

The Much Wenlock Town and Parish Plan

A Summary of Progress. April 2008



In March 2006 the findings of a detailed survey of the views of people in Much Wenlock was published. Volunteers conducted the survey in a partnership with the Town Council. First your main concerns were recorded. Then an action plan identified targets for improvement.

Since the Plan was published a volunteer group has monitored progress and put pressure on the relevant authorities.

The work of the volunteer Monitoring Group ended in March 2008. This report identifies where progress has been made following the Action Plan. It also clarifies what remains to be done to act on the views of local residents.

We hope that this report will help the Town Council to set priorities for action which respect local views.

Traffic-Management, Transport and Parking.

Progress has been made in resolving some of your main concerns. The County Council has carried out a traffic survey. New speed limits are proposed in some parts of the town and in Farley. There are also plans to improve safety in the narrow part of Sheinton Street. Work has also taken place to improve safety for road users and pedestrians at the Gaskell Arms corner.

Responsibility for parking regulations has changed and enforcement of the law is improving but a new car park, in Falcon Court, is not yet open for public use.



Local 'Friendly Bus' services have now been improved with Town Council support. Government initiatives on free bus travel for older people may help to increase demand and this may result in more regular services.

Greater progress is required in persuading the County and Regional authorities to build the by-pass, which was demanded by such a high proportion of the residents of Much Wenlock. This would improve pedestrian safety and reduce damage to our environment. The Town Council will need to maintain pressure to secure progress.

There is still a need for the Town Council to promote a traffic plan for the town. This should include measures for restricting traffic close to the town centre and planning better parking facilities for the future. This has become an even higher priority with the focus on Much Wenlock in the lead up to the 2012 Olympics.

Housing.

Residents were concerned that the proportion of new homes built in Much Wenlock, for sale at market prices, was higher than elsewhere in the District. Few affordable homes were being built for local people. The findings of the plan, presented jointly by the Civic Society and by the Town Council, persuaded the planning inspector to reject plans for a large new housing development off Bridgnorth Road.

Since the publication of the Plan no new houses have been built through a registered social landlord as affordable homes and targets set for the District Council have not been met.

40 new houses have been built for sale at market prices since March 2003. In the same period no new affordable homes have been completed.

It was disappointing that, despite the findings of the Parish Plan survey, the Falcon Court development did not specify any affordable homes.



A housing survey, carried out by the District Council, was not as extensive as that for the Parish Plan. It confirmed the need for more affordable homes. No action has yet been taken by the District Council to build a partnership with a Housing Association to ensure a consistent supply of affordable homes.

The floods of June 2007 also made many more people aware of the dangers of excessive house building.

The responsibility falls to the Town Council to ensure that any new development is sustainable and meets the wishes of local people. Affordable housing, through a social landlord, must both

maintain the town's character and also provide low- cost housing for local people.

Environment & Conservation.

The survey demonstrated a desire to maintain the town's character, and improve its environment. Recommendations included recycling to include plastics and cardboard, elimination of litter and dog mess, improved maintenance of footpaths and a removal of the barbed wire fencing installed by landowners.

In October 2007 Shropshire Waste Partnership (SWP) took over responsibility for refuse collection from Bridgnorth District Council. Early indications from SWP are encouraging. They aim to have kerbside collection for plastics by 2010. It seems there is little demand for recycled cardboard but this situation should be kept under review. Recycling banks and collection points are options for the future.

Dog fouling remains a problem. The District Council and the Police are working together to curb the actions of a few who are endangering health. Fixed Penalty Notices will be issued to people who transgress. This will apply to both dog mess and litter. The scheme should be fully operational by March/April.

There are funds for additional bins and the

Town Council will help to agree their numbers and their location.

A strong commitment has been shown by local groups and the Countryside Action Team of Shropshire County Council to preserve, maintain and improve footpaths and rights of way.

Great emphasis is being placed on trying to minimise obstacles, such as stiles, and provide easier access to the countryside. The use of barbed wire on fence posts along footways remains under the control of landowners. Safety issues may arise where barbed wire has been used to define a footpath.



There has been much progress but the Town Council will need to remain vigilant on all of the issues identified in the action plan. Only then can it hope to meet the aspirations of those who made such a positive response to the initial survey.

Employment and Retailing.

Living and working locally brings economic, social and environmental benefits which people very widely recognise. Continued support for local businesses, both retail and commercial, is helping to maintain the town's vitality.

One limit on local employment is the lack of enough small premises. Research has revealed the occasional availability of such premises on the Willey Estate or at Maws Craft Centre, Jackfield.

