

**Minutes of the Annual Town meeting held in the Low Town Community Hall,  
Severn Street, Bridgnorth on Wednesday 25 April 2018 at 7pm**

Present: Councillor R Whittle OBE (Town Mayor), Councillors Mrs C Baines MBE, Mrs S Barlow, Dr J Buckley, D Cooper, G Davies, Dr C Dyson, Mrs H Howell, Mrs K Hurst-Knight, E Marshall, Mrs J Onions, Mrs S Stevens, Mrs C Walden and Mrs C Whittle.

Barry Ince (Acting Town Clerk and Outdoors & Properties Manager)

Councillor C Lea (Shropshire Council), PC M Picken and PCSO Mrs E Smeilus (West Mercia Police) G Downes (Guest Speaker & Highways Manager, Shropshire Council) and 29 members of the public (26 residents and 3 non-residents).

Minutes' Secretaries Mrs L Gardner and Mrs P Russell  
(minutes transcribed by Mrs L Gardner)

Apologies were submitted by Shropshire Councillor Les Winwood and Town Councillor Mrs Carol Whittle who would be arriving late.

**1. Welcome by the Town Mayor, Councillor R Whittle OBE**

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. He also extended a welcome to newly elected Morfe Ward Member, Councillor Dr Clive Dyson.

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 29 March 2017 were accepted as previously circulated.

**3. Guest Speaker**

The Town Mayor then introduced the guest speaker, Graham Downes, Highways Manager at Shropshire Council.

Mr Downes thanked the Mayor for the invitation and said that there had been significant changes since his attendance four years ago, the obvious change being the appointment of a new Shropshire Council Maintenance Contractor with effect 1 April 2018 following the end of the Ringway contract. Kier had been awarded a seven year contract with the option of three further individual one year contracts depending upon performance.

Mr Downes said that first impressions with the new contractor had been positive and that improvements in the conditions of the roads should be seen soon. He stated that Kier's rates were slightly higher than Ringway's and that additionally the Highways' budget had been cut also. Central Government had however made additional payment awards due to the exceptional weather which was earmarked for repairing potholes, patching, surface dressing and resurfacing. This will be allocated using a point scoring system for which evidence of need will have to be provided.

Guests were shown an electronic tablet which is now commonly used to highlight and pinpoint particular problems and provides recorded evidence of where problems are.

It is necessary for Highways to produce a 3 year cycle/programme which obviously impacts on how the Divisional Team are able to work. Bad weather, particularly the snow this winter, has caused different issues such as tree and road damage, with A and B class roads being particularly high risk. During the winter months the local roads would normally have been gritted about 75 times whereas this winter it had been 132 times.

Questions were invited from the audience.

Q. A member of public from Eardington stated that he felt an extension to the footpath was required along the B4555 to Eardington.

He also asked why instead of awarding the Highways contract to Kier (and previously Ringway) the work could not be done in-house and wanted to know how much would be spent in Bridgnorth.

A. Mr Downes replied that three sections of the Highley Road were due to be addressed in the next 3 years, including the 6-700 metres from the Swan Inn to Bridgnorth, but it was not possible to resurface the road without closing it. They will address others issues on that section whilst the road is closed.

Q. Mr Quinton Leiper said that there was no footpath along the last 100 metres of the B4363 in Oldbury either and asked if that could be addressed.

A. Mr Downes said it could.

Q. Councillor Dr Julia Buckley said that Wolverhampton City Council used a 'Report it App' which allowed members of the public to record problems on their mobile phones and report it direct to the Wolverhampton equivalent of the Shropshire Highways Divisional Office.

A. Mr Downes requested further details which Councillor Dr Buckley said she would provide.

Q. Mr David Seymour reported that some previous work had been undertaken in Friars Street/Riverside in 2014 but a notification of work board put in place by Ringway was still in situ and he asked whether this was acceptable.

