

# Church Stretton Town Council

## MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD IN SILVESTER HORNE INSTITUTE, CHURCH STRETTON ON TUESDAY 29<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2021 at 6.30 p.m.

**Those present:** *Councillors:* Cllr L Antill, Cllr C Carson, Cllr N Carter, Cllr S Davies, Cllr R Foulkes, Cllr D Hartshorne, Cllr J Lawton, Cllr J Luck, Cllr M Morris, Cllr A Munro, Cllr H Stowell, Cllr B Welch.  
*Officers:* Mr. C Maclean (Locum Town Clerk), (Mrs H Merrett (Admin Officer), Miss R Gwilliam (Amenities Officer)  
*Unitary Councillors:* Cllr H Luff  
*Members of the Public:* 5

21.021 **WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

21.022 **CO-OPTION OF NEW COUNCILLOR FOR SOUTH WARD**

Cllr Munro outlined the co-option process to fill the vacant position on the Council. Cllr Munro welcomed the three candidates; Ms Bedding, Mr Gibbons and Mr Lewis to the meeting and thanked them for their interest and applications. Each of the three applicants presented their case for being a member of the Council.

The candidates left the room to allow Councillors to consider the merits of each presentation and vote on whom they wished to see join the Council.

Following their return, the candidates were thanked by Cllr Munro for their presentations. Of the votes cast, Mr Lewis was declared the successful candidate by virtue of a majority on the first ballot.

Mr Lewis was congratulated on being the successful candidate and invited to join the Council. Ms Bedding and Mr Gibbons were thanked for their interest and Cllr Munro expressed his hope that they would maintain interest in the Council and provide support on future occasions.

Mr Lewis signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took his seat on Council.

21.023 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES**

Miss B Clarke (Responsible Finance Officer) and Unitary Cllr D Evans.

21.024 **DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

To declare any disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter to be discussed at the meeting and which is not included in the register of interests (in accordance with the new code of Conduct adopted by Church Stretton Town Council on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012).

**NONE**

21.025 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

**NONE**

21.026 **REPORT FROM UNITARY COUNCILLORS**

In view of her other commitments Cllr Luff was invited by Cllr Munro to present her update.

Following enquiry at the last Council meeting, Cllr Luff advised Councillors that up to March 2021, the sum of £54,192.66 had been provided to Church Stretton Town Council in CIL contributions. A further payment of £33,696.87 was made in May.

Cllr Luff advised that the proposal for yellow lines on Ashes Road in Little Stretton is on the agenda and she is endeavouring to move this one forward.

Cllr Luff advised that a meeting had been scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> July with representatives from Highways England to review the traffic light set-up at the A49/Church Stretton junction. Councillors noted that rail works are scheduled with line closures impacting the crossings in Craven Arms. Businesses in the area would also be affected whilst these works were in progress.

Cllr Luff advised of a meeting held with Mr Atkin and Mr Howard in relation to elements of the Shropshire Council Local Plan which is scheduled to be discussed at a full meeting of Shropshire Council the following week.

Cllr Luff also advised that Cllr Picton, the new Leader of Shropshire Council is holding a 1:1 session with each Councillor. Councillors were invited to advise topics or questions to be raised with Cllr Picton.

21.027 **PLANNING APPLICATIONS REVIEW**

Councillors noted the applications received and considered each in turn.

***a) 21/01965/FUL – St Margarets, Sandford Avenue, Church Stretton SY6 7AB***

Councillors noted the application for the erection of a two storey rear extension.

Councillors observed that this application followed a prior application which had lapsed. Previous concerns relating to the position of a window overlooking a neighbour needed to be addressed. Subject to that issue being addressed Councillors identified no issues with the application.

All Councillors agreed that the Town Council supports the application.

***b) 21/02619/FUL – 5 Lutwyche Close, Church Stretton SY6 6BB***

Councillors noted the application for the erection of a single storey rear extension.

Councillors observed that the design incorporated materials in keeping with the rest of the property. Whilst it was noted that the application states that no trees will be affected, a site inspection suggests that the build may impact on root systems of the trees located at the rear of the site. Access to the site was also unclear.

Further consideration was considered necessary in relation to the treatment of the trees prior to any granting of permission. Subject to the appropriate mitigation measures, Councillors identified no issues with the application.

All Councillors agreed that the Town Council supports the application.

***c) 21/02649/FUL – Pear Tree Cottage, Farm Lane, All Stretton***

Councillors noted the application for the erection of a single storey extension following removal of UPVC Conservatory.

