

Minutes of 2023 AGM of Friends of Church Stretton Library on 15th June

Apologies: Belinda Cousens, Rosie Faulkner, John Goyne, Barbara Hall, Carol Lyons, Yvonne Roberts, Pat Stokes Smith, Alan Stockbridge, Peter Thorpe, Peter Toghil, Amanda Twohig, Karol Warren.

Members Attending: Barbara Allen, Noel Beattie, B&A Bradley, Mike & Sue Brookes, Jean Cuthbert, Sheila Davies, Harriet Edkins, Julian French, Beth Furlong, Julie Gildie, David & Madeline Haigh, Sarah Hewitt, Sue Hird, Gillian Hollow, Miranda Horobin, David John, Pamela Jones, David Kennedy, Maxine Lainchbury, Sylvia Loader, Janet Longstaff, Wendy Mackay, Inese Nielsen, Diane Palliser, Michael Price, Margaret Quartly, Anne Stringfellow, Martha Goral Tryers, Joanna & Vivian Meredith, Gay Walker, Ben Warren, Hazel Whitehouse, Gordon Williams, Heather Williams, Kate Williams, Sheelagh Wilson, Timothy Wood-Woolley.

Non- members Attending: Peter Banford, Barry & Collette Gwynne, Sylvia Davidson, Jenny Hodgson, Derek Loader, Andy & Vicky Munro, Margaret Notton, Rawden Parslow, Anthony Peck, Fred Quartly, Andrew Williams..

Minutes of the 2022 AGM accepted

Proposed by Heather Williams Seconded by David Haigh.

Chair's Update

Sheila Davies presented her Power Point report. This covered the setting up of the Library Support Group, its evolution into the Friends of Church Stretton Library and its Terms of Reference. The group has presented educational and cultural events, attracting a wide audience, and acted as a link between the Library Service and the wider community. Volunteers have again enabled the opening of the Visitor Information service on Monday and Wednesday, to support, but not replace the library staff.

Following suggestions at last year's AGM the Library's lighting has been upgraded with LEDs, and the VIC notice boards and storage of historic maps hopefully to be improved when refurbishment is carried out. A Citizens' Advice Bureau service is being introduced, and we have £10,000 set aside for the pending refurbishment of the Library's interior.

Trustees

Margaret Quartly and Ben Warren were elected to stand again, nominated by Hazel Whitehouse and seconded by Janet Longstaff.

Treasurer's Report

The audited accounts were presented. The Treasurer reported that £10,000 was ring-fenced for new mobile shelving for the refurbishment, £5,000 retained as reserves, leaving £15,000 for us to potentially use in the next 12 months.

Future Plans for the Library

Speakers Peter Banford, Shropshire Council Culture and Communities Manager , Rawden Parslow, Shropshire Library Services Area Manager.

Rawden Parslow stated that he considered “Friends of Church Stretton Library” to be an excellent example of the local community working with the library service. Friends are very active in support of the library and are a “shining light” of how effective support can look.

Rawden then gave a wider context to the place of libraries in the community:

- “Libraries Connect” is a national organisation that has an overview of the services that all libraries can offer – learning, literacy and culture. They advise the government and seek consistency across library services nationally.
- Shropshire Council have recently revealed an overall plan, seeking healthy people, healthy organisations, a healthy environment and a healthy economy.
- Within this overall plan, Shropshire have identified 6 “Library Strategy Priorities”:
 1. Promote reading / literacy
 2. Healthy communities
 3. Promote the economy
 4. Resilient and inclusive communities
 5. Library services that are innovative and sustainable
 6. Library services that help people cope with the digital world
- Rawden stated that Shropshire are keen to hear more feedback and suggestions from library users. He often hears that “*the staff are brilliant*” and “*I enjoy going to the library*” but rarely gets more detail on how library services help change people’s lives.

Peter stated that libraries now fall under the overall heading of Culture, Leisure and Tourism within Shropshire. Despite Shropshire Council facing a £51million shortfall this year, he stated that there “*is no intention to close services*”. There has been a staff restructure to make financial savings.

Peter stated that more people are working from home since the pandemic and therefore libraries have a key role in helping people access IT services or general Shropshire services eg helping someone apply for a bus pass or a blue badge for parking.

Rawden stated that the general overview points (stated above) have 5 implications for Church Stretton Library:

1. The staff team will be strengthened – there will be a new Assistant Library Manager to support Lec, plus an extra post of 15 hrs/week.
2. Shropshire have received Arts Council funding for new shelving in libraries across the county, and Church Stretton will benefit from this.
3. A new “self-service” machine will be installed (pending a successful Arts Council funding bid). The aim here is that people can sign out or return books by themselves, thus freeing up library staff time for other activities such as giving advice. It is not the intention that such a self-service machine will reduce staffing levels.

4. The Shropshire “Estates Team” will start to tackle building issues such as the leaking flat roof. It is hoped that a bigger team working across many areas (leisure facilities for example) will help reduce costs.
5. There will be further support for enhanced “Community Partnerships” of which Friends is a key player in Church Stretton. Rawden thanked Friends for their work and support.

There then followed a Q&A session.

Q. With more staff, is there a chance the library could be open on Monday and Wednesdays?

A. No. That would require more budget

Q. What is your overall book fund?

A. Shropshire has £230K per year for books / ebooks / audio books. Many books (not all) are bought from a central supplier that provides Shropshire with popular books ie books that get borrowed a lot eg “Top Notch” selection books.

Q. Could the VIC be used on Mondays and Wednesdays for returning books via a self-service machine?

A. Rawden was not sure about this idea. It might lead to suggestions later on for volunteers to replace staff. A member of the audience also said it was not feasible, as it would mean allowing people access to the library – but there are no members of the staff in the library on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Q. I am delighted to see you introducing new library posts. What other innovations have you seen in other libraries?

A. There is now wi-fi printing service available (for a charge) in Shrewsbury library.

The meeting then adjourned for refreshments and the opportunity for attendees to write down their own suggestions for Friends events in the future and suggestions for future library services.