hectares/43 acres site in the north of Shrewsbury bordered by roads and houses on the old route of the River Severn. Although cut off around 10,000 years ago the site still maintains many of the characteristics of the river and has various designations on it including a national designation as a site of scientific interest.

The area acts as a flood storage area, although it never totally fills up it provides a long and wide area to store water which is really important and the value of the movement of slow water is really key to modern defence strategies. The ground is made up of a peat layer underneath with lots of organic matter in it and things decay quite slowly because of the wet conditions. In terms of carbon capture peat bogs provide carbon capture trapping more than all other vegetation types combined so the peat is really important. Damaging or drying out the peat could release huge amounts of greenhouse gases as well as carbon so is of important value and planting trees could have a detrimental effect in terms of the carbon capture and storage. Water percolates very slowly through the whole site from the north end down into the Bagley Brook in the south. Management of the site has always focussed on trying to keep the site wet by removing excessive tree encroachment which has caused it to start drying out along with desilting work carried out on the ditches, removal of young saplings up and also using cattle to graze new tree growth to suppress it

Beavers are a UK native species, they are completely vegetarian and eat a range of vegetation which changes through the seasons. In time the Old River Bed would probably support two families of beavers. They tend to build what are known as leaky dams on smaller watercourses. Staff have been following a trial of introduction of Beavers in Devon

and in particular the environmental and bio-diversity benefits this project has brought to the area as well as how this has helped to address modern problems of flood control.

Part of the Old River Bed site would be fenced off to create an enclosure. There would be quite a lot of work required to clear vegetation along the fencelines, some tree lifting on the western bank, putting in fences and gates, a few culvert guards and some Beaver deceivers which deter them from piling up debris in areas that we don't want them to and also a boardwalk to attract local visitors. There was also lots of preliminary work required including surveys, protected species checks, licensing from Natural England and the Environment Agency. Staff had been pulling together a list of individuals, groups, stakeholders and researchers that would help to monitor the success of the project.

Mr Lambert appraised members of the already secured funding for this project. The project had already secured £64k Severn Trent funding, other funders like Veolia were being investigated and it was intended to launch a Crowd Funding Site to seek local public buy-in. He thanked Shrewsbury Town Council for its support and enthusiasm for the project so far and asked if the Council would consider making a financial contribution to enable a full and effective consultation to be undertaken with the local community and other stakeholders. It was important to end up with a project that was designed appropriately, safely and would maximise the benefits of having this wonderful reintroduced beaver. It was anticipated this work would cost in the region of £7,500-£10,000.

Councillor Roberts asked about the boardwalk and the potential associated costs.

Mr Wilcoxon said that a run of around 200m on the south boundary of the site was particularly difficult as it went through wetland and would have to be quite different in the design so there were two aspects to the boardwalk, one being a boardwalk built out from one side to the other to join the two sides to make the building of the fences easier but also enable fence checks to be carried out which is a condition of the licence. In other projects volunteers had come forward as fence checkers and obviously if there was boardwalk all the way round then it would be a lot more pleasant for people. Without the boardwalk on the south end would require someone in chest waders so it would need to be done by a staff member and any repairs needed would be quite difficult. There were different ways of doing the board boards and the costs would be dependent on the different robustness of materials but these be would be factored into the project. The bulk of work will be the fencing and the enclosure itself with boardwalks being considered as a more community centred part of the project. Mr Lambert reiterated the importance of high-quality visitor facilities appropriate to the site and a good infrastructure to assist the team in looking after it as this was a keystone species.

Councillor Jones expressed his support for this project and asked whether, as the Mount Pleasant Primary School, borders the land at the bottom south-eastern corner of the site, whether consideration could be given to at putting an observation platform in that area so that the pupils of the schools could access the site. He also stressed the importance of publicity and ensuring the general public are fully aware of the project details.

Mr Wilcoxon said that here would be an initial publicity drive by the Wildlife Trust in promoting the project and allaying any misconceptions the public may have. These beavers would not be for release into the river system but merely for use as a grazing animal. Although the enclosure would not go quite as far as the corner of the school land and due to it being quite wooded at that that end of the site, it was unlikely that they would be able to

look out over the area and see the beavers but they would be quite near and had already been involved from quite an early stage and were are very keen on being involved.

