



**Transforming print into sound since
1976**

West Shropshire Talking Newspaper

Annual Report 2023-24

Copies of this report can be obtained
in large print on request.

Please address all correspondence to the studio.

Established 20th January 1976. Charity registration no 504996

A member of the Talking News Federation

Studio: The Roy Fletcher Centre, Cross Hill, Shrewsbury SY1 1JE
01743 364 726 (answerphone service)
Email: westshroptn@outlook.com

Foreword

As Chairman I am privileged and very pleased to observe that this year's annual report gives ample evidence of our continued consolidation. We are widely accessible through a variety of mediums and are now focusing on improving awareness of our services. To that end, we have developed our links with other community related organisations. We respond positively to requests to talk about our services.

Our operating practices, codes of conduct and office management have all been revised and updated. The WSTN is now back in full operation, and, very importantly, has also begun to develop in new ways. This is in no small measure due to the unremitting work and dedication of the whole complex team of people who comprise the WSTN. Indeed, many people display their skills, multi-tasking a number of roles, and responding positively to unforeseen circumstances such as illness and floods. We would very much welcome more people sharing their skills with us, particularly in website management, publicity and social media and fund raising. We also welcome prospective members of the Board of Trustees and anyone willing to take on the responsibility of becoming an officer. Please get in touch with me for a chat! (Contact the office or any other Trustee – details in this report.)

Despite not being able to actively fundraise again this year, I am pleased to report that the WSTN still has a sound financial basis and we carefully monitor expenditure, However, the need remains to recruit someone to step forward and spearhead future activities.

And finally, a big thank you to whole WSTN team, and especially to my fellow Trustees for their support and guidance during 2023-24. It is very much appreciated.

Mary Pascoe

Structure governance and management

The West Shropshire Talking Newspaper, formerly called the West Shropshire Talking Newspaper for the Blind, was established on 20th January 1976.

It operates under a constitution agreed with the Charity Commission - registration number 504996.

A revised constitution, with a revised title, agreed with the Charity Commission, was adopted at the 2015 AGM.

- All recipients of the Charity's publications and those who work to achieve its objects are automatically members.
- A committee is elected annually at the AGM, to which all members are invited. Two members of the committee must be visually impaired.
- All committee members are trustees of the charity.
- The officers of the committee, namely Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, are elected annually at the AGM.

The Committee for 2023-24 comprised:

Steve Bristow	2 Shelton Oak Priory, Shelton,
Shrewsbury	
Alan Coplestone	36 Grangefields Road, Shrewsbury
Gwen Cox	48 Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury
Edna Evans	18 Greenacre Road, Shrewsbury
Chris Lemon	10 Cross Road, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury
Mary Pascoe (Chairman)	29 Preston Street, Shrewsbury.
Paul Pascoe	29 Preston Street, Shrewsbury
Lindsey Rowlands*	20 Rad Valley, Shrewsbury
Stephen Stewart (Treasurer)	6 Richmond Drive, Shrewsbury
Peter Waller (Secretary/Vice-Chairman)	25 Monkmoor Road, Shrewsbury

* denotes visually impaired member. The Trustees have actively sought a second Visually Impaired trustee during the course of the year and are pleased to note that a volunteer has come forward who is willing to join the committee following the 2024 AGM.

A committee meeting is held every two months or more frequently when required. The composition of the committee as far as possible represents the range of TN activities.

All committee members have a copy of their duties as described in 'The Essential Trustee' and annually sign a declaration concerning their fitness to serve as a

committee member. The committee is also regularly informed about guidance issued by the Charity Commission and attention drawn to relevant issues for discussion.

WSTN is also covered by Indemnity Insurance.

Objectives and activities

- The West Shropshire Talking Newspaper's stated objects in its constitution are to "relieve visually impaired persons as defined by the Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Act 2002, and to those persons affected by some other incapacity that makes reading a strain or an impossibility, by the provision of recorded news and information."
- The WSTN offers its services free to anyone in the West Shropshire area (SY Shropshire postcodes) who satisfies the objectives stated above.
- It produces a weekly audio newspaper. News stories come from the local press which is duly credited. Other internally produced material of interest to the listeners is included, as well as public service announcements.
- Audio versions of The Shropshire Magazine and My Shrewsbury Magazine are also produced regularly.

Personnel

The West Shropshire Talking Newspaper has no paid staff.

