

Ludlow Annual Town Residents Meeting

MINUTES

Minutes of a meeting of the **ANNUAL TOWN RESIDENTS MEETING** held at Methodist Church, Broad Street, Ludlow on **MONDAY 19th May 2025** at **7.00PM**

ATM/01 PRESENT

Mayor:	Councillor Lyle
Councillors:	Addis; Childs; Cowell; Ginger; Harris; Maxwell-Muller; Owen; Parry; Scott-Bell; Tapley; Taylor
Officers:	Gina Wilding, Town Clerk Kate Adams, Deputy Town Clerk Kim Pickford, Communications & Marketing Officer Helen Jones, Senior Admin Assistant
Unitary Councillors:	Parry
Members of the public:	60

ATM/02 WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR

The Mayor Councillor Lyle welcomed everyone.

ATM/03 PRESENTATION FROM LOCAL CHARITY

The charity's founder gave a presentation on the Ludlow and Area Community Partnership (LACP) based at the Ludlow Youth Centre on Lower Galdeford. The charity was set up to support the development of the Community and Family Hub and its core purpose is to support residents in Ludlow and the surrounding area, particularly those facing social disadvantage.

A hard-working team of volunteers and professionals have transformed the previously under-used Youth Centre building into a thriving community hub, from where the charity works to relieve need and promote wellbeing among individuals affected by age, ill health, disability, financial hardship, or other forms of disadvantage. It delivers a range of services, including wrap-around care and educational activities for schoolchildren, sports programmes for disadvantaged families, digital skills training, and support for migrants and refugees. In addition, the charity promotes health and wellbeing through preventative health screenings, community support groups, and referral to appropriate services. Their vision is to help build a compassionate, inclusive,

and equitable community in which individuals are empowered to support both themselves and each other.

The council and members of the public noted the valuable contribution the charity makes to the community and recognised the importance of continued cooperation and support for its work in addressing local needs and promoting community wellbeing.

ATM/04 PRESENTATION FROM LOCAL SHAPING LIVES PROJECT

The Food Projects Coordinator from Hands Together Ludlow and Marketing and Communications Officer from Ludlow Town Council gave a presentation on the current initiative under the Shaping Places for Healthier Lives project, delivered in partnership with Shropshire Council and Ludlow Town Council.

It was emphasised that Ludlow is marked by stark socio-economic contrasts, with both affluent and highly deprived areas. In response, the charity operates several community initiatives, including a community fridge that redistributed nearly 16,000 kg of surplus food in the past year - equivalent to approximately 37,000 meals - which would otherwise have gone to landfill.

The Shaping Places for Healthier Lives project aims to address food poverty and health inequality by supporting residents in adopting healthier eating habits. A key objective is to demystify home cooking and reduce reliance on ultra-processed foods, which are inexpensive but nutritionally poor. Barriers such as lack of skills, limited equipment, low confidence, and chaotic life circumstances often prevent individuals from preparing fresh meals.

To address these issues, the project is developing a set of 50 accessible recipes across five key categories:

- Meals using ambient food bank items
- Cooking for one
- Cooking with limited resources
- Meals for dietary needs (allergies, intolerances, diabetes)
- Basic, wholesome dishes requiring minimal equipment

These recipes are being designed with input from local chefs and nutritionists and will be distributed via printed recipe cards, a recipe book, and digital formats, including video tutorials. Workshops are also being held across the community, with strong uptake and positive feedback. Participants have expressed increased confidence and enjoyment in cooking, and some are progressing towards food hygiene certification - particularly younger attendees interested in food-related careers.

The project demonstrates strong reach across Ludlow, with widespread community engagement and a clear focus on empowering residents through food education, skill development, and access to nutritious meals.

Council members and members of the public acknowledged the positive impact of this initiative and commended the collaborative efforts to address health and food inequalities in the area.

ATM/05 COMMUNITY UPDATES AND TOWN COUNCIL PROJECTS & SERVICES

A presentation including updates, projects, and local services.

THE TOWN COUNCIL'S VISION

Ludlow is a successful and vibrant town where people want to live, work, and visit.

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

D-Day Celebrations on 6th June 2024.

PROJECTS 2024/25

- Henley Helpers community volunteer programme.
- Ludlow Museum at the Buttercross Accreditation Award.
- Ludlow Bathing Water Designation and pontoon ladder.
- Ludlow Orientation Boards.
- Ludlow Future Partnership.
- Ludlow Market canopies and electrical works.

