

Chairman's report for 2024 Annual Parish Meeting

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.

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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 18th 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.

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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.