Councillors observed that the proposed structure appeared to be more in keeping with the existing build style.

All Councillors agreed that the Town Council supports the application.

***d) 21/02785/FUL – Telephone Exchange, Sandford Avenue, Church Stretton***

Councillors noted the application for the installation of external exhaust ducting for new air conditioning necessary to support new telecommunications equipment.

Councillors expressed concerns that the installation would generate noise and be visible to adjoining residential properties. Councillors considered that assurances should be provided to ensure no noise nuisance would be created and that installation of baffles be insisted upon to ensure this. Subject to this requirement Councillors identified no other issues with the application.

All Councillors agreed the Town Council supports the application with the noise condition.

***e) 21/02629/FUL – Plas Newydd, Hazler Crescent, Church Stretton SY6 6AZ***

Councillors noted the application for the installation of a domestic shed, the size of which was considered to be proportionate to the plot.

All Councillors agreed that the Town Council supports the application.

***f) 21/01462/FUL – 22 Sandford Avenue, Church Stretton***

Councillors noted the application for the conversion of the first floor of the property into residential accommodation.

Councillors observed that the property is located in a prominent position within the town's conservation area. The proposed conversion is seen to be sympathetic and the only issue identified would be to ensure that external fittings (e.g. soil pipes) and windows are of a style and material which is in keeping with the location. Councillors agreed that the use of a heritage style roof-light should be a condition to approval. Subject to this condition, Councillors agreed that the Town Council supports the application.

Councillors noted that a unitary decision had already been taken on this application prior to the meeting.

***g) Unitary Decisions***

Councillors noted the list covering the period 2<sup>nd</sup> June to 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

***h) Actions Taken***

Councillors noted the list presented to Council.

***i) Current Planning List***

Councillors noted the list presented to Council.

**21.028 AMENITIES**

***a) Amenities Report***

Councillors noted the report presented to Council.

Councillors expressed their appreciation of the efforts of volunteers to support the Council. Councillors were disappointed to learn of damage through vandalism caused to a newly renovated handrail.

***b) Path Improvement Across Coppice Leasowes LNR***

Councillors noted that funding was now fully in place to allow progress on the Coppice Leasowes path.

***c) Recreation Fields – Urgent Issues and Medium Term Strategy***

Councillors noted the contents of the paper presented to Council to identify early opportunities to improve the quality of the Recreation Park and All Stretton Play Area. Cllr Munro noted that implementing these opportunities could be funded through the CIL monies received by the Town Council.

Councillors noted the work required to repair, renovate and repaint the park railings, the Bowls and Tennis Pavilions. Discussion was held on the amount of work that could be undertaken by volunteers. The question of using volunteer support to cut the hedging was also considered.

Councillors noted the condition of the waste bins and benches. Consideration was given to replacement of 6 waste bins at a total cost of £2,652 and 5 benches at a cost of £2,410. Councillors also considered the proposal to purchase 2 new picnic tables at a cost of £1,186.

Councillors noted the concerns relating to the safety matting for the play equipment area and considered its replacement at a potential cost of up to £10,000.

Proposed by Cllr Luck, seconded by Cllr Foulkes and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to spend £22,000 to rectify the immediate issues identified in the Recreation Park with Council staff undertaking the necessary construction work.**

Councillors noted the concerns raised in relation to the Play Area in All Stretton. The children's play equipment had been removed due to its poor condition. Replacement was noted and Councillors noted the costs that would be incurred to install new equipment. It was noted that the Town Council already had a reserve of £5,000 allocated towards the Play Area for new equipment and Councillors considered the option to provide a further £15,000 towards the replacement.

Proposed by Cllr Stowell and seconded by Cllr Hartshorne and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to spend £20,000 to refurbish the All Stretton Play Area with Council staff undertaking any necessary construction work.**

Councillors noted that updates on progress to address the issues identified in the report would be presented to future Council meetings.

***d) Petanque Update***

Cllr Stowell updated Councillors on the review of the proposal to install a Petanque terrain in Russells Meadow. Questions had been raised in relation to the most suitable location and method of construction. The option of locating the terrain in either Russells Meadow or the Recreation Park were to be discussed with a suitable contractor to identify the most suitable means to deliver.

Councillors reviewed the update paper and noted the recommendations thanking the proposer for seeking to bring the initiative to the town; supporting the intent to establish a club and notes the reputational and financial risks to the Council if the initiative proceeds in its current form. The requests for the proposer to provide further information as required and that a joint meeting be held to discuss the optimal location for the terrain.