Work related courses and / or detailed guidance on starting a small business is available from a variety of sources such as; the Prince's Trust; Mustard; Shell Live Wire; Young Enterprise; SCAT; Walford; Learn Direct; STIAG; Shropshire Business Link.

Since the Plan was published additional land has been made available in Much Wenlock for industrial and commercial use.

Quarry sites in the area can also be used for business purposes. Applications for using a quarry in this way are first considered by Bridgnorth District Council which has to protect "the quality of life" by restricting "noise, vibration, dust, fumes and other forms of disturbance", as set out in the District Local Plan.

The Town Council can do little to increase employment directly. However, it can have

an influence on planning policies and practices which can affect employment opportunities for local people.

Tourism.

Since the initial survey the potential benefit of tourism to the town and parish has increased. This is a result of the plans for the Olympics in London in 2012. The Wenlock Olympian Society is already actively fostering awareness both nationally and internationally about the heritage of William Penny Brookes in Much Wenlock.

Action is being taken to make the town more tourist friendly. The 'Monitoring Group' helped obtain funds through the 'Better Welcome for Market Towns' initiative. Benefits will include better marketing and signage of tourist attractions.



Parking remains a serious problem. However, it is hoped that 47 spaces in the Falcon Court car park will shortly be made available.

It is also encouraging to learn that, after a period of uncertainty, the District Council is to fund new public toilets in the St Mary's Lane car park as well as making

funds available to improve the Queen's St toilets.



The Much Wenlock link to the 2012 Olympics has increased interest from the County Council in the Much Wenlock Museum. Its profile has been higher and threatened staffing cuts have been minimised.

Funds have been provided to digitise and to improve access to documents both in the Museum and in the Much Wenlock Archives.

Considerable progress has been achieved in meeting the aims of the Action Plan from the initial survey. It will be a challenge to maintain that progress.

The Town Council 2012 group will be aware of the need to continue to create more parking spaces, preferably outside the immediate town centre.

A traffic management plan would be helpful in ensuring that increasing visitor numbers do not damage the town's environment or its tranquil setting .

As visitor numbers increase local businesses may need to review their opening hours to gain maximum benefit from this important source of revenue.

Young People.

Eight priorities were identified in the Action Plan to improve opportunities for young people. Progress has been made on some of these, but much remains to be done if the initial aspirations are to be met.

Funds have now been approved to refurbish and improve the playground on the Gaskell Field. This project has largely relied for its success on community effort and lottery funding.

The 'Switch on Shropshire' Broadplace, after a well attended opening, is now into its second year. A variety of courses are offered for young people to improve their IT skills. The Fire Station venue is ideal.

The Youth Club, open weekly, is led by a trained Youth Worker. The new Army Cadet Force unit is most welcome and offers new opportunities for young people in the area.



The new pedestrian refuge at the Gaskell Arms corner and the changes planned in Sheinton Street should

improve safety for children on their way to school.

The rebuilding of the William Brookes School, announced after the Action Plan was published, ought to offer better facilities for young people in leisure, the arts and in sport.

Progress in meeting the aims of the action plan for young people will now rest with the Town Council. Encouraging young people to elect representatives to put forward their views might have great benefits.

Young people have to travel outside Much Wenlock to some leisure facilities. Volunteers are needed to help groups to go on trips, including those organised by the youth service.

Major priorities which still need to be pursued include improving road safety at the Birchfield Garage and developing a Youth Shelter for the town. Young people also strongly endorsed the wider public demand for a better swimming pool and a floodlit sports surface.

Health.

There have been a number of improvements in health provision in Much Wenlock since the initial report.

'The Lodge', Lady Forester Nursing home is now the base for District Nurses. This centre now serves an

area from Albrighton to Cressage. District Nurses will also support Shropdoc, the out of hours service.

There is also funding for an NHS Dental surgery to be located in Much Wenlock in the near future.



G.P. beds in the Nursing Home are still operational and paid for by the PCT [Primary Care Trust]. A planning application has been approved for an extension to the Nursing Home. There will be 11 apartments in the main building and 10 new flats.

In light of the increasing number of people over the age of 85, the PCT is considering how better support can be given to people in their own homes.

Services for Physiotherapy and Chiropody are now located in Bridgnorth. Additional services, eg neurology, may soon also be available there.

The surgeries at Much Wenlock and at Cressage each lack adequate space. Sadly, Much Wenlock is only 14th on the list for PCT investment. At the same

time there is a need to identify a suitable site for a new medical centre.

We hope that the Town Council will note the need for land and will closely monitor all developments in Health. Interventions by the Council should ensure positive outcomes for the people of Much Wenlock.

