

**NOTES FROM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
PONTESBURY PUBLIC HALL  
MONDAY 12<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2018, 7.30PM**

**PRESENT:** Cllr D Fletcher (Chairman) Cllr J Pritchard (Vice-chairman), Cllr R Evans & Cllr N Hignett (also Shropshire Councillors), Cllr D Gregory, Cllr A Hodges, Cllr N Lewis, Cllr R Martinali, Cllr S Picken, Cllr S Lockwood, Cllr Peter Heywood, Cllr C Robinson, Cllr C Sandells and Cllr D Ryder.

Seven members of the public were present.

**APM 1/18                      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr B Morris.

**APM 2/18                      CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

Cllr D Fletcher, Chairman of Pontesbury Parish Council presided at the meeting and welcomed all present.

**APM 3/18                      MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting held 13<sup>th</sup> March 2017 were approved and signed.

**APM 4/18                      SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL**

Cllr Nick Hignett gave the following report:

I was elected to Shropshire County Council in May 2017 to serve the Rea Valley Ward. I am proud to sit on Pontesbury Parish Council, along with Councillor Roger Evans. These are my personal thoughts and opinions on Council decisions taken since then, affecting Shropshire in general, and this parish more particularly. Any errors or omissions are entirely mine.

The office for National Statistics (the latest figures that I can find), state approximately 310,000 people living in Shropshire. Of these, 22.9% are aged 65 years and over. This compares to an average in England of 17.6%. This is an important fact, because it helps to explain the extra pressure put on the budget of Shropshire County Council for Adult Social Services. The Annual predicted rise in Adult Social Care is from £91,976.00 in 2017/2018 to £97,846.00 in 2018/2019, both figures are Net Budget.

The rise in Council Tax this year is 5.99%. This compares to a retail price index measure of inflation at 3.1%. The rise equates to £75.45 a year extra for band D properties, or £58.68 a year extra for band B properties.

Shropshire Council is seeking to realise £42 million of savings over the next 2 years. More than £17 million will be raised through income generation. This includes £10 million from investment in property such as the Shrewsbury Shopping Centres. I supported this decision at Council, as I regard this as an investment opportunity with medium and long-term benefits. As with all prospective investments, there is an element of 'risk' involved. There has been much negative press about this use of reserve capital. Although this has centred

around the current decline in Town Centre retail trade, we need to remember that there are many other types of business outlet to make a centre vibrant and alive. Shropshire Council is now in a position to influence the future make-up and development of Shrewsbury, getting professional advice on how to improve the experience for visitors and Residents.

This year sees a £5 million cut in the Highways Maintenance budget. Despite these cuts, the new provider-KIER-is expected to deliver a better, more reliable service than the outgoing firm. One of their first priorities will be to deal with the backlog of potholes caused by the weather this winter.

Since 2010, successive governments have reduced funding for Local Government in England as part of their efforts to reduce the fiscal deficit. The Government sets statutory duties for Local Authorities to provide services, ranging from Adult Social Care to waste collection. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government views an authorities' ability to deliver their statutory services as the defining test of their financial sustainability. We need to bear this in mind, when looking at decisions taken by Shropshire Council and the financial implications thereof.

One of the main areas of concern for members of this Parish are the planning applications received over the past 12 months. I sit on the Central Planning Committee and have got involved with many of these proposed developments. I have supported the exciting prospect of a Community Hub building to serve Pontesbury and the surrounding area. I am hopeful that this building will-literally-'take shape' in the next 12 months.

Shropshire Council Library Service has designated the Library in this Village as a Tier 2 facility. I know that the Parish Council Chair will be talking more about this, but suffice to say that the outlook is promising.

Regarding youth funding, the Cabinet were looking at concentrating funding on the urban areas, to the detriment of the rural youth clubs. Following strong representation from Rural area Councillors and Local Joint Committees, including our own, the latest recommendation is that the funding, although reduced, should be allocated to rural areas.

Local Plan Review---The consultation looked at overall housing and employment growth in the county up to 2036, and identified principal and key centres. A summary of the main issues raised will be published in April. Further discussion will then take place with Town and Parish Councils and Shropshire Councillors to address matters such as housing guidelines, development boundaries and potential site allocations. The aim is to submit a final draft in Spring 2019.