It is fortunate in having a loyal and hardworking band of volunteers. It is very encouraging that new volunteers continue to join, as sadly others die or have to give up because of ill health or other commitments. In the year 2023-24 there was a significant number offering a range of support, some of whom have individual roles mentioned elsewhere in this report. (The current full list is appended to this report.) One of the consequences of the Covid pandemic was the decision that the Trustees took to suspend the memory stick service. With the end of restrictions, it proved difficult to restart this service as quickly as the Trustees would have liked. However, through the efforts of Mike Carter and his dedicated team, the regular despatch of memory sticks recommenced in 2023 and now the weekly newspaper and regular magazines are sent out from the Roy Fletcher Centre.

However, we have been actively trying to recruit new people to share their skills with us. To that end we have had exposure in the press and on local radio. Word of mouth has also been very useful. We're grateful to those existing members of the team who have assisted in the recruitment process. Help is especially needed from those who would be prepared to take on the role of editor (and sports editor), technical operator, join the committee of Trustees (including acting as an Officer) or provide IT/ computing support.

We would particularly like to hear from anyone who could help organise our charity collections and fundraising and/or take part in our store and street collections.

Please contact any committee member if you would like to help or use the contact details on the front page of this report.

Duties

The duties undertaken by volunteers to produce and support the WSTN include

- Acting as editor
- Providing weekly or monthly features
- Operating the recording equipment for the weekly and bi-monthly recordings and providing technical support
- Presenting
- Reading
- Involvement in copying and distribution
- Web pages, social media and liaison with similar bodies locally and nationally

Apart from the elected committee, listed in the Governance section of this report, many of whom carry out a number of roles mentioned elsewhere, the following also provide invaluable support for the WSTN's activities:

- Readers co-ordinator – Sandra Kelly
- Office support and listener records – Liz Finney
- Copying and despatch co-ordinator – Mike Carter

Achievements and performance

Where possible, we try to respond positively to requests to give talks to local groups and organisations. These occasions offer an opportunity to publicise the WSTN, to distribute more leaflets and information, and have also resulted in some new recipients of the service as well as donations.

Historically, the WSTN has been an active supporter of the Christmas charity card shop in St Mary's Church. However, as intimated in last year's report, 2022 proved to be the last year in which the WSTN was involved as no volunteer was willing to take on the role of co-ordinating the Christmas cards. Although the income for 2023 will show some receipts from the sale of Christmas cards, this was solely the result of the disposal of the stock left over from sales at the end of Christmas 2022. In many respects, whilst the end of the Christmas card sales was sad, as the WSTN had

been involved for a number of years, the actual financial returns were diminishing both as a result of the increased cost of card acquisition and also as fewer people purchased physical cards.

Historically, our profile was also raised by the opportunity for collections at various local supermarkets throughout the year; these activities also raised valuable funds. Unfortunately issues post Covid-19 restrictions resulted in no fund-raising activities during the period under review but it is hoped that fund-raising activities can be restored at some point.

Unfortunately, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic the 2021 and 2022 See and Hear Exhibitions did not take place and no equivalent event for 2023 at Sundorne was organised. Slight Loss Shropshire undertook a small event at The Lantern during the summer of 2023, which the WSTN attended. It was a good opportunity to meet with those involved in other local TNs and also with a number of listeners. Although the Sundorne event no longer seems to be planned for the future, the Trustees are aware of a new – but smaller – event scheduled to take place at Shrewsbury Town's football ground. The WSTN remains committed to attend such events as they do provide an excellent means of meeting with listeners and volunteers and for promoting the service.

We are amongst the most accessible of Talking Newspapers.

We offer six ways of listening:

- Memory stick delivered through the post; unfortunately, this service had to be suspended in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. The studio and office were made Covid-19 secure during the spring of 2022 and physical recording in the studio commenced later in the year. Problems with recruiting a team of volunteers meant that it was difficult to reinstate the memory stick service. Fortunately, enough new volunteers came forward and this service was reintroduced in March 2023.
- Sonata internet radio from the British Wireless for the Blind Fund
- Independently via our website through various internet devices
- Local telephone listening service. Last year's report noted the loss of this service which had been provided, until March 2022, by Talking News Services. We are pleased to report that subsequently a new operator (Voipfone) offered to host our service and this option was restored to listeners during 2023.
- Amazon's ALEXA, voice operated internet system or other smart speakers.
- Podcast versions of our weekly Talking Newspaper and regular Magazines.

We have maintained a strong Facebook presence with over 260 followers.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to know exactly how many listeners the WSTN has, as web statistics are based on IP addresses and, in the case of the TN App, estimates by the TNF's technical provider, BWBF – British Wireless for the Blind Fund).

There were just over 200 listeners on our postal mailing list when we recommenced the service. Evidence suggests that, although many of these listeners have passed away or are otherwise unable to respond, a significant number can now access the Talking Newspaper through other means.

