

**Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held in the Low Town Community Hall,
Severn Street, Bridgnorth on Wednesday 20 April 2016 at 7pm**

Present: Councillor D Cooper (Town Mayor), Councillors Mrs C Baines MBE, Ms S Barlow, G Davies, R Gill, J Gittins, E Marshall, G Mountcastle, D Seipel, Mrs C Walden, Mrs C Whittle and R Whittle OBE.

Ms Anne Wilson (Town Clerk), Ms A King and Mrs L Gardner (minutes secretaries)

Councillor C Lea (Shropshire Council), Inspector R Thomas (Police), L Pope & C Leworthy (guest speakers), and 37 members of the public.

Minutes transcribed by Ms King

1. Welcome by the Town Mayor, Councillor D Cooper

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that the meeting was the Annual Town Meeting for the residents of the Parish of Bridgnorth.

No apologies were given.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 22nd April 2015 were accepted as previously circulated.

3. Guest Speaker

The Town Mayor then introduced Logan Pope as the first guest speaker.

Logan was an eight year old young carer to his sister Esti who had autism. He explained about his relationship with Esti and that although she did not talk, he found other ways to communicate with her. He could identify when she was unhappy and looked after her by making sure she was safe. Logan had also invented rewards for Esti and gave her certificates. He admired her determination as she never gives up but would always help her if she needed it. He said that Esti was his best friend. Sometimes, Logan admitted that he gets upset but that he and his mother were still able to spend time together on their own which made him happy.

Logan explained that he was not only a young carer, but was a keen fundraiser. He had already completed an indoor skydive, a charity bike ride and the Up Steps Walk in town where he had raised a total amount of over £1300. He hoped to do further fundraising in December.

Councillor Mrs C Whittle asked Logan where he got all of his energy from as she was so impressed with everything that he was doing. She also questioned whether he would like to be Mayor next year.

Those in attendance thanked Logan and his mother for attending and gave them a round of applause.

Mr C Leworthy was introduced as the second guest speaker. Mr Leworthy was from the Shropshire Rural Community Council (RCC) who had recently engaged the Town Council to look at the capacity of the voluntary sector in the town. Shropshire RCC hoped to get in touch with as many voluntary and community groups as possible and asked attendees to contact him if they belonged to such a group. They would then look at what the community groups were doing in Bridgnorth and see how Shropshire RCC could support them.

Mr Leworthy advised the meeting that Shropshire RCC organise various schemes across the county such as “Wheels to Work” for people who can’t get to their place of work, fuel poverty and carers in the community.

Mr Leworthy welcomed questions

Q. Ms H Howell acknowledged that Shropshire Council are going to want local voluntary organisations to take over certain services and questioned whether Shropshire RCC’s proposal would help establish what resources are out there.

A. Mr Leworthy agreed that Shropshire Council were cutting services and that the proposal would establish what certain organisations can do and what they are currently struggling with.

Q. Ms H Howell asked if Shropshire RCC would be offering financial support to groups

A. Mr Leworthy advised that they were not in a position to say but that they were making the first steps to finding out more.

The Mayor then added that there were lots of sources of funding for voluntary groups and it was part of the process to understand how funds can be raised.

Mr Leworthy was thanked for his attendance.

4. Review of the work of the Town Council:

(a) The Mayor’s Report from Councillor David Cooper

“Bridgnorth Town Council has successfully delivered some major projects over the past year.

In June refurbishment work on the outside of the Town Hall was completed, and we were finally able to take down the scaffolding after several months. Subsequently, many of the Town Hall’s stained glass windows were refurbished and decades of grime removed. Many thanks to residents and to our market traders for their patience during these works.

During the summer months we also upgraded the Town’s CCTV system. Many of the existing cameras were 7 years old and getting a bit past their best, so they’ve been replaced with up to date High Definition digital ones. Additional locations were added at strategic locations in consultation with the Police. The new system records images 24 hours a day, deterring crime and helping to Police to catch offenders. The Police and Crime Commissioner and Shropshire Council made major contributions to the cost of the work.

