



Albrighton Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 21st April 2021

The meeting was held on-line on Teams and was attended by 10 Councillors and 6 members of the public and the Clerk.

Chairman's Annual Report

This year has been like no other. Indeed there was no Annual Parish Meeting last year as the Covid pandemic hit us and we were advised we could not hold the usual meeting so perhaps I may also include some comments about the previous year. Covid meant that all of us have had to change the way we lived and worked and the Council had to change the way we operated. Like many Parish Councils we had to cancel a meeting in April 2020 and following Shropshire Council's Covid advice, approval was given for the provision of delegated powers to enable the Clerk/Chairman to take any urgent decision, which would be reported to the Council at the first available meeting.

We moved to hold meetings on-line and that took some getting used to but we devised an on-line protocol to help manage the meetings and everyone made it work. Many councillors are in the upper age group of more than 70 years so they had to be particularly careful to avoid meeting others outside their family bubble and it was not possible for them to be out in the community. However one of the first things we did was to support the scheme run by the Red House & St Mary's Church to take food and medicines to the elderly who were shielding. While older councillors could not physically take part, we made the Parish Flyer and its driver available for the Red House to turn it into a travelling shop. The Council paid all the costs of the vehicle such as the monthly lease fee, maintenance, tax and insurance and we continued to pay its driver as a council employee. The Red House provided the fuel. This was a good example of working together for our residents and fulfilling a need; the Red House and the Church did an excellent job.

The Clerk had to frequently review changing guidelines from government and Shropshire Council in order to keep the Council Office, Library and Flyer Service within the rules. After the Library had been closed due to government guidance the Clerk was able to start a 'click and collect' service where residents could order library books by phone, put a note through the letterbox or order online, for collection at a stated time at the door and without entering the building. A box for returned books was put outside and books were quarantined for 72 hours before sanitising and putting back into use. Many residents said that they had found this new service very welcome during the lockdown periods.

We similarly worked with the Civic Society in preventing the development behind Shaw Lane from putting its traffic and drainage into Shaw Lane which would have increased traffic dangers to school children and patients going to the surgery. Putting its drainage into the already full Shaw Lane sewer would have exacerbated the risk of flooding in various parts of the village. This took a lot of time preparing detailed technical objections to the planning application at two Shropshire Planning meetings, which we won, and then to fight the developer's appeal run by the Bristol based Planning Inspectorate and again our position succeeded.

As a result of several flooding events the Council met with the Agencies responsible for drainage (Severn Trent, Environment Agency and Shropshire Council) and initiated the formation of Albrighton Flood Action Group which then carried on the liaison with the Agencies and has worked hard to get them to focus on solutions for the village. We are fortunate that Cllr Pete Collins with his background in the water industry is the chairman leading this group. AFLAG invited the Council Chairman or Vice Chairman to key meetings with the Agencies to emphasize Council official support for AFLAG's work.

The Council has also worked with neighbouring parishes and helped to avoid the building of 10, 000 new houses proposed near M54 Junction 3.

It is clear that some of the best successes are those where the Council works closely with other village organisations or with neighbouring parishes.

Grants were awarded to several village organisations including; to repair the roof and electrics at the table tennis club; for the Royal British Legion flagpole; support for Living at Home; the Melville Club; pledge for new boilers at the school swimming pool plus grants to others. The Council also provided substantial funding for the David Austin memorial garden and the metal plaque which had been suggested by residents at a previous annual parish meeting.

The Council also provides funding for the Nature Reserve and Churchyard maintenance

We opened negotiations with a land owner to acquire land at the station for more parking; made good contacts with West Midland Trains through whom we now have a larger modern bicycle shed and also a grant to improve the access ramp; we participated with WMT to survey residents about the Station to better their future plans for the Station; and we started discussions with WMT to persuade them to remove the parking charges which is causing cars to park elsewhere.

Council representatives are part of the Ramp Team - the group set up by our Member of Parliament to combine the efforts of the Civic Society and Parish Councils. This Team has worked hard to re-open the pedestrian access ramp to platform 1 at the Station including agreement from Shropshire Council to build a new footpath along Station Road to meet up with the foot of the Ramp. As part of this work, discussions were held with several organisations such as Transport Focus, Network Rail, Built Environment Accessibility Panel, Shropshire Council, Department for Transport Franchise Team, West Midland Trains and we finally gained their comments and support which then allowed us to apply for a dispensation as the ramp is steeper than current Standards for new built structures. We have just received their response which is positive although we now need to provide two risk assessments and technical details of the lighting levels. The response will now be discussed at a Ramp Team meeting when we hope that those members experienced in this type of work will volunteer to complete it.

