

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
Held at 7.00pm on 15 May 2023 in Uffington Village Hall

Present: Parish Councillors L Padmore (Chair), P Daimond, E Strawbridge and Shropshire Councillor L Picton

Clerk: Lisa Harris

Guests: Chas Warren, Stuart Dady, Alistair Price & Kaz Longden – the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust

One parishioner was also in attendance.

1. Apologies

None

2. Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 9 May 2022 were proposed as a true record by Councillor Padmore, seconded by Councillor Daimond and unanimously agreed by all those present as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

3. Any items arising from previous Minutes

None

4. Annual report from the Chairman

Councillor Padmore began by extending her thanks to fellow parish councillors, the Clerk and Shropshire Councillor Lezley Picton for their efforts throughout the past year.

Due to Councillors Andy Blake and Jayne Carter moving out of the parish, two Casual Vacancies had arisen and the process of filling the places on the Parish Council was underway.

In continuing to strive to do the best for the community that it serves, the Parish Council had resolved in January not to claim a precept from Shropshire Council for the financial year 2023/24. Reserve funds would be utilised to finance the work of the Parish Council meaning that each household within the Parish would receive a saving of at least £50 on their Council Tax bill from Shropshire Council. It is hoped this will help all parishioners during these difficult times.

Other actions/initiatives to benefit the community included:

- The broken streetlight on Church Road (outside The Old Vicarage) was replaced;
- Each parishioner was presented with a commemorative bone china mug to celebrate HM Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee;
- Setting up of a Community Speed Watch scheme;
- Purchased and installed two recycled plastic (maintenance free) benches – one to commemorate HM Queen Elizabeth II and one to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.

LYNNE PADMORE

5. Annual report from the Ward Councillor

“Without doubt 22/23 was a challenging year. There were many highlights, our Good OFSTED rating for Children’s Services overall and two of our in-house children’s homes being rated outstanding. The award of £18.7m towards the redevelopment of the Riverside Complex in Shrewsbury, winning a number of Industry awards and the results of our Peer Reviews in Finance, Communications and Adult Social Care showing we are heading in the right direction AND less complaints about potholes!

The biggest challenge, as always is budgetary. Despite working hard to ensure we remained in budget this financial year, inflation affects the Council too, and it is likely that we will be facing an estimated deficit between £10m and £17m which has to be cleared before we start the new financial year.

We were already seeking to close a £40m budgetary gap for 23/24 and thanks to inflation that is now closer to £51m. However, we have a plan, The Shropshire Plan, and this plan will enable us to achieve these targets. This plan is not salami slicing nor is it wholesale slash and burn. In many cases it’s about doing things differently, it’s about shortening customer journeys which will not only save money but more importantly improve outcomes. This plan seeks to protect the services that usually disappear in times of financial hardship such as libraries, leisure centres, arts provision and parks whilst ensuring we fulfil our statutory duty to present a balanced budget.

We continue to spend over three quarters of our budget on social care and this year our providers, particularly those in the adult social care market, are really struggling and we are working very closely with SPIC (Shropshire Partners in Care) to try and rejuvenate the market especially the domiciliary care sector. To give you an idea as to how this can affect the council - if a resident requires care, the cost of a residential placement can be £1,500 a week whereas domiciliary care can be provided for a third of the cost and residents are much better in their own homes. So, what is far more expensive for the council is also not good for the resident but the aftermath of Covid especially the supermarket wars for staff have meant that many care staff have now left the profession. There is no doubt that the crisis in the care market continues.

Our £60m investment into Highways is paying off but the mix of wet and freezing conditions mean that once again we are in “pothole season”. However, over the summer we will catch up but as has been reported in national and local news we need significant government investment into road infrastructure.

No Conservative Councillor wants to raise Council Tax, but it is worth pointing out that the Government Financial Settlement for Local Government expects us to take the maximum rise available. With our social care costs and inflation, we simply did not have a choice.

The easiest way to describe the council’s revenue budget is to say for every £5 we spend, £4 is spent on social care and then out of the remaining £1, 50p is spent on the waste contract. So, in short everything else the Council does is paid for out of the remaining 50p.