LOCAL SERVICES PROVIDED:

• **LUDLOW MARKET**

Trades every Monday, Wednesday, Friday & Saturday and most Thursdays and Sundays.

Street Trading creates a vibrant street scene on Events Square, High Street, Tower Street & Bull Ring.

• **LUDLOW MUSEUM AT THE BUTTERCROSS**

Open Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.

Ludlow's history through the ages, family friendly activities, and changing locally focused exhibitions.

• **FAMILY FRIENDLY PLAY AREAS**

At the Linney Riverside Park, Wheeler Road Skate Park and Housman Play Area.

• **GREEN OPEN SPACES**

At Castle Gardens, St Johns Gardens, and Sidney Road Town Green.

• **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

Key Actions:

- Improving energy efficiency.
- Supporting sustainable transport.

- Biodiversity and green space protection.
 - Reducing waste.
 - Community engagement.
 - Carbon-conscious procurement.
- **LUDLOW MAY FAIR**
Rides open from 1st to 5th May 2025.
Dodgems Service on Sunday 4th May.
 - **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS**
Following the public consultation and funding support the first new lights were installed in 2024.
 - **GRANT FUNDING**
In 2024/25, Ludlow Town Council awarded:
£1,050 Ludlow Concert Band
£1,500 Shropshire Youth Association
£500 Ludlow Piano Festival
£4,000 Ludlow in Bloom
£2,000 South Shropshire Youth Forum
£750 Ludlow Town Colts Football Club
£3,050 Project Support Grants

Project Support Grant Applications are accepted all year.
 - **FINANCIAL YEAR END 2024/25**

Reserves and balances held Year End 2024/2025 40%
£1,468,236.00

Income including Precept 33%
£1,216,516.00

Expenditure including Staff costs 27%
£986,142.00
 - Annual Report 2024/2025 released.

ATM/06 **QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM RESIDENTS

Question 1:

Please can you break down the £636,915 staff salaries and wages (budget line item 4000)? I do not expect the council to provide salary details of employees, however, a breakdown as follows would help to explain the significant cost to local tax-payers.

- 1) Total number of employed staff salaries included in the £636,915?
- 2) Breakdown of roles and number of employees in each role, for example (clerical, maintenance, management etc.)

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Subject: Response to Request for Breakdown of Staff Salaries and Wages (£636,915)

Thank you for your enquiry regarding the 2025 / 26 staff salaries and wages figure of **£636,915** included in the Council's budget.

While we are unable to provide personal or individual salary details, we are pleased to share a general breakdown to help illustrate how this total has been allocated across our staffing structure.

1) Total Number of Staff Employed

The Town Council currently employs **19 staff members**, both full-time and part-time, equating to a total of **15 full-time equivalent (FTE)** positions.

2) Breakdown of Roles and Number of Employees

As a small organisation delivering a broad range of local services, our staff are involved in multiple areas of work. The table below outlines the general categories and associated FTE:

Role Category	Number of Staff (FTE)
HR, Project, Financial, and Health & Safety Management	2.00
Administration / Customer Services / Events / Communications / Project Support	5.75
Grounds / Maintenance / Cleaning / Events / Markets / Christmas Lights/ Out of Hours	7.25

Breakdown of Total Salary Cost by Role Type

The table below shows how the overall salary cost is distributed by role category. Please note, these figures are approximate, rounded for clarity, and inclusive of employer contributions such as pensions and National Insurance where applicable.

Role Category	Total Cost (£)
HR, Project, Financial, and Health & Safety Management	£115,000.00
Administration / Customer Services / Events / Communications / Project Support	£195,560.00
Grounds / Maintenance / Cleaning / Events / Markets /	£326,355.00

Role Category**Total Cost
(£)**

Christmas Lights / Out of Hours

We hope this overview provides a helpful understanding of how staffing costs are structured within the Council. Should you have any further questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Question 2:

Q.2a) Please explain the £45,000 allocated to Professional fees/legal (budget line item 4055)? Why has this gone up by 450% this year? Does the council anticipate significant professional and legal services to be required this year and if so, why?

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Thank you for your query regarding the £45,000 allocated to *Professional Fees/Legal* in the Council's budget.

