



## **Minutes of the Pontesbury Annual Parish Meeting** **held in Pontesbury Public Hall on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

1. **Apologies** were received from Councillors A Windows and S Davies.
2. **Welcome from Chairman** Pontesbury Parish Council Chairman, Cllr Duncan Fletcher, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
3. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023.** After a proposal from Cllr Pritchard, seconded by Cllr Trow, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting be accepted as a true and accurate record.

### **4 Shropshire Council Report – a report from Cllr N Hignett**

Pontesbury Parish area is represented by 2 Shropshire Councillors—Myself, Nick Hignett, and Councillor Roger Evans. I have written the report this year, and any errors or omissions are mine.

I am sure it will not be a surprise to any of you that the major focus of Shropshire Council this year has been on financial stability, and this will continue into the next financial year and beyond, especially if there are no changes to the National funding agreements for Local Government.

This is not just a problem in Shropshire. Councils across England are suffering, and our plight is made worse due to the rural nature of where we live. We, like our nearest neighbours in Telford, Staffordshire, and Herefordshire, are having to increase Council Tax, increase fees and charges, and yet cut services which will include making redundancies.

There is no doubt that for most top-tier councils who have responsibility for social care services, upwards of 75% of their budgets are spent on this area. The demand, cost and increased complexity are pushing up these costs all the time, and high inflation adds to the financial difficulties. We have a legal and ethical responsibility, whatever the costs, to look after our most vulnerable people.

**FINANCE AND RESOURCES**—The Council has saved £41 million of spend in this financial year, which is more than has ever been achieved in a single year. The Council is seeing unprecedented demand in social care in the current year, with demand estimated at £26 million over and above the predicted increase in last year's budget. This amount makes up part of the further £62 million savings needed for the 24/25 financial year.

The finances are already cut to the bone and the proposals set out in the budget will see more visual changes for residents than have been seen to date. Council tax will rise by 4.99%, which includes a 2% adult social care precept. For the average band D property in Shropshire, this will mean an extra £1.57 a week for Shropshire Council's part of Council Tax bills.

A charge will be introduced for emptying green bins, and parking fees will rise, as will all discretionary fees the Council charges.

There will be a complete review of some service areas. Some services may be reduced, some may cease altogether.

Shropshire Council will look to leave the Shirehall as it will be a much smaller organisation, and this will save up to £1.5 million a year in running costs. Temporary accommodation will be sought, until the proposed Multi Agency Hub is built in the Riverside Development. The decision by Chester University to withdraw its Shrewsbury Campus from the Guildhall gives another option for relocation.

We are quite possibly moving into an era where there will be an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to deliver more services locally, if desired, and precept accordingly, as Shropshire Council will need to concentrate its delivery on statutory services.

The Capital programme continues, and this is different to annual revenue spend, and is funded mainly by developers' contributions and external grants. This includes £84 million for Housing, £27 million for Schools and £40 million for Highways.

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT—Grant Funding. The Climate Team has attracted Government capital and revenue grant funding awards totalling £4.3 million to date.

Low Carbon Community buildings - the design of new buildings such as the new swimming pool at Whitchurch is increasingly being informed with reference to lifetime energy and carbon performance in order to minimise carbon emissions and running costs.

Electric Vehicle Chargers - Shropshire Council has one of the largest EV- charging infrastructure programmes in the Midlands and will soon own and operate over 300 chargers in its car parks, with a further 500 planned for future years.

Business support—The Council is working closely with community climate organisations and local businesses to offer free climate advice and training for local firms, as well as free consultancy advice on the installation of solar panels on large industrial buildings. These support programmes may also help local companies supplying goods and services to Shropshire Council to reduce their emissions.

Waste—waste is the biggest contract in the Place Directorate. Significant savings must be made, including charging for green waste, and the potential closure of 2 out of 5 Household Recycling Centres. These closures will be subject to public consultation and scrutiny for alternative cost-saving measures.

Shropshire Residents produce a lot of waste. On a national league table SC is listed as the second highest producer of waste per household, so bottom of the table. However, when green waste is removed from the equation, Shropshire sits in the top third. Shropshire Council is also one of the best Local Authorities for recycling.

Smithfield/Riverside---The first stage of the Smithfield/Riverside regeneration project has been approved, enabling the delivery of a landmark new Public Park in Shrewsbury Town Centre. Financed from the pot of almost £19 million of levelling up fund money secured from the Government, this preparatory work will see the demolition of the Riverside Shopping centre and former medical practice, paving the way for key enabling works on site for future phases of the scheme. Demolition work is expected to commence in the summer, with construction of the new park due to get underway before the end of 2024.

PLANNING---The Draft Local Plan is still going through due process. A report will go to Cabinet in April or May, and it is likely there will need to be a period of consultation, focussing on any additions. It is still envisaged that the plan will be adopted in early 2025.

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION---Early Help Teams are focused on making sure that the right support is put in place for Families as soon as it is needed. This new streamlined service offers targeted advice available by ringing 0345 678 9021.