A. Mr Downes agreed that it was not but stated that the new contractors needed time to catch up with these issues. He stated that at a cost of £1,000.00 per day the line crew needed a minimum of 1 days' work to utilize their time fully. Mr Downes stated that Kier had undertaken some scoping visits already and he reiterated that they seemed very keen.

Q. A member of the public queried the value of patching up the road at Eardington.

A. Mr Downes confirmed that they are looking at resurfacing all over the road whilst it is closed.

Q. Councillor Edward Marshall said he believed in preventative measures such as drainage clearance and asked why this hadn't been done.

- A. Mr Downes replied that drains should be cleared once per year but realised that there were issues with access in town as some were difficult to get to.

#### 4. **Review of the work of the Town Council**

- (a) The Mayor's Report from Councillor Ron Whittle OBE

*'The 2017 Council year started off well in May with an enjoyable Mayor Making followed by the adjourned Council meeting when we agreed to disband all major committees in favour of two Council meetings per month so that all Councillors could be more involved in the discussions and decision-making process. I believe this change had worked well, with reduced number of meetings and reduced administration.*

*Working relationships worked fairly smoothly and the Mayoral year got off to a good start with a number of other local Mayor Makings and a successful charity curry night.*

*Work also commenced on a new Arts Trail venture where many Councillors have risen to the challenge to bring this exciting project to fruition at no cost to Council or residents. This is continuing apace.*

*I was very hopeful that we could make good headway on a number of projects, most notably the cemetery extension. Unfortunately in September with unexpected departure of the Town Clerk we found the need to restructure the remaining office staff to overcome the additional workload.*

*This has rather put a dampener on the year so that progress in some areas has been much slower than previously hoped. However we are now moving forward with new policies and procedures in the course of preparation and discussions commencing on a mid-long term strategy and our properties portfolio.*

*A working group is looking at how we can improve the viability of the Castle Hall and Town Hall, while the Events Committee is to return "in house" and combined with the Christmas Committee giving better oversight while also ensuring continued public participation. We are also well on the way to recruiting a new Town Clerk.*

*These foundation stones should provide a good basis for bringing numerous actions to fruition in the coming year.*

*Finally I must mention the Mayor's charity events. Despite work pressures that have meant we have been able to run only four events, I am very hopeful, thanks largely to the efforts of my wife, that we shall raise over £9,000 for the three charities.'*

Questions were invited from the floor but there were none.

- (b) Report by Councillor Mrs Jean Onions, Chairman of Planning Committee

*'Good evening ladies and gentlemen.*

*We are a committee of 6 at the moment having lost 2 members this year; 1 to resignation and a co-opted member with oodles of experience due to health issues, but we soldier on. We consider about 160 applications over the year. This covers*

*property extensions, new builds, listed building consent and tree works to name but a few. Knowledge of the area is very useful.*

*We are one of several consultees that Shropshire Council requires comment from about planning applications. Any really major projects in the town come before full Council e.g. the Smithfield, before being submitted to Shropshire.*

*We meet once a fortnight on Monday evenings at 7.15pm in the Mayor's Parlour, College House. Anyone is welcome to come along and sit in through the public session. You may also request to speak on any application, for or against. The committee meets fortnightly because some planning applications only have a 21 day consultation period.*

*Our role is purely advisory to Shropshire Council. We have no planning powers whatsoever as this lies with Shropshire Council. All we can do is make strong recommendations along with other residents and organisations in the hope that they listen to us.*

*All applications can be viewed through the Planning Portal on the Shropshire Council website. Any comments and concerns can be submitted directly to Shropshire. All our recommendations are uploaded to the Shropshire Council website.'*

Questions were invited from the floor.

Q. Mr Neil Hancock understood that the Town Council's Planning Committee lacked the power with regard to planning decisions and queried how that could work well for the town. He wanted to know if that could be reversed to make it so.

