

# PONTESBURY PARISH COUNCIL



## Minutes of the Pontesbury Annual Parish Meeting held in Pontesbury Public Hall on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025

1. **Apologies** were received from Councillors N Lewis, C Sandells and S Davies.
2. **Welcome from Chairman** Pontesbury Parish Council Chairman, Cllr Duncan Fletcher, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
3. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024.** After a proposal from Cllr Jones, seconded by Cllr Heywood, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting be accepted as a true and accurate record.

### **4 Shropshire Council Report – a report from Cllr R Evans**

Pontesbury Parish area is represented by 2 Shropshire Councillors—Myself, Roger Evans, and Councillor Nick Hignett. I have drafted the report this year, and any errors or omissions are mine.

As was said last year the major focus of Shropshire Council has again been on financial stability. The new government that was elected last July have made a number of changes to how it funds local government. A number of previous government grants to Rural Authorities like Shropshire have been reduced whilst others, like the Telford & Wrekin Authority for example, are due to receive a higher percentage increase. This, together with the continued increasing cost of, providing the social care that many residents of all ages need and the ever-reducing amount that is held in reserves are causing more and more financial problems.

**FINANCE AND RESOURCES**—The most recent reports for the current year show that the Council again failed to make all the savings needed and overspent the agreed revenue budget by around £35m. Reserves are again expected to be used to cover this overspend and so achieve the required budget position. This will mean they are now expected fall to the extremely dangerous low level of just over £3m. The council has incurred other expenditure, and it has now received permission from the government to borrow an extra £26.9m. This will enable the council to pay the transformation, PwC consultants and staff redundancy costs.

Charges for emptying green bins were eventually introduced last Autumn. It has now been announced that after March 31<sup>st</sup> only in exceptional circumstances will new requests to have green bins emptied be agreed. This moratorium will last until October 2025. Parking charges, after some delays, were increased a few days ago and it is stated in council papers further increases will be made later this year. It has now been declared that the former Council HQ at the Shirehall is now no longer in use, and all services have been transferred elsewhere. The Guildhall situated in Frankwell, is now the temporary Council HQ.

The council, at its recent meeting agreed that the increase in council tax for next year will be 4.99%, the maximum permitted. The savings target for this next financial year is expected to be around £52m. It has also been stated that asset sales will be used to pay off the £26.9m loan. Details concerning when and what these asset sales are, have not been published, nor the amount of interest that it is expected will have been incurred.

All of the financial information mentioned so far have covered the revenue budget, which is that part of the budget which covers the day-to-day running expenses of the council. The other part of a council's budget is the capital one. This covers one off spending and is mainly concerned with various projects. The largest of these is of course the projected North West Relief Road or NWRR.

This NWRR project was originally expected to cost just over £80m with the council projected to contribute around £27m. The balance coming from other sources, including £54m from the government. After many delays it was revealed 10 days ago in the much-delayed draft full business case that the cost is now expected to be around £215m with £39m so far spent in preparation work. No grants or external funding to meet the increase of £135m have yet been obtained. This, due to the date it was published means it cannot now be

discussed at any council meeting until June. Any application to Government for extra money to assist in meeting this increased cost cannot be made until after this June Council meeting.

There are other projects included in the capital budget. These include the proposed new Swimming Pool at the Sports Village in Sundorne and the so-called Smithfield/regeneration project. The first part of the latter project is now in progress and includes both the demolition of the Riverside Shopping Centre and the delivery of a new landmark Public Park in Shrewsbury Town Centre. No funding is yet allocated to deliver any other part of the Smithfield/riverside project.

**CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT**— The diminished Climate Team continues to attract Government capital and revenue grants. Low Carbon Community buildings - the design of new buildings such as the new swimming pool at Whitchurch is an example. Electric Vehicle Chargers - Shropshire Council have recently won new grants to further improve the largest EV- charging infrastructure programmes in the Midlands and will soon own and operate even more chargers.

**WASTE**—Green bin charges, as already mentioned was introduced last autumn. Further savings, again with little details are shown as being expected to be made later this year.

**PLANNING**---The production of the replacement, updated Local Plan has so far taken over 5 years. A draft was eventually produced and agreed by the council's cabinet. The Government appointed Planning Inspectors who have been charged with examining the proposals have now indicated they feel it does not meet a number of criteria. Further that the council does not have the capacity to make the needed alterations within any acceptable time limit. The latest position is that the plan is to be withdrawn, and work started to produce a replacement one that will cover the period 2025–2045. This will need to be produced within the next 2 years. In the meantime, it has now been admitted by Shropshire Council that due to the large increase in the number houses that are needed to meet the new government set targets it can no longer meet the 5-year housing target. This in turn means that some present planning policies are no longer valid, and developers may well come forward with planning applications that would not previously have been granted. Finally it is being suggested that government will soon introduce legislation that officers will solely determine more planning applications. Councillors will only be asked their views on strategic applications. Also, after an application is agreed in principle then any further decisions will again only involve officers.

