

I am pleased to be able to give this Annual Parish Meeting, my Parish Council Chairman's report. Last year I reported that we were looking forward to returning to our normal way of life after Covid and looking forward to some larger events such as the Platinum Jubilee party. What a day it was!. The whole community coming together. Crowds of local residents lined the streets of Pontesbury to watch the procession and then gathered on the Mary School field for music, stalls and food. A huge thank you to all involved in what was a very special occasion. The event was organised by the Parish Council working committee along with local volunteers. Our thanks go to them and to the local businesses who sponsored the event. A special thank you to our Deputy Clerk Nicki Young and Cllr Sharon Davies who kept everyone on track.

We were deeply saddened on the 8th September 2022 to hear of the passing of her majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and joined many millions across the globe in paying tribute to a much loved monarch, ten days of mourning, and the subsequent proclamation of King Charles III.

I shall now give a quick summary of parish matters in my report, bearing in mind that the Pontesbury Newsletter has provided updates on the monthly Parish Council meetings and all local activities throughout this busy year. I will keep it brief!!

The Parish Council is fortunate to have a strong team of councillors who are committed and hardworking, all sharing the same ideology of working for our community. During the last year we had a vacancy filled by Cllr Adrian Windows, already involved with several local groups. We still have one vacancy for a councillor, due to the resignation of Lynette Charles.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our two Shropshire Councillors, Cllrs Nick Hignett (also vice chairman) and Roger Evans. They both work very hard for the local community and are very approachable. I am grateful for all the work they do in our community and particularly for our parish council.

I would like to thank Cllr Pritchard who has decided to step down from his role as vice chair, for his advice and support over the last eight years which has been greatly appreciated.

The Pavilion - The Pavilion Community Hub and Library, has continued to develop into a vibrant cultural and support hub which is now being used by many organisations on a regular basis .

Anna Lawson, our Building Assistant, is the public face of the Pavilion. Anna works closely with the Deputy Clerk in managing the ever-increasing number of bookings and the running of the building, my thanks to them both for all their hard work. There will be a separate more detailed report about activities at the Pavilion.

The Pavilion Working Group has now become The Pavilion Committee (made up of councillors and representatives from local groups). The Committee has delegated authority to make certain management decisions about the building reporting monthly to full council. We have continued to have site meetings with our neighbours (the Ark Nursery and Pontesbury Coop) to ensure good communication, we work together well, keeping the site vibrant and safe.

The Friends of Pontesbury Library continue to raise the profile of the library within the Pavilion. FOPL put on a full programme of cultural and fund-raising events and a separate report about their work will follow. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Yvonne Davies for all her hard work during her time as FOPL Chair and we are pleased Colin Sharp has taken over the role and look forward to the continuation of our successful partnership working.

Finance - We are delighted that Caroline Higgins has joined the Parish Council team as our Finance Officer. Caroline comes with a wealth of finance and local council experience and has fitted seamlessly into this important role.

The Parish Council is committed to being prudent with public funds, however there are several ongoing, large and costly projects:

- Replacing older style SOX streetlights with LED lights (complex project), looking to complete in the near future.
- The play area – we have a budget for essential maintenance, however we are saving towards replacing and updating the play equipment in the future. We have set up a working group to drive this forward .
- We will be reviewing the public toilets over the next 18 months and putting a refurbishment plan in place.
- The open spaces on the Cricketers Meadow estate will be transferred from Shropshire Homes to the Parish Council shortly and developed for wildlife and community open spaces.

All these larger projects are on top of the normal running costs of the Parish Council, the Parish Council draft Strategic Plan (available on the parish council website) covers all of the projects planned over the next 2 years.

This leads me to the Parish Council precept (the council tax rate set by the Parish Council) which has been set at £207,780 for 2023-2024, which is an approximate increase of 32p/week (for an average band D property).

Grants have been awarded this year towards:

- The upkeep of Poles Coppice
- Remembrance wreath
- Shropshire Air Cadets for an outward bound trip to Portugal (6 Pontesbury cadets joined the trip)
- Tree planting around the parish

I would like to take this opportunity to thank both Cllr Trow for the quarterly internal checking of our accounts and all members of the Finance & General Purposes Committee for attending meetings and overseeing the finances of the parish council.