A. Councillor Mrs Onions replied that we do put our points of view across to Shropshire Council

The Town Mayor added that historically the planning function was with Shropshire County Council, then with Bridgnorth District Council and then with the introduction of a Unitary Council back with Shropshire Council. He added that Bridgnorth's four Shropshire Councillors do not vote but Shropshire Councillor Christian Lea confirmed that they are able to speak at Shropshire Council's Planning meetings.

It was also confirmed that many applications are decided by planning officers with delegated powers.

Councillor David Cooper added that despite popular misconception decisions are very rule based imposed by Government to give consistency but that as a Town Council we are very well placed to apply local knowledge; so although we can influence the decision it has to be justified by policy. He added that local planning is being reviewed up to 2036.

Councillor Christian Lea confirmed that the four Shropshire Councillors are consulted if the Town Council's recommendations differ to those of the Planning Authority and they will be asked whether they would prefer it if the decision was made by Shropshire Council officers under delegated powers or whether it should go to committee.

## 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

**RESOLVED:** that the accounts from the three charities be received.

## 6. Questions to Shropshire Councillor Christian Lea, Police and Bridgnorth Town Councillors

- (a) Report from Shropshire Councillor Christian Lea (Bridgnorth East and Astley Abbotts)

Councillor Lea read out the following report:

*'Good evening everyone, I'm Christian Lea, one of the Shropshire Councillors for the Bridgnorth East and Astley Abbotts Division and I'm here this evening to give you a brief Shropshire Council report.*

*I'd first of all like to bring to people's attention the fact that community groups involved with providing activities for young people are able to bid for funding from Shropshire Council's Rural Youth Activity Fund. A total of £33,000.00 funding is available through two funding rounds for youth groups and clubs in eleven eligible rural Local Joint Committee areas. Each LJC area has been allocated £3,000.00 to put towards activities that will make a difference to the lives of local young people. The first funding round runs from 23 April to 20 May 2018, with the second one running between 15 October and 12 November. Any youth club or group interested in applying for funding should first of all check their eligibility with their Shropshire councillor or contact Tracy Johnson, the Bridgnorth Area community Enablement Officer.*

*Any local businesses interest in trading overseas are invited to learn, network and share ideas on board the Export Hub which will be visiting Ludlow this Friday. The Department of International Trade's 40ft truck will be parked at The Ludlow Nut Company's brand new facility on Foldgate Lane between 10am and 1.30pm. There will be a number of presentations from guest speakers, including one from local MP Philip Dune and a diverse range of local businesses including Grainger and Worrall and there will be a tour of The Ludlow Nut Company. Experts from the Shropshire International Trade team will be on hand during the event to talk to businesses interested in the support that is available for companies of all sizes looking to sell goods and services overseas. This event is part of the Department of International Trade's Exporting is GREAT campaign.*

*The leader of Shropshire Council, Peter Nutting came over to Bridgnorth two weeks ago to meet with myself and Bridgnorth's three other Shropshire councillors. Peter was taken on a tour of the town which included the area outside the shops at the bottom of Queensway Drive, where Shropshire Councillors Les Winwood and Elliott Lynch are working alongside Town Councillor Carol Whittle to get something done about the steps which are in very poor condition. Peter was also shown the Stanmore Industrial estate as well as the Chartwell Business Park where I stressed*

*the need for Shropshire council to work with the owner in getting this valuable piece of land in the town put to good use through the creation of new employment opportunities. Peter and I also met with some local residents from Cartway, Friars Street and Riverside to talk about a number of local Highways/Streetscene issues.*

*As many of you will be aware, the former Bridgnorth District Council offices at Westgate have been vacant for quite a while now and the sale of these offices is progressing and should be completed within the next two months. Peter Nutting has met with John Campion, the Police and Crime Commissioner recently and Mr Campion has agreed that the sale of the Police Station will be included with the sale of Westgate. With the Police Station site being sold, the Police will be moving their operations to the Fire Station site in due course.*

