

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING  
HELD ON TUESDAY 12<sup>th</sup> MAY 2026  
AT 7.00 P.M. IN THE TOWN HALL, BISHOP'S CASTLE**

**PRESENT:** The Mayor, Councillor J. Dickin, in the Chair.

**Councillors:** Cllr. Perry, Cllr. Carroll, Cllr. Halford, Cllr. Blundell, Cllr. Jones, Cllr. Kosciuczyk, Cllr. Embrey, Cllr. Angell, Cllr. Magill and Cllr. Bromley.

**In attendance:** Mrs S. J. Smith, Assistant Clerk.

50+ members of the public were in attendance.

The Mayor welcomed those present to the meeting.

**1. To receive apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. Gayle.

**2. To agree the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025.**

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025 be approved as a true record. Proposed by Cllr. Perry and seconded by Cllr. Halford.

**3. Matters arising from the Annual Town Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

It was RESOLVED that there were no matters arising from the Annual Town Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025. Proposed by Cllr. Embrey and seconded by Cllr. Blundell.

**RESOLVED:** Council agreed to take Agenda Item 5 before Agenda Item 4. Proposed by Cllr. Perry and seconded by Cllr. Kosciuczyk.

**5. To receive reports from organisations and updates of current/future projects**

**a. Town of Culture:** The Mayor reported that an application had been submitted and gave a presentation to Council outlining the potential benefits to the town should the bid be successful.

**b. Tourism update:** The Mayor reported that Bishop's Castle Town Council had rejoined Visit Shropshire. This work would be facilitated by Enterprise House in recognition of the importance of tourism to the local economy. A new town map had also been produced and would be printed.

**c. Grants:** The 2026–27 grants round is now open. Applications are limited to £500 per application this year, and local organisations were encouraged to apply.

**4. To receive questions and comments from electors**

The Mayor invited members of the public to address the Council.

Bernard Edwards addressed the Council and proposed that a regular monthly meeting be established to consider grant applications, with a view to creating a Bishop's Castle main events fund. The Mayor advised that this initiative was currently being explored and that, in due course, the sharing of equipment and resources could also be considered.

Mike Watkins addressed the Council and asked those councillors who had viewed the 'People's Emergency Briefing', which had been shown on six occasions, for their views. Cllr. Carroll, Cllr. Kosciuczyk and Cllr. Magill commented that the briefing had been clearly

presented, accessible and thought-provoking, and highlighted issues of serious concern. It was suggested that all councillors should view the briefing and that it might also be shown before a Town meeting or at a larger venue to enable wider public attendance, including local politicians. The Mayor thanked the Climate Action Group for its work and commitment.

The tone of the meeting then became notably more strained and confrontational than is usual for an Annual Town Meeting.

The Assistant Clerk asked those present whether they consented to their names being recorded in the minutes in relation to comments made, in accordance with data protection requirements. Verbal consent was given.

It was noted that these minutes are not a verbatim record. During the discussion, the Mayor reminded those present on more than one occasion to refer to the Town Clerk by title rather than by first name.

Geraint Davies raised concerns regarding information published on the Town Council website in relation to the AGAR, noting that the accounts for 2022–23 and 2023–24 had been corrected. He expressed concern regarding the audit process and the adequacy of safeguards for Council business and finances. In response, the Assistant Clerk advised that a detailed internal audit had been undertaken, which identified changes between the cash-based accounting system and the income and expenditure basis, and that these changes were reflected in the corrected figures. It was further reported that the Council had acted on the audit findings by appointing an Assistant Financial Officer with relevant qualifications and experience.

Sue Cooper addressed the Council regarding the complaint's procedure published on the website, noting that it was dated 2013 and contained inaccurate information. She questioned why the policy had not been reviewed at regular intervals and considered this to be to the detriment of residents. She referred to three complaints which, in her view, had not been managed satisfactorily, citing instances of no response, delayed response and solicitor involvement. She also expressed concern regarding the review and updating of policies and procedures, and stated that a complaints committee should have been established to ensure that complaints were dealt with appropriately.

In response, Cllr. Carroll stated that the matters referred to were historical and could not now be remedied, but that lessons had been learned. Cllr. Magill added that complaints had been received and that no resolution had been achieved within the timescales set out in the complaint's procedure.

Maranda Stanley addressed the Council in relation to a matter affecting her neighbouring property. She stated that, during building works undertaken in 2023 to the chimney stack on her property, photographs were taken and concerns were raised with the Town Clerk and Mayor regarding possible damage to the Town Hall chimney. She said that the Town Clerk had advised that the chimney had been inspected and that no damage had been identified. However, she stated that she had not been aware that a builder instructed by the Town Council had accessed her scaffolding to inspect the chimney and considered that the inspection had not been properly undertaken. She further reported that numerous emails had been sent to the Town Clerk, with copies to councillors, and that the matter was ultimately addressed when works were carried out as part of a heritage grant project relating to the Town Clock. She expressed the view that the Town Clerk was not suitable for the post and stated that she was aware of three councillors who had resigned because they were unable to work with him.

