

Shropshire Council Report – a report from Cllr R Evans

Pontesbury Parish Council area continues to be 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,

I open with similar words to those I have used in previous years and as recently reported in the media. The major focus of Shropshire Council has again been on financial stability. The elected government unfortunately have continued to alter how it funds local government. Reports published by an independent rural organisation have demonstrated graphically how grants previously given to help fund the extra costs incurred by rural authorities, like Shropshire, have now been totally removed. Many urban authorities have had substantial increases in their government grants. Some have had their grant increased by up to 5 times the amount that Shropshire will be receiving in the 26/27 financial year. Telford & Wrekin Authority for example, are due to receive a higher percentage increase. It is predicted that by 2030 they will be receiving more in Government Grants than Shropshire Council. With the continued increasing number of those needing help and the cost of providing social care that many residents need coupled with having virtually nothing left in reserves the council agreed in February to increase, very reluctantly the council tax most residents pay. For this year council tax will increase by 8.99%. On top of this there will be a need to borrow substantial amounts of money to ensure the council can meet all of its commitments and start a transformation programme to change the way it works. Doing this will ensure government will not be sending in others to take over running the council finances which was always one of our greatest fears. There will be many tough decisions to make during the coming months.

FINANCE AND RESOURCES—The budget set for this year and before the last election by the previous administration in February 2025 involved saving £60m this current budget year. The latest financial projection is that at the end of this month there will be an expected unfunded overspend of £15.7m. The council has anticipated this and applied to Government in December, together with a number of other Local Authorities for permission to borrow up to, and I repeat up to £71.4m for this year. This borrowed amount includes the £32m needed to cancel the NWRR project. Government officers have stated that they have never and will not increase their contribution to the building of this road. As it is plainly, at the now projected cost of over £163m unaffordable. The £32m of capital so far spent, needs to be repaid from the revenue account. Last comment on this is to confirm

that planning permission for its construction has still not been formally agreed that this project is now cancelled at its February Council meeting.

Some other news, green waste collection charges were not increased last November, Government have been informed that Shropshire will not be implementing food collection in April and there is no mention in the budget about increasing car parking charges.

As part of the transformation changes I previously mentioned in some areas extra staff are being recruited. Examples of this are in the revenue and benefits plus Planning Departments. The amount of council tax owing to the council had increased in recent times to over £26m, this is now being reduced, and a commitment has also been made that extra help and advice will be made available to help those in need. Regarding planning, we are failing to both provide the service required and also earn extra income by giving advice to those asking for preplanning advice.

All the present all the information so far talked about concerns what is called the revenue budget. The other side of the equation is the capital budget. This is where council borrows money to do specific projects. I have mentioned the NWRR but there were others, including the Swimming Pool at Sundorne. This has been paused at present, as is what to do with the Shirehall and the Smithfield Road/Pride Hill Centre projects Only those projects which are deemed to increase future council income or are required due to safety concerns are being taken forward.

Good news however is that Council has been allocated extra money to increase both the number of EV charges and pay for the extra staff needed to deliver them.

Planning - Work on the revised Local Plan has still not started due to lack of information and guidance from government on what it needs to cover. Planning applications are now starting to be received on parcels of land which were not and have not been previously included in the local plan which of course some developers are trying to argue is out of date. Government legislation states council must have identified 5 years of housing land. At present this council now has just 3.81 years. This means plots of land in what is considered a sustainable location should expect to be granted planning permission. Finally in this section Government now seem to be suggesting that as part of their devolution programme different local authorities need to get together and identify and agree mutual critical policies.

Housing – Work involving other agencies concerning housing issues in Pontesbury, and which involve the police have taken place.

Highways. - Potholes, as many know, are an increasing problem. Although now directly employing three teams and mending more than ever before, as many will be aware, there continues to be many roads with dangerous potholes in them. This I am being told is due to lack of road maintenance for many years combined with the incessant rain and cold nights.

Before finishing I need to highlight 3 local issues.

First **road maintenance.** Shropshire Council has just announced that they plan to do work on the A488 between Hanwood and Pontesford. This will mean closing the road. I am arguing for this to be carried out overnight. This I have just been informed will begin week commencing April have raised a number of questions and even though objecting to daytime working have been told the road will be closed for certain days whilst the top-dressing work is carried out. I have asked for, insisted a site meeting is held to discuss how this is to be carried out. Included in this what and how will diversion notices be displayed. To close the whole road is not acceptable, impossible. I do have agreement that buses will be allowed through. I am also arguing that work will need to be carried out in two parts, Hanwood to Lea Cross and Lea Cross to Pontesford. The first closure is at present programmed for the 2nd of April to remove road studs or cats eyes. I will endeavour to provide more information in the next Parish Newsletter.

Second item is that National Grid have just announced that they plan to put in place a 33Kv cable between Bayston Hill Substation on Pulley Lane to Malehurst Bank Substation on Malehurst Bank, covering approximately 12.5km. I understand at least some of this may follow the public road network. Again a meeting has been arranged to enable a full understanding of the work involved.

Finally, I learnt 7 days ago that an application had been made, and much preliminary work carried involving the running of a car rally in September. This could involve up to 150 rally cars competing in 4 special rally areas. Parish Councils and residents in those so-called specific special areas have apparently been contacted and surveys carried out. However of concern to me is that the rally cars will need to travel along other public roads between these so-called specific areas. According to a map which has just been forwarded to me this will involve travel between two of them, from Dorrington to the A488 and then south. This shows them travelling from the A49 through Exfords Green across Annscroft

Crossroads, through Plealey and onto the A488. On all these roads of course the designated speed limit is of course 60mph. The actual date the event is at present programmed to take place is Sunday 20th September. Once in the morning and one in the afternoon. If you have any views on this, please write to the Chief Executive at Shropshire Council.

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 area and residents.