

Chairman's Report – Annual Parish Meeting March 2021

I am pleased to be able to give this Annual Parish Meeting, my Parish Council Chairman's report. I am going to start with how I finished my report last year, I quote:

"I will finish my report by highlighting what I believe is our strength - a team of skilled, hardworking, committed councillors and a professional clerk, who work very hard to serve their local community. I trust this will continue to be the case. Just as important is a community that is well informed and actively supports local groups, and the many individuals among the community that do their bit e.g. delivering the very successful village newsletter and 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."

Little did we know the magnitude of challenges to come, immense and unprecedented for most of us. The Covid virus has changed all of our lives and yet the communities within our parish have shown strength, great spirit and resolve, pulling together to overcome all the difficulties we have faced. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the part you have played throughout the last year and in particular to Sharon Davies and Helen Tivnen who set up and ran the local foodshare scheme supporting at the peak 25 families each week and encouraged local people to mobilise and help; the many local volunteers who delivered essential food and prescriptions throughout the parish and looked out for people who were isolated; to all the businesses, organisations, neighbouring parish councils and individuals who donated food and money to the local efforts. What is great is that many people want to continue to volunteer and thanks to a team of local volunteers and Helen Tazewell (Community Care Coordinator) the Community Good Neighbours scheme has come into being which will continue to offer support to the community as we come out of the pandemic and beyond.

The world of Zoom meetings has taken over in the last year which has ensured that both the Parish Council and Planning meetings have been able to continue to allow essential parish council business to be carried out. It is interesting how quickly we have adapted to this way of communication. However communicating online can be tiring and for that reason I am keeping this year's report short. I look forward to meeting you all in person again at next year's Annual Parish Meeting. Everything covered is reported in greater detail in both the newsletter and on the Parish Council website.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Cllr Nick Hignett and Cllr Roger Evans who represent us as Shropshire and Parish Councillors. They are both committed, very hard working and approachable and I am grateful for all the work they do in our community and particularly for our Parish Council. We are very fortunate to have such a strong team of councillors who all share the same ideology of working for our community. The role is now more time consuming and complex and their commitment is, I am sure, appreciated by the community as well as by myself.

The Pavilion The new community hub building

(The Pavilion) now officially belongs to the Parish Council. A big thank you to Shropshire Homes for providing it for the community. The opening was scheduled for April 6th 2020 so we are still waiting for a date to officially open the whole building!

However, we are already seeing the benefits of the building from being used as a temporary home for the local foodbank at the beginning of the pandemic; providing a base from which the Community Good Neighbours scheme was formed as well as opening as a library albeit with social distancing and restricted numbers and for now just providing a click and collect service.

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The work involved in taking this project to the point that the building is partially opened, has been exceptionally time consuming and big thank you to all who have been involved. We now have a steering group for the Pavilion and while there is a level of frustration of not being able to have the building open and fulfilling its potential as a vibrant cultural and support hub, our meetings continue and we look forward to putting in place those plans in the near future. The friends of Pontesbury Library continue to raise the profile of the library and fund-raise despite the difficult circumstances. They have adapted to the restrictions we have faced, providing the August Bank Holiday Treasure Hunt, the Christmas Tree trail and taking the Library Lottery online to ensure that fundraising continues. A separate report about their work will follow.

Finance

The Parish Council always strives to be prudent with public funds, however there are several large costly projects which we advised about last year, which have either been completed or are still being worked on. Our draft Strategic Plan (on the parish council website) which we hope to consult on in summer 2021 gives more details.

- Setting up the community hub building
- Replacing older style Sox streetlights with LED lights (complex project)
- A tree inspection survey has taken place and we are working on the recommendations within the report
- We had also budgeted for and undertaken essential maintenance in the play area.
- We will be reviewing the public toilets over the next 18 months and putting a refurbishment plan in place.

All these larger projects are on top of the normal running costs of the Parish Council.

This leads me to the Parish Council precept (the council tax rate set by the Parish Council) which was set at £142,000 for 2021/2022 which is an approximate increase of 59 pence per week (for an average band D house).

Grants have been awarded this year for:

- The upkeep of Poles Coppice
- Remembrance wreath
- Printing a local information leaflet for every household in the parish at the beginning of the March lockdown
- PPE for local COVID volunteers
- The local foodbank
- Community Good Neighbours Pontesbury and Rea Valley
- Feed the Birds Pontesbury and Minsterley
- Christmas lights for School Green
- Noticeboard for Plealey

Planning

The Parish Council Planning Committee have continued during the lockdown although there have been less applications and I would like to thank all the members for their contribution to the applications we have received.

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Whilst the Parish Council are only consultees - not the decision makers, our views are taken into consideration by the Planning officers. We look at all applications based on material planning considerations but are very 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 . 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 he has undertaken with the Neighbourhood Plan. 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 very much appreciated.