An increased offer to Foster Carers, as well as drop-in “Fostering Info Sessions” have been held in order to increase numbers. As a result of this initiative, additional Foster Panels have been added to deal with the increased interest.

Active Travel around Schools continues to implement 20mph zones outside allocated schools.

Secondary School places-----2,974 pupils applied and 2,667 were offered their first preference. Of all who applied 98.4% were offered one of their preferences and 1.6% offered an alternative.

HOUSING AND ASSETS---Shropshire Council's two owned housing companies, STAR and Cornovii are performing well, with over 200 homes under construction across the county. These are delivering high quality affordable homes, low energy homes, local needs homes and specialist accommodation.

Homelessness continues to be an area of high pressure for the Council, with about 250 households in need of temporary accommodation at any one time. This rise in demand is broadly in line with Local Authorities across the Country.

Specific concerns around housing in the most rural parts of Shropshire is the current focus of several projects within the Council. There is work being done to find ways to make small-scale development of affordable homes in the smaller villages viable. A team is looking at how the Council can support Housing Associations to retain/replace their properties in rural areas, thus improving standards.

HIGHWAYS---At the last meeting of Shropshire Council, held on 29<sup>th</sup> February, finance was approved to enable a full business case to be prepared. This is now being worked on, with a target date for completion of September.

The Government recently announced extra spending of £136.4 million for Highways projects in England, over the next 7 years. Councillors and MPs will have a say in how that money is spent, with Town and Parish Councils expected to be involved in the process.

We are firmly in "Pothole Season", and I know everyone can cite persistent areas of bad highway, particularly on Rural roads. However, we are seeing a long-term decline in the number of potholes—from over 8,000 in May 2021 to less than 5,000 in February 2024.

Shropshire Council has been shortlisted for a National Award for the impact of its new approach to maintaining and improving the county's roads. The Council is one of the finalists for the "innovation" award at the LGC ( Local Government Chronicle) Awards 2024, with the winner set to be announced in June.

FINALLY----- On behalf of myself and Councillor Roger Evans, we would like to thank all of the Parish Councillors and Officers for working alongside us to represent our residents.

**5. Local Policing Team Report** PC Rich Walters reported the following work on local issues:

- Following a successful Problem Solving Plan being put in place and working with the parish council and Housing Plus, the situation on School Green has settled down and there have been no further incidents.
- The policing team have worked with residents along Wray Drive, following anti-social behaviour on Wray Drive and the play area. Individuals involved have been identified and visited and notices have been put up. This has had some success. PCSOs only work until 10pm now rather than midnight which impacts on time available for patrols.
- The local team were involved in helping residents following the local flooding
- There has been a scheme to report large potholes, reporting on the spot and using whatthreewords, this has had some success.
- There have been a number of diesel thefts in the area and police staff have been handing out anti-syphoning devices and locks. There is an advisory leaflet available and residents are asked to report suspicious vehicles in the area.
- There has been some anti-social behaviour at the Hall Bank bus stop. Police staff have used their powers to obtain contact details and identify culprits. An advisory leaflet encouraging people to gather evidence and ways of reporting ASB incidents.
- There have been visits to persistent speeding offenders in the area.
- A police volunteer is looking at how to produce a statistical report for the Pontesbury area, similar to that produced and included in the Hope Valley newsletter.
- There are to be an additional 14 Officers appointed for the division.

Cllr D Jones asked PC Walters which took precedence, signage or road marking at a junction. Cllr Jones would speak to PC Walters after the meeting to discuss this.

Cllr Fletcher thanked the Local Policing Team for all the work they do, stating it is good that they remain within the community.

## **6. Pontesbury Parish Council – Chairman’s Report**

I am pleased to be able to give this Annual Parish Meeting my Parish Council Chairman’s report. I intend this year to keep it brief, bearing in mind that the Pontesbury Newsletter has provided updates on the monthly Parish Council meetings and many other local activities throughout this busy year.

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 Amy Brookes, who is already involved with several local groups and a welcome addition to the parish Council.

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.

**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 much-loved 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 is a detailed report from the Deputy Clerk, to follow.

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. We look forward to the continuation of our successful partnership working.

**Finance** - Caroline Higgins who recently joined the Parish Council team as now become our Responsible Financial Officer and has become a valuable member of the parish council team.

I will now give some brief updates on Parish Council activities over the last twelve months. As always, we are committed to being prudent with public funds.

- The replacement of older style SOX streetlights with LED lights (complex project), looking to complete by the end of March 2024. This will reduce our maintenance and energy budget significantly.
- 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 have now been transferred from Shropshire Homes to the Parish Council and we are working with the local community to develop this area for wildlife and accessible green spaces for all to use.

All these larger projects are in addition to 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) and the parish council is delighted that they have managed to keep the precept increase to 3.86% for 2024-25, which is equivalent to an increase of 11p per week on a Band D property.

Grants have been awarded this year towards:

- The upkeep of Poles Coppice
- Remembrance wreath
- Pontesbury Sports Assoc.
- Hedge/tree planting
- The Community Garden

Thank You to 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. Our congratulations to all involved in making the Neighbourhood Plan a legal document in our planning system, a wonderful achievement. Thank you also to all the councillors for their input at planning committee meetings and may I also take this opportunity to thank Cllr Neville Lewis for his expertise on the applications for work on trees around the parish. His knowledge and advice are very much appreciated.