I am well aware there will be difficult times ahead and tough decisions will need to be made but we have made a good start and, as I said, there are plans in place to reach our targets. My aim for 2023/24 is to ensure that Shropshire Council is on a firm financial footing allowing us to move forward with confidence for 24/25.

Local Government Boundary Review

Following agreement by Shropshire Council to undertake a community and Parish review suddenly the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) decided that there needed to be a

divisional review of Shropshire. The first stage of the process was for Council to agree on the number of councillors required and the system of governance for the future. The council proposal received cross party agreement and we asked LGBC to consider 76 councillors (3,499 electors per councillor) and to stay with the Cabinet system.

The LGBC came back to us to say they were minded to go with 74 (same as now, approximately 3,700 electors per councillor). The next stage was to look at how the new boundaries should be developed. A proposal, which again received cross party support, was drafted by the council but the LGBC may or may not take any notice of the suggestions made – they didn't!

The LGBC published their draft recommendations on 2nd May. We always knew there would be changes to the Tern Division as they regarded the current division as a "mop up" and they don't like these style divisions. In our own draft the parishes of Upton Magna, Withington, Uffington and Astley were separated from Bomere and Bicton, however, as suspected, the LGBC have had other ideas and have kept Tern largely as before, the change being Bicton Parish now goes to the Longden Division, some of the Bicton area goes into the Bowbrook division and the Tern Division gains the Parish of Hadnall. In the draft plan the change for the Parish of Uffington is that the properties at Pimley Manor, Coracle Close and the Shrewsbury Club etc will be removed from the parish and included in the Sundorne Division. It should be noted that the proposed Tern division now straddles parliamentary boundaries!!

Further details can be found by following the link by following the link:
<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/shropshire>

The Big Four

The Redevelopment of the Riverside in Shrewsbury

The award of nearly £18.7M for the development of the Riverside area in Shrewsbury has enabled us to move the project forward in terms of time and over the summer there will be a number of public events being held to capture ideas from residents and the general public. We will also be publishing the Movement Strategy very soon. I have often said that the town centre plans are like giant Jenga, you have to get things in the right order and the Movement Strategy is a really important piece of work. Look out for this around the summer.

The Local Plan

The Inspectorate has agreed we have fulfilled our "Duty to Cooperate" which was the big hurdle we had to overcome. The inspection now continues. There is a significant amount of work still to be undertaken but we have recently had the public session which focussed on waste and minerals. We have yet to receive dates for the site-specific examinations.

The Future of Shirehall

It was agreed at a meeting of Full Council that we would be leaving the Shirehall for a new home in the town centre. I have made no secret of the facts surrounding this building, which is expensive to run, no longer fit for purpose and will be very expensive to refurbish in a meaningful way.

The Northwest Relief Road

The final public consultation period has now concluded, and we move closer to getting the application to Committee. I am still expecting the meeting to be held in early summer.

Local Matters

The usual minor highway repairs and speed of traffic issues have come across my desk this year alongside chasing up matters reported by the Clerk.

I try to keep my annual report fairly brief however, I have included (on the following page) a short report on all the things we are doing in terms of climate change etc. There is a lot of interesting stuff taking place so thought this would be a good opportunity to give you an update, but I won't read it out at the meeting!!

As always it has been a pleasure to work alongside Chair Lynne, Clerk Lisa and all the Parish Councillors.

As always, if there is anything you need to know you only have to shout."

LEZLEY PICTON

Shropshire Councillor for the Tern Division

May 2023

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Public EV charging infrastructure

Following on from our recent success in obtaining almost £1m of Government funding for EV chargers in our car parks and streets, Shropshire Council is now hoping to obtain additional Government grant money towards a new post to help develop and implement an EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy and bid for further funding, including installations at additional public car parks, park & ride sites and parish halls. We plan to publish a 'Public EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy' and supporting resources later this year, including a 'toolkit' to help the public and businesses with their understand of the technology. We may also be able to bid for funding to support the installation of a strategic network of more powerful 'rapid' chargers to provide faster top ups for both visitors and local communities alike. This is expected to help ensure that Shropshire towns remain attractive to visitors who may need to charge electric vehicles during their stay. We have recently asked Parish and Town Councils to identify potential locations for public EV chargers in their areas.