Finally, in the autumn we were able to complete the difficult job of repairing the subsiding surface on part of the Quayside. Now that's fully open again, we were able to illuminate the Tree of Reflection on the quayside and create a Christmas landmark visible from a wide area on the Eastern side of Bridgnorth. The Tree of Reflection is sponsored by local businesses and I would like to thank them for their generosity.

The climate for public services remains difficult and during the year Shropshire Council announced that it was having to look at discontinuing some of its services. I'm sure that many of you will have read in the press that Shropshire Council are looking to communities to decide by this Autumn whether they wish to take over some of its services. If local communities do not, some services may be withdrawn from April next year. Some fairly eye-watering figures have been quoted. At this stage we do not know how those figures are made up, what the longer term implications would be, or who in our community would be affected. The Town Council has asked for urgent clarification on these points, and appointed a group of councillors to work with the staff in looking at these services. We are well aware that Bridgnorth is a service centre for its surrounding area, and that we need to work with our surrounding rural parishes. We are also looking at the scope for co-operation with other Towns. There may be scope for the voluntary sector to play a part, and Clive Leworthy of Shropshire Rural Community Charity has already outlines we have asked them to carry out a survey of the voluntary sector in the Town and its capabilities.

The Town Council's budget faces many demands, and this year we did raise our element of the Council Tax, by £4.64 a year, or just under 9 pence a week for a Band D household. Although the total Council Tax residents of a Band D property in the Town Pay is £1,615.36 a year, the Town Council's element of that is £120.52. The amount of Council Tax we charge is in fact lower than it was 11 years ago.

We do work hard to try and improve our performance, and in the past year we have been moving to sustainable planting in the Town's parks and gardens, so we have to replace fewer plants each year. We've changed the way we water our displays, saving on cost. We've also secured significant savings in the cost of street lighting, through improved maintenance arrangements and lower energy costs.

I'm pleased to report that, although we have been active in reducing the cost of the Town Council's floral displays, Bridgnorth won a Gold Award in Heart of England in bloom for the 5th successive year. The award recognises not just what the Town Council does, but also the efforts made by the wider community in keeping our Town attractive. I'd like to thank the Town Council staff for their work over the past year, and also to thank the many people in our Town who contribute to making Bridgnorth a good place to live and work.

4 (b) Report by Councillor R Whittle OBE, Chairman of the Administration and General Purposes Committee

"This has been a relatively quiet year for this committee. We have carried out monitoring of the financial situation each month, have made recommendations on a number of tenders and quotes and made, in association with the staff, considerable progress in reducing our level of debtors.

Early in the year we introduced new Terms of Reference that have had the effect of reducing our remit and input on a number of topics.

We have continued to consider staffing appointments, personnel matters and the professional development of the staff following appraisals.

The Council made the decision to amend the date of the meeting of this committee each month and this has meant that due to the juxtaposition of month end and meeting dates of this committee some Councillors feel we have not been in a position to carry out effective monitoring and recommendations to Council on the monthly financial reports. The Council will be asked to reconsider the date of the meeting each month for 2016/17 going forward.

The Committee would wish to place on record its thanks to Council staff for their assistance through the year.”

4 (c) Report by G Mountcastle, Chairman of Property & Grounds Committee

“The past year has been one of considerable success in improving and maintaining important buildings and grounds managed by Bridgnorth Town Council. The renovation and decoration of the Town Hall in the High Street has been completed including repairs to many of the stained glass windows. There has been a very positive reaction from residents and visitors to the bright and clean appearance of the historic building. An additional project completed this year has been the repair of the Quayside where movement of the foundations required major work. The Quayside is now available for events and a “Tree of Reflection” was set up with additional lights at Christmas sponsored by local businesses.

The Outdoors and Properties Manager and his team have worked hard in improving and maintaining the town’s traffic roundabouts and open spaces including The Grove triangle, Crown Meadow and Severn Park. In response to the increasing demands for tree work around the town, the Council is funding two staff to be trained in above ground tree cutting to reduce the need for specialist contractors.

There have been very successful negotiations with a new angling association to launch this new association taking responsibility for the management of the fishing rights in Well Meadow.

