

The Bulletin

Official Newsletter of Wem Town Council

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As Shropshire Council makes a grab for Wem cash

IT IS MORALLY WRONG, say angry Town Councillors

ELSEWHERE it had been described as “Robbery.” Then, Wem Town councillors added a few choice words of their own when faced at their annual budget meeting in January with news of a smash and grab by Shropshire Council.

Expressions like upset, anger, disappointment and – strongest of all – morally and ethically wrong, filled the air, but in the end the Town Council could only fire off a series of strongly worded letters with little hope of changing what had come before them.

It was the Shropshire authority’s declaration that it would no longer be passing on to local Parish and Town Councils central government money in the form of Council Tax Support Grant, meant to partially offset the effects of Council Tax on local communities. The County Council said this was down to its own “developing financial position” which no longer made this grant “affordable.”

Across the county the grant withheld amounted to £648,000 and in cold cash terms it was a reduction of £28,000 that would impact on the Wem council’s budget. It was accepted that Wem’s Council Tax requirement might be one of the highest in Shropshire, but then the cash was needed to support local facilities like the swimming pool, Town Hall and public loos to ensure their survival.

The Town Council declared a vote of no confidence in Shropshire Council over its handling and the wide ranging impact of the whole grant issue, especially when the government had included the money in its assessment of the county authority’s own settlement funding.

It also decided on an urgent letter to the County Council leader and Cabinet Member for Resources in the strongest possible terms objecting to what the authority was doing. Other letters of concern were agreed to the Local Government Minister, North Shropshire MP Mr Owen Paterson, Local Government Association Group Leaders and the Association’s Chief Executive.

Otherwise, the Town Council had little option but to approve, first at its annual precept meeting and then with endorsement at its monthly meeting, a precept of £263,493 compared with the 2013/14 requirement of £238,662. This translates into a rise of 24p per week to £148.88 for anyone in a Band D property, while the 70 percent or more living in A, B and C properties will pay less and those in and over Band E will pay more.

CARING FOR AN ICON

THE town's War Memorial is firmly in the spotlight through discussions prompted by Wem Civic Society. The society has had a handrail put to the processional steps to the memorial in High Street at the front of the Parish Church and now is looking at a possible project to replace the deteriorating paving surrounding the memorial – plus the erection of a specially designed screen between the Cenotaph and Mill Street.

However, the approach to any project will be softly, softly. The Civic Society believes it needs one supervising group, that the proposed group needs to be wider than just the society and that there should be full consultation with local townspeople – hence some Town Council input from its meeting in November. Similarly, the Parish Church and Wem branch Royal British Legion are being involved.

Such is the confined area in which the Memorial currently stands a possible relocation of the monument has been mooted, but the consensus of opinion is for the Memorial to stay put and a protective – but tastefully designed – metal screen erected as most people “accepted the increasing proximity and intrusion” of Mill Street on the Memorial was “detrimental in several ways.”

The Town Council heard how staff and pupils at the Wem Thomas Adams School had helped so far with the design of the screen so that it contained reference to the local rural landscape entwined with battlefield symbols.

However, the society warned of possible difficulties for the design as even since initial discussions county highways had again widened the Mill Street junction, so narrowing the ground still further between the historically listed Memorial and the adjoining church wall.

To use an often used phrase: watch this space!

Support For Pool, Town Hall, Public Loos, Etc, “Essential For Survival”

GIVING TO WORTHY CAUSES

RECREATION in all its forms is again being financially supported by Wem Town Council through its annual precept for 2015-16.

For instance, the council is making a contribution of £58,000 to Wem Swimming and Lifestyle Centre at Bowensfield and has also agreed a deficit guarantee of up to £10,000.

The contribution to Wem Sports and Social Association will again be £18,150.

Then there is Wem Town Hall – “a tremendous asset to the town,” in councillors’ eyes. A contribution of £20,000 was approved and, as with the swimming pool, it was also agreed there should be a deficit guarantee for the coming year – in this instance up to £7,500 funded from reserves.

OTHER HANDOUTS

Eckford Sweet Pea Society £900; Friends of Whitchurch Road Cemetery £1,500; Wem Army Cadets £300; Wem Carnival £500; Wem Christmas Festival lights £3,000; Wem Millennium Green (Aston Street) £1,700; Wem Scout and Guide HQ management committee £350; Wem Youth Centre £2,000; Wem Baptist Church Holiday Bible Club £180; North Salop Wheelers community bus project £100.

