

WEM TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Report

2014/2015

2014/2015	2015/2016
Mayor – Cllr Mandy Meakin	Mayor – Cllr John Murray
Deputy Mayor – Cllr John Murray	Deputy Mayor - Cllr Rosemary Dodd

IT has happened before and no doubt will go on occurring – “it” being frequent domination of the Town Council’s monthly agenda by controversial planning issues as would-be developers seek permission for housing in various numbers from just a few to totals local councillors feel excessive. These and other topics may be read about in this council “diary.”

April

The refusal by a government-appointed inspector of permission for the erection of 21 homes on land off Mill Street following an appeal hearing was warmly welcomed. Simultaneously, Shropshire Council was urged to amend the boundary in that particular area so that the site was excluded from any future development moves.

At the other end of the development spectrum, the proposed erection of five affordable homes at the rear of Station Road was opposed because of worries about the access being “inadequate.”

There were calls for the sweeping of Drawwell Walk and for action over dog dirt along this busy stretch of public footpath.

A quotation of £1,600, unchanged from the previous year, was approved for the annual maintenance of the town’s colourful pole-mounted floral planters.

May

At her last meeting as Mayor, Councillor Connie Granger reported the raising of about £1,400 for local charities during her year of office.

Alterations to the road layout at the junction of Station Road and Aston Street – at the railway level crossing – led to a strong letter of concern to Shropshire Council at the lack of

reinstatement of the original road layout which the Town Council had pressed for.

As for the railway level crossing itself, “issues” over its operation were discussed and a bid made to set up a meeting with representatives of Network Rail.

Councillors agreed to monitor use of the car park at Bowensfield/Butler Sports Centre, and especially the behaviour of younger drivers, whose actions were said to have raised worries among nearby residents.

June

A name was sought for new housing development comprising phase two off Oakley Meadow, Whitchurch Road. Usually, the Town Council has found inspiration in an old tithe map, but in this instance appropriate names had already been used up. Members agreed a compromise with the name, Blakes Meadow, after the site’s previous owners.

“Negative” was how councillors described the response from the Meres and Mosses Housing Association to their request for a footpath link between the Town Square on the car park and Isherwood’s Way. They also felt it was a disregard of their views. Members decided on a letter of “strong concern,” copied to

Shropshire Council’s planning department, urging re-consideration of the requested footpath link.

Two former members, Mrs Thelma Broom and Mrs Peggy Carson, who retired from the Town Council ahead of the 2013 annual meeting, were invited to become Honorary Townspeople (which they, in due course, accepted).

July

Townspeople were out in force, some 80 of them packing the meeting room, when yet more contentious planning matters were discussed.

First up this time was a proposal to build 25 homes on land off Roden Grove, which was strongly opposed after a long and full discussion. Among other things it was stressed how the site was outside the development boundary and there was the need to retain the division between Wem and Tilley.

Then there was an application for the building of 27 homes to the rear of Garth Erfyl in Soultion Road, which was also strongly objected to. The proposed vehicular access was described as sub-standard and with poor visibility. Besides, the Town Council had consistently asked that there should be no further development east of the railway crossing ahead of a relief road.

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The July meeting also heard of “difficulties” being met in organising a meeting with representatives of Network Rail to discuss the controversial operation of the railway level crossing – and the installation of a footbridge, which had been called for by local campaigners.

August

For the second month in a row there were packed public seats at the monthly meeting. It was because the council had before it yet another potential controversy - an application for the erection of 75 dwellings between Aston Road and Church Lane. After another full debate it was decided to support the planning and transport committee in objecting to the application with a reminder to Shropshire Council that it had earlier been given reasons why the site should not be considered for development.

Members were told that while Shropshire Council had bowed to local pressure to install a pedestrian crossing in Mill Street close to Roden Lodge sheltered housing, it would not, because of limited funds, be a signalled crossing. Councillors welcomed the new crossing, but regretted on safety grounds that it was not to be signalled.

September

A small group of councillors met to discuss the possibility of a footbridge being installed at the railway level crossing – this, ahead of a long-awaited meeting with Network Rail aimed at learning more about the actual operation of the (remotely controlled) crossing.

The monthly meeting asked if the Meres and Mosses Housing Association could be approached for a Town Council office sign to be erected at the Association’s Edinburgh House.

A local resident emailed the council asking about the failed twinning link with Fismes in Northern France. Members pointed out how at least two letters had been sent to Fismes – with no response. Also, it appeared there was no mention of Wem on the Fismes website.

October

Shrinkage in the safety surfacing surrounding some items of children’s play equipment was said to need nearly £5,000 worth of expenditure to remedy the problems. However, expert advice was taken and remedial work was postponed while the condition of safety surfacing was monitored.

At last meetings had taken place with Network Rail representatives, the first discussing the actual railway level crossing and the second looking at signalling issues. It was reported a further meeting was to be held to receive results of data collection.

Remedial work on the street lighting system was approved at a cost of £7,000 to £8,000.

Concern was expressed at the speed of traffic in Mill Street, one councillor suggesting that installation of a speed-activated sign would slow down vehicles.

November

The council was represented at a meeting of Wem Civic Society, when there was a discussion of ideas for the War Memorial at the front of the Parish Church – including a contentious one for possible relocation of the memorial. However, there was a consensus in favour of the memorial staying put. A specially designed decorative screen was another idea, although there were worries that this might obscure the public’s view of the memorial. Members were assured there would be further discussions before anything else happened.