Councillor Vasmer expressed his support and hoped the Town Council proposed that the Town Council support the project with funding towards carrying out public consultation. The Town Clerk advised that this had been flagged up as a capital project for some years and it had been raised recently during the budget setting and whether some monies should be allocated from climate change funding given the huge carbon sequestration aspect of this project.

The Chairman thanked Mr Wilcoxon & Mr Lambert for their time and the interesting presentation

**RECOMMENDED:**

**That the Finance & General Purpose Committee be asked to allocate £10,000 from the Climate Emergency Fund to enable public consultation on the Old River Bed Beaver Project.**

**38/20 UPDATE ON OPERATIONAL DELIVERY IN LIGHT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

Members had received the Town Clerk's update report on Council work in light of the second and current lockdown. There were several points of note:

The Town Clerk had given instructions to close-down Butcher Row Toilets in the short-term. These facilities were not being used by the public but were being frequented by individuals who were being temporarily housed in the hotel opposite. They had been using this facility purely to take drugs and the condition was placing staff and the public at risk. This had been raised with both the Police and the lead officer dealing with Rough Sleepers at Shropshire Council.

Instructions had been given to commission more robust sharps box containers. These individuals regularly crowbar the sharps boxes open to get access to used needles and again this was potentially injurious to staff and the public

The Operations Manager reiterated the problems including that staff were often reporting problems occurring before the facilities were even open where individuals would push past them to enter the facilities and were generally abusive. Staff were following protocols and reporting these incidents through Team Shrewsbury.

The Town Clerk reported that staff were reporting increased abuse from the public at large, blaming them for the restrictions in place, ripping up signs and throwing them on the floor in front of them, not respecting their social distance. It was appreciated that everyone was thoroughly fed up with COVID, no more so than staff particularly given that all of them had worked solidly throughout the pandemic. But this was just not acceptable. She proposed to start with messaging, some Be Kind to Each Other messages and asked the Mayor to help; she was happy to do so.

Councillor Pardy asked whether staff wore bodycams. The Town Clerk reported staff had been trained on the use of bodycams but they were not worn all the time, only in

challenging situations where they may be subject to potential abuse and their use was restricted as much as possible. Staff in the town centre and the park were also able to radio the services of CCTV staff who could watch incidents unfolding and notify the Police if need be so there was a good support network around the staff. She felt it was more about getting the 'Be Kind' message across.

The Town Clerk reported having received comments from Councillors asking whether muddy footpaths areas could be addressed. As the Countryside & Greenspace Manager was present at this meeting, she asked him give an update on footpaths from his perspective. He reported that in terms of the pressures on the footpaths, during the first lockdown people did start to use their local areas more readily than they previously had but during that first lockdown the weather conditions had been really good. However, during the last two lockdowns the weather has deteriorated and now again being at the point again when people were being encouraged not to travel usage of the sites was really high again. There had been a lot of capital work undertaken on improving the worst footpaths, the ones that were in a poor state and had the highest amount of traffic but there were obviously others that had not yet had that kind of attention. So really it was a combination of that, the wet weather conditions and the high volume of usage that had led to them becoming so muddy.

The Town Clerk asked the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager to give an update on the issue of the unintended consequence of lockdown and in particular delays to the football season and what that might mean going into May/June when the grass would be growing quickly and the demands of the summer sports season kicked in. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager reported that normally ahead of the football season there was liaison with the various leagues and the Sports Village as to when then the end of the season would be to enable them to fulfil all their fixtures and cup games by usually around 9 May. However as a result of the first lockdown it had been agreed that the season be extended by two weeks to compensate for the loss of weeks where they had not been able to play. Now with the current lockdown and the uncertainty as to when games might be able to resume it was unlikely that all of the fixtures would be able to be fulfilled. The season could not be extended beyond the end of May because staff would be focussing on the summer sports such as cricket, croquet and tennis. There were also repairs to be done to the existing football pitches in order to prepare them for an August start to the season. He had been liaising with the leagues.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Report be noted**

**39/20 FOOTFALL**

Geo-sensing counters were located in the Quarry X 4, Market Hall X 1 and The Square X 1. The Project Manager reported that visitor numbers had increased following the 2 Lockdowns and the expected drop for Lockdown 3 would be seen in the January figures.