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 the hard-working groups around the parish.

**The solar lighting project** on the Pontesbury/Minsterley cycleway has proved to be a great success, showing how successful two parish councils working together, can be. We are now working on 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 **traffic calming measures in Pontesbury**. A public consultation has taken place and a public meeting is now scheduled for the 18<sup>th</sup> March at the Pavilion (6pm) and an update on the plans will be presented to local residents for comments.

We have also been working with Shropshire Council Flooding Officer, and Shropshire Rural Housing to look at **flood alleviation measures** needed within the village. Some of these measures could potentially 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 of the group's activities including the recent building of a community garden for all to enjoy and learn more about growing food locally.

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 Geoff Cummings, 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. A report follows about the group.

The relationship with our **local policing team** continues. We have an excellent working relationship with the team, based at the Pavilion. The local base and knowledge pays dividends when supporting local residents. Thank you to PC Richard Walters and his colleagues for all their hard work.

**The 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. Letters are sent out to drivers speeding and visits are made to the more persistent offenders. Information is collated on a weekly basis and a big thank you to our team who give their time to collate this information.

A big thank you to Jonathan Walton and Christine Day and the great team of volunteers who ensure the very popular **parish newsletter** is distributed through the Parish. Also, a big thank you to our Deputy clerk Nicki, for all the hard work she puts in as editor and making it so successful.

We will also receive reports from the hardworking groups that make up Pontesbury Sports Association and one from the newly established Pontesbury Youth Group. You will also hear reports about the village halls within our parish that provide essential spaces for the local community to come together and socialise. A big thank you to the many volunteers involved in running these keystone parish assets.

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 also take this opportunity to thank her 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, and for all of the support given by our Parish councillors.

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 very proud to be part of such a thriving and vibrant community.

#### **7. P3 Footpath Group Report from Geoff Cummings, P3 Group Coordinator**

##### **Annual Report for year ending Dec 2023**

2023 was a busy year apart from limitations caused by the various floods. We have had a new member join us who is also an active member of the Friends of Pontesford Hill group, which is a useful link for us. Chris Hearn has retired as Treasurer this year and Ken Jenks has retired from the group, both after many years of service for which we are very grateful.

Man-hours worked in 2023 were 487. We completed 74 different items of work. In this we have covered path surveys, stile repair/replacement, vegetation clearing, bridge and gate repair, signposting & waymarking.

Regarding other local groups, we have again worked with the Friends of Pontesford Hill Group this year to find areas on Pontesford & Earl's Hills where we can co-ordinate our efforts. We continue to ask for direct referrals of problem paths with position references and photos from members of the public.

Although we concentrate on the Pontesbury/Minsterley core area, we have also worked out this year to Longden, Lyth Hill, Bromlow Callow, Wagbeach, Shelve, etc. – basically wherever we can help.

I would like to thank all the volunteers who give up their Tuesday mornings to work for the group come whatever the weather, the farmers and landowners for their co-operation in helping us access the routes on their land, and also Helen Beresford at Shropshire Council Rights of Way Office for all her help and assistance given to us.

#### **8. Parish Village Halls – reports from representatives:**

**Pontesbury Public Hall – report from Cllr Lewis**

##### **Pontesbury Public Hall report - Annual Parish Meeting 2024**

The public hall lettings and bookings have now fully recovered and functioning after the problems with the Covid shutdown. The hall is used regularly by the Pontesbury Players and also the junior section, yoga classes, keep fit, Pilates, Tai chi classes and an excellent Wednesday afternoon line dancing session, which is very popular.

There is short mat bowling during the winter period and also Slimming World classes are held every week of the year. A new dance exercise class has recently started in the main hall. We also have two sewing groups who meet regularly in the Len Simpson room.

Quite a large number of parties, both children and adults, concerts, quizzes, funeral wakes are also held over the year.

The Good Neighbours hot meals are held monthly in the hall and the hall trustees agreed that during the winter months these meals are held fully free of charge, to provide a warm supportive space.

#### **Cruckton Village Hall** – report from Cllr Sandells.

This year Cruckton village Hall has benefited from an internal redecoration of the main hall freshening up the appearance.

The committee have replaced the flat roof above the toilets and are in the middle of the refurbishment of the lavatory facilities. Making good use of the community infrastructure levies to do much needed maintenance on the hall. Cruckton village Hall is an important facility for the local community and this maintenance project will benefit and be enjoyed by all who use the hall and encourage more people to hire the hall.

The Hall has regular bookings from Lea Cross WI, The art club, Yoga class, The Fitzroy Academy, parties etc

The village Hall has hosted the Kings Coronation lunch and The Harvest supper and both events were well supported and enjoyed by the local community giving new and old residents the opportunity to mix.

The village Hall committee want to keep up their good work having a presentable and well loved village facility available for everyone to use at an affordable hire charge.

The village Hall thank all who support it.