**CHILDREN AND EDUCATION**---Requests for help with travel passes for the 16 - 18-year pupils attending education establishments are still awaited.

More foster carers are desperately needed, and anyone interested are asked to urgently contact the council. A few schools now have 20mph zones in place and more are being planned.

Just announced is that for September 91.1% of secondary school students were offered their first preference.

**HOUSING AND ASSETS**---Shropshire Council has two owned housing companies, STaR and Cornovii, both are performing well, with over 200 homes under construction across the county. These are delivering high quality affordable, low energy, local needs homes together with some specialist accommodation.

Homelessness continues to be an area of high pressure for the Council, however, using the ex-university accommodation in Shrewsbury has much improved the situation.

STaR Housing Association has had its borrowing envelope increased by £52m. SC in partnership with STaR is committed to delivering over 500 homes of various descriptions by summer 2026.

**HIGHWAYS**---At present numerous comments about “Fix My Street” have been made. These are being investigated. Locally many complaints have also been made about potholes and flooding. An invitation has been issued to council officers covering these to attend the Annual meeting.

**DEVOLUTION** –The Government recently announced that it was their intention to make a number of changes involving Local Government. They intend, to use their words, to put in place a more efficient system and introduce Unitary Authorities throughout England. Each Unitary Authority will cover an electorate of at least half a million electors. Also included in this reorganisation, Government has stated they wish to create Strategic Authorities throughout England each having a Mayor and an electorate of at least 1.5m.

A number of Local Authorities were asked if they would agree to postpone their elections, which were due to be held in May. At present 10 Counties have agreed this proposal and to postpone them until May 2026 so allowing time for this change to take place and new Unitary Authorities to be created. It is expected more

will follow in the next few years. Where this leaves Shropshire with an electorate of around 260,000 is not yet known. It is understood that Staffordshire are considering the Unitary proposal.

Locally there are a number of issues being pursued. These include identifying a number of narrow roads in the parish as Quiet Lanes and introducing both a 30-mph limit in Cruckton/Cruckmeole and a ban on HGV vehicles using this as a through route. Also, there are an increasing number of roads subject to flooding problems.

**FINALLY**----- On behalf of myself and Councillor Nick Hignett, we would like to thank all of the Parish Councillors and Officers for working alongside us to represent our residents.

**5. Local Policing Team Report** PCSO Sarah Edwards reported the following work on local issues:

ASB - Reports of various Anti-Social Behavior in play parks, streets, bus stops, public toilets and Church.

The Safer Neighbourhood team are working hard to tackle ASB by working with partner agencies, Housing, Schools, Residents and our Police Harm Hub.

Level one ASB letters have been sent out to parents to notify them of individuals involved. High visibility patrols are being conducted in all areas mentioned.

Speeding – The Safer Neighbourhood Teams have been conducting regular speed checks in Pontesbury, Minsterley and Hanwood, several force operation requests have been enforced in these areas by Motorbike Traffic Support Team . Tickets and fines have been issued to offending motorists.

Currently officers are being trained with the new Trucam Equipment which will enable officers to pick up offending vehicles. The Trucam speed camera is a handheld device used by Police to detect speeding vehicles typically utilizing laser technology to measure a car speed and capture the registration plate, allowing them to record video evidence of speeding offences without needing to physically stop the driver.

Vehicle Seizures – over the last 12 months several vehicles have been seized within the local area for no insurance or Tax. Safer Neighbourhood Teams will continue to remove any illegal vehicles that are seen on the public highway.

Local Schools – The Team have been busy visiting local Schools conducting talks, reassurance visits and throughout the winter months ensuring children's safety by giving out lots of reflective equipment for bikes, school bags, arm bands and stickers regarding to be Safe and Seen when out and about.

The Team have been out conducting targeted patrols in Rural areas for reassurance, named Operation Headlight where officers have worked until the early hours ensuring Farms, Businesses and residential areas where reports of burglaries have taken place, visits to victims where Smart Water , Crime prevention advice and Signage were issued.

The Team continue to keep the communities safe.

Cllr Fletcher thanked the Local Policing Team for all the work they do, saying that the local community is very fortunate to have the team based locally.

## **6. Pontesbury Parish Council – Chairman's Report**

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,

This is the end of the four-year election cycle and elections will take place early in May. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the councillors who have been committed and hardworking throughout this time, all sharing the same ideology of working for our community.

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.

I understand there is a possibility that some long serving councillors may not re-stand for election this year and there will be an opportunity in the future to acknowledge their contribution to the Parish Council.

