



THERE was no avoiding the inevitability of rising costs and various other influencing factors at Wem Town Council’s annual budget meeting in January, but councillors’ prudent housekeeping softened the blow for local council taxpayers.

Their careful deliberations when faced with estimates for 2014/15 brought about a final figure to be met through precept of £243,662—or a reduced £238,662 when members decided to ease the overall burden by taking £5,000 from reserves.

Last year the corresponding figure was £227,426, so there was no massive hike in taxpayers’ bills.

In the current financial year ending March 31 there was the introduction of a government initiative, the Council Tax Support scheme (CTS), giving Wem a grant of £31,090. In 2014/15 this contribution drops to £28,576, giving town councillors more cause for thought.

Estimated spending under the heading of public lighting—and ignoring for the time being any grant towards Christmas lighting—amounted to £31,638 with £10,000 provisionally allocated to street lighting improvements.

Subsequently, the Wem Christmas Lights and Festival succeeded with a request for £3,000 towards this year’s decorations.

Estimated costs of £13,362 under the heading of the Love Lane and Whitchurch Road burial grounds included £10,000 for a proposed extension to the Love Lane cemetery and its access road, work that was essential, stressed council clerk and treasurer Mrs Jane Drummond. There was also £1,500 towards the maintenance of the Whitchurch Road burial ground through the Friends’ group.

Wem Sports and Social Association asked for £18,150 for its continued administration and maintenance of local sports facilities, public open spaces and play areas—a drop of £500 based on the success of the annual bonfire and fireworks display.

TOWARDS A BETTER GRASP OF TOWN HALL ISSUES

With major changes in the operating of Wem Town Hall in the offing, councillors were asked to raise the council’s contribution to the funding of

**IT COULD
HAVE
BEEN
WORSE**

the facility by £5,000 to £23,000.

However, it was decided to include the lesser amount, £20,000, in the estimates and at the same time to seek discussions with the Town Hall Community Trust “to obtain a better understanding of the current situation.”

Local councillors also want to explore the issue of use of the Town Hall for two civic functions a year, this after they had at their December meeting suggested free use of the premises on these occasions, in recognition of the council being a substantial contributor to the Trust.

Seeking more cash in the coming year, the Trust—consisting of local interested people—said it was needed towards essential services, building maintenance and what it called “changed management costs.”

About to end

A five-year working partnership between the Thomas Adams School and the Trust (with valued support from the town and Shropshire councils) is about to end. At the same time the school loses its specialist funding so that it will no longer be able to provide specialist and experienced staff to oversee development, nor will it be able to manage day-to-day operations of the hall and its programme on behalf of the Trust.

The Trust added that its requested increase in the Town Council’s cash support “reflected the significant challenge ahead” as the Trust assumed all operational responsibility for the hall. “We hope that the Town Council will recognise how vital its continued support is at this critical time in seeking to secure a viable future for this well used community asset,” it said.



Surfing the Council Minutes

**GOOD
EVENIN'
ALL.....**

COUNCILLORS at their October meeting were enlightened on a series of issues when the new local police sergeant introduced herself.

Sergeant Claire Greenaway explained that she had been transferred from Shrewsbury to take responsibility for policing of Wem, Market Drayton and Whitchurch.

Of staff cuts within the force, she assured that those affected were administrative staff—not the uniformed officers. She added that officers were now expected to remain out of the office for

most of their shift times. And she appealed for information from the public to assist the police to deal with anti-social behaviour and crime.

A councillor referred to the longer waiting times at the railway level crossing since the introduction of the remote control signalling system. Sergeant Greenaway agreed times were longer and she said she would liaise with the British Transport Police over the issue. However, safe operation of the crossing was paramount, she stressed.

It was suggested that traffic speeds in Mill Street especially had worsened with subsequent worries about parked cars and tractors mounting pavements. The sergeant said she would speak to a colleague about these worries and she agreed that education about the speed of tractors through Wem would be beneficial.

To a query about the apparent loss of counter cover at the local police station—in Edinburgh House, New Street—the sergeant said she was strongly in favour of the service, which could be manned by volunteers if necessary, and she would press for it to be re-opened.

REVIVAL OF TWINNING? *A councillor relayed the plea from a member of the local Wem - Fismes Town Twinning Committee for twinning signs on the town boundaries to be retained. Why? Because there were hopes locally for a renewal of the twinning arrangement with the French northern town at some time in the near future.*

IMPACT FEAR: *Ahead of the planned start of major work on the local gas mains renewal (see opposite for the full story), members of the public and councillors expressed worries about the effects of the tricky operation. It was feared there would be difficulties for school buses, while Wem Civic Society had concerns about the impact on local shops and businesses. However, it was accepted the work was essential and that every effort would be made to lessen the effects.*

STOPPING THE BUS STOP: *The council was told about the removal of the bus stop at the station end of Aston Street. The road markings were being erased and an adjacent parking bay extended to make it clear there was no longer a stop at this point.*

TREE-MENDOUS: *Wem Christmas Festival Committee was warmly congratulated on its display of Christmas lights this year. Councillors and townspeople described the show of illuminated trees as “outstanding” and “excellent”.* □

HUNDREDS of pounds were handed in grants to a sizeable list of local organisations at the Town Council's annual budget meeting.