Footfall within the Quarry continued to track along the same numbers as previous years on non-event days although dwell times had dropped during the 2020/21 period indicating these journeys were being taken as part of exercise rather than using the park as a day out.

At present it was only possible to see visitor journeys that began or ended at one of the Geosensing units. Should an extension of the project occur it would enable further tracking of visitor journeys far more accurately. Officers were in communication with Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury BID about the extension possibilities for this project.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the Report be noted.**
- (ii) That Officers continue expansion talks with Shropshire Council**

## **40/20 MARKETS**

### **40/1 Markets Update**

The Outdoor Recreation & Assets Manager reported that since 5 January 2021, the indoor and outdoor markets had only been open for essential goods only. For the Indoor Market, this meant food outlets along with cafes providing a takeaway service only, although a number of cafes had found that as with previous lockdowns and advice to stay home, footfall was diminished greatly. The indoor market normally had 260 units per week available and currently had 97 being utilised, which was also reflected in the income received.

The Sunday Market initially had six stalls deemed essential, but after the previous lockdown, most found it not viable to open up, and only two stalls opened initially and then closed due to the lack of customers.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

### **40/2 Tenant Mix Policy**

Members were asked to consider a report which had been circulated prior to the meeting, the aim of which was to review the various options available relating to tenant mix and to agree a policy which best reflected the most suitable operating model for the management of the markets.

The Outdoor Recreation & Assets Manager reported that each year the policy is reviewed considering factors that contribute towards the success of a retail market including location, accessibility and local population, but one of the most critical being the variety of goods or services on offer on sale known as the ideal Tenant Mix. This year the categories did not include the periphery units or the units on the gallery landing, which were owned and managed by Shropshire Council.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the Report be noted.**
- (ii) That the Tenant Mix Policy as outlined in the Report be adopted.**

**(iii) That the Tenant Mix Policy be reviewed in 12 months.**

## **41/20 FISHERIES**

The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager updated members on the current situation within the Fisheries managed within the Town. Since 5 January 2021, the fisheries had been able to operate in accordance with guidelines produced by the Angling Trust and Government.

The only recent issues there had been was with poaching. Details had been obtained about the individuals and the vehicles used and the matter had been passed on to the Police and Environment Agency.

The areas around the fisheries were being used more by visitors, keen to exercise or walk the dog. More paths had been installed to accommodate visitors, and at the same time keeping them separate from the Anglers. A recent concern was at Mousecroft Pool. This was now receiving many visitors per day and it was having an adverse impact on the walk way down from the car park to the pool, with one or two visitors slipping in the mud. The Anglers would like to install a path from the car park down to the pool to connect to the path created last year. The Anglers have been applying for Grants from the Angling Trust to install 3 new purpose built fishing pegs for disabled anglers, along with the new path, this would ensure the facility is more accessible to disabled anglers.

Grants were sought to enable the installation of two more fishing pegs on the Monkmoor fishery and also for more trees in the Frankwell area, to compliment what the Countryside team have already done, this will also contribute to the stabilisation of the river bank.

A more detailed plan of improvements will be produced for a future meeting.

### **RESOLVED**

**That the Report be noted.**

## **42/20 TEAM SHREWSBURY**

The Operations Manager reported that tactical meetings continued virtually on a monthly basis and operational meetings had re-commenced on a fortnightly basis. Purple Flag accreditation had been extended until January 2022.

Police were currently re-invigorating the Violent Crime & Serious Disorder Strategy which encompasses knife crime. Steer Clear Project which educates youths about violent crime and knife crime is to be launched with a pilot scheme due to take place in Shrewsbury. WMP Youth Inclusion Team were working with schools regarding knife crime. Virtual meetings were to be arranged with parents.

There were 29 known 'rough sleepers' who were currently accommodated in temporary accommodation and all rough sleepers had been offered CWP/COVID temporary accommodation.