Although there are many other items that I could bring up, I must finally mention Brexit.. Again, the media is responsible for concentrating far too much on negative headlines. As a predominantly rural county, Shropshire will of course be affected by the final settlement—particularly in relation to agriculture. Let us keep our heads, when many around us are losing theirs, and continue making representation to our local M.P.and other government departments to achieve the best deal for this area.

**APM 5/18**

**Local Police Team**

PC Ross Cookson, representing the local Police team gave the following report.

I have been working in this area since September 2017 alongside my colleague PCSO Joe Bradley (also here tonight). There is an additional PCSO for the area who is currently on loan to Shrewsbury.

Crime levels are relatively low at present, apart from the odd spikes. We have had some trouble with fires on Pontesford Hill but we have identified someone in connection with these and the fires seem to have abated. There are still some thefts of plant machinery which is the same across the county and we would urge owners to take precautions to help to deter these thefts.

The present Police Commissioner for Shropshire upholds and wishes to protect neighbourhood policing and although there are significant pressures on police forces nationally we do strive to provide the same gold standard service. It helps significantly if individuals do what they can with CCTV and taking obvious precautions with properties, belongings and safeguarding personal safety. In Pontesbury you have two members of staff (myself and Joe) who live locally and are very committed and interested in the area. Please contact us at any time.

There were questions about levels of staffing and PC Cookson responded saying that there had been a recent recruitment round which has boosted the numbers of PCSOs. The numbers of Special Constables is down but the numbers of police volunteers who help with administrative duties is up significantly. Police staff are working increasingly in multi-agency partnerships to focus on particular issues such as issues/problems associated with housing. PC Cookson also encouraged the public to use social media and Neighbourhood Watch to link to police staff, a more informal but effective approach to sharing information about what is happening in your local area or concerns you may have.

Cllr Duncan Fletcher wished to thank PC Cookson and PCSO Bradley for the report, for giving up their time to come to the meeting, and for all the hard work they do in Pontesbury.

## **APM 6/18**

## **PONTESBURY PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

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

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

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

We were fortunate to have the new leader of Shropshire Council, Cllr Peter Nutting, to attend our meeting in July. He outlined his ambitions to work with town and parish councils and explained the financial constraints that Shropshire Council is facing and the potential impact on our services. Also, an outline of the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire 2017-2021 was provided. Poles Coppice is an example of the Parish Council working with

Shropshire Council. In these difficult times the Parish Council agreed a grant fund of £1500 for assistance with the provision of volunteers to support the Shropshire Council management team work to improve this countryside site.

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

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

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

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

Shropshire Council's Library Services' consultation has now been completed and due to the hard work and commitment of all those involved, Pontesbury Library has been classified as being in Tier 2 which means that Shropshire Council has an expectation that the library will become cost neutral from 2023 i.e. self-funding. This allows the local community additional time to produce a viable financial plan. The Friends of Pontesbury Library, with Bob Boden's great enthusiasm as their Chairman, have continued to raise substantial sums of money. They endeavour to have the library used for other activities to enable it to be at the heart of

the community. They have now been granted charitable status and their representatives on the Library Steering Group continue to work on the long-term strategy. My thanks must go to all those involved, and the Parish Council continues to support the long-term retention of a library in your community.

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

The Police's Safer Neighbourhood Team continues to be based in Pontesbury. We are fortunate that we have an excellent relationship with the local Police team. This year PC Jon Summerfield retired. Everyone felt that he was very much our local Bobby, however we have been very fortunate in our new replacement PC Ross Cookson who has been active within the community and his colleague PCSO Joe Bradley. They are both always available to discuss local issues.

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

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

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

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

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

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Parish Councillors for their continued support. The role is now more time consuming and your commitment is, I am sure, appreciated by the

community. Indeed, we have a wealth of local groups and many members of the Parish Council are involved in them and able to listen to community concerns and when necessary raise them with the Parish Council. I also would like to thank members of the community who attend our Monday night monthly meetings.

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

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

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

#### **APM 7/18                      P3 FOOTPATH GROUP**

Chris Hearn who is the Joint leader P3 group gave the following report:

Annual report for year ending December 2017.