#### **Habberley Village Hall** – report from Cllr Pritchard

The Hall continues to serve the local community with a proactive committee who are trying to move forward with increased activity in the post "Covid" era. Costs are rising at an alarming rate and the reduction in available funding will cause problems in the future - there is only so much money that can be extracted from the "punters" and the readily available entertainment from other sources is difficult to compete with.

Habberley is fortunate in having a stable population who are very supportive of the Hall either through the "100 Club" or the various activities. "Flics in the sticks" has been re-introduced and various other "Arts Alive" events bring in more professional entertainers. The two highlight events of the year are the Bar-b-Q and the Harvest Supper which are fully supported.

We have moved on to card payment for drinks etc which has been very helpful and a library book exchange is operated via the pub which supports the Hall.

#### **9. Pontesbury Parish Neighbourhood Plan** – a report from the Chairman, Cllr Hodges

On 7th September 2023 the Pontesbury Parish Neighbourhood Plan was supported by 86% of the voters in the Local Referendum. As a result, it has now been adopted by Shropshire Council as part of their Development Plan which means that it will help to decide future planning applications relating to our parish. In order to be adopted the Plan had to satisfy the external examiner that its policies represented the views of the local community as expressed in the extensive consultations which took place.

The policies relate to:

- housing provision and design
- protecting local landscape character and rights of way
- increasing biodiversity and reducing carbon emissions
- safeguarding community services
- small scale employment and farm diversification
- amenity views and protection of local green spaces

The core purpose of the Plan is to encourage future development to respect and enhance the existing character of Pontesbury Parish. There will be a considerable increase in CIL money awarded to the Parish for infrastructure improvements now that the Plan has been approved.

The impact of the Neighbourhood Plan is already in evidence in terms of planning decisions taken by Shropshire Council and how housing designs have been drawn up.

It is no mean feat to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. Only half a dozen Shropshire parishes have so far completed one and our Plan was made possible only as a result of many hundreds of parishioners who responded to the essential consultations.

## 10. **Friends of Pontesbury Library** - Yvonne Davies, Acting Chair

Friends of Pontesbury Library is a registered charity with the following aims:

- to raise funds to secure and maintain a Library building
- to support and help develop Library services in Pontesbury to serve the surrounding local area
- to develop and promote the use of the library and the value of literacy for the benefit of everyone without discrimination

We have approximately 450 FOPL members and there are over 130 members in the 100 Club Library Lottery. This brings in a regular revenue. Our events, organised across the year, are not only fundraisers but increasingly provide free activities aimed at a wide demographic of young families, schools and the elderly. During this year 2022/23 we have been particularly aware of the need to extend support to refugee families and those falling into poverty as a result of the sudden rise in the cost of living.

NB FOPL has now signed up to the PC agreement to pay for space used for FOPL activities at a reduced rate.

**Looking forward** - A year's extension to the current contract between FOPL, Shropshire Libraries and the PC to pay £3,500 pa towards the library's back office was agreed before Christmas. This runs out at the end of 2024. With the cost of living still rising and Shropshire Council budget cuts on the horizon it will be a challenging year ahead. It would be appreciated if the PC can keep us in touch with any developments. Councillor Nick Hignett is a FOPL Trustee and has been very supportive to date, along with PC Chair Duncan Fletcher and councillor Roger Evans.

We would ask that all Parish Councillors support FOPL to help keep our library open by encouraging the community to become library members, 100 Club Lottery Members and, where possible, canvass for more volunteers in their dealings with the community. I am sure you appreciate that many of our volunteers do an amazing job to make FOPL a success. However, some need to retire from their roles as the years roll by, and a new generation of volunteers will need to take over. (We appreciate that some people do not necessarily want to join a committee, but are happy to help with individual events or ongoing activities e.g. caretaking the Pavilion Garden.)

The FOPL Committee are actively pursuing this and have 3 new committee members already who bring a wealth of expertise with them, but we need more. There isn't absolute clarity about whether it is a legal requirement to provide a library for Pontesbury and the surrounding Rea Valley area, so we have to make the case again as we did successfully in 2015/16. *FOPL asks that the Parish Council will work with us to do just this.*

Our first step is to make the case for keeping the library open to Council Leader Lezley Picton & Robert Macey, postholder for Culture & Digital. Following our committee meeting last Thursday I have invited comments from Members and active supporters in the first instance, and have been pleasantly overwhelmed with responses based on the following questions:

1. What's the value of a library in general and in particular Pontesbury Community Library which serves a hinterland of other villages and hamlets in the Rea Valley?
2. Why do you use the library? Do you know of other people prepared to make positive comments about the library and its resources?

The intention is to include comments from a wide range of community members in a draft of the letter to the Council leader to reflect the wide support our library has.



