

Chairman's Report – Annual Parish Meeting 2022

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:

“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 reconnecting in person to celebrate a return to normality over the coming months.” We are now returning to our new normal way of life, rebooting our projects, having face to face meetings (although Zoom will still be part of our communications) and can look forward to some larger events such as our Platinum Jubilee party in June of this year.

I shall now cover Parish Matters in my report, bearing in mind the Pontesbury Village Newsletter has provided updates on the monthly Parish Council meetings and all of the activities throughout the last busy year, so trying to keep it brief!!

In April 2021 we appointed a Deputy Clerk, Nicki Young, who has settled in with the Parish Council and become a valuable member of our team bringing a wealth of knowledge of working with both town and parish councils.

We had an uncontested election in May and 3 of our serving Councillors decided to stand down, Cllr Richard Martinelli, Cllr Brian Morris and Cllr Susan Lockwood. I am sure you all want to joint me in thanking them for their contribution over the years and still retaining a keen interest in the running of our Parish. We are fortunately to have Cllr Michelle Trow stand in May for Cruckton Ward and shortly afterwards we co-opted Cllr Lynette Charles and Cllr Sharon Davies for the Pontesbury Ward. Cllr Bradbury resigned at the beginning of July and Cllr Neale Manning was co-opted to the Council. All of our new councillors have brought great enthusiasm and a desire to be involved in the running of the council.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thanks Cllrs Nick Hignett and Roger Evans, who were re-elected 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 increasingly more time-consuming and complex, and their commitment is, I am sure, appreciated by the community as well as by myself. This year we decided to have 2 vice chairs, Cllr Hignett and Cllr Pritchard and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them both for their help and support.

The Pavilion

The Pavilion Community Hub and Library, despite somewhat of a stop – start approached governed by the pandemic, is now rapidly moving forward as a vibrant cultural and support hub.

Anna Lawson, our Building Assistant, continues to be the public face of the Pavilion. Anna works closely with the Deputy Clerk and is taking the role forward, managing

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the ever-increasing number of bookings. There will be a separate more detailed report about activities at the Pavilion.

We now have a Pavilion Working Group, to make management decisions about the building and also site meetings with our neighbours (the Ark Nursery and Pontesbury Coop) to ensure we have good communication channels and 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. They 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 Chair. Yvonne will be standing down at the FOPL annual meeting.

Finance

The Parish Council is committed to being 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:

- Setting up the community hub building
- Replacing older style SOX streetlights with LED lights (complex project) and looking to complete in the near future.
- A tree inspection survey has taken place and we are working on the recommendations within the report.
- 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 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 later this year and developed for wildlife and public open spaces.

All these larger projects are on top of the normal running costs of the Parish Council, the Parish Council draft Strategic Plan (on the parish council website) covers 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 £179,424.00 for 2022-2023 which is an approximate increase of 46p / week (for an average band D property).

Grants have been awarded this year for:

- The upkeep of Poles Coppice
- Remembrance wreath
- Christmas lights for School Green and the area outside the Pavilion

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

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The Parish Council Planning Committee

Cllr Allan Hodges balances the role of the 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.

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 with 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:

The solar lighting project on the Pontesbury/Minsterley cycle way was completed last year and has proved to be a great success and shows how successful two parish councils working together can be, linking the two villages. The solar lighting has led to an increased in the use of this path and local residents being more active.

The Pontesbury 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 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 when this 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 a 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

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plan to ensure the council and parish are carbon neutral by 2030. Regular meetings and online talks have been taking place and the groups 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 during, including Richard Martinelli and Chris Hearn. 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 activities, including an afternoon tea for everyone here in the Public Hall.

The relationship with our local policing team continues. We now have PC Simon Lewis and his colleagues based in the Pavilion and so have successfully retained a local police presence. We have an excellent relationship with the local policing team and the close working from the same base and local knowledge has already paid dividends when supporting local residents. PC Lewis has sent a report for this meeting and a big thank you to Simon and his colleagues.

We are working the Police on tackling the speeding issues in the village along with the neighbouring parishes of Minsterley and Hanwood. We have liaised with the community speedwatch team (thank you for all the work they do) and we are now looking to install ANPR cameras in Minsterley, Pontesbury and Hanwood. This is a successful joint project involving three parishes, Policy, Shropshire Council and expert advice from Charles Pedrick from Rodborough Parish Council, Gloucestershire. This project is well on its way to being implemented and the cameras should be operational this spring.

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. Thank you also to our professional editor, who works hard to prepare each interesting edition, liaising with local groups and advertisers.

We have set up an Emergency Planning Working Group representing as many wards as possible to pre-empt emergencies such as flooding which impacts 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.

The Platinum Jubilee Working Group has been set up and a big thank you to the Chair, Cllr Sharon Davies, and all the volunteers for coming forward to help make the weekend's events be truly memorable and a fitting tribute. As part of the 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 will be registered as part of the Queen's Tree Canopy project on the national website.

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May I, on behalf of us all, thank our Clerk, Debbie Marais, who ensure 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.

Finally, despite the turbulence we have experienced with COVID and troubling times we find the world is in, I am sure we are all proud to be part of our wonderful parish of Pontesbury and as a community we will maintain all the support and help for each other. A huge thank you to everyone who has helped their fellow residents over the past couple of years. The strong community spirit will enable us to bounce back an ever greater and more resilient as a community.