

**Notes on the Meeting with Rt Hon Owen Paterson, Town Mayors and Clerks of
Ellesmere, Oswestry, Wem and Whitchurch Town Councils**

PRESENT:	Rt Hon Owen Paterson (OP)	MP
	Cllr P Goulbourne (PG)	Mayor of Ellesmere Town Council
	Cllr P Glover (PG Wem)	Mayor of Wem Town Council
	Cllr B Duffy (BD)	Mayor of Whitchurch Town Council
	Cllr D Kerr (DK)	Mayor of Oswestry Town Council
	Mr A Roberts (AR)	Town Clerk to Oswestry Town Council
	Mrs P O'Hagan (PO)	Town Clerk to Wem Town Council
	Miss J Butterworth (JB)	Town Clerk to Ellesmere Town Council
	Mrs J Hynes (JH)	Deputy Clerk to Ellesmere Town Council

Cllr Goulbourne thanked everyone for attending and invited AR to open discussions.

Role of Town Councils in the sustainable regeneration of Shropshire – access to grant pots

Oswestry Town Council were lucky to receive funding from Shropshire Council to invest into their High Street regeneration. It was felt unfair that the town and parish councils had to bid against each other to Shropshire Council to apply for the funding, it would be excellent if town and parish councils were able to bid for funding directly. It was agreed that being able to apply for direct funding would be more beneficial and advantageous for smaller town and parish councils, PO commented that Wem Town Council had also bid for the High Street funding, although they didn't feel their application was considered of the same merit due to Oswestry being in a stronger position as a council with more money to match fund, which was frustrating, she thinks that Town and Parish Council's need more support and recognition. OP expressed that he would like to see Shropshire have a stronger voice and would like to see us reunited Shropshire with Telford and Wrekin to create this, he is fully supportive of more power being given to T & PC's.

Actions: It was agreed that AR write a combined letter on behalf of the North Shropshire Market Towns to OP who will then write to Robert Jenrick in support for greater recognition of town and parish councils and for them to be granted greater powers to access funding opportunities.

Greener Planning Policy – Call for clearer guidance.

The need for high energy efficient housing and clearer planning guidance and greater planning controls was discussed. It was felt that local councils should be given the power to oppose inappropriate building in their areas, for instance on flood plains. Concerns were raised over the efficiency of the country's electricity supply and its ability to supply power for a greener environment, it was thought that the infrastructure would need greater improvement before delivery is successful. Further concerns were discussed over the current loft insulation schemes and it was highlighted that the funding was not getting to the people most in need. OP explained that he felt achieving Zero Carbon within the next 9 years was unrealistic, however making homes more

energy efficient is a far more achievable goal. Nobody had raised the issues regarding the loft insulation schemes with him before and he would be happy to offer his support on this matter.

Actions: Oswestry TC will write to OP to gain his support in raising the inadequacy of the current loft insulation support scheme.

Community Governance Review

As most Town Councils are surrounded by Parish Councils, they all encounter the same issues when building on parish boundaries occurs, which is that the building is outside the urban boundary, so the funds go to the parishes, yet the residents of these areas use the services provided by the towns who receive no contribution towards the services that they provide. The inequality of council tax between towns and parishes was also discussed as well as the need for some of the very small parishes to amalgamate. It agreed that it is imperative to raise all of these issues during the Community Governance reviews. OP urged all councils to have a clear idea of what it is they need and will agree to before entering talks with their local parishes, so that a united response can be submitted.

Highways - Health & Safety concerns relating to Shropshire roads

The extremely poor condition of the roads and the ineffective highways maintenance across Shropshire was discussed.

PG reported on health and safety concerns over a dangerous stretch of the A495 at Cambridge Court in Ellesmere which has seen numerous accidents and a very near fatal accident which left a husband and wife with extensive injuries.

The matter of social distancing measures within town centres was raised and it was questioned if the local towns were going to be consulted on removal of the current measures and whether future plans for the management and ownership of these areas going forward. DK reported that despite efforts to discuss this with Shropshire Council no response had been received.

PO commented that Shropshire towns are desperate to evolve and that Town and Parish councils need to be trusted to shape their towns for the good of their communities. OP offered his support.

OP expressed that there are some good local level opportunities to discuss highway and asset ownership schemes at the moment, he encouraged the local councils to devise their own schemes and contact Shropshire Council.

JB asked OP if he would support the Town Council's concerns regarding the A495 near Cambridge Court in a bid to get Shropshire Council to take the concerns seriously, to which he agreed.

Actions:

Town Councils that would like to have more engagement over the in the future management or ownership of highways within their towns, should devise a plan and engage with Shropshire Council.

Ellesmere TC will write a letter to Shropshire Council regarding Cambridge Court junction and copy to OP for his support.

Broadband & Mobile Phone Connection issues Shropshire.

The frustration over the poor connection issues around the area were heard. OP said that he has spent a lot of time campaigning for better connections here. The Government reached it's target to extend superfast broadband to 95% of the UK in 2017 but North Shropshire is still in the 5%, of rural areas being left behind, which is extremely frustrating and damaging. He has also been in talks with Airband UK, however there are also restrictions to its use in certain areas.

Actions: Any councils that want OP's support to obtain better connections in their areas are to write to him directly.

Direct access to the southbound platform of Whitchurch Railway Station.

BD explained that the only access to and from the southbound platform at Whitchurch railway station is via a footbridge, she asked how Whitchurch TC can get help to try and improve the accessibility of the platform.

OP highlighted that the stations in Shropshire are controlled by a company in Wales, which can sometimes make getting things done difficult. He explained that he has lobbied on Whitchurch's behalf in the past but feels that it is time to re-address the matter by writing to the Chancellor again. He also pointed out that Ken Skates the Welsh Minister for Economy and transport lives locally and may be understanding to the situation.

PO highlighted that Wem railway station has also experienced problems, they have been waiting for 18 months to see the installation of a new ticket machine at the station, which will hopefully be completed by the end of the month.

Actions: Whitchurch TC to write to OP for his support over the accessibility of Whitchurch station platform.

Standards of Councillor's behaviour and when the recommendations will be enacted.

BD asked that with bad behaviour increasing across the country by way of bullying and harassment, how council employees be sure to have protection under employment law. The standards consultation has happened, but when will this be brought in as law?

OP explained that he attended a meeting with David Preston with, then Junior Minister Rishi Sunak to discuss this matter, but he has not heard anything further he was under the impression that it was all going ahead, he will chase the matter up. In the meantime, he suggested that councils write to NALC to investigate the situation further.

Actions:

OP will chase the progress discuss this matter with fellow MP's.

Individual Council's to investigate the matter with NALC.

Remote meetings

With face-to-face meetings due to return from May, the general feeling was that remote meetings were good in their place, OP thinks that we should return to face to face meetings post Covid. AR shared that when face to face meetings return in May, they will be forced as a council to hire an alternative venue to accommodate all councillors whilst adhering to the social distancing. PG reported the SALC are pushing for more freedom to hold virtual meetings going forward as they have proved popular and well attended, it was agreed that this is another example of where trust

should be placed in local councils, so they can decide when it would best to hold a face to face or virtual meetings.

As the meeting drew to a close, OP reminded everyone that if they need his support to write to him, preferably one issue per letter for ease of response and forward actioning.