## **BRIEF SUMMARY: EVENTS & ACTIVITIES 2023**

**Chip It for Charity** - This invites the community to bring along their Christmas Trees for recycling by the Wood Matters' Team. This year it was held for the first time at the Ark Nursery carpark and coincided with both Twelfth Night and the FOPL coffee morning. We hope to use this venue in future years

**12 Coffee mornings** - Held on the first Saturday of each month and always well-attended. During the year we had a selection of speakers including Caroline Wright's presentation about Lily Chitty which scored top attendance for the year. We were also entertained by committee member readings for Valentine's Day, Michael Carding with his Loopy Lines Poetry, Lynn Evans talking about her art & craft pictures

**'Songs & Stories for Spring' presented by Mary Keith & Sal Tonge** - The library area was full as Mary taught Spring-themed acapella songs and Sal related stories to make us laugh and cry. Singing together made us all feel uplifted: a memorable occasion.

**Spring Plant Sale** - The weather this year didn't favour seedlings as much as in previous years. Tomato plants were a scarcity! However the event overall was again a great success.

**Summer Reading Challenge** - Dave Edwards, the renowned ex-Shrewsbury and Wales footballer, generously gave up his time to give out the awards for this in event which had a sports theme this year. His presence gave a high profile to encourage children's reading. He has indicated he'd be happy to work with us in the future.

**Art & Craft activities** - Six of these were held across the year in addition to those provided by Library Manager Beverley Link. Children were accompanied by adults, some of whom had not been library users. The Christmas Decorations workshops were held on two Saturdays in December. FOPL funded the materials. Two young people with Adult Social Care Provision also attended in their wheel chairs accompanied by their carers.

**Primary School visits** - Throughout the year there have been 10 visits by Pontesbury CE primary School, 2 by Minsterley School and a prospective visit by St Thomas & St Anne's Primary in Hanwood. Pontesbury children can walk to the Library, but FOPL provided £100 towards a coach for Minsterley's visits and will offer the same for Hanwood if needed. The Ark Nursery has also visited and intends to do so on Tuesdays with their oldest children in the future.

**Pre-loved Clothes Event, held at the Congregational Church** - We were overwhelmed with good quality children's clothes, including some school uniform items, toys and equipment. The items were free to take away. Those left over were gratefully received by Hope House charity shop in Shrewsbury.

**Elvis comes to Pontesbury!** - We ended 2023 with a fundraising evening featuring Andy King's tribute to Elvis Presley at the Public Hall. It was a huge hit! And it drew in an audience of younger people and older fans who enjoyed singing along, while giving a boost to FOPL funds.

**11. Pontesbury Climate Emergency Action Group** – a report from the Chairman, Liz Knowles

**Group status:** Pontesbury Climate Emergency Action Group now has a constitution as an unincorporated group.

Chair: Liz Knowles Treasurer: Roy Munton

We are in the process of adopting a Health and Safety Policy and purchasing Public Liability and employers' insurance to cover future events and the use of volunteers.

**Events:** on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2023 we held a "Get Growing" event at the Pavilion. This was included stalls from Street Allotment Guys from Shrewsbury, a local honey producer, a master composter, Proper Good Dairy, Pontesbury gardeners information point, plus planting activities for children, seed and plant swap and teas coffees and cake. It was a lovely day and was felt to be a success, with the community planters at the

Pavilion planted up by children with runner beans and salad crops. The public who dropped by were interested in our activities and several signed up for future community gardening.

**Repair Cafe:** This project, set up by Di Carrington with the help of St Georges church and Debbie Cairns is on-going bi-monthly at St Georges and is growing in popularity. Many items have been restored to good use, saving people money and the earth's resources.

**Clothes Swap:** PCEAG was asked to join FOPL in helping to run a clothes swap at the congregational hall in autumn 2023. This was a great success, with a large amount of good quality clothing donated and many people attending on the day. Good recycling.

**Road verge scheme:** Work finally started on parts of the road verge between Minsterley and Pontesbury (A488) this year. Pete Carty from RSVP arranged a contractor to close mow the areas selected, and members of PCEAG spread Yellow Rattle seed on these areas at the end of the summer. Councillor Doug Jones has been very supportive of this scheme, and Doug has paid and carried out weed control and cutting/removing on site, and liaised with contractors and Shropshire Council.

**Hedging and trees:** In January 2024 members of the group along with local volunteers planted 240 hedge whips along the fence at the back of the Hall Bank estate to complete the row begun last year. Members also assisted in planting the orchard on the same site, provided by the parish council.

**Community food gardening:** An appeal was put out by the group to find local people interested in setting up a community gardening scheme in the village. This was successful and a small group of people began to plan for this and consider a site, funding and expertise. Bill Sample has taken directorship of the scheme, produced a plan, and provides gardening expertise. Funding has been provided by Pontesbury Parish Council and a grant Save Our Shropshire (SOS), for which we are very grateful.

The site, on Cricketers Meadow green, was marked out on February 20<sup>th</sup> and on 24<sup>th</sup> February the beds were constructed on site by local carpenter Will Griffiths using up-cycled pallets assisted by members of the community, residents of Cricketers meadow and members of PCEAG. The beds have been filled with locally sourced organic compost, although more compost is required to finish the job.

The Pavilion community planters produced a fair amount of fresh produce last year and a large amount of this was donated to the Food Bank. Food produced in the community garden will also be destined for use by the community, and we are hoping that volunteers will join us in our work parties and also in using the produce. For further information on why, what and how of the scheme please contact Liz.

