

Pontesbury Annual Parish Meeting March 2021

Shropshire Council Report – By and from Councillor Roger Evans

March 8, 2021

Good Evening

The Pontesbury Parish Area is represented by two Shropshire Councillors. Councillor Nick Hignett and myself. This report is prepared by me, Roger Evans and any errors or omissions are mine. The area I cover is largely north of Pontesbury Village. Councillor Hignett represents the main village, Habberley and areas to the south of the village. He is here tonight and available to answer questions concerning the area he represents.

It is good that both your Shropshire Councillors work together to try and help all our residents. Together with the Parish Council and thanks to many other volunteers we have hopefully managed to ensure residents during these last 12 months received the help they needed.

All meetings during the 12 months have of course been carried out using remote technology. Shropshire Council's preferred method is to use the "Teams" system. All meetings are now being recorded so can be listened to either live or after the meeting is finished.

Council Finances.

The Council Tax Precepts will shortly be delivered and for this Parish the payment for a Band D Property will be £1,954.36. This is the total and will include the Parish Council, Fire & Rescue, Police and Shropshire Council. Last year this was £1,849.21 so represents an increase of £105.21.

There is a hope that the much-delayed Fair Funding Formula will be announced during the next 12 months and increase the amount of grant that Government give the Shire Councils like Shropshire.

In a report being considered by the Shropshire Council Cabinet earlier today (Monday 8 March) officers state that they expect this year's budget to be overspent by just over £0.8M. This will be covered by use of monies from General Reserves. This will reduce the total of General Reserves to £12.6M. The appropriate risk-based balance state they should be £19.2M.

The budget for the next Financial Year was agreed in a vote by the majority of councillors at the full council meeting held on 25th February. To achieve a balanced budget for next year this showed that there needs to be cuts of around £9M to be made.

The council does of course have around £170M in its Capital Reserves available for investment. This is held largely in cash at various banks and institutions all on very short-term conditions.

Coronavirus Update

During this last year, an exceptional year, one we hope never to see again a number of different actions needed to be taken.

Covid cases as publicised by Shropshire Council on 4 March shows that during the period 19 – 25 February in the SC area there were 322 new cases reported (a decrease of 106 or 24% on the previous week). 28 of these new cases relate to people over 70 years of age. This total equates to 99.6 cases per 100,000; for England the equivalent figure is 96.4 cases per 100,000; 30% of the new cases were from the Shrewsbury & Atcham area.

During this same period, 19 – 25 February a further 22 people died at our Shropshire Hospitals bringing the total number of deaths since March 2020 to 578.

The Council now has various dedicated telephone numbers providing help during this time. The master one if needed is 03456 789028.

Everyone is urged to continue taking the recommended safety precautions.

The Council has distributed over £125M to Shropshire businesses in the last 12 months. The government also recently announced another tranche of help to businesses. Shropshire Councils share of this is £6M and it is to be distributed to businesses hit by the current third lockdown.

Planning

The planning application to build the North West Relief road has now been submitted. The date for this to be decided is at the end of May. The business case to support this project will not be published until near the end of this year. There are many objections to and various discussions took place the Council meeting last week. This was in the form of two amendments, one was to welcome its construction and the other was asking for it to be reviewed and the implications of the Governments Climate Change Strategy, its commitment to reduce carbon emissions and the likely reductions in traffic as more people work from home. The amendment welcoming it was passed by a majority of those present. Other issues to do with Climate Change were also discussed including a proposal asking the Council to back the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill (CEE) at present being debated and considered by Parliament. This was amended and supported by a majority referring this proposal for consideration by a committee.

The new updated Local Plan has now completed all its consultation stages. The last being what is called the Regulation 19 consultation. After many requests the date for its finish was extended. There is now a cabinet meeting being held next Thursday (11th March) when it is expected the date when Council will be asked to finally agree it will be fixed for July 2021. If this is agreed at that meeting, then it will become a very real material consideration when any applications are considered. Before then it has very limited effect on any applications. The Plan will become the only plan which all applications will need to comply with after it has been considered after a public enquiry, organised and run by a Planning Inspector appointed by the appropriate Government Minister takes place and a report of this is made discussed and accepted at a future Shropshire Council meeting. This will be at some time during 2022. The chairman refers to what development is proposed for the Pontesbury Parish area in his report. Outside of the main village the rest of the Parish is designated as open countryside. Included in the revised Local Plan are various other updates and one or two new policies.

Other issues which Shropshire Council have considered, and I feel may be of interest to residents include:

Big Town Plan. Support for this was agreed by the cabinet recently. The plan or vision includes scrapping the main bus station. All rural buses would then terminate at the nearest Park & Ride site. Passengers would then need to transfer and catch a P&R Bus to access the town centre. This would include all passengers using the buses that pass through Pontesbury. I have objected to this as have many others living in rural areas. Minsterley Motors have also objected to this proposal.

The cabinet have agreed that the replacement of the Quarry Swimming Pool would be built at the Sports village. A small pool would be built on the Quarry site. Again, I have objected to this.

Selling off the Shirehall site and transferring the main council offices to the Pride Hill Centre has been agreed by the Council. This new site is to be renamed the Civic Offices. I and a number of other councillors have objected to this proposal. There is at present a refusal to look at a number of alternatives.

The Government has recently informed Shropshire Council that it will give us a grant of £9.15M to help mend all the many potholes. It is hoped that Kier, the council's contractors will make better use of this money than in past years.

Discussions are at present being held between Councillor Hignett and officers concerning the recent flooding problems in the village. This also includes various road improvements that are needed.

Dog mess in the areas many of us walk along is on the increase and the Dog Warden has been asked to visit the area and, if needed, give out fines to the few who do not clear up the mess left by their dogs.

Requests for Quiet Lane signage in Pound Lane, a speed limit and HGV restrictions in Cruckton, speed reduction measures outside Hanwood School and help towards renewal of play equipment adjacent to that school are being progressed. It is hoped to use some of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money to pay for this.

Discussions are being held with the police and others looking at the installation of vehicle number plate recognition cameras. These will identify vehicles that are being driven at speeds in excess of the relevant speed limit. At present it is not anticipated the information will not be used for prosecution purposes. When installed they will be the first in Shropshire.

Broadband coverage is bad in a number of areas. The Government have made cashable vouchers available for some pre-selected rural areas. These vouchers can be used to help residents meet the cost of installing Fibre direct to each house. Residents in Plealey live in one of the selected areas and are at present negotiating with Open Reach for the installation of Fibre direct to each house in the village and the immediate surrounding area.

Finally, the new building called the Pavilion is an excellent example of working together and achieving an outcome for residents that many other communities see are envious of.

Shropshire Councillor Roger Evans

March 7, 2021