

I am pleased to be able to give the Annual Parish Meeting my Pontesbury Parish Council Chairman's report, which will take the same format as last year; an overview of the years activities. I am sure you are aware our council meetings are reported in the newsletter and this year has seen more changes than we would normally expect which I will now report.

This last year started with both Parish and Shropshire Council Elections and we are very fortunate now to have Cllr Nick Hignett and Cllr Roger Evans representing us as Shropshire and Parish Councillors. They are both committed and approachable and I am sure you will all join me in thanking them for the work they do in our community. We had a contested election in the Pontesbury Ward, the first for 20years, and we welcomed Cllr Susan Lockwood who was our new elected Councillor. After the elections Cllr Charlie Sandells, Cllr Colin Robinson and Cllr Peter Heywood were co-opted to fill the vacancies in the Cruckton ward. I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank again the outgoing councillors, Margaret Beckett, Nick Deane and Billy Goodall for their valuable contributions over the last term of office.

I must report in the last year we had the funerals of two former Parish Councillors, Clive Griffiths and Jean Swann who had both been long standing Parish Councillors and were very active within our community.

We were fortunate to have the new leader of Shropshire Council, Cllr Peter Nutting, to attend our meeting in July. He outlined his ambitions to work with town and parish councils and explained the financial constraints that Shropshire Council is facing and the potential impact on our services. Also, an outline of the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire 2017-2021 was provided. Poles Coppice is an example of the Parish Council working with Shropshire Council. In these difficult times the Parish Council agreed a grant fund of £1500 for assistance with the provision of volunteers to support the Shropshire Council management team work to improve this countryside site.

This leads me to the Parish Council precept (the council tax rate set by the Parish Council) which was set at £70,000. This is an approximate increase of £4.25 per annum, increasing the annual cost to approximately £59.27 per annum for a Band D house. The Parish Council strives always to be prudent with public funds but an increased workload for the Clerk and financial contributions to ensure the retention of local services, has meant that a small Council Tax increase was needed.

The Parish Council Planning Committee have had another busy year and I would like to thank all the members for their contribution to the meetings. Whilst the Parish Council are only consultees - not the decision makers, our views are taken into consideration by the Planning officers and we look at all applications based on material planning considerations. However we are aware planning can be an emotive and stressful time for those concerned. Cllr Allan Hodges balances the role of chairman of the planning committee with expert knowledge and empathy for those present. We are very fortunate to have his continued support to undertake this time-consuming role. I am sure you will join me in expressing our thanks, considering the extra work the Neighbourhood Plan will bring. May I also take this opportunity to thank Cllr Neville Lewis for his expertise on the applications for work on trees with tree preservation orders. His knowledge and advice are greatly appreciated by the Planning Committee.

Continuing with planning, the partial review of the Local Plan is currently taking place and in the consultation document it is proposed to retain the development boundary which we as a Parish Council strongly supported. Pontesbury was previously linked with Minsterley as market towns, however it is now proposed that in planning terms Pontesbury will be classified as a "hub". This is due to us undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan. To give you a very brief overview, preparing a Neighbourhood Plan enables communities to take the lead in producing part of the statutory development plan for their area. Crucially, unlike a Parish Plan these Neighbourhood Plans are a statutory document and must be used to determine a planning application in a neighbourhood area. We have had our first meeting with members of the public and Parish councillors and we are looking to set up a steering group. Thank you to all who have volunteered to be involved.

The planning application for the proposed development of the land at Hall Bank, Pontesbury has now closed its public consultation and in making the Parish Council comments we listened to the concerns of the community particularly concerning the 100m of the A488 leading into the site where there will be increased traffic and pedestrians. Support was given only on the basis of important improvements to this stretch of road and the pavement for safety reasons. The Parish Council welcomed the offer from the developer to build a community hub which will benefit the community. It meets the Parish Council aspirations and will ensure long term sustainability for community activities and services. As part of this an initial public consultation has been undertaken, by the library steering group, with a proposal to relocate the library from its current location to a new hub. The feedback is being processed at this time and will then be published.