The community garden will have a **“grand opening”** on Saturday April 6<sup>th</sup> this year at our next **event**.

Many thanks to all who have supported and assisted us this year.

**12. Pontesbury Sports Association** – report by Tim Barber – Chair Pontesbury Sports Association and Secretary PCC

### **Pontesbury Sports Association**

As I reported at the 2023 Parish Meeting, the committee of the Sports Association was about to undergo a major change in personnel. I am pleased to report that the new committee has been energetically working on projects both on and off the field.

The new executive committee has representation from across the member clubs (Cricket, Football, Bowls and Rounders). Off the field we have updated the Constitution to bring it into line with current best practice. I would like to place on record my thanks for the support of the Parish Clerk and members of the Parish Council in the last 12-months.

The flagship project for the PSA and member clubs has been the redevelopment of the pavilion, which will be covered later.

**4x4** - At the 2023 Parish Meeting we reported that we were in need of a replacement 4x4 to pull the gang mowers. Fortunately, we were able to secure a suitable vehicle before the start of the cricket season.

**Pontesbury CC** - We are pleased to report that we have successfully maintained our ECB Clubmark Juniors.

We were able to run coaching sessions from May through to September holding sessions on a Monday and adding a session on a Friday evening so we could manage the groups and maximise the opportunity for children to participate. This included boys and girls from 4yrs to 15yrs.

We were able to run the ECB national programmes (AllStars 4-7-year-olds and the Dynamos programme for 8-11year-olds).

We have juniors playing for the County teams (1 x girls U11, 3 x girls U13 and 1 x boys U12)

For 2024 there will be a mixture of softball and hardball for juniors so that we can provide opportunities for children of differing abilities.

**Women & Girls** - The Women & Girls section continued to go from strength to strength with over 30 ladies playing softball cricket and hardball cricket. In recognition of the continued development of our Women & Girls section the Club was awarded Shropshire Women's Club of the year 2023.

Seniors

Shrewsbury and District Evening Cricket League. We ran one team in 2023, which was primarily a development team to introducing juniors to adult cricket.

In The Shropshire County Cricket League, we ran three teams. Two teams playing Saturday and one on a Sunday. For 2024 we will continue with two teams in The Shropshire League, but the Sunday team will revert to friendlies.

**Flooding** - As reported last year the new drainage ditch around the bowling green has helped alleviate the flooding at the wood end of the playing field.

However, during this winter we have experienced multiple and significant flooding from the brook which runs between the PSG and Mary Webb playing field. We have engaged a contractor to review remedial work to clear vegetation from the brook and re-establish the channel. We are currently in discussions with stakeholders to enable the work to be carried out this Spring/Summer.

**Worthen Juniors** - For the 2023/4 season Worthen are running both a women's team and a new adult men's team (mostly U18) from the PSG. Both teams playing competitive league and cup fixtures.

With the women's football team there is additional incentive to improve the changing facilities.

**Bowls Club** - Bowls continue to struggle for members, but we are hopeful of increasing numbers for 2024.

**Mytton Rounders** - The rounders section has now expanded and includes the teams that play at the Mary Webb. So for 2024 we will have 4 teams playing under the umbrella of the Sports Association. Two playing on the PSG and two on Mary Webb.

We have reached an agreement with Mary Webb over the use of the rounders pitches on the school field which will help the provision of rounders for 2024.

**Pavilion Project** - This project to make improvements to the showering / changing facilities at the pavilion to make sure that it's fit-for purpose for adult and junior sport, satisfying the safeguarding requirements of the FA and ECB.

We secured an ECB County Grant Fund (£10,000) which helped us with phase 1 – the internal reconfiguration of the changing rooms / toilets / showers to create a new changing room for women/girls and juniors. With additional funding from the Parish Council, Shropshire Homes and club funds the building work was completed.

In addition to the work on the changing rooms / showers, thanks to additional support from Good Neighbours and a legacy from Sue Sycamore. We were also able to take the opportunity to refit the kitchen, replacing all the old kitchen units and equipment.

With the building work completed we are now painting!

To complete Phase One – we are also looking to create a patio area where players and spectators can relax and enjoy the sport in an inviting space. At the time of this meeting, we are getting quotations and looking to secure the necessary funding.

The carpark has been renovated with 60-tonnes of stone to fill in all the potholes!

**Phase 2** would be to expand the pavilion by going up a level to provide a cub room and viewing area. The Sports

Association will be engaging with interested stakeholders during the coming months to plan the best way forward.

**PSA Giant Fun Day -13th April** -Celebration of sport in the village. Grand opening of the refurbished pavilion, giving our supporters and sponsors the chance to view the progress to date and see our future plan.

The fund day will also be an opportunity to raise funds for the ongoing refurbishment of the pavilion.

All welcome from 12pm.

**13. Pontesbury & Rea Valley Community Good Neighbours Scheme** – report from Chairman, Cllr Sharon Davies.

Community Good Neighbours have had a very busy year although our volunteer numbers have dropped, we do have a core ten people who help when required.