Bamber Hawes stated that he had resigned because of difficulties in working with the Town Clerk, and that Andy Stelman, former Deputy Mayor, had also resigned for related reasons. He further commented that too much time had been spent on internal matters to the detriment of external priorities.

Mandy Bryce-Smith speaking on behalf of the Save Our Beds campaign, stated that she had sent more than thirty emails to the Town Clerk regarding the purchase of a bench for the town without receiving a response. She stated that copies of the correspondence had also been sent to all councillors and that no reply had been received. She considered this to reflect poorly on the Town Council.

Andy Stelman stated that, in view of the level of concern and distrust expressed by residents, the Town Council should now address the matters being raised.

Cllr. Carroll observed that the discussion was becoming highly personal and noted that the Town Clerk was not present to respond to the allegations being made. Cllr. Magill asked why he was absent and was informed that he had another prior commitment arising from the change of date for the Annual Town Meeting.

In response to a question from Jill Martin as to whether a vote of no confidence had been taken, Cllr. Magill stated that the Mayor had called a meeting in July 2025 because of concerns regarding the standard of work and competence of the Town Clerk, and that a unanimous vote of no confidence had taken place. She further stated that a file of evidence compiled by the mayor, herself, and other councillors had been presented to staffing and finance meetings and that she had sought over a period of time to address the issues identified. She expressed the opinion that dismissal of the Town Clerk would be the most appropriate course of action.

Mr Green addressed the meeting and stated that, following discussions with individuals he described as experts, he had been advised that there were serious concerns regarding the Council's financial management and compliance. He further stated the view that the Council was non-compliant, making significant payments and potentially insolvent.

Mr Green then put a number of questions to the Assistant Clerk and requested direct responses. The Assistant Clerk was unable at that time to answer questions concerning the 2024 audit and year-on-year expenditure comparisons. Mr Green referred to information contained within an internal audit report regarding unclaimed VAT of £22,640. The Assistant Clerk confirmed that the VAT had subsequently been recovered from HMRC.

During this exchange, the Mayor asked Mr Green on two occasions to submit his questions in writing so that a formal response could be provided. Cllr. Houghton also addressed the meeting to state that concerns had been heard and reiterated that questions should be submitted in writing. Mr Green nevertheless continued with his line of questioning.

Sue Wilmer asked that councillors introduce themselves. The Mayor apologised that this had not been done at the start of the meeting, following which councillors and the Assistant Clerk introduced themselves to those in attendance.

Jenny Olivent asked what progress had been made in relation to road markings on the High Street. The Mayor acknowledged the work that Cllr. Houghton had undertaken on this matter. Cllr. Houghton advised that the matter had remained unresolved since the post-pandemic period. She reported that she had spoken that day with the Head of Highways and the relevant

Portfolio Holder regarding road lining and parking spaces. She asked residents not to leave SORN vehicles in public places, including car parks. She also outlined the process and approximate cost (£5,000) of obtaining a traffic order for parking enforcement and asked whether the Town Council might consider applying for an environmental grant, potentially on a match-funded basis. The Assistant Clerk advised that the grant window was closed. It was also noted that Church Preen had established a volunteer group to undertake minor highways works.

Sue Wilmer noted that the bollards in the Market Square, intended to prevent parking on both sides of the road, might cause damage to vehicles. It was further noted that white lines were present in passing places but that there was no corresponding 'no parking' signage. The Mayor advised that a one-way system might offer a way forward and that an informal trial would take place when the road was closed. Consideration was also given to issuing a questionnaire regarding a possible one-way system.

Jo Pritchard asked whether, if the Town of Culture bid were successful, funding might be used to improve the toilets in the Auction Yard. The Mayor responded that the toilets were not currently being refurbished because of budget reductions and that a Public Works Loan would be required in order to undertake the works.

Alison Goldstone addressed the meeting and stated that, notwithstanding the concerns and difficulties raised, she remained grateful for the hard work undertaken and thanked councillors accordingly.

Andrew Goughs, who stated that he had not previously been aware of the issues raised, asked whether the Town Clerk would now respond to emails.

Geraint Davies commented that the questioning was difficult for the Council to hear and that it was not possible to avoid the perception that the comments were directed at Madam Clerk.

In his closing remarks, the Mayor acknowledged the comments made, thanked those present for attending and for their contributions, and stated his wish for the Council to maintain an outward-looking focus.

The Mayor suggested that a scrutiny committee could be established to monitor matters arising and responses to them. Cllr. Magill requested that an extraordinary meeting be convened to consider the issues raised in greater detail. The Mayor also conveyed birthday wishes to Cllr. Houghton on behalf of the Council.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.20 p.m.