The market under the Town Hall has been relaunched successfully following the Town Hall’s renovation.

Next year there will hopefully be discussions with the Rugby Club to clarify the future involvement of the Club in Severn Park following their plans to use land at Swancote for pitches.”

4 (d) Report by Councillor J Gittins, Chairman of Planning Committee

“Bridgnorth Town Council’s Planning Committee consists of seven Members of Council. I am currently the Chairman and Councillor Ms Vanessa Voysey is Vice Chairman. In addition we also have one co-opted member, who although not a Member of Council and therefore has no voting rights, has many years valuable planning experience as a member of both the Town Council and the former Bridgnorth District Council.

This Committee considers on average 160 applications each year varying from tree works, property extensions, new builds, Listed Building Consent, replacement windows and change of use to name but a few. We are one of the many consultees that Shropshire Council request comments from for planning applications relating to land, trees and properties within Bridgnorth town. Any major projects in the town, such as a major retail development for example, would be considered by all members of Council at a Town Council meeting rather than the Planning Committee.

The Town Council's Planning Committee meetings are held every Monday fortnight at 7.15pm in the Mayor's Parlour, College House, St. Leonard's Close and members of the public are welcome to sit in on the meetings throughout the public sessions. They may also request to speak on a particular application if they so wish either in support or to raise objections. The reason this committee meets every fortnight is because the majority of planning applications only have a 21 day consultation period and it would not be possible to submit comments within the time required if the committee only met once per month.

Our role is purely advisory; we have no planning powers; this lies with Shropshire Council. The Shropshire Planning Authority takes our comments into consideration however, as well as those submitted by residents of the town and interested parties.

In an effort to save paper, the Town Council are no longer printing off paper copies of planning applications. All applications can be viewed prior to the meeting on the planning portal of the Shropshire Council website and also electronically during our Planning Committee meeting. Comments can be submitted directly to Shropshire Council via their website. Agendas listing applications due to be considered by our Committee are uploaded to the Town Council website. Exceptionally, applications not shown on the agenda have to be considered during the meeting if they are notified to us after dispatch of the agenda but if their response time is inadequate to delay their consideration until a subsequent meeting."

5. Accounts from Charities

Members were asked to receive the accounts from the following Charities:

- (a) Bridgnorth Parish Charity
- (b) Reverend Francis Wheeler's Charity
- (c) Sir Robert Lee's Charity

The Mayor outlined what the charities do in the town and stated that the purpose of having the accounts available at the meeting was not to approve them, but to note and receive them. The meeting was advised that unfortunately, the accounts from the Bridgnorth Parish Charity were not available.

The accounts from the two charities were received.

6. Questions to Divisional Surveyor's Department, Police, Shropshire Councillors and Bridgnorth Town Councillors

(a) Report from Graham Downes, Highways Manager for Shropshire Council (Bridgnorth Area)

Mr Downes had sent his apologies for the meeting but the Town Clerk advised attendees that the following highways works were planned for 2016/17 subject to change due to budgetary constraints and potential utility company activity.

1. High Street – carriageway resurfacing
2. Postern Gate – carriageway resurfacing
3. Listley Street – carriageway resurfacing
4. Moat Street – carriageway surface dressing
5. Conduit Lane – carriageway surface dressing
6. Wenlock Road – footway resurfacing

The Town Clerk invited questions from the floor and advised that she would pass on any comments or questions to Mr Downes following the meeting.

Q. Councillor Mrs C Baines MBE stated that one week after the carriageway works were carried out in Conduit Lane, the tarmac started to lift. She raised concerns that improper materials were being used if this was happening in such a short timescale.

(b) Report from Inspector R Thomas from West Mercia Police

Inspector R Thomas advised that West Mercia Police set some performance indicators every year and that there had been a 20% rise in crime; however this may be due to the public being encouraged to report crimes to give justice for individuals. A new initiative called Immobilise had been set up and was available online at www.immobilise.com. Here, members of the public could register their valuables to enable victims of theft to get their items back. Inspector Thomas went on to talk about Smartwater which was a forensic solution which can be put on valuables and/or property. This is given out free of charge to victims of burglary to people's homes.