**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. Solar panels have just been added to the building and are part of our desire to reduce costs and to be carbon neutral by 2030. 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.

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. And indeed, have reduced the precept for 2025/26, more on this shortly.

- The **replacement of older style SOX streetlights with LED lights** (complex project), has been completed and will reduce our maintenance and energy budget significantly.
- The **Station Road 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 Facilities Working Group to drive this forward.
- We have reopened **the public toilets** after the recent vandalism and are looking at putting a refurbishment plan in place.
- Last year I reported the **public open spaces on the Cricketers Meadow estate** had been transferred from Shropshire Homes to the Parish Council and we now have a **community orchard** of apple, crab apple, pear, plum and damson trees planted. We are working with the local community to develop this area for wildlife and ensure accessible green spaces for all to use. I would like to thank Siobhan Reedy for all her help and advice on setting up the orchard. Siobhan retired from Shropshire Council as a Tree Officer this year and her support has been invaluable in getting this project completed. We were also delighted that the Mary Webb Society chose the community orchard as the site to plant a St Milburga's White rare crab apple tree. Mary Webb had written two of her novels whilst living locally.

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 2 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 a decrease of 2.59 percent for the 2025- 26 precept, without cutting back on any corresponding high standards in services offered. This has been achieved mainly by prudent investment of reserves and a good rate of interest received. 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
- Pontesbury Sports Assoc. for essential upgrading of the Sports Pavilion
- Hedge/tree planting
- Pontesbury Festival
- The Community Garden

**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 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 shown how successful it can be having two parish councils working together, and we are now working together on a joint verges project, planting wildflowers along part of the cycleway to boost biodiversity in the area. A big thank you to Cllr Jones and to Liz Knowles for all their help and input.

We continue to work with Shropshire Council Highways department, and their consultants WSP, looking at **traffic calming measures in Pontesbury**. A public meeting has been held and we are awaiting updated information from the highways dept. 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 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 a 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 **ANPR cameras**. This successful joint project has involved three parishes, Pontesbury, Hanwood and Minsterley, along with the Police and expert advice from Charles Pedrick from Rodborough Parish Council, Gloucestershire. We have set up our Safer Speed Shropshire group to educate drivers in reducing their speeding. Through working with the safer neighbourhood team, we are able to pass on information collated from the cameras. A report will be included in the next newsletter.

A big thank you to Jonathan Walton and Christine Day, who stood down this year from managing the delivering of the parish newsletter and a big welcome to our new volunteers who have taken over from them. 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 our Deputy clerk, Nicki Young, and Responsible Financial Officer, Caroline Higgins for all their 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.

#### **7. P3 Footpath Group Report** from Geoff Cummings, P3 Group Coordinator

2024 was a busy year for us apart from limitations caused by the weather. We have had 2 new members join us this year and are always on the lookout for more keen volunteers.

Man-hours worked in 2024 were 505. We completed 53 different items of work in the year. In this we have covered path surveys, stile repair/replacement, vegetation clearing, bridge and gate repair, signposting & waymarking.

We continue to ask for direct referrals of problem paths with position references and photos from members of the public. Although not everything reported to us falls within our remit, we will always endeavour to pass on such reports to the relevant authorities for further action.

Our core area is Pontesbury/Minsterley but we have also worked out this year to Annscroft, Lordshill, Bromlow Callow, Hemford, etc. – basically wherever we can help.

I would like to thank all the volunteers who give up their Tuesday mornings to work for the group come whatever the weather, the farmers and landowners for their co-operation in helping us access the routes on their land, and also Helen Beresford at Shropshire Council Rights of Way Office for all her help and assistance given to us.

#### **8. Parish Village Halls** – reports from representatives:

##### **Report from Habberley Village Hall.** Cllr John Pritchard, trustee

The Hall continues to thrive driven by a dedicated band of volunteers but is hampered to some degree by being removed from population centres - Habberley only comprising circa 90 people.

We are fortunate that many of our residents are longstanding and willing to support the Hall. In addition to local events such as Harvest Supper and the annual Bar-b-Q such events as "Flicks in the Sticks" and "Arts alive" are held throughout the year. Other events such as bowls, discussion groups and quizzes add to the programme. Private events tend to be minimal due to a lack of parking, with a thriving pub just across the road.

The future of Village Halls needs to be addressed given the financial constraints of local Government.

##### **Report from Pontesbury Public Hall** – Cllr Neville Lewis

The public hall lettings and bookings have had a good year with our regular users the maintstay of the financial aspect of the hall.

Pontesbury Players and also their junior section have a number of productions throughout the year and we also have some excellent classes: Keep fit; yoga; exercise classes, dance exercises, tai chi, Pilates all at various times throughout the week in the main hall. There is also an excellent Wednesday Line Dance afternoon, very well supported. Short mat bowling afternoons are held throughout the winter months and

Slimming World hold classes 52 weeks of the year. The Public Hall is also the home of Pontesbury W.I. and Pontesbury Ladies Club, for their meetings.