As in the past couple of years, the Pontesbury P3 Group continues to expand their territory, regularly working way beyond the Parish boundaries of Pontesbury and Minsterley and on several occasions venturing out to the other side of Westbury. Along with their regular work of maintaining the local foot paths, replacing stiles and gates etc. they have carried on with various projects with the Wild Life Trust on Pontesford Hill and also with the Landscape Partnership Schemes up at Poles Coppice who's funding unfortunately will cease during 2018. However the P3 Group will continue to support and help maintain and develop these areas along with keeping the local foot paths as their main focus. A couple of their more "mature" members decided to put down their tools during the year, however they were very quickly replaced with some much younger retirees! The "Circular Walks around Pontesbury and Minsterley" brochure that the group produced some time ago is still available at the usual places in and around the area. Clocking up well over 500 volunteer hours for the year they finished off with a Christmas Lunch at one of the local hostelryes!

#### **APM 8/18                      PARISH AND CHARITY ACCOUNTS**

It was noted that the following accounts were on display:

- Pontesbury Parish Council
- Pontesbury Public Hall
- Pontesbury Charities

Cllr J Pritchard gave the following report for **Habberley Village Hall**:

The hall continues to fulfil its purpose by providing social opportunities for the local community and others from further afield. There has been a combination of locally organised events such as Beer & Skittles and dance lessons to Arts Alive functions which bring into the local community artists of national acclaim, at a nominal fee. Visiting speakers have given talks on a variety of topics such as 'Rowing the amazon', 'The history of Rolls Royce and soon we will be having one on taxidermy.

The committee annually hold a barbeque and harvest supper events, both of which are a complete sell out. This year a Burns' night was held and this proved popular to the degree that it will be held next year too.

Despite its age the hall has a pleasing interior with designated bar area, newly built ladies toilets, kitchen area, stage lighting and a portable stage. Chairs of modest design enable the audience to sit through a performance with complete comfort.

The hall is available for hire for private functions with/without a staffed bar. It is equipped to all current regulatory requirements and there is a defibrillator on site.

Like many rural communities the numerical catchment area is around 100 in the village with some outlying support. In order to survive long term there must be funding available from external sources to carry out improvements as required and to keep pace with the ever changing regulations.

Cllr Cllr R Martinali gave a report for **Pontesbury Public Hall**:

Lettings for the hall are good, around 12 per week, plus weekends for sales, parties, concerts etc. We are in a fortunate position where hiring fees cover the everyday running costs, but we do need grants and donations for major projects. This year we purchased 40 upholstered chairs and extra tables using a grant from the Co-op.

Sometimes we have a problem with parking. The car park is financed and is an integral part of the hall. When hirers hire the hall they are also hiring the car park so they must take preference. However we accept short stay parking for people using Connections and the Post Office.

We have held very successful Christmas concerts for 3 years now and we have been asked to organise one this year, the date will be 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018

Finally our audited accounts are on the table at the back of the hall

Cllr Charles Sandells gave the following report for **Cruckton Village Hall**.

The Hall enjoys regular bookings from Lea Cross WI, The 55 Club and Cruckton Art Group. It has been a quiet year regarding bookings. The hall hosted the Village Halls Quiz and continues to attract good numbers to the Harvest Supper. The Village Hall barely breaks

even and has to delve into reserves for maintenance and any up-grading works. This however is not sustainable in the long term as the current reserve balance of £2367 will eventually deplete if there are no future profits to invest. Therefore it is essential that the venue attracts more bookings to increase the revenue.

It is note worthy that the Hall is in need of refurbishment in the long term to keep the facilities up to a standard comparable with other village halls in the local area and therefore achieve bookings and future revenue.

It is also noted that the Title of the Village Hall has been vested with the official custodian i.e The Charity Commission.

Cllr Fletcher wished to congratulate everyone who is involved in providing these essential community facilities.

**APM 10/18                      PARISH BUSINESS – PUBLIC COMMENTS AND VIEWS**

None.

**APM 11/18                      DATE OF THE NEXT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting was agreed as 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

There being no other business, that Chairman thanked everyone for their reports and for attending and closed the meeting.

Meeting ended at 8.15pm

**Signed .....**  
**Chairman of Parish Council**

**Date .....**