JUST A MINUTE.....

A digest of some of the Council's issues since the autumn Bulletin

MORE HOUSING ON "THE WRONG SIDE"?: Controversy often reigns whenever development is proposed east of the local railway crossing and a bid in August for planning permission for 75 homes between Aston Road and Church Lane proved no exception.

Some 50 townspeople turned out to voice their opposition and their relief was palpable when the council backed its planning and transport committee's rejection of the application. Some speakers in the public seats referred to the proposed scheme being "on the wrong side" of the busy railway level crossing and it was also suggested that no further development should be allowed east of the crossing before a strategic scheme was designed to relieve Wem's traffic congestion.

Still east of the level crossing, there was an application for the building of 10 dwellings adjoining Ash Grove off Soulton Road, to which there were objections from Wem Rural Parish Council ultimately backed by the Town Council.

However, the final decisions, as always, lay with Shropshire Council.

SAFETY CONCERNS: Town councillors gave a guarded welcome to plans for a pedestrian zebra crossing near Roden Lodge sheltered housing in Mill Street after hearing that it would not be a signalled crossing due to "funding limitations." Town councillors said they preferred a signalled crossing for safety reasons.

At the same time the council heard that a pedestrian crossing was NOT proposed for near the Parish Church steps in Mill Street, although the provision of low-cost additional signage at this point would be investigated and this particular location monitored.

Also, concern has been expressed about the speed of traffic using Mill Street and it was suggested the installation of a speed-activated warning sign would slow down motorists.

A WEEKLY POLICE SURGERY?: Welcomed in September, Police Sergeant Claire Greenaway spoke of her disappointment at the closure of the front police counter service at Edinburgh House. She explained how it was insufficiently used by people, but she hoped that the alternative might be weekly surgeries open to all members of the public.

COP THIS!: As for the former police station in Barnard Street, Shropshire Council has approved plans which will mean demolition of the former facility and its replacement with six dwellings.

APPEAL SET: It was reported to councillors in December that would-be developers had launched an appeal against refusal of permission for 25 homes on land adjoining The Larches, Shawbury Road, with a hearing to be held in the New Year.

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

THE TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

EAST WARD:	SY4 Address/Tel	Email
David Boddy The Rowans, Mill Street 5EX	234708	boddychristine@hotmail.com
Pauline Dee 17 Chapel Street 5ER	233037	pauline.dee@shropshire.gov.uk
Paul Johnson 55 Eckford Pk 5HL	232035	annpajess_johnson@yahoo.co.uk
Mandy Meakin 5 Station Road 5BQ	234834	mandymeakin@gmail.com
Chris Mellings 37 Kynaston Drive 5DE	234877	chris.mellings@shropshire.gov.uk
Clive Shingler Lower Lacon Caravan Park	232376	clive@llcp.co.uk
Edward Towers 8 Fismes Way 5YD	235283	edwardtowers@btinternet.com
WEST WARD:		
Kathleen Bailey 46 Barnard Street 5EF	234019	
Peter Broomhall 3 Swain Close 5NZ	232573	peterbroomhall@fsmail.net
Rosemary Dodd 18 Marlcroft 5AN	233083	rosemary.dodd@mypostoffice.co.uk
Philip Glover 6 Trentham Close 5AS	809201	philip@glover1.fsmail.net
Connie Granger 1 Barnfield Av 5HT	236460	constancegranger123@btinternet.com
Philip Moyse, MBE JP 7 Marlcroft 5AN	233533	phil.dee@hotmail.co.uk
John Murray 6 Marlcroft 5AN	233536	jmurray@hotmail.co.uk

SHROPSHIRE COUNCILLORS

Chris Mellings 37 Kynaston Drive 5DE	234877	chris.mellings@shropshire.gov.uk
Pauline Dee 17 Chapel Street 5ER	233037	pauline.dee@shropshire.gov.uk

CLERK and TREASURER

Jane Drummond, Town Council Office, Edinburgh House, New Street 5DB – tel 232733 email info@wem.gov.uk

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