A contribution of £1,000 was made to Wem Carnival, although the event organisers had asked for an increase to £1,200 on the current year because of rising costs.

The grant to the Eckford Sweet Pea Society was maintained at £900 after the society had pointed out how it faced extra staging costs so that it needed a higher cash flow to fund the show in advance of monies coming in. Also, if there was to be “a bad show” the society might not cover costs and might have to repeat its help plea.

Trustees of the Millennium Green in Aston Street succeeded with a request for £1,700 to meet annual grass maintenance costs. They assured: “The Trustees remain committed to keeping the green a safe and pleasant place for visitors to enjoy and a space anyone can use.”

A Re-Launch

The sum of £2,700 was retained in the estimates for Wem Youth Centre, currently being re-launched on the back of a major refurbishment, and a further look at the request was promised for April/May. The centre was said to look forward to attracting much wider use of its facilities.

As reported elsewhere, the Christmas Lights and Festival was granted £3,000 after it pointed to a need for new trees to replace artificial trees that were over ten-years-old.

The Scout and Guide HQ at the Butler Sports Centre received £350 towards running costs compared with this year's £270.

Other recipients of grant included the Baptist Holiday Bible Club and Wem branch of the Shropshire Army Cadet Force League. Each was granted £180. □

Work on upgrading gas main

HOPES FOR A TROUBLE-FREE SCHEME—WITH FINGERS CROSSED

AT the time this newsletter is near to printing, a step has been taken or is about to happen aimed at keeping Wem abreast of the 21st century.

It is renewal of the ageing town centre gas main, scheduled for a start at the beginning of February and due to last eight weeks, the Wales and West Utilities company plan being to replace some 450 metres of old metal gas services with longer lasting plastic pipes, plus renewal of some 50 service connections to adjoining residential and business premises.

The work covers Market Street, Aston Street, Leek Street and High Street itself between Maund's corner and the New Street junction and measures will include temporary suspension of the one-way traffic orders on Leek Street and Chapel Street.

There has been pessimism and optimism expressed about a scheme that has the object, in the words of the utility company, "to maintain a safe and reliable supply of gas to these areas, as required by the Government's Health and Safety Executive."

Local authorities and councillors were consulted about the necessary work—part of a 30-year multi million pounds gas mains replacement programme—and the public had a drop-in information evening at the Town Hall.

WWU representative, Mr Peter Hughes, facing searching questions at the Town Council's November meeting, accepted the work would be "very disruptive," but he assured that every effort would be made to minimise the impact of the various closures and traffic measures, with

deliveries to shops in particular maintained.

Councillors suggested there should be a waiving of car parking charges during operations—and indeed this concession, with its positive benefits, has been obtained through Shropshire Council.

They also stressed how Wem would still be "open for business" and wished to encourage shoppers and others to continue visiting and supporting the town during this period.

In a newsletter made available to townspeople, the WWU said there would be a team on site throughout the project and where necessary there would be weekend working to ensure speedy completion of the scheme and minimal disruption for local people and businesses. □

FROM MAKING A SPLASH TO CHAINS OF OFFICE—ALL IN A NIGHT'S WORK

SPORT and leisure will come at a price, as usual, in next year's spending.

For instance, the Town Council will again be backing the town's swimming pool with a contribution of £68,000.

At the same time councillors were reminded how there had been two bursts in the pool's mains water supply pipe, but no sum had been included in estimates for the pipe's replacement.

Then there is a scheme to provide items of fitness equipment on a patch of the Recreation Ground and to also make some improvements to existing equipment on the Rec.

The council was told applications for grants would be made and that there was a special deposit account containing about £22,700, received from developers to assist with play area

equipment provision.

Now for something completely different.....!

For months the Town Council has been seeking ways of meeting the cost of refurbishing the authority's Mayoral regalia—chains of office—to keep it in a state befitting the office.

The work is to cost in the region of £2,700, and with about £1,700 raised through donations the budget meeting agreed to fund any shortfall from the end-of-year balances. □

**A COPY OF THIS
NEWSLETTER CAN BE READ
ON-LINE ON THE WEBSITE
www.wem.gov.uk**

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

The council always welcomes electors' comments and suggestions and has time designated 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 in High Street and on the council's official website: www.wem.gov.uk

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TRIBUTES did not stop at warm words on the death in November of a former councillor and twice holder of the Town Mayor's office, Mrs Nancy Wilson. The esteem in which she was held was emphasised when her former colleagues on the Town Council formed a guard of honour at Wem Parish Church on the eve of cremation (at Emstrey) and a subsequent thanksgiving service at the Parish Church.

Mrs Wilson, 82, pictured right as she celebrated her 80th birthday, was a member of the Town Council for 22 years until standing down ahead of the May 2013 elections. She was also Town Mayor in 1996-97 and again in 2007-08.

The popular Nancy was made an Honorary Townsperson in 1999 in recognition of her council and community work—an award of which she was particularly proud because she was following in the footsteps of her late mother, Mrs Emily Astley, similarly recognised in 1987.

Councillors at their December meeting spoke highly of their old colleague and of her "total commitment" to Wem and, indeed, good causes typified by her derring do in taking a Quantum Leap Challenge for charity, a zip-wire crossing of the Severn in Shrewsbury—at the age of 77!

Elsewhere, she was described as a superb councillor with her whole heart in Wem and such a hard worker for the town. □