The review of the Local Plan, has reached its last public consultation stage. The next step is to go to the full Shropshire Council for consideration and then onwards to the Planning Inspector. In the consultation document it is proposed we will be classified as a hub which we as a Parish Council strongly support. Pontesbury was previously linked with Minsterley as a market town. The Local Plan consultation is to take the plan to 2038. For Pontesbury there is shown an amendment to the development boundary. This is to accommodate limited future growth for development with a site for approximately 40 houses, with a further 22 houses expected in windfall or exception sites.

Working in partnership

The success of what we as a parish council can achieve relies on us working successfully in partnership with residents, businesses, and other local and regional organisations. I would like to give you a flavour of some of these partnership projects.

The Pontesbury Parish Neighbourhood plan involves creating a strategy for development in the local community and is a way of helping local communities to influence the planning of the area in which they live and work. It is a community-led process to create a shared vision for our neighbourhood. Cllr Allan Hodges Chairs this group and has provided a separate report on our progress and there will be an opportunity to ask questions about the plan later.

The Hall Bank development is nearing completion and we have been working with Shropshire Council Highways department (and their consultants WSP) looking at improvements for the junctions at the bottom and top of Hall Bank. The parish council have been consulted on the provisional plans and are awaiting to see further proposals. We have always identified pedestrian safety as a priority.

We have also been working with Shropshire Council Highways and Flooding Officer, and Shropshire Rural Housing to look at flood alleviation measures needed. We are awaiting a report which will look at medium and longer term measures, some of which will be incorporated into the works done on the Junction at the bottom of Hall Bank.

The Climate Emergency Action group is working hard in partnership with the Parish Council, supporting the declaration of a climate emergency and producing an action plan to ensure the council and parish are carbon neutral by 2030. Regular meetings and online talks have been taking place and the group continues to grow and develop. Liz Knowles who chairs this group has provided a report on the progress of the group and is happy to answer questions later.

The P3 group despite difficult circumstances have continued to help to develop the footpaths in the parish and I am sure we all wish to thank the volunteers for all their hard work, including Cllr Richard Martinali and Chris Hearn.

The relationship with our local Police team continues. We are fortunate that we have an excellent relationship with PC Ross Cookson and his colleague PCSO Joe Bradley. Both

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are very active within our community and always available to discuss local issues and work with our Shropshire councillors and the Parish Council. We would like to thank the whole team for all their hard work in maintaining the low levels of crime that we enjoy locally. We are working with the police on tackling the speeding issues in the village along with the neighbouring parishes of Minsterley and Hanwood. We are pleased to see that the community speed watch team are active in the village. We have raised our support for a 20mph through the village with Shropshire Council. We have also been working to find a solution to the problems of traffic and parking outside the schools at each end of the day. Following discussions between the Police, Highways, schools and Councillors, yellow lines have been put down as a temporary measure, while a more permanent solution is considered.

We are also working with Minsterley Parish council on installing solar lighting along the cycleway linking the two villages.

Getting the newsletter out each month has been essential, passing on vital information and updates along with articles to lift our spirits. We have had to provide a mix of online and print versions during the pandemic and lockdowns, as restrictions have dictated. I'm sure you will all wish to thank our professional editor Christine Lawrie who works hard to prepare each interesting edition, liaising with local groups and advertisers. A big thank you to Jonathan Walton and Christine Day and the great team of volunteers, who ensure the newsletters are distributed throughout the Parish.

Elections

We will be having elections this May and I would like to thank all our Parish Councillors for the work they have put in during the last four years and hope they wish to continue supporting our Parish in their wards. May I take this opportunity to thank my Vice-Chair Cllr John Pritchard for his support during this period.

I am sure you will all want to join me in thanking our clerk Mrs Debbie Marais for her commitment during the Covid pandemic. I quote from the nomination that was sent to the Lady Lord Lieutenant Anna Turner

"I would like to nominate our Clerk Mrs Debbie Marais to be sent a thank you card for the exceptional work she has done for the Parish of Pontesbury liaising with Shropshire Council, community care workers, helping support volunteer groups, and helping to provide an information sheet to every household in the Parish. Debbie has worked tirelessly and has been instrumental in ensuring that through this most difficult time our community has received support at all levels".

Debbie has ensured the running of the Parish Council during a very difficult period in a professional and efficient manner, on top off issues raised with the pandemic. May I take this opportunity to thank her and also for her help in writing this report.

Finally, if I have missed out anyone or not reported a matter please accept my apologies. This has been a most difficult year and I am sure as a community as we emerge from this pandemic, we will maintain all the support and help for each other and a huge thank you to everyone over the last year. We look forward to re-connecting in person to celebrate a return to normality over the coming months.