*Shropshire Council's Highways Department have been awarded an additional £1,858,807.00 of funding from the Department of Transport to repair the numerous potholes which have appeared during the past few months. This money will help increase the council's resurfacing budget, minor works budget, surface dressing budget and top up the pothole repair budget where Shropshire Council are already directing additional resources, having increased the number of teams tackling potholes from 12 to 25. With Shropshire Council's new highways contractor Kier having taken on responsibility for road defects from the start of this month, they have a number of earmarked sites which they will be working on in the coming few weeks.*

*That concludes my report, but if anyone has any issues which they would like me to raise with Shropshire Council, then please do let me know and I will do my best to help'*

He then invited questions from the floor.

Q. Councillor Lea was asked what would happen to the money from the sale of the Police Station.

A. Councillor Lea replied that he did not know but said that the money from the sale of Westgate went into the county pot.

Q. Councillor Dr Julia Buckley asked Councillor Lea why he had personally voted for the cuts in the Highways budget.

A. He said that the money has to be found from somewhere as it is needed elsewhere such as in youth services.

Q. Councillor Dr Buckley pointed out that those services were being cut too.

A. Councillor Lea reiterated that choices have to be made.

Q. Councillor Dr Buckley queried whether Shropshire Council should refrain from the investment in the new shopping centre [in Shrewsbury].

A. Councillor Lea stated that it was felt that it would produce a good return.

Q. Councillor Mrs Helen Howell asked what the situation was with the Innage Lane Youth Centre and what the plans were for it. She also raised a query regarding asbestos on the site.

- A. Councillor Lea responded that the Youth Centre is still in use and that they still meet on Monday nights. He added that the development of the site is at the Cabinet stage at the moment but the site is likely to be used for houses and a new Youth Centre.
- Q. A member of the public asked whether Shropshire Council had considered going in-house when the Ringway contract finished to avoid paying shareholders.
- A. Councillor Lea responded that Ringway had not been quite as good as was hoped and a decision had been made to go out to contract.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Lea for his report and for answering questions.

(b) Report from Police Constable Matt Picken from West Mercia Police

PC Picken reported that up until 8 April 2018 policing in Bridgnorth was covered from Telford but has now changed to in-house. Although he hadn't formally been advised about the move to the Fire Station he stated that previously they had often been needed in Telford where the demand for policing is higher.

He introduced PCSO Emma Smeilus who was attending the meeting with him and also confirmed that there is a full time sergeant based at Bridgnorth.

He confirmed that there is a protected budget for the Safer Neighbourhood Teams and that they are also recruiting at the moment for regular police constables. He advised that the Bridgnorth Safer Neighbourhood Team consisted of himself, PCSOs Helen Oakley, Mandy Leek and Emma who was with him today.

He advised that much of their time was managing and monitoring the more vulnerable people in the community which included monitoring those most at risk of causing harm to themselves or to other people. This also includes gathering intelligence and the management of sex offenders. He stated that dealing with crime was just a small part of their tasks with much being centred around the disabled and mentally ill. There was also a certain amount of countryside crime including offences related to fox hunting, bats and protected newts.

PC Picken highlighted some of the problems in Bridgnorth relating to drug offences which included drug trafficking along the county lines, drug dealing and cuckooing (taking over other peoples' houses for drug purposes). He also stated that there have been reports of anti-social behaviour in areas such as Riverside, The Friars, St. Mary's Churchyard and Crown Meadow. He said that in some areas the addition of CCTV cameras and improved lighting was being looked at and problems on Crown Meadow were being addressed by multi agencies.

He said they worked closely with local schools on preventative crime issues and also in support of the road safety officer.

PC Picken read out the latest crime figures for Bridgnorth and stated that although the reported crime is down, he is aware that if a crime was not reported it would not have been included in the figures and therefore it would be difficult to argue the case

for additional officers. He urged those present to report any crime they become aware of to the police on 101.

He then invited questions.

