

## 2024 Friends of Church Stretton Library AGM

URC Hall 7.30pm Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June

1. **Minutes of 2023 AGM** Acceptance proposed by David Haigh Seconded by Barbara Hall.
2. **Chair's Report** Thanks were offered to Sandra Whitlock, Hily Clark, Janet Longstaff, Ben Warren and Joanna Clark for their fundraising talks and poetry events and to Geoff Taylor for his work on the calendar. The 2025 edition has an even higher standard than usual. We have continued funding events for children, most recently Zoolab, and given £10,000 to purchase new shelving (see below). The planter we purchased is being well maintained. Our team of volunteers has continued to open the Visitor Information Centre on Mondays and Wednesdays when the Library is closed.
3. **Treasurer's Report** During the year income was over £8,000. Regular donors make a significant contribution and we now have a savings account which generates interest. £10,000 was contributed to the purchase of mobile shelving which enables more flexible use of the library space. Current available balance is £22,000.
4. **Election of Trustees** Beth Furlong and Inese Nielson proposed by Martha Tryers Goral, seconded by Janet Longstaff.
5. **Library Budget cuts** SD described the possible implications of SC library budget cuts, starting with how savings had been made in market town libraries over the last ten years. In Church Stretton, this began with a proposal to relocate the library to the school which was taken to judicial review. This led to a lengthy procurement process. Eventually in 2019, Shropshire Council agreed to continue running Church Stretton library where it is with financial support from the Town Council and Friends. However, this was never followed up.

While this was taking place, Shropshire Council was also seeking to make savings at other market town libraries. We now have 4 different models for operating market town libraries, many of which include some local Town/parish councils providing financial support. Shropshire Council are likely to look for savings from the five market town libraries which are still managed and fully funded by Shropshire council which includes Church Stretton library.

An analysis of Shropshire Library visitor statistics for 2023-24 show that Church Stretton has a high number of active user figures in relation to population size (25%). Other libraries have a much smaller proportion of local residents actively using their libraries., This might be explained in some libraries by the huge variance in opening hours with some libraries open 5/6 days a week and others only 3/4 days a week. A fairer way of making savings might be to reduce the opening hours of libraries open 5/6 days a week including the main town libraries. We expect a Shropshire Council to hold a library consultation in the Autumn.

A Q&A session followed - see below.

If the agreement made in 2019 with the Town Council and Shropshire Council is resurrected, Friends would initially seek pledges from the community for monthly

donations. Once Friends were confident they could raise the funding required by Shropshire Council and an agreement was in place, Friends would ask people who had made pledges to set up their monthly donations.

## **Questions & Answers**

**Question:** Ten years ago we had a judicial review concerning the decision to relocate the library to the secondary school. Can the Town Council reassure us that they will not be seeking to move the library to the school in the future?

**Reply by Andy Munro**, Mayor of Church Stretton:

‘Thank you for an excellent presentation and for the strong leadership that clearly “Friends” have as an organisation. Of the 3 options noted in the presentation perhaps the best may be for the Town Council to make a fair contribution to Shropshire Council to run the library – but remember, there is not just the library but also the swimming pool and leisure centre to consider. There are lots of factors here.’

**Question:** Central government are not giving enough funding to county councils, who therefore have to make cuts to services. Do you think there might be a change of policy after the forthcoming general election?

**Reply by Sheila Davies** - Not convinced there will be but we can live in hope!

**Question:** If the council withdrew funding for staffing at our library, could it be run by volunteers? This happens in other libraries.

**Reply by Sheila Davies** We think it would be very difficult for a library the size of Church Stretton, with so many activities taking place, to be run solely by volunteers. The remit of “Friends” is to support the library staff in providing a great service, NOT to replace them.

**The meeting concluded at 8.27pm and was followed by refreshments and further discussion.**