This budget line has been increased to account for a number of ongoing and potential matters requiring professional advice and support. The key areas currently anticipated are:

1. Due Diligence – Play Areas Transfer
The Council is currently considering the potential transfer of 11 play areas from Shropshire Council. As part of this process, we are undertaking detailed due diligence, which includes legal and professional advice to ensure any transfer is managed appropriately and in the community's best interest.
2. Conservation Surveys – Grade I Listed Buildings
The Council has agreed to commission conservation surveys for its two Grade I listed buildings. These are necessary to support responsible long-term management and maintenance of these important heritage assets and will require input from conservation professionals and specialist surveyors.
3. Potential Legal Action
We have received correspondence from the Parochial Church Council (PCC) indicating that it may consider taking legal action. While no formal proceedings have been initiated at this time, it is prudent to allocate funds in case legal advice or representation becomes necessary.

We hope this explanation clarifies the rationale behind the budget allocation. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you need any further details.

Q.2b) If these additional Professional fees/legal fees are related to the town wall, please explain why this budget item is required considering that the council has stated the walls are not the responsibility of the council?

Answer:

Thank you for your follow-up question regarding whether the additional allocation for *Professional Fees/Legal* relates to the town wall, and why such a budget would be necessary given the Council's stated position that it does not hold responsibility for the structure.

To clarify, while the Council maintains that it is not responsible for the town wall, it is important that it is prepared to defend its position should this be formally challenged. Allocating funds for professional and legal advice ensures that the Council can respond appropriately to any legal action or disputes that may arise.

This budget provision is therefore a matter of prudent financial planning—not an indication of a change in the Council's stance, but a recognition of the need to be properly advised and represented if required.

We trust this explanation provides reassurance about the rationale behind this budget item. Please feel free to contact us if you require any further clarification.

Question 3 - Code of Conduct:

The content of some recent media reports and some social media comments carries the risk of damaging the reputation of our town. People disagree sometimes. That is fine, and inevitable – but the way we disagree is important.

Will all Councillors, 'new' and 'old' alike, ensure that they abide rigorously by the Local Government Association Councillor Code of Conduct?

The Code includes requirements to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect; to treat the Town Council's employees (and volunteers, and staff of partner organisations) with respect and respect for the role they play; respect being defined here as 'politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word'.

Councillors are of course required by the Code of Conduct to refrain from bullying and harassment and to promote equalities.

In return, Councillors have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. The Code explains, 'If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the local authority, the relevant social media provider or the police.'

Our Council will need at times to take contentious decisions. It needs to be able to do that without personal attacks, anonymous letters, and bullying. May I also, briefly, draw Councillors' attention to the parts of the Code relating to the registration and declaration of interests? There is careful guidance within the Code on the registration and declaration of interests,

extending beyond pecuniary interests. The Code points out the circumstances where a conflict of interests may arise, and therefore 'where you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation'. Members of the public have the right to assume Councillors will seek to actively avoid possible conflicts of interest. Integrity in public life still matters.

A commitment from every Councillor to take on board the Code of Conduct and the principles within it would be very welcome.

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Thank you for your thoughtful and timely reminder regarding the importance of upholding the Local Government Association's Councillor Code of Conduct.

Whilst differences of opinion are a natural and necessary part of democratic life, how councillors conduct themselves — both in public and in private—has a significant impact on the reputation of our Council and the wider community we serve.

Councillors have a responsibility to model respectful, courteous, and constructive dialogue, especially during periods of disagreement or when dealing with complex or contentious matters.

Thank you for highlighting the council's obligations to treat Councillors, Council staff, volunteers, and members of the public with respect, and to refrain from any behaviour that could be seen as bullying or harassment. It is equally important that councillors feel supported in taking appropriate steps should they be subject to any form of abuse or intimidation, whether online or in person.

With regard to the declaration and registration of interests, I appreciate the emphasis placed on transparency and integrity in public office. The guidance provided within the Code is essential in helping us all to maintain public trust and ensure decision-making is free from any perceived or actual conflicts of interest.

Please be assured that in accepting their role, each councillor has made a personal commitment to abide by the Code of Conduct and to uphold the highest standards of integrity, respect, and accountability in their role.

Question 4:

Q.4a) Could you explain why the allocation for the community projects grants was removed from the 2025/26 budget? (previously £10,000)

Answer:

Thank you for your enquiry regarding the allocation for Community Project Grants in the 2025/26 budget.