Inspector Thomas advised that there was no longer an active "Pub Watch" scheme in the town; however another scheme could be introduced where the police and licensed community work together - offenders were sent on an awareness course and received a fine. Once completing the course, they may be allowed back into public houses for a probationary period.

Another scheme which was being rolled out across the Country was FaceWatch. This was working well in various towns and cities and is a web based information platform where images from CCTV systems or from a mobile phone can be shared amongst other members to notify one another of suspected shoplifters. Inspector Thomas advised that in the absence of CCTV, FaceWatch is accessible to all by downloading the app. West Mercia Police had recently sent out letters to local businesses to gauge interest in joining the scheme. 15 – 20 local businesses had shown an interest in the scheme and the next step was to host an open meeting with a member of FaceWatch present to address interested parties. They also hoped to

hold a Retail Crime Reduction evening in the near future as this had been well attended in Ludlow.

Attendees were notified of various websites which provided information about policing issues in their area; such as the West Mercia Police website and the Safer Neighbourhood website.

Finally, Inspector Thomas stated that the police were still present in the town in several guises. He felt that social media was excellent and he hoped that a specific Facebook page for the local area would be set up shortly. He then welcomed questions.

Q. Is it possible for criminals to access people's asset registers via immobilise.com?

Inspector Thomas advised that immobilise.com is bespoke to the individual and requires various entry codes to access data.

Q. Mr Speke stated that growing up, there were police everywhere however when he was burgled last year, police took over an hour to attend. He felt that having more policemen on the beat was the only security measure to combat this and that something needs to change.

Inspector Thomas reassured Mr Speke that the police were doing their best with the resources they had. Both the current Chief Constable and the Police Commissioner were changing and this may bring different views on the way things are done; however West Mercia Police were affected by national and international changes.

Q. Mr Baines stated that it was nice to hear the Police admit that crime was going up. He felt that if the Police Commissioners post was removed, there would be more money available for resources.

Q. Councillor Seipel asked how the FaceWatch scheme will be effective if it bypasses the CCTV system?

The Town Clerk advised that it would not bypass the CCTV system and quotations to link the two had already been received.

Inspector Thomas stated that the FaceWatch scheme in Bridgnorth was very exploratory at the current time.

The Town Clerk stated that the funds which the Town Council currently have from the previous ShopWatch/RadioWatch scheme does not belong to the Town Council and is from the community. An open meeting would be arranged in the next few weeks to show how FaceWatch worked and it was hoped that someone would take ownership of the scheme as neither the Town Council nor the Police wanted to run it.

Q. Mr MacIntyre-Reid stated that he had received a visit from Inspector Thomas who had asked him to desist in making remarks about the Town Clerk. He questioned whether the police did not like freedom of speech and requested a response from Inspector Thomas.

Inspector Thomas stated that the matter had been dealt with and should Mr MacIntyre-Reid have further concerns, these should be reported to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Mr MacIntyre-Reid stated that he had contacted them and had not received a satisfactory response. A heated conversation then took place and Councillor D Cooper asked Mr MacIntyre-Reid to refrain from making derogatory comments and for raising his voice as there were children present who were getting distressed.

- Q. A member of the public asked whether reports are kept on how many crimes are solved using the CCTV system and how successful the scheme is?

Mrs P Becke MBE, CCTV Co-ordinator, advised that in the past they used to receive reports from the police as to the outcome of crimes where CCTV has been used. Unfortunately this was no longer the case now the Police Headquarters were in Malinsgate. She stated that the system was very good and she had been thrilled with the new system.

Inspector Thomas stated that members of the public can find individual crimes, receive updates and the results of Court hearings on www.police.uk

Mrs Becke MBE advised that there were 17 cameras in town which worked well but they were short of volunteers to man the CCTV suite. It was noted that the cameras record 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to know how effective the CCTV system was in terms of prevention.

Councillor D Cooper advised that the CCTV Suite is manned by staff and volunteers but the Town Council were always looking for more volunteers. This would be subject to a vetting process but those in attendance were asked to contact the Town Clerk if they were interested in volunteering.

