

## Chairman's report for 2025 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 and greater detail will be in the Annual report.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our two Shropshire Councillors, Cllrs Nick Hignett (also Vice Chairman) and Cllr Roger Evans. I am grateful for all the hard work they have done for our local community and how involved and approachable they are. May I take this opportunity to thank Cllr Michelle Trow, my other Vice Chair for her continuing hard work and support.

Four new councillors (Cllrs Moss, Wallace-Johnson, Jones and Day) have joined the parish council this year. They each bring a wealth of professional experience and strong individual skills which will benefit the parish council enormously. I would like to thank them for all their efforts during the last year, and their enthusiasm in learning how to be a councillor and contributing to the existing team. Thank you also to the other councillors who continue to work hard in support of their local communities,

**The Pavilion Community Hub and Library**, continues to thrive as a much used community asset, housing the parish council offices, Pontesbury Library and the Safer Neighbourhood police team. Anna Lawson, our Building Assistant, is the much-loved public face of the Pavilion. Anna works closely with the Deputy Clerk, Nicola Young, 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 short report from the Deputy Clerk, to follow.

**The Friends of Pontesbury Library** have been recently given the King's Award for Voluntary Service in much-deserved recognition of their continuing hard work to raise the profile of the library and provide a rich and varied programme of social and fundraising events. A separate report about their work will follow. We look forward to the continuation of our successful partnership working.

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 big capital project completed this year is the refurbishment of the public toilets, which has included increased security measures. We are very pleased with the new look toilets.

The Play Area Task and Finish Group have been working hard to source replacement play equipment for some of the older pieces which need to be withdrawn. On 13<sup>th</sup> March, four companies will present some options and there will then follow a two week consultation period for local residents to give the council feedback on which would be their preferred options.

The council have also started to replace the concrete streetlight columns, two in the 2025-26 financial year and then the remaining eleven over the next two financial years.

The biennial inspection of the trees that the parish council are responsible for, showed a considerable amount of work to be done to ensure they continue to thrive. We are also working closely with an arboriculturalist to draw up a Tree Management policy in line with national best practice and to address specific issues such as ash dieback.

All these larger projects are in addition to the normal parish council service provision and associated running costs.

The Parish Council Strategic Plan (available on the parish council website) covers all of the projects planned over the next three 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, despite rising costs in many areas, to keep the increase to an increase of 10 percent for the 2026- 27 precept, equivalent to an increase of 30p per week on a Band D property. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Caroline Higgins our Responsible Financial Officer for all her hard work and expertise in this role.

Thank you to Cllr Trow for the quarterly internal checking of our accounts and financial procedures and to all members of the Finance & General Purposes Committee for attending meetings and overseeing the finances of the parish council.

Parish Council grants have been awarded this year towards:

- The upkeep of Poles Coppice
- Remembrance wreath
- the provision of a defibrillator in Plealey
- Wildflower meadow creation project with Pontesbury Primary School
- A shed for Pontesbury Primary School
- A noticeboard for Lea Cross
- Power tools for the P3 group
- Publicity for the Pontesbury Festival in June 2025

**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. Thank you also to all the councillors for their input at planning committee meetings. 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.

We continue to work closely with the neighbouring parishes of Hanwood and Minsterley. There is a new project to maximise the efforts the three councils make towards helping nature recovery throughout the Rea Valley. 'Rea-act for Nature' aims to highlight and demonstrate simple activities that local residents can replicate at home, thus creating wildlife corridors across the Rea Valley. The parish councils are working closely with Pontesbury Climate Emergency Action Group and other local wildlife groups such as Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group. One of the first projects being undertaken is working firstly with Pontesbury Primary School, and then over autumn with the other two primary schools, to create mini wildflower meadows throughout the three parishes. Children at the school will be involved at every stage from sowing the seeds to planting out the meadows. The first meadow will be planted out to coincide with the Green Day event on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2026. The group will also include articles about suggested activities in the three parish newsletters and organise local talks and events.

The parish council continue to work with Shropshire Council to look at ways in which important local services can continue to be provided despite the significant budgetary pressures at county level.

The **Pontesbury 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 events 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 an update on the community garden. Thank you also to Bill Sample and Phil Bradshaw for all their support in helping everyone 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 **Rea Valley Community 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 Cllr Sharon Davies and all the volunteers. A report follows about the group.

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

The successful **ANPR camera** project, Safer Speed Shropshire, working with Hanwood and Minsterley parishes continues to provide useful information to discourage speeding vehicles along the A488 throughout the parishes. Through working with the safer neighbourhood team, we are able to pass on information collated from the cameras.

A big thank you also to the great team of volunteers who ensure the very popular parish **newsletter** is distributed through the Parish. A big thank you to our Deputy clerk Nicki, for all the hard work she puts in as editor helping to make it so successful.

We will also receive reports from the hardworking groups such as the **Pontesbury Sports Association** and one from the newly established **Pontesbury Youth Group**. You will also hear reports about the **village halls and Public Hall** 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 Parish 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 all of the parish council staff team and the Parish councillors for their hard work and support.

Finally, I would like to finish by thanking all the many local volunteers 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 that we will work hard to continue to support and help each other and help our local community flourish.