We would like to clarify that the £10,000 budget for Project Support Grants has not been removed. We apologise for any confusion caused by incorrect information on the Council's website.

The Council has, however, made a minor amendment to the grant criteria. Specifically, organisations in receipt of a core grant may now apply for up to two Project Support Grants in addition to their core funding within the same financial year. This change is intended to ensure fair and transparent access to funding while continuing to support a wide range of community initiatives.

We appreciate your interest in the Council's budget and community funding, and we are happy to provide further details if needed.

Q.4b) What is justification for the contingency provision in the 2025/6 budget of £181,252.00 given the very large cash reserve already held of over a million pounds?

Answer:

Justification for £181,252.00 Contingency Provision

Summary:

The contingency provision of £181,252.00 is a prudent financial safeguard to deal with unpredictable in-year costs, without eroding strategic reserves held for other commitments or emergencies. It ensures the council can respond effectively to risks, while still upholding statutory duties and financial sustainability.

Further information:

Local Government Financial Prudence (Guidance and Best Practice)

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires councils to set a balanced budget with "adequate provision" for future liabilities.

Sector guidance encourages the inclusion of a realistic contingency provision based on risk assessment.

Local Government Volatility (2025/26 Risks)

In light of economic uncertainty, councils are budgeting for volatility in the position of the unitary council and supporting local services at short notice.

Risk-Based Budgeting

A contingency fund reflects a risk-based approach: the council anticipates possible issues but avoids overcommitting core service budgets.

This prevents service cuts or hasty reserve use when challenges arise.

Reserves include:

- Earmarked reserves (set aside for specific projects or legal obligations)
- General reserves (held for financial stability, recommended at 3–12 months of net revenue)

Q.4c) What is the reason behind the £45,000.00 budget provision for legal fees in the coming year as this is a significant increase from previous years?

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Thank you for your query regarding the £45,000 allocated to Professional Fees/Legal in the Council's budget.

This budget line has been increased to account for a number of ongoing and potential matters requiring professional advice and support. The key areas currently anticipated are:

1. Due Diligence – Play Areas Transfer

The Council is currently considering the potential transfer of 11 play areas from Shropshire Council. As part of this process, we are undertaking detailed due diligence, which includes legal and professional advice to ensure any transfer is managed appropriately and in the community's best interest.

2. Conservation Surveys – Grade I Listed Buildings

The Council has agreed to commission conservation surveys for its two Grade I listed buildings. These are necessary to support responsible long-term management and maintenance of these important heritage assets and will require input from conservation professionals and specialist surveyors.

3. Potential Legal Action

We have received correspondence from the Parochial Church Council (PCC) indicating that it is considering taking legal action against the Council. While no formal proceedings have been initiated at this time, it is prudent to allocate funds in case legal advice or representation becomes necessary.

We hope this explanation clarifies the rationale behind the budget allocation. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you need any further details.

Q.4d) Why are the minutes for the Council meetings published without the attachments that they reference? This makes them largely useless from the point of the resident. Can the council agree that they will publish these documents going forward?

Answer:

Thank you for your enquiry regarding access to council meeting documents.

We can confirm that the approved minutes of council meetings are published on the council's website for public access. In addition, the headline agenda is also made available online in advance of meetings, in line with statutory requirements.

For each meeting, the full open agenda pack, including supporting reports, has been provided to the press, in recognition of their important role in keeping the public informed.

Going forward, and as part of our ongoing commitment to transparency and accessibility, the council will endeavour to publish the full open agenda pack—including all non-confidential supporting documents—on the website alongside the agenda wherever possible.

We appreciate residents' interest in council business and will continue to improve the availability of information to ensure public engagement is well supported.

Question 5:

Q.5a) Please advise LTC justification for raising the precept when there is a large cash surplus. LTC has run at a surplus for the last 13 years and as at year end 2023/4 had £1.22M in cash reserve. Accounts are not yet available for 2024/5 but on current trends it would be expected to be increased to over £1.4M. What is the justification for this?

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Town councils in England are advised to maintain prudent levels of reserves to ensure financial stability, manage unforeseen events, and support responsible budgeting. However, there is no fixed legal minimum or maximum. Instead, guidance comes from sector bodies like JPAG (Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance) and NALC (National Association of Local Councils).