There are also large number parties both children's and adults, concerts, quizzes and funeral wakes held over the twelve- month period. There is a Friday sewing group held in the Len Simpson room and also some meetings.

The hall hosts the 'Good Neighbours' monthly hot meals during the winter period all free of charge to support the excellent job that they do for the Rea Valley area.

### **Report from Cruckton Village Hall – Cllr Charles Sandells**

This year Cruckton village Hall has benefited from the refurbishment of the lavatory facilities. Making good use of the community infrastructure levies to do much needed maintenance on the hall. Cruckton village Hall is an important facility for the local community and this maintenance project will benefit and be enjoyed by all who use the hall and encourage more people to hire the hall.

The Hall has regular bookings from Lea Cross WI, The art club, The Fitzroy Academy, parties etc

The village Hall has hosted the Harvest supper and this event was well supported and enjoyed by the local community giving new and old residents the opportunity to mix.

The village Hall committee want to keep up their good work having a presentable and well loved village facility available for everyone to use at an affordable hire charge.

The village Hall thank all who support it.

### **9. Friends of Pontesbury Library - Yvonne Davies, Acting Chair**

**Introduction** This time last year there was concern about a possible closure of our library. The previous 5-year arrangement was due to be reviewed and was more pressing in light of Council budget cuts. However two recent meetings have seen a positive outcome to the Friends' current financial arrangement supporting the Shropshire Libraries' contract with the PC & FOPL. A meeting in January, hosted by Parish Council Officers, resulted in an agreement being reached with Shropshire Council Library Service to maintain the Library within the Pavilion Community Hub with FOPL increasing our contribution by £500 more p.a. making a total of £4,000 p.a. towards keeping our community library open.

We are grateful to the Parish Council for their diplomatic handling of the two meetings which resulted in the new agreement.

FOPL, as you know, is primarily a fundraising charity but it's developing to be so much more: a valuable community asset alongside normal Library business and the existing social support given by Library Manager Beverley Link. You only have to look at recent events:

- **Coffee mornings** on the first Saturday of each month providing a social meeting place and contact point for services e.g. Good Neighbours, alongside raising funds via the Library Lottery. (The Library was so full last Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> March, we almost ran out of chairs!)
- **Seasonal Art & Craft Workshops** for parents, grandparents and of course children. The next one coming up is Spring.
- **Concerts** – Val Sinclair staged a group performance in the Pavilion turning the Library into 'Ronnie Scott's' in the space of an hour. The event raised funds and was enjoyed by all who attended.

- **School visits** aimed at developing a children's love of books, improving literacy and resourcing teachers.
- **Exhibitions** such as that about local resident Lily Chitty one of the first women archaeologists, and Speakers e.g. local author Laurel Rond who brought her harp.
- Liaison with other key groups in the community e.g. PCEAG & u3a.
- **Spring Plant Sale & Chip it for Charity**

## Successful Accountability

### 1. Co-op Local Community Fund

During February last year two FOPL Committee members attended a 'zoom' meeting with a Co-op representative who interviewed us because FOPL had received funding. The meeting was very successful. FOPL members prepared sets of photographs, accounts and a comprehensive document as evidence of our activities and their value to the community.

### 2. King's Award for Volunteers (KAV)

We are pleased to announce that FOPL has been nominated for this award, the equivalent of an MBE for groups of volunteers. There was a 3-hour interview with KAV Deputy Lieutenants, followed by preparation of accounts, policy documents and evidence of our activities. We will know sometime in June if our efforts have been recognised and we receive an award.

## Changes to FOPL Website

The Committee decided to update our website. Do check it out at [pontesburylibrary.co.uk](http://pontesburylibrary.co.uk). We will post on social media using the Library FaceBook page -USE PONTESBURY LIBRARY- more often for everyday news and events. Thanks to Emma Lawrence for the new website design and to Mike Fletcher for setting up the IT for the new site.

## Upcoming Events

**Lily Chitty Exhibition** Ms Chitty lived in Station Road, Pontesbury for much of her life and is only now being properly recognised for her pioneering work as an archaeologist. This fascinating exhibition curated by the Young Collective was recently staged at Shrewsbury Museum. Our Library Manager Beverley Link has managed to secure it for our library for the month of April.

**Pontesbury Festival 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> June** Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March saw the launch of FOPL's contribution to the village festival. It's a **WRITING COMPETITION, open to all ages on the theme of 'It happened in Pontesbury . . .'** Further details and entry forms are available from the Library and can be downloaded from the website [pontesburylibrary.co.uk](http://pontesburylibrary.co.uk). The competition is free! And there are prizes!