The Council initiated a review of work to repair and conserve the war memorial and we are very grateful that John Stretton agreed to lead that work which has now got to a key stage when decisions about the technical specifications of the work need to be taken and the work to contact potential sources of funding must start. The Council has successfully negotiated agreement from Shropshire Council's arboreal officer for the three very large trees adjacent to the memorial, and which threaten it in strong winds, to be removed and two much smaller flowering Hawthorne trees will be planted at the rear corners of the site.

A Planning Working Party was formed to streamline the process of Council's review of planning applications. The three WP members make a detailed review of all planning applications and provide a summary for all councillors. For those simple and non contentious applications, and only if all members of the WP agree, a recommendation is provided for the final decision by full Council. Reasons for bringing full details of an application for a discussion and decision by full council would include: an application which they felt should be refused, or were back-land developments, or any major

developments and those with more than one dwelling. This initiative has worked well and saves time at meetings.

The Council, and particularly its Clerk, has had to consider a raft of new or revised policies and regulations including; Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications), Accessibility Regulations 2018, Scheme of Delegation, APC Risk Assessment Policy, and we drafted a Backland Development Policy as we had several to deal with, Internal Controls Policy, Pensions Discretionary Policy, CCTV Policy, multiple Covid Risk Assessments for each of the areas of Parish Council service delivery and for all employees, to name just a few.

The Chairman and the members of the Place Plan Working Party has met with the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity together with councillors of neighbouring parishes. Concerns were raised about the usage of the green belt but they assured us that the 36 acres mentioned in the Shropshire Council report was not needed and that a much smaller area was proposed. The Council noted MAAC's excellent work and after hearing their detailed proposals supported MAAC's intention to move their headquarters to the new Cosford site. It was hoped that their involvement with the community could be expanded once they had moved their headquarters from Stourbridge to Cosford – for example first aid classes for local groups such scout/guides etc. Some of their staff will be travelling daily from the Stourbridge area by train and so my suggestion that they may wish to book the Flyer from the station to their office was of great interest.

Many residents assume that the Parish Council is responsible for the state of roads and footpaths and as we all note there are very many potholes in the village. However the roads and footpaths are the responsibility of Shropshire Council and although we do report our concerns regularly to Shropshire Council and we ask for their schedule of repair works but they are not often forthcoming which is frustrating for the Council and to our residents as we can't provide adequate information. The services which the Parish Council does provide includes Christmas lights, grass cutting, tree trimming, litter warden, planters, refurbishment of village benches and also the consultation provided by the Parish Council on all on all planning issues where we can offer our view but we do not have the right of veto.

The work of councillors is supported by the Clerk. During this year Shirley has been asked to join the National Association of Local Councils national assessment panel which oversees the assessment of Council applications for the Quality Council scheme and she has also been invited to join the national consultation on the new Councillors Code of Conduct. The Clerk is now a qualified Fire Warden for APC, which had been required following the last Fire Safety Assessment; she had undertaken the Fire Warden Training and final examination which of course is beneficial to the Council. I would like to thank Shirley, on behalf of the Council, for all her hard work and support this last year.

I also wish to place on record the exceptional service which the late Councillor Tom Maguire provided to the Council through his Chairmanship of the Finance and Personnel Committee. He worked hard to support the Clerk in making sure our finances were well managed and transparent; he also brought his expertise and patience to bear in dealing with personnel issues. Tom is sorely missed by all councillors.

Now may I make a personal comment? I am not standing for election this time. As part of my professional life I have been a main drafter of British Standards for the UK construction industry over many years and I have recently been appointed by British Standards Institution to lead a United Kingdom's team in negotiating the United Kingdom's position in the writing of a new European Standard and I will also be a drafter of this document. It is important for the country that we achieve the best outcome especially after Brexit. This will take a lot of my time over the next 3 years and therefore I will not be able to provide enough of my time to be a councillor but I will be working to support the village in other ways.

I would like to thank all current councillors and the Clerk and all the Council Staff for their hard work and support during this last year and I send the seven people who are standing for Parish Council my best wishes and trust that they may be successful in carrying on with the work to the benefit of all our residents and local businesses.

At the end of the meeting the Chairman said that Cllr Malcolm Pate is no longer standing for office as a councillor for the Parish and for the County was the end of an era. Malcolm had served our community with distinction for more than 40 years in his councillor roles and had worked hard to bring benefits for residents. Malcolm had always been generous with his time and always responded to calls for help. His long council experience meant that he was called on to act as a mentor and advisor to many Councillors and many Chairmen of the Parish including the current Chairman. On behalf of the Parish Council and the community the Chairman thanked Malcolm for all his efforts and long service and wished him well in his well deserved retirement.

Rod Smith
Chairman
Albrighton Parish Council