Recommended Reserve Levels for Town and Parish Councils:

General (Unallocated) Reserves

JPAG Guidance (Practitioners' Guide):

“The generally accepted minimum level of a smaller authority's general reserve is between 3 and 12 months of net revenue expenditure.”

Ludlow Town Council holds £401,000 in general reserves.

Earmarked Reserves

These are reserves set aside for specific purposes, such as:

Planned capital projects (e.g., building renovations, playground upgrades), election costs, emergency repairs, or legal contingencies.

There's no upper limit for earmarked reserves, but they must be clearly justified and documented, especially during the annual audit.

The council holds, £1,064,571.00 in earmarked reserves for

- Capital Land Reserve Henley Orchard,
- Public Toilets,
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL),
- Neighbourhood Fund, Play Areas Fund,
- CCTV,
- Skatepark,
- Wheeler Play Area Resurface,
- Mkt website,
- Guildhall,
- Buttercross,
- Market,
- Cemetery Paths,
- Cemetery Refurbishment,
- Tree Survey & Works,
- Linney Riverside Park,
- EV Charging Compound Fund,
- Allotments,
- Streetlighting,
- Signage,
- Street Furniture,
- Christmas Lights,
- DLF Equip Replacement Fund,
- Neighbourhood Plan,

- Babies Memorial,
- Civic Regalia,
- Mayfair,
- Contingencies,
- Town Centre Planters,
- Grant Match Funding,
- Large Project Fund,
- and Legal & Reg Compliance.

Further considerations:

Shropshire Council has been under financial pressure, like many upper-tier councils, due to rising social care costs, inflation, and constraints on funding from central government.

In late 2023 and into 2024, several councils across England (e.g., Birmingham, Woking, Croydon) issued Section 114 notices, essentially declaring effective bankruptcy.

Shropshire Council had not issued a Section 114 notice, but it had acknowledged significant financial strain, with budget gaps projected in the tens of millions for coming years.

Based on the trends and public reporting:

The risk of insolvency is not negligible, especially if costs continue to outstrip revenue and if additional government support is not forthcoming.

However, Shropshire Council has been actively seeking to avoid insolvency by implementing cost-cutting measures, considering asset disposals, and lobbying for fairer funding settlements.

While insolvency is not imminent, the risk is elevated and should be taken seriously by town and parish councils, especially as future budget rounds may include further cuts to non-statutory services.

Impact on Market Towns:

If Shropshire Council were to declare insolvency or take drastic financial measures, the following impacts on market towns like Ludlow could be expected:

Reduced Services

- Non-statutory services such as libraries, leisure facilities, local transport subsidies, and environmental maintenance would be at highest risk.
- Ludlow could face service reductions or be asked to take on responsibility for certain services (e.g., parks, play areas) currently managed by Shropshire Council.

Q.5b) LTC Financial Policy FRP/19/v.2 states that reserves can be classified in two ways.

- a) General reserve or;
- b) Earmarked reserve,

Please provide a breakdown of how the 2023/24 £1.2M cash reserve was classified.

If general reserve was over 100% of precept, what was the explanation given to the internal auditor?

If part of the reserve was classified as 'earmarked', please provide an explanation as to what it is earmarked for and how much is allocated.

If the reason for earmarked reserve related to future potential liability for the wall collapse, please advise what the mechanism for returning the money to the town resources to benefit the people of Ludlow, since no liability is now accepted.

Answer:

In 2023/24:

- a) General reserve - £610,694.00
- b) Earmarked reserve - £607,168.00

The precept was £773,395.00.

Earmarked reserves are for specific projects, building and facilities maintenance for Grade I listed buildings, facilities and other public buildings that is beyond the scope of day-to-day maintenance.

Question 6 – Questions on the Town Wall Repair:

Shropshire has a low-wage economy. The cost-of-living crisis continues. Poverty is a real issue for many local residents. Will the Council take this context into account when it considers solutions to the repair of collapsed section of the town wall?

Will the Council consult carefully with residents if the proposed solution may commit us to many years of increased council tax payments for local people?

Background:

The work needs to be progressed, and urgently. Ideally, we need external funding – e.g. lottery or other charitable or public sector funding. If that alternative funding is not possible, then interested parties need to work together to find a way forward. Shropshire Council, Ludlow Town Council and the Church have all been viewed as potentially liable for the repair of the

walls, and all should be involved in a solution. If the finance has to be raised locally, will Ludlow Town Council seek an outcome that takes into account the ability of those interested parties to pay?