The Parish Council Planning Committee - Cllr Allan Hodges carries out 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, especially considering the extra work he has undertaken with the Neighbourhood Plan (separate report to follow) As a matter of interest, planning applications have reduced by approximately a third in the last year.

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.

Following on from my report last year, the review of the Shropshire Council Local Plan (in place until 2038) has now gone to the Planning Inspectors. The proposed Local Plan shows an amendment to the development boundary for Pontesbury. This is to accommodate limited future growth for development, including a proposed site for 40 houses. A further 22 houses are expected in windfall or exception sites.

May I also thank all members of the Planning Committee for their input at the monthly meetings.

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 successful projects and hard-working groups around the parish.

The solar lighting project on the Pontesbury/Minsterley cycleway has been completed and has proved to be a great success, showing how successful two parish councils working together can be. The solar lighting has led to an increase in the use of this path linking the two villages, and local residents being more active. We are now looking at developing a joint verges project, planting wildflowers along part of the cycleway to boost biodiversity in the area.

The Hall Bank development has now been completed 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 and a date for when the work can be started. We have always identified pedestrian safety as a priority. We have also been working with Shropshire Council Highways and the Flooding Officer, and Shropshire Rural Housing to look at flood alleviation measures needed within the village. 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 netzero 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, continue to develop the footpaths in the parish and I am sure we all wish to thank the volunteers for all their hard work. A report from Alan Drury will be given at this meeting.

Many thanks to the Good Neighbours Scheme, who have continued to grow and put on more social activities for local people, their commitment in supporting local residents has proved invaluable and a huge thank you to all the volunteers.

The relationship with our local policing team continues. We have an excellent relationship with the local policing team and the close working from the Pavilion and local knowledge pays dividends when supporting local residents. PC Richard Walters and PC Simon Lewis have sent a report for this meeting and a big thank you to Richard, Simon and their colleagues for all their hard work.

Last year I reported that we were looking to install ANPR cameras. This successful joint project has involved three parishes, Pontesbury, Hanwood and Minsterley, along with the Police, Shropshire Council and expert advice from Charles Pedrick from Rodborough Parish Council, Gloucestershire. We have set up our Safer Speed Shropshire group and we are already seeing a reduction in speeding. Information is collated on a weekly basis and a big thank you to our team who give their time to collate this information. We will be looking to send out a monitoring report in the near future.

A big thank you to Jonathan Walton and Christine Day and the great team of volunteers who ensure the newsletters are distributed through the Parish. This year our editor stood down from the role and we are grateful for her contribution over the years. Our Deputy clerk Nicki has taken over and we are very grateful for the seamless transition.

The Emergency Planning Working Group continues to meet, representing as many wards as possible to pre-empt emergencies such as flooding, which impact on the parish. Thank you to all those involved, particularly Cllr Jones with his expert knowledge on matters relating to flooding, Cllr Gregory on health and safety issues and Cllr Sandells on his local knowledge of issues affecting Cruckton.

As well as my previous thank yous to the team who brought us the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, I also wish to thank Shropshire Council for providing the beautiful new oak tree for School Green and to Siobhan Reedy (Shropshire Council tree team) and Ben Jones from Woodmatters and, also, Cllrs Neville Lewis & Geoff Manley for helping plant the tree. The tree has been registered as part of the Queen's Tree Canopy project on the national website.

May I, on behalf of us all, thank our Clerk, Debbie Marais, who ensures we have a professional well-run parish council, which as you can see from my report has an increasingly large amount of work and responsibility. It is at the annual meeting when her work can be acknowledged by us all.

Personally, may I take this opportunity to thank her and also for her help in writing this report. If I have missed anyone out or not reported a matter, please accept my sincere apologies. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our deputy clerk Nicki Young for all her help and assistance.

Finally, I would like to finish by thanking all the many volunteers in our community who give their time freely and are involved in the many activities taking place in the parish. I am sure we are all proud to be part of our wonderful parish of Pontesbury and as a community we will work hard to continue to support and help each other. I am proud to be part of such a thriving and vibrant community.