Councillor training sessions around exploitation & vulnerability were scheduled for 8 or 11 February. Team Shrewsbury partners and some Town Council staff had already attended training sessions.

ASB incidents recorded during December 2020 included:

Alcohol litter - primarily broken glass in the vicinity of the Quarry  
Damage/Arson – amalgamation of various types of vandalism  
Needles – predominately Butcher Row toilets & Quarry

Councillor Jones raised the issue of rough sleepers who congregated outside the Ark with no regard to social distancing amongst themselves or towards the public.

The Town Clerk reported that this was regularly raised with Team Shrewsbury and the Ark but often these individuals were under the influence of drugs or alcohol and their ability to understand was limited.

The Town Clerk brought to members' attention vandalism that had occurred on the Copthorne Park site where someone had cut down a beautiful mature oak. The public had been incensed by this and information of potential culprits had been passed to the Police. The Town Clerk sought members' approval to purchase trees to replace it with good sized trees to really send out the message that this was not acceptable. This would probably be in the region of £1000 for the trees and the necessary infrastructure to put them in.

Members expressed their disappointment at the removal of the Oak tree and were in support of replacing the trees along with wide publicity.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the Report be noted.**
- (ii) That members expressed their disappointment at the illegal removal of a mature Oak Tree on Copthorne Park.**
- (iii) That sizeable trees be purchased and the Oak tree on Copthorne Park be replaced.**

## **43/20 QUARRY MATTERS**

### **43.1 Events & Activity in the Park**

The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager updated on the current and potential bookings within the Quarry. Due to current COVID restrictions no bookings of any events in the Quarry were being hosted. The Council continued to keep a diary with provisional dates for events once restrictions are lifted.

Members discussed the potential for holding such events in 2021. The Town Clerk said that herself, the Deputy Town Clerk and the Operations Manager continued to work with Public Health colleagues in the Recovery Taskforce and they remained cautious about any likelihood of events taking place. If regulations did lift, it was likely that attendance numbers would be greatly reduced and that in turn would

bring issues around economic viability. Liaison with major event organisers continued and there was a need to work with them whatever decision they took. The key for the Council would be the need to develop an Event Safety Plan and a COVID Risk Assessment that will satisfy both Emergency Planning and Public Health. She felt the Council were at the stage where they needed to make a conscious decision that no events would be considered in the Quarry before 1 July.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the updated be noted.**
- (ii) That members support the decision that no booking be taken for events in the Quarry before 1 July and the situation be reviewed by the Recreation & Leisure Committee at the March meeting.**

**43.2 Update on the Feasibility Work for the Quarry Pool**

The Town Clerk updated Members on discussions taking place with Shropshire Council regarding the redevelopment of the Quarry Pool.

Members are aware of the plans Shropshire Council has to redevelop the Quarry Pool. A recent Cabinet Paper sought approval for feasibility of the project incorporating two different swimming offers for the town, using the existing Quarry Pool Site and the Shrewsbury Sports Village.

The Council has appointed a Project Manager and the Town Clerk has had introductory conversations where ambitions of both Councils was shared and initial ideas around how mutually beneficial ancillary facilities might be constructed that could be used by both facilities' patrons.

It was evident from those discussions that there was a need for collaboration to ensure that the Quarry Park & Pool deliver a comprehensive and collective recreational offer for the town and continue to be high quality, well maintained assets. Communication with the wider public to ascertain what their aspirations for the area as a whole was crucial and there could be merit in exploring the commissioning of joint work to develop a strong Management Plan for area.

The Head of Operations had been pulling together the makings of a Management Plan for the Park and with other officers had developed a priority list of works that are required to preserve and enhance the park.

The Park is the Town Council's Jewel in the Crown asset, the one that attracts the highest footfall of any public asset in Shrewsbury and one which is generally loved by all. The fact it has high footfall means that wear and tear is evident.

Officers therefore sought approval to explore the potential of commissioning external works to support the conservation and development of the park in association with works being carried out by Shropshire Council.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the report be noted**
- (ii) That Council supports Officers continued engagement with Shropshire Council on the development of the Quarry Pool**
- (iii) That Officers explore the potential for commissioning external support on the development of a Management Plan for the Park**

### **43.3 CCTV Upgrades**

The Project Manager updated on the CCTV upgrades required for the Quarry and Monkmoor Recreation Ground.