Shropshire Council has been close to bankruptcy in recent years, with deep cuts to core services.

Ludlow Town Council is funded for fixing things like broken public toilets, broken benches, and putting the Christmas tree back up when it blows down in a storm. It doesn't have the funds to fix collapsed medieval walls. The total income of Ludlow Town Council this year, 2025/26, will be around £1 million. Recent estimates of the cost of repairing the walls range between three times the annual funding of the Town Council and five times the annual funding of the Town Council.

The Church of England is, by contrast, a wealthy organisation. Its endowment fund is reportedly worth over £10 billion, it holds many other assets, and it receives significant public sector grants. This is not in any way a criticism. It is just an observation.

The bulk of Ludlow Town Council's funding, around 94%, comes from the 'precept' – the money raised through council tax. If our Town Council were to pay £3m or £5m for the repair of the walls, this would require a large loan and the repayment of this loan over time by every single council tax payer in Ludlow.

It has been suggested that National Lottery funding would be dependent on Ludlow Town Council accepting future liability for maintaining the walls. Taking this responsibility on would have required a very small Town Council with very limited funding to make an open-ended spending commitment for the future. That is not consistent with fiscal responsibility.

I am not an expert in medieval walls. Just a local resident and council tax payer. I want to see this resolved, but in a way that is about workable solutions now and in the future.

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Thank you for your thoughtful and well-considered comments regarding the collapsed section of Ludlow's historic town wall. Your concerns reflect those of many in our community, and we welcome the opportunity to respond with clarity and openness.

Financial Context & Community Concerns

You are absolutely right to highlight the financial pressures that many local residents are facing. Shropshire is indeed a low-wage economy, and the cost-of-living crisis continues to affect households throughout Ludlow. These realities are central to how Ludlow Town Council is approaching the matter of

the town wall. The solution should not place a long-term financial burden on local residents.

Current Position of the Town Council

Whilst the council does not accept liability, the council is fully committed to seeing the wall repaired — both to preserve Ludlow's historic heritage and to protect public safety. In relation to future potential liability for the collapsed wall, the matter of who is responsible is not something which the Council, or any other body, can decide unilaterally. If disputed, it is a matter that can only be decided by legal process, the outcome of which cannot be predicted.

We agree that the ideal route is securing external funding, including from national bodies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, and potentially charitable foundations.

Working Toward a Solution

We are committed to:

- Progressing discussions with all stakeholders;
- Exploring external funding as a priority;
- Ensuring that any local contribution is fair and proportionate;

We value your input and your respectful tone. Like you, we want to see this resolved — but in a way that is financially responsible and sustainable for the long term.

Thank you again for raising these important points.

Question 7 – Equalities:

Will all Councillors, individually and collectively, read and uphold the Council's Equal Opportunities policy?

In particular I draw the attention to every one of you to content that includes:

...the Council will do everything in its power to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect at all times. Respecting and celebrating diversity is a vital part of the strength of our community.

We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination whether it be direct or indirect discrimination, victimisation or harassment on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

The Council will strive to ensure that all services provided by, or on behalf of, the Council are made accessible to all individuals and groups equally and without discrimination.

All service users will be treated with respect. Actions, behaviour, and attitudes will consistently demonstrate respect for the dignity and worth of an individual.

The Council will, wherever appropriate, work in partnership with other agencies in the area; including the relevant unitary, county, district, and borough councils, voluntary groups, and community organisations to promote equal opportunities.

The Council will ensure that all contractors directly supplying goods and services or executing works for, or on behalf of, the Council comply with this Council's stated policy on equal opportunities.

The Council will work with others to ensure that our community is a safe place in which to live, work or visit.

I would welcome the agreement and support of every Councillor to the content of this policy.

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Thank you for your question and for highlighting the importance of the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

The Council fully supports the principles set out in the policy and recognises its legal and ethical responsibility to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of its work.

We reaffirm that:

All Councillors are expected to read, understand, and uphold the Equal Opportunities Policy in the course of carrying out their duties.