## 10. **Pontesbury Climate Emergency Action Group** – a report from the Chairman, Liz Knowles

The PCEAG has continued to pursue various projects this past year.

**1. Community Garden.** This was established on the Cricketers meadow site with the help of volunteers and advice/assistance from Will Griffiths a local carpenter. Monthly work parties have continued throughout the growing season with local volunteers. We hope that the coming year will see more community involvement.

A great deal of the produce this past year was donated to the Pontesbury Food Bank and to 2 community meals organised by St Georges Church with funding from Shropshire Good Food Partnership.

Cordon fruit trees were added to the garden during the winter.

We still have funding in the bank to cover the coming years compost top up and other necessary items. An event was held in September to raise funds as well as local awareness of the community garden, in conjunction with the apple pressers, which was well attended in spite of the pouring rain.

**2. Group Structure.** We now have Public Liability and Employer's Liability insurance to cover events including work parties for the garden. This is at a cost of around £200 per annum.

**3. Hedges and Verges.** Mowing by Shropshire Highways did not happen as expected this last year. In the summer yellow rattle was present on at least 2 of the verge sites chosen having been sown earlier in the year by PCEAG volunteers and by Cllr Doug Jones. Doug also did most of the mowing and risings removal himself after a not very successful cut by contractors. A meeting later in the year determined that PPC and MPC will hire contractors to do the mowing in March and late summer 2025. More seed and young native plants will be planted/sown shortly on the verge strips.

Work parties to clear the hedgerows of thick weeds and nettles took place at the end of summer on Cricketers meadow site. This work needs to continue until the plants are bigger and stronger but unfortunately, we do not have enough volunteers from the community to do this efficiently.

**4. Project with Marches Energy Agency.** MEA have offered support with training, events and publicity for community climate groups. After discussions it was decided to hold a "Climate Fresk" in Pontesbury in March 2025. This is an event designed to engage people in the community on the problems that the climate emergency is causing and will cause in the future for all of us, and what we can do about it in our own lives, and in our communities. MEA and PPC are funding the event which will be held at the Pavilion on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1.30 to 4.30pm. We hope to engage some younger people in the event, using social media outreach.

**5. Events** this year include a Spring growing event linked to the garden project, an autumn / harvest event featuring pressed fruit juices and pizza, a post -Christmas present swap and the Climate Fresk to be held shortly. The first garden work party of 2025 will be held on February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## 11. **Pontesbury Sports Association** – report by Tim Barber – Chair Pontesbury Sports Association and Secretary PCC

Firstly, I would like to thank my Executive Committee of Sharon, David and Wayne for their hard work and support during the last 12-months. 2024 had been a busy year both on and off the sports field.

**On-field.** On the field both the Worthen men's and women's teams continue to go from strength to strength. Bowls continued on the PSA bowling green and it was great to see juniors taking part too. We had five rounders teams playing either on the PSA field or on Mary Webb. Despite the wet weather in the Spring and delayed start the cricket club had an extremely busy schedule of training and fixtures from AllStars, Dynamos, U11 & U13, through to Women & Girls hardball and soft ball, Shrewsbury Evening League and finally Shropshire County Cricket League.

During Summer evenings it was fantastic to see multiple sports being played across the field and over on Mary Webb.

At this point I would like to thank Mary Webb school for their cooperation with the use of the school field which was invaluable when we needed additional parking during busy sessions.

**Off-field.** Off the field we have continued to upgrade the facilities in the pavilion, following on from the work funded by the cricket club ECB County Grant. During 2024 to comply with regulations we have also.

- Installed fire alarms and extinguishers.
- Upgraded the alarm system.
- Upgraded the CCTV
- Upgraded the electrical system, including LED lighting throughout the building and installing emergency exit signs.
- We have also had the building surveyed for asbestos and for legionella (this has highlighted some additional work that it required to comply with legislation).
- The flooring was replaced throughout the building.
- The kitchen was refitted.
- We have repaired the carpark with sixty tonnes of stone.
- The field was verti-drained
- The PSA also funded a replacement mower for the cricket outfield & football pitch.
- We have also had the brook on the boundary with Mary Webb dug out alongside the football pitch as far as the Shropshire Council officers would allow. Thanks to Trevor Evans for his work on this.
- Additional drainage was installed across the carpark to help take away water gathering in front of the pavilion. Thanks to Matthew Dorricott for his help with this.

Flooding continues to be an issue on the field, with the problem area being across the cricket outfield towards the pavilion and when the brook overtops the culvert during periods of heavy rainfall. We have on-going discussions with the Parish Council and County Council to try and find a resolution to this. Until we can resolve this flooding other projects in front of the pavilion will have to be delayed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Parish Council for their continued support in helping us upgrade the facilities. Upgrading the pavilion, ensuring that we comply with current legislation has come at a cost giving us a challenge for 2025 and in the future to ensure that we have sufficient income to maintain a quality and compliant facility.

