DROITWICH SPA TOWN COUNCIL

**DROITWICH SPA TOWN MEETING - LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Annual Droitwich Spa Town Meeting held in the Main Hall, Community Hall, Heritage Way, Droitwich Spa on Monday, 13 March 2023 at 6.30 pm.

# A G E N D A

1. To confirm the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 9 May 2022 (delay attributed to Pandemic which prevented meetings in 2020 &2021).
2. To receive the reports of the Town Mayor 2022/23 and the Chairmen of the Council’s Standing Committees.
3. To receive items to be referred to the Town Council by members of the public.
4. Communications as permitted by the Mayor.

~oooOOOooo~

# MINUTES

The Town Mayor and 17 Town Councillors were in attendance, of which 7 were District Councillors and 2 were County Councillors.

Invited representatives present were Jayne Pickering – Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer for Wychavon District Council and Sergeant Sarah Kent & Inspector Dave Wise of West Mercia Constabulary.

The meeting was attended by 39 Town electors.

PRESS ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Ryan Smith, Reporter for the ‘Droitwich Standard’ Newspaper.

A public notice convening the meeting had been displayed on noticeboards at St Richards House (inside and outside the premises) and at the Community Hall (inside and outside the premises) for the required period. Copies of the Agenda, Mayor’s & Chairman’s Standing Committee Reports and Minutes of the last Town Meeting held on 9 May 2022 were made available at the meeting.

The Town Mayor - Councillor G Duffy took the Chair and welcomed invited guests and members of the public present.

Councillor Duffy then introduced:-

Councillor Mrs Christine Bowden – Chairman of the Community & Amenities

Committee.

Councillor GR Brookes - Chairman of Planning Committee & Leader of the Town Council.

Councillor WT Moy - Chairman of Resources Committee.

The Mayor advised that there were other members of the Town Council that were in attendance at the meeting, who would be speaking in their capacity as residents.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: There had been no apologies for absence submitted.

MINUTES: the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 9 May 2022 were presented for adoption. There were no matters arising.

REPORTS: The Mayor referred to his written report that had been circulated. The Mayor stated that it had been a great honour and privilege to represent Droitwich Spa throughout the past year covering a wide range of Civic engagements in all parts of the Town, District and further afield. The cumulative three year impact of the pandemic, global conflict and general economic uncertainty continues to present difficult challenges and circumstances for everyone. To conclude the Mayor expressed appreciation to fellow Councillors and the Town Council Officers for their support.

The Mayor then invited the Chairman of the Town Council Community & Amenities Committee – Councillor Mrs C Bowden to present her report, summarising various matters including Community Grants, Municipal Planting arrangements, Band Concerts programme and an overview of the Town Events through the past twelve months.

Councillor GR Brookes presented the Planning Committee report and highlighted three key strategic aspects from the past year as follows. The launch of the Wychavon District Council -Town Centre Prospectus for Droitwich Spa in May 2022, the resurrection and progress made with the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) project from July 2022 and the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review (SWDPR) Regulation 19 public consultation event and subsequent resolved corporate opinion response from the Town Council during November & December 2022.

Councillor WT Moy, Chairman of the Resources Committee then presented and advised upon the Resources Committee report. Special mention included the zero increase on the precept for 2023/2024 – representing the third successive year, the healthy financial position and good overall standards for due diligence and governance. Special mention was made towards the various strategic projects which it is anticipated will progress further post Elections after May 2023.

Thereafter the Mayor invited residents at the meeting to speak on their matters of concern.

* Councillor Alan Humphries, 17 West Street, Droitwich Spa.

Councillor Humphries commented that in his opinion the decision to suspend the Neighbourhood Plan project in September 2018 was correct, the original project would have been cost neutral and he believes that the latest incarnation devalues the contribution made by other people. The comments were noted.

* Mr Mike Meredith (Civic Society), Aquarius, Hanbury Road, Droitwich Spa.

With regard to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, interest was expressed for the Civic Society to contribute and join. Councillor Brookes acknowledged & welcomed the request and asked that contact be made through the Town Clerk to take arrangements forward. Clarification was made that the Steering Group was not a Town Council Committee.

* Mr Richard Whittle, 5 Suffolk Way, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Whittle commented that there was a lot of empty shop units in the town centre and not enough variety. The opinion was put forward that a possible solution could be free parking in town centre public car parks for two hours. Further opinion mentioned with this regard included - A statistic that Morrison’s Supermarket trade had dropped by 15 % following reinstatement of parking charges after the pandemic period, that traders were struggling to continue and closure of the High Street to all traffic during Town Centre Events would be welcomed by retailers. The request was made for Wychavon District Council Elected Members to support consideration for free parking.