The Council is committed to treating all individuals fairly, with dignity and respect, and to opposing all forms of unlawful discrimination, whether direct or indirect, as outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

We are equally committed to ensuring that Council services are accessible to all, that contractors and partners comply with equality obligations, and that we work collaboratively to help make our community a safe, inclusive, and welcoming place for all.

We thank you for drawing attention to this vital aspect of the Council's responsibilities and welcome continued engagement from residents on this matter.

Question 8:

Ludlow Town Council has a small and effective workforce, including the staff who manage and run the administration and finance of the Council, the market and street trading, the Henley Road Cemetery, and the Buttercross Museum;

also of course the small Direct Labour Force that maintains amenity areas and play areas, cleans the public toilets, puts up Christmas lights etc.

The importance of services like these tends to be overlooked. They quietly make life easier or brighter for probably every single one of us in Ludlow. You don't notice the importance of day-to-day services like this until they have gone. Any moves to reduce staff numbers or outsource services would carry a high level of risk around service disruption, poorer and more uncertain future services, and increased costs (including redundancy costs).

With a number of new Councillors joining Ludlow Town Council, will this Council please commit to continuing to view its staff as a hugely valuable asset?

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Thank you for your thoughtful message and for recognising the dedication and value of Ludlow Town Council's staff. Your acknowledgement of the essential services they provide — often quietly and without fanfare — is deeply appreciated.

Recognition of Staff Contribution

We fully agree that our staff are a vital asset to the community. From managing the cemetery, market, and museum, to maintaining public spaces, operating essential amenities like public toilets, and ensuring events like the Christmas lights run smoothly — their work touches nearly every part of day-to-day life in Ludlow. These services are often taken for granted until they are disrupted or lost, and we are proud of the consistently high standards our team maintains.

Council's Commitment

With new councillors joining Ludlow Town Council, there is a fresh opportunity to build on our commitment to good governance, responsible decision-making, and community engagement. We can confirm that:

- The Council recognises its staff as one of its greatest assets, and values their experience, skills, and ongoing commitment to the town.
- Any future considerations involving staffing - whether structural, financial, or operational — will be made carefully, transparently, and with full awareness of the risks to service quality, community well-being, and long-term cost-effectiveness.
- We do not underestimate the challenges and risks associated with reducing staff numbers or outsourcing local services, especially where those services rely on continuity, local knowledge, and community connection.

Moving Forward

We are committed to working with staff, fellow councillors, and the wider community to ensure Ludlow continues to benefit from reliable, high-quality

services that enhance life for all residents. The value of a stable, dedicated, and locally-rooted workforce is central to that goal.

Thank you again for your recognition of the importance of our staff and services. It is through the combined efforts of council, staff, and residents that we can continue to keep Ludlow a well-run, vibrant, and caring town.

Question 9:

Q.9a) Town Clerk Budget Oversight

My understanding is that it is highly unusual for a town clerk to have access to a £50,000 budget without requiring prior approval for expenditures. However, I understand this has been the case since the Covid period and it has yet to be reverted back.

Could the council confirm whether this is accurate, and if so, can a full financial review be conducted to detail how this money has been spent during the time free rein was allowed?

Answer:

Thank you for your question regarding the financial delegation to the Town Clerk and the oversight of Council expenditure.

We would like to clarify that at no point has the Town Clerk been given "free rein" over Council finances. All expenditure by the Clerk has been—and continues to be—governed by the Council's Financial Regulations.

These regulations permit delegated spending only where the expenditure has been agreed by the Council as part of an approved budget, and within defined limits. This ensures the efficient operation of Council activities while maintaining full transparency and control.

The Council is, and has always been, subject to both internal and external audit, which provide independent scrutiny of financial processes and expenditure. These audits play a key role in ensuring accountability and good governance, and any delegated spending is reviewed within this framework.

There has never been a period of unrestricted or unauthorised spending. All spending decisions remained within budgeted limits and were reported to the Council in line with proper practices. The government made provision for online meetings to become legal decision-making mechanisms, and minutes are on the website.

All of the Council's expenditure is documented in its accounts.

Q.9b) Procurement and Use of Local Businesses

At a recent public meeting I attended, the town clerk mentioned being too busy to obtain additional quotes for a planting project that many in attendance felt was significantly overpriced.

Shouldn't it be standard procedure to obtain a minimum of three quotes for such work, including at least one from a local business where possible, to ensure transparency, value for money, and support for the local economy?

