

Pontesbury Parish Annual Meeting—March 2022

Shropshire council Report---NICK HIGNETT.

Pontesbury Parish area is represented by Myself and Councillor Roger Evans, and we work together for the good of all residents.

I am presenting this report, so any errors are mine, but We are both available to answer questions raised during the Meeting, or afterwards;

CORONAVIRUS—After another 12 months of difficulties associated with the Pandemic, I am hopeful that the end is in sight, and We can return to a more “normal way of living”. I would like to thank all Council Staff, Councillors, NHS Staff, and Care workers for their dedication and commitment during the Pandemic.

UKRAINE---Shropshire Council has been watching the events in Ukraine with horror and bewilderment, and stands ready to support those fleeing the awful events that are unfolding. The Council will continue to work closely with the Home Office and the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership to offer assistance and Humanitarian Aid when possible. I know that there are a number of Local fundraising Initiatives already taking place in the Area.

BUDGET---Shropshire Council was disappointed with the single-year spending round announcement provided by Central Government. This means that certain assumptions have to be made, when planning for future years. The Council continues to battle with a £50M structural funding gap, that cannot be addressed sustainably without a review of the Local Government funding approach, to reflect the cost drivers more reasonably, in large rural counties like Ours. At the last Full Council Meeting, the budget for 2022/2023 was set, as well as projections for funding and expenditure over the next 5 years. An increase of 3.99% was voted through, the maximum allowed. This means that a band D property would pay £1,561.11 this year---last year the amount was £1,501.22. Adult and Children’s Social Care costs in Shropshire are growing at an unsustainable rate; soon 85% of the budget will be spent on Social Care. The number of service users accessing Social Care remains close to 10,000, representing 3% of the population of Shropshire—based on a figure of 323,000. The other 97% DO access other services, such as Highways, Transport, Public Protection, Leisure, Parks and Open Countryside. These Facilities are more important than ever, yet the funding is constantly under pressure.

SUSTAINABLE WARMTH PROGRAMME---The Council has been successful in bidding for funding under the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery and Home Upgrade Grant. The scheme aims to improve the energy efficiency of fuel-poor homes, and target properties with the lowest energy efficiency ratings. At the last Council Meeting it was agreed for Shropshire Council to operate as the Accountable Body for the green homes grant, Local Authority delivery phase 3, as well as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Shropshire has higher than average levels of fuel poverty----over 12.3% of all households.

OTHER DECISIONS PASSED AT THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING---It was agreed to go Digital (i.e. Paperless) whenever possible. All Agendas and information for future meetings will be provided online. Paper copies will only be provided on request.

It was voted to ban Sky Lanterns and Balloon releases from all Shropshire Council Property. A media campaign will aim to ensure that Members of the Public are aware of this new ruling. Town and Parish Councils will be encouraged to follow this lead.

AMBULANCE SERVICE----Shropshire Council expressed concern regarding the current situation, and supported a campaign to return the Ambulance Hub to Ludlow, as well as Bridgnorth, Craven Arms, Oswestry and Bishops Castle. It was agreed to write to West Midlands Ambulance Service.

SHOPPING CENTRES AND SHIREHALL---Darwin Shopping Centre is now at 97% occupancy. Indicative plans for redevelopment of the Riverside Area of Shrewsbury have been approved By Council. This involves Demolition of Riverside and Pride Hill Shopping Centres, Demolition of Raven Meadows multi-storey car park, replacing with Multi-Agency Hub, Hotels, Travel Hub, Residential Units and a "Riverside Realm". This will be linked to the Disposal of the Shirehall Site. Possible completion could be as early as 2026.

Finally—COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW-----This is being undertaken during the years 2021-2025,with changes due to take effect from may 2025.It's purpose is to seek recommendations from Town and Parish Councils, to enable more effective representation of Their populations, and strengthen Their positions within the Local Government Heirarchy. An explicit requirement was to absorb Parish Meetings(of which We have some 35 in the County) with Neighbouring Parishes, and encourage more Warding of Parishes, so that They retain Their distinctiveness, in the event of a merger. There is also a Local Government Boundary Review, starting in October 2022.The draft proposals for this have to be taken to Full Council, followed by Public Consultation. Any Changes are to be laid before Parliament in October 2023.

That concludes My report, and I am happy to take questions.

Nick Hignett.

Councillor for Rea Valley Ward.