Shropshire Council's Library services' consultation has now been completed and due to the hard work and commitment of all those involved, Pontesbury Library has been classified as being in tier two which means that Shropshire Council has an expectation that the library will become cost neutral from 2023 i.e. self-funding. This allows the local community additional time to produce a viable financial plan. The Friends of Pontesbury Library, with Bob Boden's great enthusiasm as their Chairman, have continued to raise substantial sums of money. They endeavour to have the library used for other activities to enable it to be at the heart of the community. They have now been granted charitable status and their representatives on the Library Steering Group continue to work on the long-term strategy. My thanks must go to all those involved, and the Parish Council continues to support the long-term retention of a library in your community.

How does all this information go out to the community? This is something which is almost taken for granted. The Pontesbury Newsletter has local information and is paramount in getting information into the public domain. Our professional editor Christine Laurie prepares it for printing, liaising with local groups and advertisers. Once 1400 copies are printed it then must be prepared into bundles ready for our volunteer deliverers. This year Neil and Daphne Williams stepped down after five years of bundling the newsletters. A big thank you to you both and we were delighted that Jonathan Walton and Christine Day took over getting them ready for distribution for our great team of volunteers, who ensure the newsletter is distributed throughout the Parish. A big thank- you to you all.

The Police's Safer Neighbourhood Team continues to be based in Pontesbury. We are fortunate that we have an excellent relationship with the local Police team. This year PC Jon Summerfield retired. Everyone felt that he was very much our local Bobby, however we

have been very fortunate in our new replacement PC Ross Cookson who has been active within the community and his colleague PCSO Joe Bradley. They are both always available to discuss local issues.

The Parish Council representatives have continued to attend meetings on your behalf. Examples include The Local Joint Committee Meetings, Shropshire Association of Local Councils and the Town and Parish Council Forums, which are organised by Shropshire Council. We are always keen to have representatives attend and report back to the Parish Council ensuring we are well informed and up to date with policies and developments that can affect our community.

The services provided by the Parish Council continue to be well used particularly the play area and the BMX track. The Parish Council took over the public toilets several years ago and it has just been agreed, in partnership with the Rea Valley First Responders, to locate a defibrillator on the outside wall of the public toilets. First Aid and defibrillator training has been provided. Thank you to the initial volunteers but more are needed. Please see the newsletter for details.

I must report Miss Kate Davies has left the role of Parish Clerk formally on 16th February however stayed on in a handover role till the end of February to facilitate a smooth transition. Thank you for this and I will repeat what was said at the February meeting of the Parish Council:

" I am sure all members of the Parish Council will want to join me in publicly recording our thanks and appreciation for Kate's commitment over the last five years as our clerk. The support and guidance we have received from you has been invaluable and you have shown integrity at all times."

The role of Parish Clerk has evolved and will continue to do so. For a Parish of the size of Pontesbury it is now virtually a full-time role. Kate was responsible for developing this role and we are delighted to welcome Mrs Debbie Marais who comes with a wealth of experience. Debbie's last role was as Branch Manager at Oswestry Library. We look forward to working with Debbie and the Parish Council will give her its full support and looks forward to an enjoyable and long association.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Parish Councillors for their continued support. The role is now more time consuming and your commitment is, I am sure, appreciated by the community. Indeed, we have a wealth of local groups and many members of the Parish Council are involved in them and able to listen to community concerns and when necessary raise them with the Parish Council. I also would like to thank members of the community who attend our Monday night monthly meetings.

May I take this opportunity to thank my vice chair, Cllr John Pritchard, for his continued support. This is the third year with us both in our respective roles and I appreciate being able have the opportunity to discuss issues and tap into, I believe, approximately 45 years' experience!!!

Finally, we face another challenge, new General Data Protection Regulations which come into force in May. I will finish my report by not looking at change, but, at a what I believe is our strength - a Parish Council which serves the community well. I trust this will continue to be the case but just as important is a community that is well informed and actively supports local groups or as individuals doing your bit i.e. keeping the Parish free of litter - the unsung heroes. Thank you to you all and I believe we are in a strong position to jointly face the challenges that lie ahead.

In addition to my report with the very testing weather conditions we have experienced recently i would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped whether farmers clearing the snow , volunteer four by four users , neighbours checking on each other and clearing paths a great community effort and a big thank you to you all .