Answer:

Thank you for your question and for attending the recent public meeting.

To clarify, a council meeting is a formal business meeting of the council, where decisions are made based on the information available and within the constraints of time, resources, and urgency. In the case of the planting project you mentioned, councillors and the clerk were openly, and transparently discussing a new and time-sensitive project. In such cases, it is entirely reasonable to seek clarity on project scope, timelines, and procurement processes to ensure decisions are informed and accountable.

As for procurement, the council is committed to achieving value for money, transparency, and—where feasible—supporting local businesses. Best practice typically involves obtaining a minimum of three quotes for services, especially where public funds are concerned. However, this can depend on the nature of the project, its urgency, and the availability of suitable contractors. Where time constraints are significant, decisions may be made to progress a project efficiently while remaining within legal and financial regulations.

Engaging in these discussions transparently at a council meeting is part of good governance. However, it's important that these proceedings are respected for what they are: open and accountable decision-making, not an opportunity to undermine or deride those contributing to the discussion in good faith.

The overheard discussion was part of the process for setting mutually agreed parameters for a new project the needed to be successfully executed, and required the clerk and other staff to learn new skills, and take on an extra workload within a very short timescale. In the end, the plants were sourced locally (although due to the nature of the product this is not really in question), quotes were obtained, and the town clerk and member of staff grew their skill sets.

The council welcomes constructive feedback and public engagement and is always working to improve its practices in the interests of the community.

Q9.c) Given the importance of community engagement and transparency, would the council consider live streaming all non-confidential meetings via a platform such as YouTube or Facebook Live, so that residents who cannot attend in person can still stay informed and involved?

I am following up from a resident's group as it has been an incredibly popular idea. It has proved beneficial in other councils (and obviously parliament) and can remove the time taken typing up minutes as you can actually retrieve them from recordings.

Answer:

Thank you for your thoughtful suggestion regarding live streaming non-confidential Ludlow Town Council meetings. We are pleased to see such strong local interest in increasing transparency and accessibility, and we welcome this kind of constructive input from residents and community groups.

Community Engagement & Accessibility

We fully agree that public engagement and openness are essential to good governance. Making council proceedings more accessible — particularly for those who are unable to attend in person due to work, caring responsibilities, mobility issues, or other barriers — is a goal the Council shares.

Live Streaming: Opportunities & Considerations

Live streaming meetings via platforms such as YouTube or Facebook Live has clear potential benefits, including:

- Greater public access and awareness of council decisions;
- Enhanced transparency and trust;
- Reduced reliance on lengthy written minutes for general context;
- Opportunities for more flexible participation in local democracy.

We are aware that many councils, and indeed Parliament, have adopted this approach with success. However, as with any initiative, there are some technical, legal, and cost considerations that would need to be carefully reviewed. These include:

- Ensuring data protection and GDPR compliance, particularly in relation to members of the public who may be present;
- Technical setup and ongoing resourcing;
- Moderation or comment management (if using interactive platforms like Facebook Live);
- Archiving and accessibility standards for recordings.

Next Steps

The Council will consider this proposal as part of ongoing discussions about improving communication and engagement. We will explore:

- The feasibility and cost of introducing live streaming;
- Appropriate pilot schemes or trial setups;
- Best practice examples from other councils;
- Consultation with staff and councillors to ensure legal and practical readiness.

We appreciate you raising this on behalf of a wider residents' group and will ensure the idea is properly discussed in an upcoming committee or full council meeting.

Thank you once again for helping to shape how we communicate and connect with our community.

Question 10: Can you tell us if there is a Ludlow Town Plan please? If a Town Plan has not been developed, what arrangements are in hand to produce one? Additionally, what help does the Town Council require from residents to assist it in the plan development?

Name and address supplied.

Answer:

Thank you for your question.

Ludlow's Town Plan is available on the Town Council's website and is titled the *Community Led Plan*, which may be why it was not immediately easy to locate. You can find it here:

<https://www.ludlow.gov.uk/your-council/council-documents>

To improve accessibility, we will review the way it is described on the website to make it easier for residents to identify and access.

The Council warmly welcomes feedback and ideas from residents regarding the plan, and we encourage you to share any thoughts you may have.

QUESTIONS FROM RESIDENTS AT THE MEETING

There were a number of points raised and statements made relating to the town walls and efficiency audits.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.