Q. Councillor Dr Clive Dyson asked whether the police received reports from the CCTV officers and how this was recorded.

A. PC Picken said they rely on the victim being willing to report the crime. If an incident is caught on CCTV it isn't necessarily reported as a crime. If the incident is over when the police arrive, the victim or any other witnesses may not be willing to report it or they may have already left the scene.

A member of the public queried whether the cost of CCTV in St. Mary's churchyard was justified.

Q. Tim Beardmore, the proprietor of Mower Mec in Stanley Lane stated that he was disappointed with the police response to the burglary at his premises. He claimed that many people feel that low level theft is inadequately dealt with. He claimed that, in his case, following the issue of a crime number nothing else appears to have happened. He also claimed that there are issues with the Shropshire Council Canern Brook site not being secure enough which is how the thieves were able to gain access and spend up to three hours on site.

A. PC Picken said that the camera images of the thieves were very good even though they had not yet been identified. He added that forensic reports were still awaited.

Pam Becke MBE, CCTV Co-ordinator, queried the crime figures given in PC Picken's report. She also claimed that although some very good CCTV images are sent to Hindlip they don't get followed up. She also felt that the police should be making it easier for her to contact them and said that she has to contact PC Picken via 101.

Q. Councillor Mrs Carol Whittle said that people in town are not reporting crimes because they do not think anything will get done about it.

A. PC Picken did not agree as there are still many criminals going to court. He also stated that what people see is the result of budget cuts and complaints should be directed to those in power.

Q. A member of the public stated that he was surprised at the report that crime is only a small part of what the police have to deal with and queried whether social and animal related issues should not be dealt with by social services and the RSPCA instead.

A. PC Picken replied that it was not within their remit and in response to a further query raised he said that the police will respond to crimes in Bridgnorth and the surrounding countryside 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Graham Oliver, Community Ambassador for Shropshire (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) introduced himself and reported that the police have the very latest technology to assist and record crimes e.g. mobile phones and laptops and he

said that the public are often not aware of the presence of firearms, ANPR cameras and unmarked cars. He stated that there were 136 mental health issues recorded in the last year and that these did take up policing time including transport time to places of safety.

He claimed that in the West Mercia area with regards to crime levels Shropshire was doing well and Bridgnorth was very good.

He reiterated that it was up to the public to report crimes or activities such as frequent unknown visitors to neighbouring houses which could indicate it was being used for drug activity.

He also undertook to find out more information regarding Bridgnorth police moving into Bridgnorth Fire Station.

(c) Report from Sally Everett of the Bridgnorth Advice Service

Prior to the meeting, Sally Everett of the Bridge Advice Service had asked to give a short presentation and she was invited to take the floor.

Sally explained that the Bridgnorth Advice Service meet every Monday between 10am and 2pm at the Bridgnorth Community Hub off Severn Street. They help people fill in forms, give advice on benefits and earlier in the year they welcomed members to their team who had training in employment issues.

Sally continued by thanking the Town Council for their financial support by way of a grant.

Councillor Mrs Connie Baines MBE thanked Sally for her commitment and asked whether people needed to make an appointment to visit the Bridgnorth Advice Service for assistance to which Sally replied that they didn't and confirmed that the service was completely voluntary.

In response to a question Sally confirmed that the Citizens Advice Bureau had left Bridgnorth some years ago but could still be contacted by telephone and locally have offices in Shrewsbury and Ludlow. She pointed out that CAB got Government funding whereas BAS were completely independent.

Sally was thanked for her report.

## 7. Discussions relating to Parish matters

In response to a question the Town Mayor said that the Council had set up a strategy plan and are getting assistance from NALC and will shortly be having additional help over the course of three days from the Chief Executive Officer from Cirencester Town Council. The Town Mayor reminded guests that the Town Council has limited powers, a limited budget and limited staff.

Councillor Mrs Carol Whittle pointed out that the Town Council are currently taking part in the Local Plan Review with Shropshire Council.