Proposed by Cllr Lawton, seconded by Cllr Hartshorne and

**RESOLVED (12 in favour, 1 against) to implement the recommendations as set out in the paper.**

**21.029 PARKING AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS**

Advice had been received from Shropshire Council that current traffic regulation orders on the High Street would be removed as a result of the relaxation of COVID restrictions.

Councillors considered options on whether to maintain the current bollard and one-way system set-up which would be in place for two years or agree to their removal. Councillors agreed that the current set-up had failed to meet expectations. Councillors noted that factors such as width of the pavement, one way systems and pedestrian set-ups needed to be considered and addressed. Further changes to the set-up within the town would require longer term planning and a higher level of funding than could be sustained by the Town Council which would require negotiation with Shropshire Council.

Proposed by Cllr Welch, seconded by Cllr Hartshorne and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to request the removal of the bollards and one-way system in the High Street.**

Councillors considered undertaking a holistic review of the public realm with clear terms of reference established. Publicising this and securing feedback was agreed as essential to understand and agree what change is required.

Proposed by Cllr Lawton, seconded by Cllr Carson and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to draw up terms of reference for a consultation to redesign the public realm of Church Stretton.**

#### 21.030 **FINANCIAL ITEMS**

##### ***a) Financial Position and Audit Reports***

Cllr Munro advised Councillors that discussion with the Internal Auditor had identified that his report would state that there is a total lack of compliance to financial controls and systems, with no progress seen on the issues raised the previous year. He was also advised that, currently, the year end accounts do not balance with a difference of £19,700 requiring attention.

Councillors agreed that external support was required to address the issues and that an approach be made to a firm of forensic accountants to assist in the investigation and remediation of the accounts. Councillors agreed that a budget of £15,000 should be set aside to cover the remedial costs.

Councillors agreed that a full understanding of the Council's accounts and financial issues was required and that a meeting of Councillors should be convened to achieve this.

Proposed by Cllr Munro, seconded by Cllr Stowell and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to hold a Councillor only meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and to set aside a budget of £15,000 to deal with the remediation of the financial accounts.**

##### ***b) VAT Issues***

Councillors noted that whilst advisors had reviewed the Council's affairs and identified the VAT issues, no remedial action had been put in place. Cllr Munro advised Councillors that on reviewing the elements making up the VAT issues and the work to quantify and address these issues there could be a potential liability and cost to the Council of up to £115,000.

##### ***c) Annual Accounts and Need For Extension***

Councillors noted in view of the delays to the completion of the accounts, the deadline for submission of the completed governance documentation could not be met and an extension to the submission deadline would be sought.

**d) Co-op Bank Accounts**

Councillors noted that as a result of the absence from the office of the RFO no financial transactions could be undertaken. It was also noted that no action had been taken to change the signatories on the accounts following the election and change of Councillors. The current requirement for the signature of the RFO on cheques also prevented their issue. The other authorised user on the account is the former Clerk who retired earlier in 2021 due to ill-health.

Councillors noted the request for the Locum Town Clerk to become an authorised user on the account which would enable payments to be made by BACS.

Proposed by Cllr Stowell, seconded by Cllr Hartshorne and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to allow councillors to complete the documents for Co-op bank needed to make changes to enable BACS payments to be made.**

Councillors considered the new signatories required on accounts. Councillors noted that, currently, Cllr Welch is a signatory.

Proposed by Cllr Stowell, seconded by Cllr Davies and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to appoint Cllrs Davies, Lawton, Luck and Munro as authorised cheque signatories and any two of these to be required to sign each cheque.**

Councillors noted that no action had been taken to date on the accounts maintained with the other financial institutions holding monies from the Council and its Charities. These would be addressed following the commencement of the new Town Clerk.

**21.031 CLP HOUSING GROUP**

Cllr Munro advised Councillors that at a meeting of the CLP Steering Group there was agreement amongst members that the data from the survey that was previously undertaken could not be used. Reviews had identified that both the methodology and results were flawed.

Councillors noted the proposal that a new survey be undertaken once the design of the questions had been completed. Work will be undertaken to calculate the costs to progress and identify opportunities to secure the views of the younger members of the community.

Proposed by Cllr Morris, seconded by Cllr Carter and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Housing Survey be redesigned.**

**21.032 POLICE CHARTER UPDATE**

Councillors noted the current four local priorities for Police to address remain (i) speeding, (ii) theft from commercial premises (iii) visible presence of the Police and (iv) behaviour of cyclists.