- (c) Cllr Christian Lea of Shropshire Council representing Bridgnorth East and Astley Abbotts introduced himself and read the following report.

I imagine that most of you here will be very pleased to hear that the kerbside collection of cardboard is being rolled out across the County later this year. At the same time that this is introduced, a new recycling collection service will come into effect which will see residents being provided with a new blue bag for paper and cardboard. Plastics, cans and glass will be able to be mixed together in the recycling boxes, meaning that they will no longer need to be separated. The kerbside collection of cardboard has been made possible by Veolia purchasing a new fleet of collection lorries. As you will probably remember, the removal of cardboard from garden waste collections was forced onto Shropshire Council and Veolia by a change to national composting standards in November 2011. Since then Shropshire Council and Veolia have been exploring ways to collect cardboard for recycling from the kerbside and I'm really pleased that this service is being brought in for residents. With residents in Shropshire already recycling 52% of household waste, it is hoped that this figure will increase and further reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. It is also hoped that a food waste collection service will also be introduced locally in the future, once a high-tech in-vessel composting facility designed to serve the area is built. A planning application is expected to be submitted later this year, with a view to the new facility becoming operational in 2018.

Fifty jobs could be created if planning permission is granted for a new facility at the Recycling Centre on Faraday Drive. Veolia want to create a new recycling plant where operatives dismantle flat screen TV's, monitors and tablets and recycle the various components. There is currently an empty warehouse space within the Faraday Drive Household Recycling Centre which Veolia hopes to obtain planning permission for to develop this new recycling process. Myself and Cllr John Hurst-Knight met with Steve Mitchell, Veolia's West Midlands Director at the start of March and Steve informed us that a number of potential sites around the West Midlands were identified for this new recycling initiative and Bridgnorth was deemed to be the ideal location. If planning permission is given, Steve informed us that Veolia hope to have the new plant up and running in the Autumn, adding that Veolia hope to be able to recruit fifty staff locally. Two shifts will operate from 7am until early afternoon and then early afternoon until 10pm.

You will no doubt be aware of the need for Shropshire Council having to save £77million over the next five years. The Chief Executive, Clive Wright, James Walton, Shropshire Council's Head of Finance and the Council leader Malcolm Pate went to London earlier this year and met with Marcus Jones the Minister for Local Government to make him aware of the serious financial situation which Shropshire Council finds itself in along with other Shire Counties. As a result of this meeting, Shropshire Council has been given an additional £8.5 million over the next two years. Since the meeting though, an overspend in the Council's adult social care budget will use up this additional money. Malcom Pate has now arranged for Gregg Clark, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to come to Shropshire next month to meet with him, Shropshire Council's Chief Executive Clive Wright and Head of Finance James Walton to further discuss Shropshire Council's finances. As you will appreciate, this issue is an ongoing one and every effort will continue to be made by Philip Dunne MP and Malcolm Pate to attempt to improve the Local Government settlement which Shropshire Council receives in order to reduce the amount of cuts which could potentially have to be made in order for Shropshire Council to have a balanced budget.

Three public consultations affecting my Council Ward will shortly be getting under way. Proposals have been drawn up for "No waiting and no loading at any time" restrictions to be introduced in Whitburn Street with double yellow lines proposed from outside Nock Deighton's Estate Agents up to the junction with the High Street. The existing disabled parking bay and loading bay will remain. This is being proposed following vehicles regularly being seen parked on the actual footway in the evening, which has caused the paviers to sink in places, as well as causing an obstruction to pedestrians. As you will be aware, the bus stop outside The Bear Inn at Northgate is no longer used and it is proposed that approximately a third of this bay will be used as a loading bay with the remainder of the bay being used for parking, with a 40 minute waiting restriction. Finally, there is to be a public consultation regarding the Old Worcester Road which meets with the A442 Kidderminster Road. With visibility being very poor for traffic exiting from the Old Worcester Road onto the A442 thus creating safety issues for motorists, it is proposed to prohibit traffic exiting from Old Worcester Road at Danesford. If this is introduced, drivers around the Stourbridge Road vicinity wishing to travel towards Alveley and Kidderminster will have to drive along the A442 from the Kidderminster Road island. Further details regarding the consultations which I have outlined above will shortly be on Shropshire Council's website, with the Town Council and other usual consultees being asked for any comments which they may have.