**12. Pontesbury & Rea Valley Community Good Neighbours Scheme** – report from Chairman, Cllr Sharon Davies.

2024 has been another very busy year for the Pontesbury and Rea Valley Community Good Neighbours organisation, with fifteen dedicated volunteers and six committee members working extremely hard on a wide variety of activities to support the community.

The monthly Coffee Mornings at the Plough inn Pontesbury is very well supported and continues to be a success.

The smaller groups “Coffee and Chat” meetings and the Gentlemen’s Club provide support to those who prefer to meet in an environment where it is a smaller group of like-minded individuals. Often those who attend the smaller groups then have the confidence and the desire to attend the larger Coffee Mornings and the Luncheons, which is great to see.

We are delighted that the ‘Gentlemen’s Club’ has grown and is now running twice a month offering support to men in the community.

The Luncheon at the Public Hall in Pontesbury has had another successful year, with around forty + people attending.

The Committee would like to thank the volunteers who work tirelessly either cooking, serving, helping behind the scenes, setting up the hall, clearing up afterwards – the Luncheons would not be possible without the time given by these individuals especially our cooks Ali & Kim.

The Good Neighbours group have supported the Carers' Event this year with the provision of a donation for a buffet lunch and some musical entertainment, which was well received by those who attended.

Good Neighbours still has three volunteers befriending vulnerable individuals in their homes.

Other events and activities in 2024 included the provision of Easter Eggs for the Severn Hospice, donations of biscuits to the Rea Valley Food Bank at Christmas for hampers, provision of emergency food parcels for specific families under special circumstances, and additional support for vulnerable families with further food bags being created and provided.

Mary Webb School were supported by GN providing bags of compost for a garden project & Pontesbury Sports Association have also been supported by the Good Neighbours group this year with flooring and equipment.

This year's Christmas Meal was held at The Gates at Ford, where 56 guests and nine volunteers enjoyed a three-course meal. The Good Neighbours committee organised the post-lunch musical entertainment and provided transport to and from the event. The feedback from those who attended was tremendous, with some describing it as "the best one yet".

The "Festive Friends" Christmas Lunch was supported by the Good Neighbours group where we made a donation to enable several individuals who would otherwise have been alone at Christmas were able to share a festive meal with others on Christmas day.

2025 promises to be just as busy as previous years. With regular meetings, luncheons, coffee mornings and smaller groups continuing to provide the support to the Community that is so desperately needed.

The Committee would like to record its thanks to the Pontesbury Co-Op, Pontesbury Parish Council, Pontesbury Public Hall, Hignett's, Pontesbury One Stop, Amy, Derek & Ali (The Plough) & Age UK.

A special thank you to all members of the community who have made donations to the Good Neighbours group, and to those from the community who help out in so many ways. The ongoing activities of the Pontesbury and Rea Valley Good Neighbours group would not be possible without the support from all these individuals, groups and companies.

### **13. Pontesbury Youth Group – report by Revd Greg Smith, St George's Church**

#### **Work at Mary Webb Secondary School**

A significant portion of my youth work takes place at Mary Webb Secondary School, where I currently spend two days a week providing one-to-one support and facilitating group sessions. These sessions focus on equipping students with essential life skills and fostering personal growth.

Additionally, we run two thriving student groups during break time and lunch. The break-time group, attended by around 20 enthusiastic Year 7 and 8 students, includes engaging games and short talks with Christian themes. The lunchtime group, which attracts 10-15 students from Years 9 to 11, provides a space for fun activities and meaningful discussions. Beyond these regular sessions, we also lead school assemblies five to six times a year, often centered around themes or Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, always incorporating a message from the Bible.

#### **Youth Café**

We currently run two after-school Youth Cafés each week, providing a relaxed and welcoming space for young people to unwind, connect, and enjoy some pizza.

- **Monday Youth Café:** Typically, we see between 9 and 13 young people attending, primarily from Years 7 and 8, with a few older students from Years 9 and 11. Once this group becomes more firmly

established (similar to our Wednesday Café), I plan to introduce a structured course or other engaging initiatives.

- **Wednesday Youth Café:** This session attracts between 8 and 11 students from Years 10 and 11. Recently, I introduced the STIR course, a gentle introduction to Christianity designed as a precursor to the Alpha Course for young people. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, sparking curiosity and deeper conversations about faith.

**Youth Weekend Away** Just before the summer holidays, we took nine students on a weekend away at Conover Hall, where they participated in archery, aerial trekking, kayaking, and other exciting activities. It was refreshing to see young people disconnect from their phones, immerse themselves in the outdoors, and build strong friendships.