Great strides were made over securing the future of the local swimming pool when a local community group, Wem Swimming and Lifestyle Centre, took over management of the facility from Teme Leisure. The continued use of the pool was welcomed as “another stage in the town’s regeneration.” Lots of information was conveyed to townspeople when the pool was featured in a special edition of the council’s newsletter, *The Bulletin*.

December

Councillors heard of a new role for the former Police Station in Barnard Street – or, at least, its site as Shropshire Council had approved the erection of six properties following demolition of the “cop shop.”

Despite some amendments to the plan, the planning and transport committee reiterated the Town Council’s strong objections to the proposed erection of 75 homes between Aston Road and Church Lane and to the building of 27 dwellings behind Garth Erfyl, Sulton Road.

January

The annual precept meeting produced some of the strongest headlines in decades, mainly because of news that Shropshire Council was not passing on to parish and town councils the government-funded council tax support grant, impacting on Wem’s precept to the tune of £28,000. A handful of protest letters to all levels of government was agreed. The council’s own newsletter said it all: “As Shropshire Council makes a grab for Wem cash, ‘It is morally wrong’ say angry town councillors.”

In public participation time (15 minutes at the start of the meeting) concern was expressed at an apparent signal failure endangering users of the railway level crossing.

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January Continued...

Later, in the actual meeting, members were told there was no explanation for the failure, so letters were fired off to Network Rail seeking reasons for the problem and requesting yet another meeting with the operators of the crossing.

It was reported that Shropshire Council had approved a footpath link between Oak Avenue and the Town Square.

There was a warning of “a major impact” on the town through various roadworks leading to the temporary closure of Soulton Road and a ban on parking in Station Road to improve the flow of diverted traffic (in the event, the work overran the initial finishing date by several weeks).

February

The Town Council organised a public meeting to discuss the proposed closure by Coverage Care of Westlands Care Home, Station Road, and about 90 townspeople were present. It was called “a contentious” issue with emotions running high.

At its own meeting, the Town Council agreed on letters to Shropshire Council and Coverage Care, pressing the need for this type of accommodation in Wem and to highlight the numbers of elderly living in the town.

The “poor appearance” of the former White Horse Hotel – so prominent on the junction of High Street/Mill Street – attracted comment during public participation time. The answer: Shropshire Council was trying to locate the property’s owner about the problem.

Councillors saw a draft copy of the logo for the information sign the Town Council had requested at the front of Edinburgh House, where it has its office.

The veritable saga of concern for Shrewsbury being included in Wem’s postal address and the Royal Mail delivery problems that could be caused continued with the Town Council writing on the issue to Business Secretary Vince Cable.

The council gave support to residents in their calls to Shropshire Council for improved road safety measures in Ellesmere Road, with the need for a possible footpath extension being one issue.

March

As the municipal year neared closure, the protection of the local library service was urged and members were pressed to fight any moves there might be to cut public services such as this.

Standing Orders were suspended so that a member of the public could speak on behalf of an action group formed because of concerns over the controversial remote control of the railway crossing. Later, there was discussion of a letter about the level crossing from Network Rail and of a meeting with the company, when the provision of a footbridge was mentioned and the need for shorter down-times of the barriers called for.

Councillors were told how large amounts of litter were having to be picked up and cleared from the Recreation Ground. It was felt that notices in local takeaways urging customers to dispose of their litter responsibly might help to counter the problem. At the same time the concerns were to be reported to the local police. ■

Wem Town Council meets on the last Thursday of every month – except in December – at Edinburgh House, New Street, Wem, at 7pm.

The Council always welcomes electors’ comments and suggestions and allows time at the start of each monthly meeting for questions from any members of the public caring to attend. A copy of the agenda for meetings is displayed on the Town Council’s official notice board at the front of the Town Hall, High Street, and on the Council’s official website: www.wem.gov.uk.

This Annual Report can only be a digest of Town Council business while the website as above is the source of more information such as minutes, reports, etc.

HOW THE MONEY COMES....AND GOES

Income and Expenditure 2014-2015

Year Ending	Income	Year Ending
31.3.14		31.3.15
227,426.00	Precept	238,662.00
835.02	Bank Interest	839.72
8,575.00	Cemetery Fees	5,800.00
935.50	Allotment rents	967.76
322.00	Story of Wem	160.00
33,163.27	Grants, Refunds	28,996.02
<u>0.00</u>	Miscellaneous	<u>2.56</u>
271,256.79	TOTAL INCOME	275,428.06
	Expenditure	
21,493.84	Public lighting	27,902.85
3,371.28	Allotments & Burial Grounds	13,897.46
18,650.00	Recreation Grounds – WSSA	18,150.00
4,375.86	Recreation Grounds – Other	25,576.32
77,190.04	Salaries and Wages	78,815.43
17,333.21	Administration	14,783.72
0.00	Election Expenses	200.00
1,500	Mayor's Allowance	1,500
500.00	Hospitality Allowance	407.63
8,007.00	S137 Contributions	7,262.00
2,475.00	Floral Planters	2,475.00
1,750.44	Wem Town Hall – Loan Charges	1,594.69
18,000	Wem Town Hall – Continued	20,000.00
537.22	Petty Cash	308.67
68,439.84	Wem Swimming Pool	73,689.94
360.00	Story of Wem	120.00
13,883.03	Public Toilets	13,838.46
2,250.00	CCTV	3,275.00
<u>2,714.60</u>	Miscellaneous	<u>3,426.19</u>
262,831.36	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	307,223.36
370,583.66	Balance 1.4,2014	379,009.09
<u>271,256.79</u>	Add Income	<u>275,428.06</u>
641,840.45		654,437.15
<u>262,831.36</u>	Less Expenditure	<u>307,223.36</u>
379,009.09		347,213.79