A member of the public referred to the British Retail CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) which had highlighted inflation with wages not keeping up and although

Bridgnorth may have avoided that he referred to the symbolic Fairtrade sign at the entrance to the town at the top of the Hermitage and asked what brand does the town have at that level to keep attracting people to the town. He said the High Street only exists because of residents, visitors and the people who work here and that we should be calling on businesses in town to support a living wage.

The Town Mayor advised the gentleman that he seemed to be talking about the world in general. Regarding the High Street and keeping it looking attractive; he reminded guests that the Council had spent a considerable amount on keeping the Town Hall looking attractive and had plans for further expenditure on Northgate in the future. He reminded guests about our High Street floral success and said that people often said how lucky we are to have such a vibrant High Street with so many shops occupied and such a good community spirit. He referred to the Arts Trail which is being funded by sponsorship and added that there is a limit to what the Council can do and reminded guests that last year Bridgnorth won the Great British High Street award due to voluntary efforts and suggested that people should tap into that.

John Hart, a resident, said that he had moved to Bridgnorth 3 years ago having formerly lived in a town for 45 years where he had seen several historic buildings lost. He had joined the Civic Society since moving here and said it would be a shame if we lost these facilities in Bridgnorth. He said that he hoped that the Strategy Plan would look at how to make use of these buildings and not sell them off.

John Hart then proposed the following motion:

*'The publicly owned, historic buildings of Bridgnorth belong to the residents and tax-payers of our town and we therefore instruct the Town Council to preserve their status as community assets. These buildings include College House, Castle Hall, the Town Hall, Northgate and the Annexe.*

*Any future changes to the status of these buildings must be subject to a referendum of the residents'*

The Town Mayor pointed out that of those mentioned only the Town Hall and Northgate are historic buildings. He said that Councillors had been instructed to think outside the box to see what is best for the residents of the town. He said that working parties were looking at how best to improve the viability of the Castle Hall and the Town Hall as both were losing money. He pointed out that having obtained a licence that marriages in the Town Hall were going well but it needed better marketing. He added that discussions had only just started however.

Mr Hart pointed out that it would be a shame to lose a community facility such as the Castle Hall and reiterated that the public should have a say before any community facility is taken away.

Councillor Edward Marshall pointed out that the cost of a referendum could run into tens of thousands of pounds and urged people to speak to their local councillors with ideas.

Mr Hart was concerned that it would be a fait accompli and that any proposals should be put to the people of the town.

The Town Mayor confirmed that any proposal would have to go to full council and that people could participate to a certain extent although some items would have to be discussed during closed session.

Charlie Peters asked if the Town Mayor knew how old College House was to which the Mayor replied that although it was Georgian it was not the oldest building in St. Leonard's Close.

Councillor Dr Julia Buckley said to the Mayor that he personally had put forward the idea of selling College House but she felt these buildings were assets and residents should be made aware and that we should listen to them. She said that she would like to second the proposal made by Mr John Hart.

The Town Mayor said that he had merely put forward suggestions because someone has to start discussions and he personally felt that the offices in College House were not fit for purpose.

A member of the public brought up the subject of the police moving from the police station and stated that there were too many charity shops in town to which the Town Mayor reminded guests that this was a town meeting and that the Council have no control over Government policy.

The Town Mayor read out the proposal made by Mr John Hart which had been seconded by Councillor Dr Julia Buckley and called for a show of hands to vote and reminded guests that only residents/electors of the town could do so.

The proposal read as follows:

*'The publicly owned, historic buildings of Bridgnorth belong to the residents and tax-payers of our town and we therefore instruct the Town Council to preserve their status as community assets. These buildings include College House, Castle Hall, the Town Hall, Northgate and the Annexe.*

*Any future changes to the status of these buildings must be subject to a referendum of the residents'*

Those in favour of the proposal 14

Those against the proposal 16

The motion was lost.

The Town Mayor thanked guests for attending and the meeting closed at 9.20pm.