Councillor RJ Morris explained that car parking revenue concessions was a matter for consideration by the District Council. He agreed to raise the matter at Wychavon to see what options were in scope.

* Mrs Val Humphries, 17 West Street, Droitwich Spa.

Mrs Humphries acknowledged that it was pleasing to see that the Weekly Charter Market was set to resume in April. It was commented that Town Events should do more to involve local businesses such as allowing temporary stalls and a road closure for the High Street. Also it was commented that the recent announcement of closure for the Spice Fusion Restaurant on St Andrews Road was disappointing news.

The comments were noted .Councillor GR Brookes updated from the perspective of the County Council that infrastructure was in place to enable temporary closure of the High Street for Events and Festivals. It was explained that the consensus of opinion from High Street traders and residents was not always in favour of the road being closed for many different reasons – including delivery traffic being inhibited , loss and interruption to passing trade for the take away food businesses and disruption created for retailers , customers and residential properties over on street parking.

Councillor RJ Morris expressed the opinion that there were no firm plans in place to pedestrianize the High Street permanently, although this was mentioned as an aspirational option for future consideration within the Wychavon District Council – Town Centre Prospectus launched in May 2022. Councillor Morris added that a dialogue between traders would be useful along the lines of a “Mini Chamber of Trade” helping to coordinate ideas and work together.

* Mr Mark Heel, 43 Burrish Street, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Heel expressed disappointment with Healthcare provision in the Town including the opinion commentated upon that , - Emergency Doctors referrals required two week’s notice for appointments & prescription ordering required two week’s notice for collection. Mr Heel asked for consideration that the Towns Health and Schools provision was made suitable for the population size.

The Mayor acknowledged and noted the comments. It was explained that Health Care and Education provision were complicated matters assigned to the relevant Statutory Authorities. By example Doctors Services provision is determined by first registration of patient numbers and statistically many people do not register with practices until the occasions that they require a medical referral. This is a contributory factor towards some of the strain being encountered by local Health Care.

* Mr Geoffrey Stollard, 30 Old Coach Road, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Stollard expressed concern that there may be plans to pedestrianize the High Street and the opinion that business rates were too high for many retailers to afford.

Councillor RJ Morris clarified that the setting of business rates was a matter for Wychavon District Council and he reiterated an assurance that there were currently no firm plans to pedestrianize the High Street.

* Councillor CM Murray, 2 Blackfriars Avenue, Droitwich Spa.

Councillor Murray asked what measures are in place after the May 2023 Elections for the Neighbourhood Development Plan project ?

The Mayor clarified that the two mandates to procced with the resurrection of the NDP project and the contractual appointment of the professional Consultant are legal decisions reached at the Town Council Extra Ordinary Meeting on 18th July 2022. To this effect post- election these decisions still stand and any change in outlook would require further and wider informed consideration by Full Council including cost implications.

* Mrs Val Humphries, 17 West Street, Droitwich Spa.

Mrs Humphries commented that the recent refurbishment work for some of the underpasses had improved the internal lighting, and asked what further plans were in place for footpath lighting near to St Nicholas Church and the underpass beneath the Salt Way adjacent to the Medical Centre on Ombersley Street?

The Mayor clarified that Railway Station underpass refurbishment marked the final stage of the collaborative WDC & DSTC programme (The West Prjrct and Beyond) which is not extended to cover the additional Medical Centre underpass.

Councillor RJ Morris explained that footpath lighting was within the remit of the County Council Highways - Street Lighting Department. It was updated that there may be some additional foot path resurfacing repairs available for the footpath next to St Nicholas Church on the approach to the railway Station underpass.

* Mr John Armstrong, 7 Westwood Close, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Armstrong raised about the importance of the Heritage connection with John Hemming for Droitwich Spa. With 2023 marking the 400th anniversary year some other places have wider celebrations planned - including yearlong coverage in Stratford upon Avon and a variety of large activities in London. It was raised whether Droitwich Spa will consider a suitable celebration to mark this anniversary year?

Councillor AM Sinton suggested that a commemorative plaque may make an appropriate addition at St Peters Church and mentioned that the Heritage Centre / Museum has a small pop- up exhibition already on display about the life of John Hemming.