The number of memory sticks posted each week has averaged just over 80 since late August 2023 with the number of cancellations – for whatever reason – being compensated for by a small number of new listeners.

We also have anecdotal evidence that the memory sticks are listened to by more than one person, particularly if the recipient is in a care or nursing home. We have historically circulated nursing homes advising them of our service.

Application forms are always available to download from our website as well as being available in printed form from appropriate organisations and Shropshire's Eye Clinic Liaison Officer.

Despite the earlier caveat, data concerning hits on our website gives us some insight into those accessing from other sources.

During the calendar year 2023, just under 600 separate "users" accessed the service via our website and a further 110 via Alexa and other smart speaker systems. Together with "hits" via the Talking Newspaper app for smartphones and tablets, we recorded 7,338 "hits", compared with 6,480 in the previous calendar year (an increase of 13%). We would welcome some feedback from anyone who listens via any means other than the memory stick service.

The Committee receives regular feedback on any technical or other quality problems at the regular committee meetings. We monitor and respond to reports from listeners on the players and memory sticks we provide, and we try to resolve any difficulties as quickly as possible. New deliveries of the players are checked before issue and returned to the supplier for replacement if found to be faulty.

We continue to monitor our output carefully and we are constantly trying to make our systems as robust as possible.

The quality of the weekly newspaper depends on the skill and hard work of the team of editors and thanks must go to Steve Bristow, Gwen Cox, Bill Curnow, Ian Musty, Averil Newell, Paul Pascoe and Peter Waller. A comprehensive set of guidance notes supports this work.

Regular high quality recorded programmes depend on our small group of technical operators as well as on the studio hardware and associated recording software. The WSTN has been very well served by our volunteer technical team – either in the studio or recording content remotely – throughout the year and thanks are due to Emma Bentley, Steve Bristow, Alan Copplestone, George Gunn, Chris Lemon, Ian Musty, Paul Pascoe and Chris Renshaw.

Over the year we have continued to develop our links with the other local talking newspapers. This has proved remarkably productive with regards to our relationship with the East Shropshire Talking Newspaper. Following the sad death of Aiden McGinley in late 2022, the WSTN struggled to find a volunteer willing to take on the role of sports editor – and thanks are due here to John Wilson who stepped temporarily into the breach (having previously retired) – and through the co-operation of the ESTN, we are now able to use their weekly sports report from veteran Shropshire Talking Newspaper reporter Dave Gregory. More recently, this co-operation has extended to working together on the production of the monthly Shropshire Magazine.

Whilst the basic format of the weekly newspaper has remained the same since the introduction of digital recording and distribution, the capacity of the memory stick means that we can vary the length according to the quantity of news on a particular week and offer expanded coverage of key local stories. On average each issue runs to about ninety minutes of news and features. We continue to try to develop our use of original material, such as live recordings, local reports and interviews, and share material with other Talking Newspapers. We welcome any feedback on content and/or quality.

We continue to produce audio-versions of “The Shropshire Magazine” and “My Shrewsbury” Magazine. Currently both magazines supply some of the material used as features in the weekly TN.

The WSTN is a member of the Talking News Federation and has attended a number of its web-based seminars and discussion groups over the past 12 months.

In the course of the year we have been pleased to have further developed our links with Sight Loss Shropshire and Community Resource (Shropshire), as well as with the monthly Stretton Focus magazine.

Financial Review

Accounts

Appended are the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2023, together with the Independent Examiner’s Report.

As ever we are grateful to Jonathan Rimmer, and to Messrs James, Holyoak and Parker, Chartered Accountants, for their examination of our accounts and financial records, and for waiving their professional fees.

Commentary on the accounts

Income and expenditure

The WSTN depends entirely on donations, small grants and fund raising.

Our reserves stand at a healthy £47,644.81. However, we are operating at a loss and our accounts for 2023 show a deficit of £4,919.16, a significant worsening from the previous year's deficit of £1,765.23. Although there was a reduction in revenue for the year of almost £4,000 (the 2022 figure being increased as a result of £5,000 grant from Veolia), expenditure for the year was largely unchanged over the year.

The consequences of Covid-19 have continued to have an impact on the finances of the WSTN. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of the pandemic and the restrictions imposed was that it was again impossible to hold any fund-raising activities during the year; as in 2020, 2021 and 2022 no income was generated from these activities at all. There was a significant reduction – from £6,332.00 to £2,449.43 – in donations and legacies and, in this connection, we need to record our thanks to the Friends of the WSTN who have made a significant contribution; however, this decrease can again be entirely accounted by a single large donation at the start of the previous year.