#### **Quarry Park**

The Quarry has 3 CCTV cameras that are monitored by Shropshire Council. They are located at the Play Area, The Hercules Statue and the Dingle. Of these the Play Area and Hercules camera suffered damage during the floods of 2020 due to their locations within lighting columns close to the river.

The planned upgrades will future proof the cameras by either moving the power supplies further up the column or making them easily removable should a flood be forecast. The current analogue cameras will be replaced with upgraded, digital cameras following a survey completed by the CCTV contractor and Openreach to ensure the fiber cables were sufficient to accept the digital cameras.

The Dingle camera will also be upgraded to the new digital version to ensure all cameras continue to be operational.

Currently awaiting delivery of the equipment, install is imminent.

#### **Monkmoor Recreation Ground.**

The CCTV at Monkmoor is currently split in to two systems. There are 3 cameras currently monitored by Shropshire Council these are located at the Car Park, close to the Croquet Lawn and at the entrance to the play area. The Town Council also has a system on site with 3 cameras these are all attached to the Parks Attendant's office covering the front of the pavilion and the front and back of the attendants shed.

Following a site meeting several areas that currently have no CCTV coverage were highlighted. The CCTV contractor quoted for the installation of a further 5 cameras to cover the Bowling Green, the Astroturf pitch, Tennis Courts and Kick about area. The majority of this work will be carried out using existing cabling and ducting on site from a previous system.

Currently awaiting delivery of the equipment for this phase of the upgrade.

Across the estate the Town Council operates a number of CCTV systems. As mentioned above some are monitored and recorded through the CCTV Control Centre whilst others are recorded on remote hard drives and accessed remotely.

Experience has shown that the need to access CCTV post activity (given the timing of incidents) is often more crucial than expensive real time monitoring.

Quarry Cameras work well for real-time monitoring but it is questioned whether it is beneficial for Monkmoor. Members are asked to consider converting the real-time rotating cameras for static cameras recording to local hard drives, accessible by the Projects Manager.

#### **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the report be noted.**
- (ii) That Officers explore the potential of local recording of all cameras at Monkmoor Recreation Ground.**

#### **43/20 ASH DIE BACK**

The Chairman welcomed Jim Goldsmith, the Town Council's Countryside Ranger. Members had in the past received reports on the risks associated with Ash Die Back and as a result, money had been set aside to address this issue. In 2020 during lockdown, Mr Goldsmith had spent a lot of time developing an Ash Die Back Plan and assessing the Town Council's tree stock to understand the extent of the disease.

Ash die back is caused by the fungal pathogen *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (previously known as Chalara). It originated in Asia, has been present in UK since 1990's and was officially recorded in the UK in 2012. It is caused by fungal spores spread on the wind that infect nearby trees. Fungus moves from the leaves to branches and into main stem. There are an estimated possible 2 billion Ash trees in the UK of varying sizes and they are one of the most common trees within Shropshire. All these trees provide us with benefits and Loss of trees will change the landscape and woodland composition and Loss of ecosystem services that Ash trees provide.

Ash die back was first noticed by the Countryside unit at Coton Hill in 2014. It was first noticed affecting young/sapling trees and later noted on larger trees. Over the next 5 years it was identified on many other sites. After being raised with management Nov 2019, Council allocated £100,000 funds and the Countryside team were tasked with producing an action and recovery plan. The first Ash survey was conducted in the summer of 2020.

There are increased health and safety issues due to declining Ash trees on roads, countryside sites, housing estates, schools, cycleways, bridle paths and footpaths as well as risks to staff carrying out work on affected trees due to their brittle nature and unpredictable holding wood during felling.

There are economic impacts including increased liability from injury/death and damage to property, purchasing and maintaining extra equipment, cost of hiring MEWP's etc. and competition for resources and costs of replanting.