Finally, Shropshire Council's Public Health Team has recently helped to launch the national One You campaign, which is to support adults across the county to stay well for as long as possible. This ground-breaking campaign, led by Public Health England aims to help adults avoid future diseases caused by modern lifestyles. The campaign will encourage adults in the County to move more, eat well, drink less and be smoke free, as well as providing information on how people can reduce their stress levels and sleep better. By the time we are in our 40's and 50's, many people will have dramatically increased their chances of becoming ill in later life. Whether we are eating the wrong things, drinking more than we should, continuing to smoke or just not being active enough, all of these things add up and they increase the risk of you developing conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cancer and lung disease. The One You campaign gives people the chance to reappraise their lifestyle choices, put themselves first and do something positive about their own health before it's too late. People can complete the One You health quiz, "How Are You?" which is an innovative quiz which provides you with personalised recommendations based on your results and which directs you to tools and offers to help you take action where its most needed. For further information about the "One You" campaign and to take the quiz, visit the Healthy Shropshire website www.healthyshropshire.co.uk

Councillor Lea then welcomed questions.

- Q. One member of the public asked if the £50million that Shropshire Council has in reserves be used to subsidise the money being asked of from Town and Parish Councils? Another member of the public felt that there was only one town that gets things done and that is Shrewsbury.

Councillor Lea stated that Westgate cost £50,000-£60,000 annually to run but this has now been sold. The money from the sale of the property would go to Shropshire Council who must balance their books. Councillor Lea was not proud to be giving bad news but difficult decisions had to be made. Councillor Malcolm Pate has made the government aware of the situation in Shropshire.

- Q. Mrs Dixon raised her concerns regarding the wellbeing of the Low Town bridge and questioned whose responsibility it was and when it was last checked as there was a lot of debris caught underneath.

The Town Clerk advised that the Town Council had reported the debris several times to the Environment Agency but due to the speed of the river, they were unable to come out to remove it. Attendees were advised that it was thought that a survey of the bridge was carried out every other year. Both the Town Clerk and Councillor Lea would follow this up. Mrs Dixon then stated that HGVs had increased in weight and the kerbside was now pulling away from the road.

- Q. Logan Pope asked whether the British Red Cross Young Carers group would start again after its closure.

Councillor Lea advised that he would follow this up and report back.

- Q. Councillor R Gill asked if the Shropshire Councillors were actively promoting Bridgnorth.

Councillor Lea advised that he was always championing Bridgnorth and does his best to promote the town.

- Q. Councillor R Gill then questioned whether the four Shropshire Councillors worked together?

Councillor Lea advised that the four Shropshire Councillors meet monthly with Chris Edwards, Area Director.

- Q. Mr Baines asked how we can get people to answer the phone at Shropshire Council. He had previously been on the phone for 30 minutes in regards to a planning matter.

Councillor Mrs C Baines stated that if Bridgnorth people wanted to attend a meeting to discuss a planning matter, they had to travel to Shirehall.

Councillor Lea advised Mr Baines that he could always contact his local Shropshire Councillor to discuss matters.

- Q. A member of the public asked if there was any update with Cliff Road.

Councillor Lea advised that Shropshire Council were no further forward with the issues in Cliff Road but had previously brought the matter up but had not received an immediate answer.

- Q. Mrs Dixon stated that two years ago, she had asked about the legal costs paid by the Town Council in respect of an employment tribunal for the sum of approximately £300,000. This money was due to be paid back to the Council and she questioned how much of this money had been received and how much was outstanding.

The Mayor advised that this was a difficult situation. The Town Council was awarded £10,000 and £2,000 has been received. This is reviewed regularly.

Mrs Dixon asked why it had got to this stage.

The Mayor advised that there was a court process to follow and there were some circumstances in which you could force the individual to pay, and others you can't.

Mrs Dixon questioned the benefits to the tax payers of paying approximately £300,000 in legal fees.