Although the WSTN's involvement with the Christmas Card shop ended, the disposal of the remaining stock raised £795.01 in 2023; this revenue will, sadly not be repeated in future years.

In accordance with the most recent (2016) Charity Commission guidelines on Reserves, the Committee takes the view that reserves should cover approximately three years running costs. This secures the WSTN in the medium term against any unforeseen drop in income, or unexpected costs. The current reserves meet this requirement.

The accounts show monies reserved for technical development, and service development, also in accordance with Charity Commission Guidelines.

At the request of the donors, the Ethel Leake Memorial Fund is money designed for use in special projects, as and when they arise.

The WSTN is very grateful to our generous donors and to those who gave gifts in memory of family and friends.

Following a thorough review of the equipment and other material held by the WSTN, a programme of disposal of non-saleable items has been pursued whilst certain redundant items have been sold. This has had the added benefit of improving immeasurably the office and studio environment.

A list of donors is at the end of this report.

Office costs

Our major item of expenditure was as usual our rent and service charge. Nevertheless, the Roy Fletcher Centre continues to offer very competitive rents for our office and recording studio.

The BT contract for phone and internet services is kept under review.

Financial Risk Management

All cheques and disbursements are subject to a double signature from the designated list of signatories, namely Secretary, Treasurer, Chairman and Vice-Chairman (excluding the payee). Receipts are required.

Two debit cards are held, and a protocol for their use agreed by the committee. The cardholders are the Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Expenditure is authorised by the Treasurer.

Historically, bank statements were inspected by a non-cheque signatory member of the committee at each bi-monthly committee meeting. When Trustee meetings were held by Zoom, this was impossible. However, all the accounts are subject to an external audit and the normal checks have been resumed as meetings are now being held physically. The Income and Expenditure Account is presented and discussed at each bi-monthly committee meeting.

The placement of the reserves and our banking arrangements have been reviewed in the financial year, and the Committee takes the view that they are secure and appropriate.

There is a fundraising protocol in accordance with the guidance of the Fundraising Regulator in place.

List of Donors

In memory of Mrs Beryl Armitage
Dorothy Bailey
In memory of Mrs Judy Gosling
Mrs C. M. Hughes
Mr Richard Humphries
Mrs R. L. Jarman
Mr M. Law
Ludlow Quakers Meeting
A. M. Lunt
Monday Bridge Club
Mrs B. M. Simcock
Mr S. R. Stewart
The Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club
U3A French Beginners Group
Mr W. E. Wilkins

Friends of West Shropshire Talking Newspaper:

Mrs F. Barlow
Mrs J. Dodd
Mr M. Dwyer
Mr J. Elliott
Mr J. Garrard
Mr J. Goldsworthy
Mr M. Harrison
Mr S. Herd
Mr J. Hickson
Mr M. Law
Dr S. Thomson

List of Volunteers 2023/24

Steve	Aze
Emma	Bentley
Harriet	Bisson
Margaret	Bowman
Kath	Bristow
Steve	Bristow
Diane	Browne
Judy	Bryant
Mike	Carter
Ken	Chippindale
Meriel	Chippindale
Alan	Copplestone
Gwen	Cox
Linda	Croot
Bill	Curnow
Geraint	Dyfnallt
Edna	Evans
Phil	Evans
Marianne	Fifield
Elizabeth	Finney
Mavis	Gulliver
George	Gunn
David	Harris
Kathryn	Heraghty
Kirsty	Hill
Sue	Hughes
Joy	Hutchings
Rob	Hutchings
David	Jenkins
Sandra	Kelly
Aurora	Kenny
Glenys	Knight
Peter	Knight
Chris	Lemon
Sian	Lovegrove
Beryl	MacGinley

Liz	Merrifield
Elaine	Moore
Diane	Monether
Ric	Morris
Kathy	Moselhi
Jim	Mould
Kirsten	Mould
Carol	Musty
Ian	Musty
Averil	Newell
Deryn	Oliver
Paul	Pascoe
Mary	Pascoe
Cynthia	Phillips
Allan	Price
Chris	Renshaw
John	Richardson
Pam	Richardson
Jennifer	Roberts
Gwyneth	Rollins
Lindsey	Rowlands
Hermione	Sandall
Quentin	Shaw
Sarah	Smith
Malcolm	Soutar
Stephen	Stewart
Margot	Sutton
Michelle	Sutton-Jones
Julia	Taylor
Margaret	Thrower
Genevieve	Tudor
Angela	Turner
Peter	Waller
nJohn	Wilson
Carol	Wood

WEST SHROPSHIRE TALKING NEWSPAPER

ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

James, Holyoak & Parker Ltd
Chartered Accountants

WEST SHROPSHIRE TALKING NEWSPAPER

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT
YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2023

I approve the annexed accounts:

.....
Treasurer

Dated: 29/4/2024

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT
TO THE TRUSTEES OF WEST SHROPSHIRE TALKING NEWSPAPER

I report on the accounts of the Charity for the year ended 31st December 2023, which are set out on pages 2 and 3.