## **Survey 2020**

- To survey all Countryside sites managed by the Countryside team.
- To survey all STC owned land.
- To count every ash tree on these sites.
- To quantify all ash into one of the four “Ash health categories”.
  - Health class 1, 100-75% remaining canopy (healthiest class),
  - Health class 2, 74-50% remaining canopy,
  - Health class 3, 49-25% remaining canopy,
  - Health class 4, 24-0% remaining canopy (least healthy class).
- Identify possible targets from falling trees.
- Identify any trees requiring work or removal.

## **Findings – Countryside Sites**

- Just under 8,500 ash trees counted on countryside sites.
- 45% showing advanced signs of dieback.
- Skewed slightly by the prevalence of small trees within the community woodlands.
- Stocked with Danish provenance which are very susceptible.
- Larger trees more healthy with about 25% showing signs.

## **Findings - STC owned land**

- 1458 ash trees on STC land.
- Higher proportion of “big” trees than on countryside sites.
- More open grown.
- Still, 143 (10%) of trees showing signs of advanced dieback representing a real challenge to safety.

## **Replanting plan**

- Recommended re-planting rule of 1, 2, 3.
- 1 tree to replace a small tree, 2 to replace a medium and 3 to replace a large.
- Should be a minimum.
- Costs around £30-£50 to replace a tree with a suitable large sapling.
- We are replanting 30 this year at a cost of £1000-£1500.
- Tree, stake, tree tie, planting & after care (spraying, watering etc.)
- Suitable trees to replace ash, Aspen, alder, field maple, sycamore, birch, Rowan, along with native oaks.

## **Issues from the 2020 survey**

- Lack of dedicated tree survey and inventory software.
- Having to use multiple platforms and paper to survey.
- Multiple platforms to produce work sheets for tree gang/countryside.
- Much easier to survey, plot location, send job to tree gang electronically.
- Will make monitoring trees over successive years much easier.
- When to remove a tree?
- Guidance warns that trees with over 25% dieback may be unsafe to climb.

- Work using MEWPS is likely to increase with added costs.
- We currently have the trained staff needed to cover demand but this is unknown in future years.

#### **Plans for 2021 and the future**

- Summer 2021 survey –there will be no need to count all the trees this time so will be doing a risk-based survey.
- Software and hardware appraisal and purchase – have had several meetings with companies that provide tree inventory and software.
- Upskilling of current Tree gang/Countryside operatives.
- Training of new chainsaw users and experience for inexperienced users in dealing with dangerous trees.

In summing up the Town Clerk commended the work that Mr Goldsmith had done and said it gave a real understanding of the issues and what needed to be done. He had spoken on the problems of reporting and it was evident that the software options available, using Shropshire Council's GIS system were limited. Therefore, the team had been investigating other mapping software. Given the number of trees, having a system that effectively would map trees and monitor management would prove extremely helpful in prioritising workload. These mapping systems could look at a whole raft of other assets like bins, benches, CCTV, street lights. She therefore sought delegated authority to proceed with purchasing what she believed to be the most efficient tools to do this work and was comfortable this could be funded through the established Ash Die Back budget.

The Countryside & Greenspace Manager reiterated the need to plan for the amount of work that would be required going forward. He said it had been worrying as this had taken hold on some of the sites and projecting that in two years' time there could potentially not be enough equipment or staff to deal with the number of dangerous trees. It would be a challenge but he felt that having started now and looking ahead at next year's programme it would save a lot of trouble in the future. He thanked Mr Goldsmith for the comprehensive piece of work he had undertaken in challenging circumstances over the last year that would help the team deal with this issue.

On behalf of the Councillors, the Chairman thanked Mr Goldsmith for his presentation and for the work he had undertaken.

The Operations Manager echoed the thanks to both the Countryside & Greenspace Manager and Mr Goldsmith for the excellent presentations they had given at this meeting and said that it demonstrated the real strength and depth of the excellent staff in the Town Council's employment.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

## **44/20 RECREATION GROUND MATTERS**

### **44.1 Consultation on New/Improved Play Provision**

The Operations Manager reported on progress on a number of play facilities that were to be improved in the forthcoming financial year. There was a requirement for phasing of these sites throughout the year to take into account ground conditions and contractor ability to get on site as well as officer capacity. Tendering and Project Management is a timely exercise.