Community Benefits from Solar Farms

Shropshire Council is working with SALC to develop and distribute guidance to help Parish and Town Councils and Parish Meetings to engage with the prospective developers of new solar farms to help them to negotiate a package of community benefits if appropriate.

Roof-mounted Solar and the Big Solar Co-op

Shropshire Council already has 27 roof-mounted solar arrays on its buildings and is currently reviewing its own estate to identify potential opportunities for additional arrays. Shropshire Council has also provided a grant to the not-for-profit Big Solar Co-op to provide free advice to businesses and community organisations (including parish councils) wishing to explore the installation of solar panels on appropriate roofs in Shropshire. The capital costs of the installation are also met by Big Solar Co-op and funded through crowd funded investment, with cheap, renewable energy being supplied to the host organisation at 10-20% below market energy costs.

Business Energy Breakfast

Shropshire Council recently organised an event at Shrewsbury Town FC (which Ian attended) to provide local business with access to authoritative advice and practical information and guidance on sustainable energy solutions, funding sources and energy and environmental auditing. Additional value has been derived by filming the event and making the footage more widely available through the Council's YouTube channel.

<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2023/03/energy-resilience-affordability-and-sustainability-top-of-the-agenda-for-business-leaders/>

Cool Shropshire

Shropshire Council has grant funded a local environmental consultancy, E4 Environment, to provide a free environmental support scheme for local micro businesses and SMEs looking to be a little greener and start their carbon reduction journey. Businesses registering with the scheme will receive tailored advice about how they can reduce overheads through increased efficiency, enhance their reputation, and connect with like-minded businesses to collectively make a difference.

Biochar Plant

Shropshire Council is exploring the potential to develop a demonstrator project around the manufacture of biochar from natural woody materials from grounds and highway maintenance using a pyrolysis plant which cooks (rather than burning) the woody feedstock to reduce it to pure carbon. There is a rapidly expanding market for the resultant biochar, which as well as storing carbon which would otherwise be released to the atmosphere from burning or natural decomposition, can be used to improve soil quality and in the manufacture of low carbon building materials. The process can also generate internationally recognised 'carbon offset credits' for sale to organisations wishing to offset their carbon emissions.

Area-based Carbon Insetting

Shropshire Council has recently applied for Government funding to develop and test a mechanism which would provide a local alternative to the purchase of internationally validated carbon credits in rainforest countries, allowing them to invest in projects which reduce emissions or capture and store carbon in Shropshire (including through the manufacture of biochar above). This is called 'insetting' as opposed to 'offsetting'. If successful, this project has the potential to revolutionise how local climate action and carbon reduction measures could be funded.

Supply-chain emissions modelling

94% of Shropshire Council's carbon footprint is generated by what it buys in from suppliers. The Council has commissioned detailed modelling of everything which it has purchased during the last 3 years to help it to identify the goods and services which generate the most carbon. The Council will then work with its suppliers to help them to improve their carbon performance and proposes to update its corporate procurement policy to identify carbon performance as key consideration in the procurement process.

Green hydrogen feasibility

It is widely recognised that current battery technology is unlikely to be suitable for heavy goods vehicles due to issues of range, weight and recharging infrastructure. This is relevant for council buses, gritters and refuse vehicles in particular, but is also crucial for the agriculture, construction and road freight sectors. The Council is therefore working with Kier and their technology partner

Protium to explore the potential to establish a small-scale demonstrator hydrogen fuel manufacturing facility, co-located with renewable energy generation on Council owned land. This work may also identify a separate network of potential refuelling facilities in strategic locations. It is expected that, if proven, such a facility could then be replicated locally, for example at the scale of an individual farm business.

Battlefield Heat Network

Shropshire Council has commissioned consultants to develop proposals for a local heat network which would capture and distribute waste heat from the Battlefield Waste to Energy plant to nearby businesses. It may be possible in future to extend the network to include local community buildings and social housing. The study is expected to report later this year and if a business case is established, will inform a bid for Government funding towards the capital costs of the heat network.

6. Parish Matters

None notified.

Guests from the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust presented a report to the meeting:

“Thank you for the invitation to talk with you this evening. We hope that this can be the start of a long and fruitful collaboration between our two organisations.