One of the highlights of the trip was the campfire, where we had meaningful conversations while toasting marshmallows and playing games. The evening ended with leaders sharing personal experiences of overcoming difficulties, which encouraged several young people to open up about their own challenges. Since the trip, we have been following up with individuals who expressed a desire for further support. The feedback from both leaders and participants has been overwhelmingly positive, and there is great enthusiasm for organizing similar trips in the future.

**Detached Youth Work** Over the summer, we organized two barbecue events for Youth Café attendees and other young people in Pontesbury—one just before the summer holidays and another toward the end. Additionally, Greg and I spent time at Pontesbury Park engaging with young people to understand what activities they would like to see in the area. Their suggestions included a snooker tournament, access to the AstroTurf at Mary Webb, and opportunities to use gym equipment for fitness training. I have taken note of these ideas and am actively exploring their feasibility.

Following these conversations, we successfully launched a Drop-In session at St. George's Church, where nine young people (five boys and four girls from Years 10 and 11) came to play table tennis and pool. This was particularly exciting as most of these young people had not engaged with our programs before, apart from a few who attended our summer barbecue. Their enthusiasm has encouraged us to plan additional sessions during the February and Easter half-term breaks.

**Other Youth Work Initiatives** Beyond our regular programs, I have had the opportunity to raise awareness about our youth work through media and political engagement. I was invited to speak on BBC West Midlands Radio and BBC Shropshire, where I shared insights into our work in Pontesbury and our partnership with SYFC. Additionally, I had a productive meeting with MP Julia Buckley, where I highlighted the needs and concerns surrounding youth work in the area.

**Future Projects and Aspirations** Looking ahead, I have been tasked with planning youth activities for the Pontesbury Festival this summer, which is an exciting opportunity to further engage with the community. I am also exploring the possibility of organizing another weekend away or day trip to strengthen relationships among young people. However, the success of this initiative will depend on securing adequate funding and volunteer support.

**Conclusion** So far, all of our projects have been met with enthusiasm, and it has been incredibly rewarding to witness young people forming connections, growing in confidence, and engaging with our team. As we continue to build and expand these initiatives, I look forward to seeing even greater positive impacts on the youth of Pontesbury.

#### 14. **The Pavilion** – report by Deputy Clerk

Pontesbury Pavilion Community Hub & Library has had another great year during 2024-2025 Financial Year and is continually building on a great reputation and good facilities. This is thanks to the Pavilion Committee and staff team who manage the building. Looking forward to 2025, we already have events booked in and the building is also part of the Pontesbury Festival on Friday, Saturday & Sunday 27th - 29th June 2025. The staff team work to the ethos that “Community is the foundation to success” as quoted by Kristen Jones, and work together to continually refresh, maintain and provide a safe environment for the community. Anna Lawson, Building Assistant and the face of the Pavilion, is the person who greets you upon arrival, she

takes your bookings, and sets spaces up - Anna is the backbone of the Pavilion and is there every day to keep the building 'wheels' turning - it's thanks to Anna that everyday is a community day in the Pavilion. Nicki Young, Deputy Clerk & Pavilion Building Manager, keeps those 'wheels' turning behind the scenes, with the Committee, Nicki works to provide a strategic outlook for the Pavilion, applying for funding, keeping H&S up to date, and providing the link between the community and Council. The Pavilion is now a vibrant community building thanks to the many different and varied activities which take place, catering from babies & pre-schoolers to those older in age. Regular hirers are listed below, some meet weekly and others on a monthly basis:

- Monday: U3A Family History; U3A History Group and Dan Lewis Fitness runs 2 classes
- Tuesday: U3A Geology group meet monthly
- Wednesday: Sea Change - group for families with pre-school children;  
Age UK STW Dementia Group - run on alternate Wednesday mornings; U3A English;  
Wine Tasters meet in the winter months only
- Thursday: Dan Lewis Fitness - chair-based exercises for the over 55s;  
U3A Creative Writing;  
Library Book Club;  
Get Creative - free crafting group;  
Good Neighbour's Scheme Men's Group - men of a certain age meet to play cards, dominoes, read the paper and generally socialize
- Friday: Carer's Group meet monthly, still well supported by Shropshire Council older people's team, Community Care Coordinator, Age UK STW and Alzheimer's Society.

the newsletter volunteer sorters also use the meeting room on the last day of the month to sort out the newsletters, and put them out for collection

**Day-to-Day Running of the Pavilion** Both the Deputy Clerk (Building Manager) and the Building Assistant continue to work closely to run the behind-the-scenes operations of the Pavilion. This year we have had additional work uploading all H&S information to SafetyNest and completing H&S training through LearnNest. Working with Shropshire Council Property Services Group, the staff team have also organised Legionella Testing and the maintenance programme continues to keep the building services working seamlessly.