Cllr Luck noted that West Mercia Police had acknowledged the priorities and that a more effective response is required.

**21.033 YOUTH WORK**

Cllr Foulkes advised of family connections to this topic and declared an interest which was noted by Councillors.

Councillors noted the proposed initiative to set up a three-way support arrangement between the Town Council, Mayfair and Shropshire Youth Association (SYA).

Councillors noted the previous Council agreement to provide funding towards this initiative of £5,000.

Councillors considered the arrangements and agreed that more detail was required to ensure clarity over responsibilities, risk assessments and data control between the three parties.

Proposed by Cllr Lawton, seconded by Cllr Morris and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Council provide funding of £5,000 towards the Youth Work for the next financial year.**

Councillors noted that the proposed Partnership Agreement required further work to set out detail of the responsibilities, parental and data controls.

Cllr Welch agreed to work on this with the other two partners and refer back to Council with an updated document.

Proposed by Cllr Luck, seconded by Cllr Munro and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to agree to sign a partnership agreement when it is updated.**

At 9.20pm, the Locum Town Clerk advised Councillors that the meeting had exceeded the two hours as documented under the Standing Orders.

Proposed by Cllr Morris, seconded by Cllr Lawton and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to suspend Standing Orders.**

#### 21.034 **STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT**

Councillors noted the contents of the update paper presented to Council by Cllr Munro.

#### 21.035 **PARISH WARD MATTERS**

Cllrs Carson and Lawton noted the situation regarding the proposed yellow lines at Ashes Road and would seek resolution as soon as possible.

Councillors noted that grass is growing out of the pavement at the War Memorial in All Stretton. The Amenities Officer would check and report to appropriate authorities.

Cllr Luck advised Councillors of Police efforts to deal with local issues and Cllr Munro advised that he was scheduled to meet with Police later in the week to discuss local matters.

#### 21.036 **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

Date of the next Council meeting to be confirmed to Councillors.

The Chairman declared the Public Meeting Ended 9:40pm

#### 20.037 **CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS**

**Under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 S1(2), it is RESOLVED (unanimously) that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is in the public interest that the public and press are excluded from these items.**

##### ***a) Staffing – Deputy Clerk/RFO***

Cllr Davies advised Councillors of the meeting held with the Deputy Clerk/RFO and Cllr Munro on 17<sup>th</sup> June. The meeting was held to introduce themselves as the new Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council and to gain a better understanding of the financial affairs of the Council.

Councillors heard of the concerns raised by Cllrs Davies and Munro over the failure within the Council to comply with its Financial Regulations which they shared. Serious concerns were also shared over the Council's inability to be aware of its financial position. Councillors expressed concerns over the suitability of individuals to perform

their roles within the Council.

Councillors noted that the Deputy Clerk/RFO had submitted to the Council a Statement of Fitness for Work Note the following weekend dated with effect from 18<sup>th</sup> June and being signed off from work for one month. Following receipt of this, external advice had been obtained on the Council's position and would continue in light of what had been identified.

Noting the position of the Council's financial affairs and the upcoming requirement to submit the AGAR documents, Councillors agreed that a Locum RFO be sourced and invited to assist during this period of absence. It was also agreed that forensic accountants be requested to assist in addressing the concerns raised by the internal auditor in his report.

Councillors agreed that appropriate steps be taken to ensure that the Council is placed in a position of compliance with its Financial Regulations.

Proposed by Cllr Munro, seconded by Cllr Luck and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to take appropriate action to ensure compliance with Financial Regulations.**

***b) Staffing – New Town Clerk***

Cllr Lawton updated Councillors on the recruitment process undertaken to fill the Town Clerk role and offer the position to Dr Kate Howe.

Councillors noted that the previous Council had set the salary scale within the range of SCP 35 – 38. Following a review, members of the Personnel Committee considered that SCP 39 be more appropriate for the role.

Proposed by Cllr Munro, seconded by Cllr Stowell and

**RESOLVED (unanimously) to endorse the decision of the Personnel Committee to set the role at SCP 39 and the offer to Dr Kate Howe.**

***c) Planning***

Cllr Munro advised Councillors of concerns raised over a current planning application. Concerns had been raised over the appropriateness of the site for what had been proposed. Concerns were also raised over some historic aspects of the site.

Councillors considered what actions considered and taken may have on the application.

Proposed by Cllr Welch, seconded by Cllr Antill and

**RESOLVED (10 in favour, 1 against, 2 abstentions) to accept the resolutions as set out in the paper.**

Meeting Ended 10:35pm

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