Respective responsibilities of Trustees and Examiner

The Charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year (under section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 (the Act)) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:-

- examine the accounts (under section 145 of the Act);
- follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners (under section 145(5)(b) of the Act); and
- state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of Independent Examiner's Statement

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the Charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair' view and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent Examiner's Statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to our attention:-

1. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements
 - to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Act; and
 - to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the Act have not been met; or
2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



29/4/2024

Jonathan Rimmer, A.C.A.
James, Holyoak & Parker Ltd
Chartered Accountants
1 Knights Court
Archers Way
Battlefield Enterprise Park
Shrewsbury
Shropshire, SY1 3GA

WEST SHROPSHIRE TALKING NEWSPAPER

**RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT
YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2023**

	<u>Restricted</u>	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>
			£	£
Receipts				
Donations and Legacies	-	2,449.43	2,449.43	6,332.00
Christmas Cards	-	795.01	795.01	727.03
Gift Aid Refund	-	559.22	559.22	-
National Savings Interest	-	-	-	1.94
Caf Cash Interest	-	10.33	10.33	32.40
Caf Gold Interest	-	798.58	798.58	52.05
Julian Lodge Interest	-	-	-	323.09
Sale of Equipment	-	135.00	135.00	-
Miscellaneous	-	-	-	5.57
TOTAL RECEIPTS	-	4,747.57	4,747.57	7,474.08
Expenditure				
Equipment	-	1,166.45	1,166.45	100.26
Telephone, Internet and Postage	-	763.30	763.30	621.26
Stationery, Printing, etc.	-	62.60	62.60	157.97
Studio Maintenance, Cleaning and Software	-	949.14	949.14	1,759.58
Christmas Cards	-	-	-	453.72
Rent	-	5,480.50	5,480.50	5,323.00
Insurance	-	701.69	701.69	643.07
Room Hire	-	116.00	116.00	15.50
TNF Membership Fee	-	42.00	42.00	42.00
Miscellaneous	-	82.75	82.75	122.95
TN Lunch	-	302.30	302.30	-
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	-	9,666.73	9,666.73	9,239.31
Net (payments) for the Year	-	(4,919.16)	(4,919.16)	(1,765.23)
Reserves at 1 st January 2022	8,090.00	44,473.97	52,563.97	54,329.20
Reserves at 31 st December 2022	8,090.00	39,554.81	47,644.81	52,563.97
*Note				
	£	£	£	£
Equipment	-	506.80	506.80	100.26
Playback Speakers	-	419.88	419.88	-
Memory Sticks	-	239.77	239.77	-
Chairs	-	-	-	-
	-	1,166.45	1,166.45	100.26

WEST SHROPSHIRE TALKING NEWSPAPERS

**STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES
YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2023**

<u>CASH FUNDS</u>	<u>2023</u> £	<u>2022</u> £
National Savings	2,083.23	2,083.23
Caf Cash Account	1,210.42	8,886.46
Caf Gold Account	44,351.16	41,594.28
Julian Hodge Bank	-	-
TOTAL	47,644.81	52,563.97

UNRESTRICTED RESERVES

Analysis of Reserves	Opening Balance <u>01/01/23</u> £	Deficit/Surplus for Year £	Closing Balance <u>31/12/23</u> £
General Fund	23,473.97	(4,919.16)	18,554.81
Technical Development	11,000.00	-	11,000.00
Service Development	10,000.00	-	10,000.00
TOTAL	44,473.97	(4,919.16)	39,554.81

RESTRICTED RESERVES

	Opening Balance <u>01/01/23</u>	Deficit/Surplus for Year	Closing Balance <u>31/12/23</u>
John Leake Memorial Fund	8,090.00	-	8,090.00
TOTAL	8,090.00	-	8,090.00
TOTAL RESERVES	52,563.97	(4,919.16)	47,644.81

NOTES

	<u>2023</u> £	<u>2022</u> £
<u>1. Donations and Legacies</u>		
Donations	1,302.00	5,450.00
Legacies/In Memory	740.43	-
Friends of	407.00	882.00
TOTAL	2,449.43	6,332.00

Signed on behalf of the Trustees:

.....
Mr S. Stewart (Treasurer)

29/4/2024