We made the decision to close the phone line towards the end of last year as we were getting calls that we felt were no longer a priority and family members could collect prescriptions etc.

We continue to run our **Monthly Coffee Mornings** at the Plough Pontesbury and thank Amy for her continuing support, she is often called down to help if we are busy. We average anywhere between 25 and 40 people coming along and even in some of the awful weather they have turned up.

Rob runs a successful **gentlemen's club** once a month at The Pavilion and this is well attended and Rob has a waiting list of men who would like to come along, it's a time to play cards, read the paper and chat with men who maybe widowed or are carers – so it's a welcome break.

Amanda runs a small group '**Coffee & Chat**' twice a month in the Pavilion, this is for ladies who cannot face a large group of people at the Coffee Morning or recently bereaved – we have found after a couple of sessions they come along to the coffee morning.

Good Neighbours group continue to support the **Carers' Event** once a month, and we also provided funding for coffee and cake on two occasions in recognition of Carers' Week.

Good Neighbours still has three volunteers **befriending** vulnerable individuals in their homes.

Our successful **luncheon at the Public Hall** is run for six months of the year from September – March, we feed on average forty people and lately have become a meals-on-wheels delivering to some who can't attend, or we know would benefit from a warm meal. We make a small charge as we are lucky enough to be supported by the Public Hall who do not charge for the room. The event does not make any money so this helps greatly and enables us to keep our prices down. I would like to thank Neville for all his support and the trustees of the Hall, and I would also like to thank Ali & Kim Catering for cooking the food this year.

In December Good Neighbours had a tombola stall at the Plough Christmas market in Pontesbury, raising funds and allowing the purchase of 40 boxes of biscuits, which were donated to the Rea Valley Food Bank to go out with the Christmas Hampers.

Also in December, we organised a **Christmas Meal** at The Corbet Arms, where over seventy people came along for a three-course meal. We organised a singer to entertain them after for an hour or so and transport was paid for by Good Neighbours. The event was very much enjoyed, and we have organised a date for this year.

We have been fortunate to have been chosen by the Coop as their local cause this year and last and have been granted over £3,000 this has enabled us to help out on other Community Projects where we have felt the Community as a whole would benefit.

The GN Committee would like to thank the Parish Council for their on-going support.

Whilst the need is there, we will carry on supporting the Community.

#### 14. **Pontesbury Youth Group** – report by Revd Greg Smith, St George's Church

In 2023, a partnership was born between St George's Church, Pontesbury Baptist Church, Pontesbury Congregational Church and Shrewsbury Youth for Christ to deliver youth work in Pontesbury.

After three rounds of advertising, we were finally able to appoint a full-time youth worker, Joseph Barnes. Joe commenced work on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024. There is a twin focus to his work with 11-18 year olds.

He will be supporting the work of Mary Webb School by taking assemblies, leading lunch-time groups, providing mentoring for students who are struggling and contributing to the humanities programme.

He will also be leading the Pontesbury Youth Project, which to date consists of an after-school youth café on Wednesday afternoons. The café which mirrors the successful youth café that has been running in Minsterley for 18 months, has been slow to take off. The venue, Pontesbury Baptist Church, is not quite directly on the route home from school, and many pass by without calling in as we had hoped. However, those that do access the provision make extremely positive comments about how valuable it is to them.

There are also on-street discussions with young people who are happy to talk at length about the issues they face.

Joe's number one target is to review this provision and develop it in such a way as to engage with much greater numbers of young people.

This project is also in receipt of grant funding from Hereford Diocese and the Joseph Rank Foundation.

## 15. **The Pavilion** – report by Deputy Clerk

2023-2024 has been another successful year for the Pontesbury Pavilion Community Hub & Library and as thoughts of the pandemic and lock-down became distant memory, people started to come back out into the community and use of the Pavilion grew.

The Building Assistant, Anna Lawson, continues to produce the monthly event sheet which is now sent to over 50 people per month. The recent Parish Council survey for the Pavilion saw many people sign up to receive this information.

Weeks in the Pavilion are now quite busy, some of the groups below meet weekly and some monthly:

- Monday: U3A Family History; U3A History Group and Dan Lewis Fitness runs 2 classes
- Tuesday: U3A Geology group meet monthly
- Wednesday: Sea Change - group for families with pre-school children;  
Age UK STW Dementia Group - run on alternate Wednesday mornings; U3A English;  
Wine Tasters meet in the winter months only
- Thursday: Dan Lewis Fitness - chair-based exercises for the over 55s;  
U3A Creative Writing;  
Library Book Club;  
Get Creative - free crafting group;  
Good Neighbour's Scheme Men's Group - men of a certain age meet to play cards, dominoes, read the paper and generally socialize
- Friday: Carer's Group meet monthly, still well supported by Shropshire Council older people's team, Community Care Coordinator, Age UK STW and Alzheimer's Society.

## **New Office for 2023**

A couple of new projects have been completed this year - Pontesbury Parish Council staff now have a dedicated office space. This aids the working environment for the staff as it provides a private space for any confidential conversations, enables a quiet working environment and sets aside shelving for all Parish Council paperwork and files.