* Mr Mark Heel, 43 Burrish Street, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Heel complained about the condition of the Highfield pedestrian underpass beneath the Salt Way and the intersection of Worcester Road near Castle Hill. The problems were described as lifted paving slaps in need of repair and surface water run off drains in need of clearance. Mr Heel added that it was disappointing that these issues had not been resolved despite previous reporting and that the problems created difficulties for people using the busy underpass route.

Councillor GR Brookes confirmed that these issues were the responsibility of WCC Highways Department. Reports for any defects can be pin pointed, registered and progress tracked on line, using the digital - “report it” portal at [www.worcestershire.gov.uk](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk)

* Mr Mike Meredith (Civic Society), Aquarius, Hanbury Road, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Meredith expressed disappointment that the ongoing road works near to Queen Street and the Hanbury Road cross roads in Droitwich Spa town centre have caused a lot of congestion and disruption for traffic and residents. It was raised whether signage and the updating of information for the reason of the works can be improved.

Councillor GR Brookes explained that these were WCC Highways responsibilities and he understood that the recent problems had originated first from scheduled road resurfacing work being interrupted and delayed by emergency water infrastructure works in the same location. The feedback regarding the coordination and improvements to notice and signage was noted.

* Mr Mark Heel, 43 Burrish Street, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Heel complained about the ongoing restricted traffic flow and management at the Worcester Road- Copcut- Pulley Lane junction,

Councillor RJ Morris acknowledged the disruption and delays this ongoing situation was causing for road users including many residents and daily commuters. It was explained that this scheme had been one of several developer designed and led road projects in the wider County which at this stage had not been fully accepted for adoption by the County Highways Department. Scrutiny and monitoring are ongoing because a series of road traffic accidents, had necessitated that the layout of the scheme was now subject to further road safety auditing. Part of the audit process necessitates traffic management restrictions to be implemented to control the flow. Councillor Morris reassured that a lot of effort was being taken forward to resolve the position between WCC Highways, Road Safety Auditors and the Developer (Redrow Homes).

* Mr Geoffrey Stollard, 30 Old Coach Road, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Stollard asked that any additional costs for any remedial measures for the Copcut junction be passed to the Developer responsible for designing and leading the Scheme.

The comments were duly noted.

* Mr Richard Whittle, 5 Suffolk Way, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Whittle raised that school places provision should be an important consideration to include within the Neighbourhood Development Plan project.

The comments were duly noted.

* Mr John Dudley, 17 St Josephs Close , Droitwich Spa

Mr Dudley asked how new residents moving to the Town can find out about facilities.

The Mayor responded that information was readily available through the 3 Councils websites (Town, District and County), the Council for Voluntary Services, the Heritage & Tourist Information Centre and in publications including the WDC - Town Centre Prospectus (also available online).

* Mr Mark Heel, 43 Burrish Street, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Heel expressed disappointment towards the dilapidated and deteriorating condition of the former Raven Hotel site in the town centre, as well as the delays with progressing the development. The desire to resurrect the Brine Baths offering for the town was also mentioned.

Councillor RJ Morris and Jayne Pickering (Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer for Wychavon District Council) explained that the former Raven Site development was progressing but a complicated process. The agreement was currently subject to ongoing Section 106 monies negotiation taking place between the developer/owner and the District Council- Planning Authority. Councillor AM Sinton added that the process and delays were frustrating for everybody involved including many residents, but reassured that matters were proceeding.

Sergeant Sarah Kent from West Mercia Police updated that the trespass issues attributed to people breaking into the buildings and site were concerning and presented a serious health & safety risk to the perpetrators due to the derelict site condition. The Police Team are actively supporting through advise & working with the owner /developer and other connected Agencies to help resolve these problems.

* Mr Mark Heel, 43 Burrish Street, Droitwich Spa.

Mr Heel commended the Town Council for the Heritage and Tourist Information Centre, the standard of the Towns Municipal planting and the summer programme of Sunday band concerts.

* Councillor WT Moy, 5 Leycroft, Droitwich Spa.

Councillor Moy commented that the development of the former Raven Hotel site and the further consideration towards resurrection of the Brine Baths facility would enhance the Towns rich heritage and help attract tourism.

There being no further questions or comments, and no communications for consideration, the Mayor concluded the meeting at 8.05pm. Councillor Duffy thanked the representatives from Wychavon District Council and West Mercia Police for their attendance and support as well as members of the public for their comments and questions.