

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,

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.