

**POULTON PARISH COUNCIL
ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON THE 10TH MAY 2021
AT 7.30 PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

Parish Councillors – Cllr. Davies, Cllr. Heneghan, Cllr. Young, Cllr. Summers
Cotswold District Councillor – Cllr. Spivey
Gloucestershire County Councillor – Cllr. Spivey (newly elected)

Chairman's Report.

This has been a strange and difficult year for most communities. Poulton has been impacted in various ways but has fortunately avoided the most severe effects of the pandemic.

Obviously, there has been a suspension of community events but on the positive side, especially during the first period of lockdown, many villagers came forward to offer help. It is pleasing to note that the list of volunteers rarely needed to be referred to as neighbours and friends assisted others which, similar to elsewhere, is a credit to the residents and our village.

In this I think we should acknowledge the hard work of the village hall committee in keeping some events going notably over the summer when there was a lull in restrictions. The Falcon also deserves a mention of their provision of takeaway food over a period which must have been very challenging for them.

Issues old and new remain. There are several newcomers in the village who have been unable to effectively integrate because of the paucity of events. There has been an influx of visitors which have put a greater pressure on our footpaths and causes a loss of privacy in some parts of the village. Flooding, of sewage and surface water, are on-going problems and the state of the roads has been so bad for so long it almost fails to be of significance.

The speed of traffic and the number of heavy lorries traveling through Poulton continues to worsen despite further requests to various bodies, including our MP to get something done. It impacts on our quality of life, our properties, and our safety. This is after all a village and I fail to see why no action is taken. It is unacceptable and I must question why something positive is never done about this.

It was our intention to hold a public meeting regarding traffic and the provision of cemetery space. Covid restrictions got in the way but hopefully we can move forward on this in the not-so-distant future.

In the last annual report, I pointed out that people will not get involved with Parish Councils unless we have more impact on an autonomy in decisions which affect us. There has been a classic example of this in the recent replacement of perfectly serviceable road signs by the District Council. No one asked us about this unnecessary expenditure which could have been spent here to much greater advantage. The first point of contact should always be the Parish Council. Please do not marginalise us and listen more otherwise no one will want to do this job. Personally, I am fed up with hearing the words “we must agree to disagree” when the response should be “we shall listen to what the village wants and do everything to achieve it”.

This money could have been better spent on tidying up the Falcon Green which desperately

needs attention, so why not ask us first? There needs to be an appropriate sense of priority.

I would like to thank the Clerk and the Councillors for their support. It is also pertinent to thank Shaun Parsons for his many years of involvement in the village as our County Councillor. He has always been prepared to attend Parish and site meetings and to listen.

District Councillor' Report

What a year this has been for us as individuals, families, public and private bodies, indeed as a nation and as an entire global community. The effects of the pandemic have hit hard with personal loss, financial loss and uncertainty, erratic schooling, and the toll on general physical and mental health and wellbeing being amongst the numerous adverse effects the virus has leashed upon us.

On a positive note, we have been relatively “lucky” here in the Cotswolds that the rural nature of our lives has meant that we have been so far spared the terrible case numbers and subsequent deaths, although every life lost is a tragedy. We have also witnessed, and in many cases, been part of, a tremendous community effort to look after the most vulnerable amongst us and to rally whenever help has been needed. It was heartening to know that in both the thick of the pandemic, and during the recent vaccine rollout, the number of volunteers has way exceeded the number of people requiring help. What a fantastic testament to the caring nature of Cotswold District residents which has been echoed all over the UK.

From a District Council perspective, the action plans put in place last February/March carried us through the last year. Staff were re-deployed, moved to working from home, adapting, and continuing to deliver everyday services for residents as well as picking up the extra responsibilities required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents faced with the pandemic.