**Art exhibitions** by local artists really make a difference to the Pavilion, sharing the arts and crafts that the talented people of Pontesbury have produced, encouraging other to exhibit and also get involved with crafting. In 2024-2025 there were 4 such exhibitions including one from the talented Pavilion staff; from John Cruyton; Gill Scriven; and "It Takes Two" by Tina Tweed & Pam Wyatt - by offering the exhibition space, the parish council celebrate the wealth of talent and time to produce such great artwork.

**The Pavilion Committee** is chaired by Councillor Duncan Fletcher, with Committee members Councillors, Nick Hignett, Roger Evans, Sharon Davies and Michelle Trow. This Committee oversee the strategic work of the Pavilion, along with receiving reports and quotes for larger projects and making recommendations to full Council in line with Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

This year the Committee have achieved a successful bid to UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) / Worcestershire County Council to install solar panels on the roof of the Pavilion and, in addition, the Council approved funds to purchase solar energy batteries, which are now installed in the Pavilion kitchen. This project is now completed and the Council are already reaping the benefits and seeing a reduced use of energy from the grid. A screen in the Bistro Area gives daily updates on the solar energy used and stored.

**The project to install solar panels** was seamless, the Deputy Clerk worked to a tight deadline to achieve a great result. Severn Valley Renewables won the contract to install 28 x solar PV cells with micro-inverters onto the Pavilion roof and 3 batteries sited in the kitchen. All members of SVR and the scaffolding team have worked extremely hard to bring the project to completion in time to make the claim. There was great

communication from all parties and SVR provided help where needed, and this is also followed up by one year support from SVR.

**Partnership Hire Agreements**, with those local organisations who the Council have a special relationship, were drawn up and signed with the approval of the Committee. In recognition of the organisations' regular use of the building, they receive favourable hire rates. In line with this, a Concessions Policy was also drafted and agreed by the Committee and Council.

The Pavilion Committee met with members of the Shropshire Council Library Service and Estates Team to discuss the future of Pontesbury Library and the License to Occupy in the Pavilion. We are pleased to report that the parish council have agreed to pay £15,000 per year (an additional £1,000), including a contribution from Friends of Pontesbury Library of £4000, and that an agreement was signed by Shropshire Council to continue to pay £5,000 for the Library to be based in the Pavilion.

The Meeting Room is due to be repainted in March 2025, with quotes sought and a local painter and decorator being successful with their price. We look forward to this work taking place in the first week of March, and providing a spruced up brighter space for the community.

To save money, the Pavilion Committee also agreed to purchase a carpet cleaner rather than hire in a company. This now means that the Building Assistant, along with her other cleaning duties, washes the Pavilion carpets on a more regular basis, this was most beneficial during the winter rainy months.

Many moons ago, when the building was handed over, there was a problem with a bent uPVC patio door, this let in considerable cold air in the winter months. The Committee are glad to report that this issue has now been rectified using white foam tape.

Looking forward, the Pavilion team will be working with partners, such as Public Health, to bring meaningful events to the Pavilion to assist with the happy and healthy communities in Pontesbury Parish.

**Room Hire** The Pavilion Committee voted to retain the same hire price for the financial year 2025-2026. Hiring of the rooms in the Pavilion has been consistent, with a total number of bookings in last Financial Year of 490 compared to the total number of bookings for the current Financial Year decreasing slightly to 487, which includes paid hiring and hiring not paid for, ie, for Council meetings, Council events, Committee meetings. This equates to an average of 40 bookings per month.

A total of 26 one-off events were held in the Pavilion during FY 2024-2025, with approximately 476 people attending these events, so the total number of people using the building over the year is quite a considerable number. Therefore, as the number of bookings has been consistent with last year [FY 2023-2024], so has the Pavilion room hire income, totalling £4,912.50 by 7th February 2025 with a projected income of £5,000 by the end of March 2025.

#### **15. Matters of interest or concern to the parish of Pontesbury from the electors of the Parish:**

Rev'd Smith also wished to highlight the upcoming Pontesbury Festival on 27-29 June 2025. This is a partnership of local groups providing a weekend of performing and visual arts at various venues across Pontesbury

A local resident requested an update following the public meeting about the proposed changes to traffic management at the bottom of Main Road/Minsterley Road and raised concerns about problems with parking in other areas of the village such as outside Connections and Hignetts. Cllr Hignett responded that an alternative scheme is yet to be drawn up but Shropshire Council were aware of the S.106 deadlines and the widening of the pavement at the bottom of Hall Bank.

Cllr Pritchard raised concerns about starter homes and changes to stamp duty and requested that the Clerk write to the local MP to ask Government to bring payments in line with market values which differ across the country.

**16. Date of next Annual Parish Meeting** will be Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

The meeting closed at 1930

Chairman: ..... Date: .....