Community Facilities and Leisure.

The wishes of local people as set out in the Plan centred particularly on improving the swimming pool and Leisure Centre, and on providing floodlights for the pitches. The link between William Penny Brookes and the Olympic movement ought to be useful in improving local sports facilities.



The 'Monitoring Group' has been represented at meetings connected with exciting opportunities for leisure created by the planned developments at William Brookes School.

The current budget for school rebuilding does not include provision for enhanced leisure facilities.

These would, therefore, require separate financing. A 'professional' fund raiser has been appointed to explore all opportunities for financing 'Arts' and 'Leisure' projects. These might include not only an improved pool and leisure centre but also a multi-use games area with floodlights and a new running track.

The evidence seems to show that the period leading up to 2012 will remain a difficult time to fund local community projects. A high proportion of the available funding is being directed to provide Olympic Games facilities.

There has been considerable progress in other areas identified in the Action Plan. Grants from the 'Aggregates Fund' and from the 'Garfield Weston Foundation' along with the District and Town Councils enabled the management committee at the Priory Hall to repair the roof and improve its insulation. A grant from 'Awards for All' then enabled the installation of a much improved central heating system. 'Help the Aged' also assisted with funds for a Hearing Loop and Public Address system.

There has also been success in improving the children's play facilities at the Gaskell Fields. This was the result of sustained pressure by a small group of grandparents and

parents who then gained support from the Town Council. Funding has now been secured through the Bridgnorth District Council for improvements to the entire play area which will be completed during 2008.

The Town Council will need to be insistent if sports and leisure facilities are to be improved. The strength of the local demand for improvements was clearly expressed in the survey. The move to a new Local Government structure must not be made an excuse for further delay in making these improvements.

Local Government.

The Local Government Action Plan identified four distinct areas where it was felt that progress ought to be made. It has been encouraging to note that so much has been achieved.

The 2007 local elections saw a major change in the composition of the Town Council following the retirement of several long serving members.

The Town Council is now reporting its proceedings regularly in the Wenlock Herald and the names of Councillors are also being more widely publicised. The Town Council Website is also a valuable source of information for local people.

The success of community action since the publication of the Town and Parish Plan has been encouraging.



Action groups have been formed seeking progress from relevant authorities on several issues. They have included groups seeking action on children's play facilities, on improved road safety and more recently on managing the flooding risks. They seem to have helped to secure a more positive response from the County, District and Town Councils and from other authorities such as Severn Trent and the Environment Agency.

Empowerment of people within the community may have derived in part from knowing, through the findings in the plan, about the strength of feeling in the community on the issues.

One area on which the Town Council may now wish to concentrate is in involving young people more widely. The election by young people of their own representatives, to make their views known to the council, could have substantial benefits.

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Crime Prevention, Police & Fire Services.

The neighbourhood police officer ensures liaison with the Town Council and information to the public via the 'Neighbourhood Watch' letter. The appointment of a Community Support Officer has been welcomed by residents, who have already noted some improvements.

CCTV coverage has been improved with a panning capability and new camera. These are linked to digital equipment and are regularly monitored by the police.

The agency 'Parkright' now deals with parking offences. Residents and visitors are urged to use the available car parks instead of the streets. The new Falcon Court car park will soon provide additional parking.

The Town Council continues to give its full support to the maintenance of the local 'retained' Fire Service, which provided excellent service to local residents during the floods. The preservation of old and historic buildings remains of particular concern in Much Wenlock in case of fire.

The Town Council plays a key role in encouraging residents to support the neighbourhood watch scheme and also in encouraging volunteers to join the local fire service.

Ed. Howard Horsley and Graham Jones.
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The excellent response of the townspeople and the efforts of those who conducted the survey and produced the Plan have been rewarded by major progress on several issues raised by residents. Much still remains to be done.

The Plan has provided strong and reliable evidence of public opinion on important issues in Much Wenlock. Co-operation between the Town Council and local pressure groups has proved particularly effective in improving the situation. On issues as varied as resisting over-development, improving road safety, refurbishing the Priory Hall, reducing flooding risks and redeveloping a play area, this pattern of co-operation has proved of value.

We believe this model should be encouraged. The new Unitary local government system could reduce local influence on decisions which affect the parish. The Town Council's ability to influence decisions will remain greatest when it can demonstrate strong local support.

To honour people's views the Much Wenlock Town Council will need to exert strong influence within the Unitary system. Priorities for action include building more affordable homes while preventing over-development, improving leisure facilities, and, vitally, agreeing a funded traffic plan and ensuring the early building of the relief road demanded by residents.