Perhaps we could introduce ourselves – Stuart Dady is our main work party leader and co-leader of our local group. He is to be found every Tuesday and two Saturdays per month working hard on the canal somewhere in this area. Alistair Price is a previous leader of our group and now co-leader of a partnership at Rodington between Rodington Parish Council, Rodington P3 Group & the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust. My name is Chas Warren, co-leader of the Shrewsbury Group of our Canal Trust.

A Brief History of the canals in this area

In the 1790s Shrewsbury – the County Town - was still reliant on the River Severn and a very poor road network for transport. The Holyhead Road was in particularly poor condition, especially the 14 miles from the coalfields around Oakengates which had become almost impassable. Consequently, the cost of coal was very high.

Therefore, a canal was proposed to transport coal in tub boats. A survey was done in 1792, an Act of parliament was passed in 1793 and Josiah Clowes was appointed as Engineer. He died in 1795 before the canal was finally completed through to Shrewsbury in 1796. It carried principally coal & limestone, but also butter & other dairy products to be exported to Liverpool, Birmingham and the rest of the country.

Major features included the 970 yard long Berwick tunnel and the cast iron aqueduct at Longden (arguably the prototype of the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct). Both are still in reasonably good condition today.

The canal was officially abandoned in 1941 with some stretches remaining in national ownership and others being sold off to local landowners and local authorities.

The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust has the aim of restoring the canal between the Butter Market in Shrewsbury and the junction with the Shropshire Union at Norbury Junction. This is very much a long-term project & it will realistically taking several decades to come to fruition.

However, in the meantime we aim to preserve the heritage of the canals, provide improved public access for leisure activities and significant wildlife & environmental improvements.

The SNCT has six volunteer groups – one at Norbury actively restoring a pair of historic working narrow boats – Bainton & Berkhamstead, one at Newport, covering the stretch from Newport to Norbury, one at Longden Aqueduct working to maintain the heritage and public access, one in Telford which is actively restoring the historic Warehouse and canal basin at Wappenshall (which will become the Thomas Telford Centre), one at Rodington which is working in partnership with Rodington Parish Council and the local P3 Footpath Group to preserve the canal heritage there and re-open the site to the public as a nature reserve and walk (Alistair is co-leader of this group & so may well be able to answer questions later about this partnership), and of course one based around Shrewsbury and particularly active around Uffington.

In the last 12 months the SNCT, Shrewsbury Branch has been very active around the Uffington area, both within your Parish boundary and also just to the South of it.

Our activities have included work on the canal around the South and North Portals of the Berwick Tunnel and also most recently the short stretch adjacent to the Shrewsbury Electricity Sub-Station between Brickyard Cottages and The Manse.

In the last few years we have cleared and re-opened access to the canal either side of the Berwick tunnel. Members of the public have free access and can use these sites for their heritage, leisure and wildlife interest (subject to any work taking place at the time).

Significant improvements in the last few years have included :

- Opening the sites for access & clearing excess vegetation
- Clearing the canal of vegetation
- Stabilising Widows Bridge at the S Portal – we are about half way through this & hope to do more later this year
- Clearing invasive & damaging vegetation from both portals
- Clearing and re-levelling the towpaths
- Starting to create a circular path at the N Portal (currently closed due to tree hazards)
- Stabilising & starting to re-build the donkey stable at the N Portal
- Working with the National Trust at Pelham Road and at Berwick Wharf
- We are currently working on clearing self-set trees from the canal bed at the Electricity Sub Station. (We intend to open this to the public in the foreseeable future)

All work is carried out by our small team of volunteers, supplemented occasionally by volunteers from further afield including various Waterway Recovery Groups from London, the North West and other parts of the country, who normally stay in the village hall here in Uffington.

There is much more we would like to do – for example on the stretches of canal and the heritage assets within Uffington Village itself, but we are limited by the numbers of available volunteers. We would love residents to become members of the SNCT and possibly volunteers as well.

We would very much welcome a closer ongoing partnership with Uffington Parish Council and local landowners to facilitate the ongoing work.

We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.”

Chas Warren
(07734 878 777)

<https://sncanal.org.uk/the-canals/>

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 7.48pm.

Signed:
Chairman

Date:

DRAFT