- Upton Lane BMX – has been advertised as an expression of interest, part of which will be a tender sum so will give a guide expected costs. The Local Ward Member was involved and once expressions of interest were received then it was planned to involve the Youth Team in consultations with the young people.
- Upton Lane Play Area – planned to go ahead with BMX first and then lead into Upton Lane Play area.
- Kynaston Road Recreation Ground Skate ramps – a sum of £30,000 was earmarked for skateboard ramps but this had not gone out to tender as it may form part of a package with other items of play equipment. Indicative costs to replace some of the items of play equipment on this site had been received and input from Youth was planned.
- Kynaston Road Recreation Ground Infants Play Area & Greenacres Play Area – it was intended to package these together as one item. For Kynaston Road Recreation Ground Infants £35,000 was earmarked for some drainage work as that infant play area was prone to flooding and at Greenacres it was hoped to replace a multi-unit for £30,000.
- Mary Webb Road Play Area – there had been liaison with the Ward Member who had been doing some consultation work. £60,000 was earmarked to refurbish the whole play area.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the Report be noted**
- (ii) That officers update members on a regular basis**

### **44.2 Commission of Performance Quality Standard Assessments on all sport and recreational sites**

The Operations Manager updated members on the commissioning of Performance Quality Standard (PQS) testing on all the Council's grassed playing surfaces following the Town Clerk's report on the Play Pitch Strategy presented to this Committee on 25 November 2020 and subsequent Minute reference 25/20.

Shropshire Council's Play Pitch Strategy provides an assessment and recommendations of the following types of facilities:

- Football [including 3 G pitches
- Cricket
- Rugby Union
- Tennis Courts
- Netball
- Bowling Greens

As part of the process in developing the Strategy, consultants undertook a desktop and/or visual inspection of these sites. It was however evident from the results that there wasn't a consistent approach to the assessment. It was therefore recommended that the Council commission a Sports Surface Consultant to undertake a PQS on all its grass play surfaces.

The PQS is a recognised national standard developed by the Sports Turf Research Institute, the National Playing Fields Association and the Institute of Groundsmanship. The methods for testing is covered in the British Standards (BS7370:P3 and BS7044:P2. It has been adopted by Sport England as a basic quality standard for natural grass pitches and is recognised by the FA as the recommended minimum quality standard for the construction and maintenance of pitches which may be located at a variety of locations including club sites, parks and recreation grounds.

The test covers the following:

- Ground cover (desirable grass species)
- Presence of pests, diseases and weeds
- Grass rooting depth
- Thatch (partially decayed organic material) depth
- Stone content
- Infiltration rate (i.e. surface drainage rate)
- Gradient along and across the direction of play
- Surface evenness
- Surface hardness
- Traction
- Ball rebound resilience
- Ball roll

A competent professional has now been commissioned and will work closely with the Recreation and Formal Space Manager who will be able to provide background information on the complex and conflicting sporting demands at these facilities as well as an overview of current maintenance programmes within the staff resources and specialist turf machinery available.

The report will include:

- Performance Quality standards of ground conditions.
- Assessment of current drainage systems and proposed improvements
- Soil Testing
- Recommendations over specifications and service delivery improvements.



This process will not only provide a valuable assessment of pitch standards across the Council's estate but will set required levels of maintenance in accordance with the needs of the actual facility rather than general perception. This will also inform any necessary amendments to the Play Pitch Strategy, the Shrewsbury Place Plan and the Council's long-term sports development plan.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the Report be noted.**
- (ii) That a further report to be presented to Committee once the survey work is completed.**

**44.3 Abbey Gardens**

The Operations Manager updated members on the programme of works as a result of the recent public consultation. Tree survey work has been completed on the 15 trees located in the Abbey Gardens and a request for tree works in a conservation area had been submitted to Shropshire Council. Subject to planning consent the work would be tendered as a whole package.

Ornamental seating will be refurbished, currently the Corporation seat dated 1893 has been removed and is being restored. Further seats will be removed, repaired and repainted.