To assist with the move into the office all the items from the store room had to be moved into a shed.

There is now dedicated shelf space for FoPL, the cleaning items and all the chairs have been stored successfully in the shed too - it is actually quite spacious and is holding a lot of equipment and paraphernalia.

Alongside the shed are two new water butts which are collecting all the rainwater from the shed guttering, so we can use this to water the patio plants in the summer months, all assisting with the Council's aims to become net zero by 2030. And we continue to recycle plastic, paper & cardboard as well as soft plastics, which was introduced in 2023.

A new waste & multi recycling contract has just been signed with Veolia.

Christmas was again a celebratory time in the Pavilion. The Parish Council provided a Christmas tree for the central space between all buildings. This was decorated by stars and lights, and a big thank you to everyone who helps with this, including Andrew Trow & Councillor Duncan Fletcher.

The Friends of Pontesbury Library (FoPL) ran workshops for children with the theme "Snow People" which decorated the Pavilion throughout the festive season.

## Day-to-Day Running of the Pavilion

Both the Deputy Clerk and the Building Assistant continue to work closely to run the behind-the-scenes operations of the Pavilion. There has been a concentration to update all Risk Assessments in 2023.

The Pavilion Committee continues to meet on the last Monday of each month and is chaired by Councillor Duncan Fletcher, with Councillors, Nick Hignett, Roger Evans, Sharon Davies and Adrian Windows as Committee members. The Committee have just voted to have quarterly meetings.

The Pavilion Committee oversee the work in the Pavilion, along with receiving reports and quotes for larger projects. This committee has delegated responsibility for up to £5,000 project spend, with all other projects with a higher spend, along with contractual agreements being recommended to full council for formal resolution.

### Events of Note in 2023-2024

- February - Shropshire Homes hired the meeting room for one weekend to promote their new homes
- March - Shropshire Council held a team meeting in the building  
Jeanette Hamer hosted a coffee money to raise further money to support her London Marathon funding target.
- April - Friends of Pontesbury & Earls Hill held a launch event to showcase an exhibition of the hill in celebration of the work that has been done to secure the hills for the community's future.  
Pontesbury Climate Emergency Action Group ran a "Grow Your Own Food" event
- April - Songs & Stories for Springtime
- April - May Shroptech ran computer courses for beginners.

### **Room Hire**

Hiring of the rooms in the Pavilion has increased, from a total number of bookings in last Financial Year of 397 to the total number of bookings for the current Financial Year increasing to 490, which includes paid hiring and hiring not paid for, ie, for Council meetings, Council events, Committee meetings. This equates to an average of 40 bookings per month.

Therefore, as the bookings have increased so has the income, with the projected income from Pavilion room hire totalling £5,000 by the end of March 2024.

| Financial Year            | No of Bookings | Income from Room Hire   |
|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Mar 2022 - 10 Mar 2023  | 397            | £3,848.62               |
| 1 Apr 2023 - 29 Feb 2024  |                | £4,590                  |
| 1Apr 2023 - 31 March 2024 | 490            | Projected income £5,000 |

Annual income is also received from:

- Shropshire Library Service = £5,000 per annum to hire the Library shelving space and office during Library opening hours (18 hours per week)
- West Mercia Police = £4000 for rental of the dedicated Local Policing Team office and 24/7 access to the building plus a proportional contribution to service charges

**Promotion** The staff team continue to work to raise the building's profile, advertise events on the SMART TV, noticeboards, promotions in the Village Newsletters and on a dedicated Facebook page, which has 680 followers and linked with many local Facebook pages and, of course, the monthly events sheet which is emailed out to over 50 people.

**Climate Emergency** The Pavilion Committee has received an Energy Efficiency Report from Marches Energy Agency and have set a budget in 2024-2025 to professionally review the roof structure and obtain an expert report on the installation of solar panels.

**Safe Space** The Pavilion is now a registered Safe Space, and cards with information on have been passed onto people in the community. This initiative is certainly working as a person was recently brought to the Pavilion and, working with the local policing team, family were contacted and the person was

reunited. This led to information being provided about partner organisation assistance that was available to local residents.

**SUMMARY** Use of the Pavilion building has increased, and more people are now visiting this lovely community building. In recognition of the building & the promotion, the Council is being approached by more and more businesses for training hirings, along with more regular hirings and services being provided for the community. The Pavilion continues to be an asset for the whole of Pontesbury Parish as well as surrounding communities in the Rea Valley area.

**16. Matters of interest or concern to the parish of Pontesbury from the electors of the Parish:**

Rev'd Smith also wished to highlight the costs of maintaining the cemetery, a much-loved community space. Currently the cost of £5000 is being met by the church. There is a coffee morning planned for 13<sup>th</sup> April 2024 to discuss how the community could support the church in this endeavour.

Cllr J Pritchard expressed his concern at the escalating insurance costs for village halls.

**17. Date of next Annual Parish Meeting** will be Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

The meeting closed at 1955

Chairman: ..... Date: .....