The Mayor stated that the case was brought under Employment Legislation and legal fees were incurred defending the case. Sam Riley Law Associates would have more information on the matter than the Town Council.

Mrs Dixon then asked why the money was spent and why the £10,000 awarded to the Town Council was not claimed immediately.

The Town Clerk advised that there was a legal agreement in place to repay £2,000 and this is regularly reviewed. The Town Council was unable to force the process as they were tied up in the legal agreement.

Mrs Dixon felt that the Town Council would have known that the costs could not be reclaimed before the money had been spent in defending the case. She stated that the Town Council's Solicitor should have told the Council to cut their losses at some point and not allowed such expenditure. She questioned whether the Council was currently still pays legal fees in staff and Councillor disputes and if so, what amounts have been paid over the last two or three years.

The Mayor advised that there were no legal fees as such but fees for employment support and insurance.

Mrs Dixon then asked whether there had been any claims or disputes over the past three years.

The Mayor stated that there had been some employment issues of a much less significant nature and dealt with through contracted support. No fees had been paid to a Solicitor.

- Q. Mr A Tacchi stated that he was present at the Employment Tribunal proceedings and was one of the Councillors at the time that had discovered fraudulent dealings and reported the matter to the Police. As a result, the Town Clerk met with the Mayor at the time to explain why unlawful payments had been made. The Mayor then sadly passed away. The Town Clerk left the Town Council and claimed constructive dismissal which resulted in 19 days in an employment tribunal. There were four respondents in the case and two teams of Solicitors. The Council wanted to pay off the Town Clerk but she refused and therefore the Council decided to defend their case in court which was very successful. Only one complaint was upheld and the Council then made a resolution stating that all respondents had been vindicated by the Judge.

Councillor Mrs S Barlow stated that as a new Councillor, she had stood for Council to help residents, become a voice for them and change a few things. She understood the history but felt that what was in the past could not be changed. No good could come of going over the past and that people must focus on the future.

Mrs Dixon stated that this was a current issue as the money was still owed to the Town Council.

- Q. Mrs H Howell stated that Sustainable Bridgnorth would like to see an electric car charging point in the town. People had previously thought there was one available at Dexter's Garage however it has been confirmed that this is for staff use only.

The Town Clerk advised that this was being discussed at the Town Council meeting in June.

- Q. Mr A Tacchi requested an update on the damage to the Town Hall caused by the Christmas lights contractor and questioned why the process had taken four years, resulting the tax payer being £12,000 out of pocket.

The Mayor advised that the matter was still being pursued by the insurance company. Mr Tacchi then requested an update in writing.

- Q. Mr A Tacchi noted the statement which had appeared in What's What magazine regarding planning permission being obtained for an extension to College House and the Mayor's Parlour. He also questioned why public meetings were no longer recorded and stated that the Town Council had been ordered by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) to release the tapes.

The Mayor stated that he was keen to engage with the public and was an advocate for openness and transparency. He advised that Council had made a resolution not to record meetings as it was felt inappropriate to continue doing so. Initially, the recordings were used to assist with typing the minutes as there had been a history of disagreements in what was said in the minutes. The Mayor acknowledged the ICO's ruling to release the tapes and the Town Council duly complied.

- Q. Mrs Dixon highlighted an issue with buses and coaches using Severn Street car park as a bus depot for free each day. These could be turned into car parking spaces and income received; however at the moment, coaches from Stourbridge and Codsall have been parking there all day as it is free of charge and yet they are bringing nothing to the town.

Councillor Lea stated that he would bring this to the attention of Shropshire Council.

- Q. A local resident from Madeley stated that it was not necessary to get into the water to clear the debris under the bridge as scaffolding could be used. They raised their concerns that the debris will eventually cause damage to this fundamental part of the town.

Councillor J Gittins advised that the Environment Agency came out to clear the debris a month previously but due to health and safety, they could not carry out the works.

- Q. Mrs P Becke asked why the trees aren't being prevented from falling into the river.

Again, it was stated that this was an Environment Agency matter and they would be contacted following the meeting.

The Mayor thanked all those who had attended the meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.