Drainage works are required. A low point on the footpath connecting the existing gardens with the river footpath that constantly holds flood water due to the ground topography. This is proving to be more complex to disperse the standing flood water as any outfall will have to drain into the River Severn. Advice and consent is being progressed with the Environment Agency and options are being discussed.

Options over alternative access are also under review as during flooding the public take a short cut over the waterlogged grass and a muddy slope.

Currently part of this land is in Shropshire Council ownership and also retained by the Developer.

**Future Refurbishments as Identified in the Abbey Gardens Consultation**

- Replacement hooded litter bins, additional benches and picnic tables.
- Some repairs to footpaths.
- New information boards.
- Repairs to stone walls.
- Selective replanting of shrub borders.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the Report be noted;**
- (ii) That officers update members on a regular basis**

## 45/20 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Member had received the Town Clerk's update report and there were a couple of points of note:

- Footpaths –the start of works to Whitehart and Kenton Drive had been delayed due to the high river levels. The water table needed to reduce to avoid doing too much damage to the ground.
- The Monkmoor Meadows project was virtually finished bar a few trees left to install.
- Castlewalk – Good conversations had taken place with the Environment Agency about how the work would be undertaken and they were happy with the proposals and had suggested we apply for an exemption from licence rather than seeking a licence. The paperwork for tendering and exemption application was being prepared.
- Barge Gutter – A demolition company had been on site to take a look and whilst the costs were not that bad an Asbestos Survey was needed so that had been commissioned.
- County Ground Repairs had been costed and the work commissioned and the Cricket Club were happy with the works. They were also understanding of the need to review the bigger scheme.
- Dana Footpath – The Town Clerk & Operations Manager had met with the Shropshire Horticultural Society earlier in the week and had stressed the need to press on with the proposals. There would have a decision from the General Committee by mid-February.

### RESOLVED

**That the report be noted.**

## 46/20 COMMUTED SUMS

To receive an update on outstanding developer discussions/negotiations:

- (a) **Copthorne Barracks Play and Open Space** – offsite contributions to play (£30,498 - £20,498 for Shorncliffe Drive & £10,000 for Silks Meadow – to be paid on 75% occupancy) and open space (£115,000 for sports pitches & associated facilities at County Ground – paid on 50% occupancy)
- (b) **Barratt Homes/Bovis Homes – Mytton Oak Road** – scheduled adoption Autumn 2020 – costing for snagging list agreed by developers, awaiting sign-off & legals. The Technical Officer (Grounds and Arboriculture) has a site meeting for final snagging of this site.
- (c) **Shrewsbury South Urban**
  - i. Sutton Grange site – ongoing – likely transfer in 2021

- ii. Bellway Homes site – discussion on land adoption and adoption of acoustic fencing
  - iii. Galliers site – early discussions on land adoption
  - iv. Community Centre – location on the site
- (d) **Ingleby Way** – Adoption & Maintenance of open space – now ready for adoption – with legals
- (e) **Holgate Drive** – Adoption & Maintenance of open space - now ready for adoption – with legals;
- (f) **Belvidere Paddocks/Hillside Drive** – Adoption & Maintenance of open space – now ready for adoption – with legals;
- (g) **Sweetlake** – Development of play area and future adoption of open space – Play Area currently in construction. Developer working through snagging list. Legal teams in discussions; paperwork has arrived and documents have now been signed and sealed.
- (h) **Crowmoor House** – s106 agreement for offsite play & open space contribution to be used for Upton Lane & Monkmoor Recreation Ground – two-staged payments on trigger on percentage occupied properties. Council to bankroll work at Upton Lane Rec; Cornovii have now started their Working Group Meetings and Councillor Mrs Mosley, the Town Clerk & the Deputy Town Clerk sit on that group.
- (i) **Harlescott Infants/Juniors site** – Offsite contributions to sport. Discussions have taken place with Shropshire Council Officers about accessing some developer money from the school site for improvement to existing sports facilities in Northern Shrewsbury. Suggested sites have been put forward and officers will be in touch once funds are available.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

### **32/20 CLOSING REMARKS**

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked Councillors for attending and taking part in this virtual Town Council meeting and also thanked the staff involved in this meeting. He thanked members of the public for logging 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.