Here are a few of the highlights of work done:

- 716 Residents given emergency support via the Help Hub.
- £39.2million worth of business grants paid out
- £18.6million of rate relief paid out to support local businesses
- 90,485 telephone enquiries dealt with by customer services during the various lockdowns.
- 152,737 waste and recycling containers emptied weekly.
- 1,157 extra tonnes of recycling collected.
- 3850 Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents were contacted during the November lockdown alone.
- over 400 residents were visited in person to ensure that their needs were being met and that they were safe.
- almost 90% of staff were working from home.
- over 120 staff were re-deployed to support the Council's Covid response

The last year has seen some new faces at the District Council, including a new Chief Executive, Rob Weaver, a new Climate Change officer, Chris Crookall-Fallon, Paul James heading up Economic Development, the creation of a Sustainable Transport manager, Hannah Fountain and a Head of Communications, Mark Pritchard to name but a few. These people have been brought in to ensure the safe running of the council after an LGA peer review

carried out in late 2019 suggested some changes were necessary and also to help deliver on the Council's priorities. These individuals are working hard and have begun to show their worth with Chris Crookall Fallon in particular, securing £1.2million of funding to install carbon reduction and energy saving measures in Council buildings.

Key strategy documents were published on Green Economic Recovery, Affordable Housing Delivery, Climate Emergency and Leisure for the Cotswolds, as well as the annual budget which managed to balance maintaining high quality service delivery, along with investment for key priorities whilst mitigating the severe losses brought about by the pandemic.

A new fleet of waste collection vehicles, with new routes and additional kerbside collections was introduced just as we entered the first lockdown in March last year, and whilst there were inevitable teething problems compounded with large numbers of staff being off sick with Covid or self-isolating, the service managed to find its feet and was generally back on track by the end of the first period of lockdown. The service has been under enormous pressure as people have either been in full lockdown or generally working from home for over a year, with household waste streams seeing a minimum 20% increase. Every time a review is suggested, we seem to go back into lockdown, and finding a new "normal" or "baseline" is difficult for the time being.

Keeping the wheels of local government turning has been a challenge, and I commend all Parish Councils for adopting virtual meetings and grappling with previously unknown technology (who had even heard of zoom, pre-March 2020?!). The Council has taken this opportunity to ensure that not only have virtual meetings been possible and streamed live to residents, with the already approved upgrading of technology in the Council Chamber, we will be able to continue to facilitate this widening of democracy as we move back to in person meetings from the 7th May 2021.

I look forward to seeing whether the new Crowdfunding scheme – Crowdfund Cotswold will help to deliver for communities with exciting plans for their villages and towns. It has been successful in similar areas to the Cotswolds and offers the potential to maximise our existing community grants scheme with pledges able to be made by businesses, individuals, other public bodies etc.

I also have great hopes for the Civic Pride programme which will roll out over the next 2 years. Boosting officer resource to tackle low level environmental crimes such as littering and dog fouling as well as increased street and verge cleaning will hopefully begin to restore some pride in our district which has become rather shabby looking in some areas.

The Cotswolds continues to have very low levels of crime and we are lucky that our community police officers from Inspector Simon Ellson through to our local PCSOs work hard to do what they can with limited resources and a large geographical area to cover. I have met with them regularly this year and in particular have asked for increased speed patrols with their speed guns to catch motorists breaking the limit and endangering lives. We have talked about holding community meetings as lockdown eases further so that everyone can have a chance to meet their local police team.

A great deal of work has gone on in my own portfolio- Housing and Homelessness – to help the most vulnerable in our community and to try to prevent homelessness. We took out a lease on a property in Tetbury with 9 self-contained units for emergency/temporary

accommodation which has been very useful. We have also committed to a Housing First scheme to help the most complex people sustain a tenancy and have joined in a number of County wide schemes which should help reduce homelessness.

We have also put money into 2 schemes which will deliver on our commitment to social rented homes in the District as well as reducing carbon emissions with funding for better insulation, air source heating systems and PV panels.

We continue to demand more from large agencies over flooding and sewage discharges which were exacerbated over Christmas by the heavy rainfall. The Council stepped in quickly and helped the residents most affected by offering hotel accommodation, co-ordinating pumping and

Of course, these have been trying times and not everything has been easy. The planning department in particular has found adapting to working from home very challenging given the number of large documents involved and there has been an increase in planning applications which has led to some applications taking much longer than usual to be determined. It was felt that the department was not functioning as it should and is currently going through a thorough review to identify where the problems are and how best to solve them.

It has been an honour to be your ward member for 2 years now and I look forward to working with you over the next year.