HIGHLEY PARISH COUNCIL

The **Annual Parish Council Meeting** was held at The Severn Centre on Tuesday 7th May 2024 at 6pm

The Chairperson of The Parish Council, Mr Tom Quinn, took the Chair and there were 9 Councillors and 27 parishioners present.

**Council Chairmans Report:**

I'd like to warmly welcome you all to the 2024 Annual Meeting of Highley Parish Council, for anyone who doesn't know me my name is Tom Quinn, and I am the current Chairman of Highley Parish Council.

It was this time last year that I was elected as Chairman of The Parish Council, and I set out to further all the good work of those who proceeded me but also to improve those areas of the council I felt needed a little attention. I said at the time I would be focusing on ensuring everything The Parish Council did was done in a correct and proper way with relevant governance structures in place to allow us to not only operate how we should but also to be able to demonstrate and evidence that if we ever needed to. It is incredibly important to me that the work of The Parish Council is always aligned with the needs and desires of the people of Highley, it is your money we are in charge of, and you deserve to know we're spending it wisely and fairly.

Throughout the year I have been ably assisted by my Vice Chair Tracy Pinches and our Parish Council Clerk - Holly for the first half of the year and Alison for the second whilst Holly was on maternity leave. The Parish Council could not operate without the tireless work of our Clerk, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank both Holly and Alison for their hard work this year and to thank Tracy for all of the help she has given me over the last twelve months.

It has been a fantastically positive year for The Parish Council, the governance I wanted to ensure was in place when I took over as Chair has now been reviewed and we are operating with a full set of new policies, our standing orders have been reviewed and revised and we've even managed to go through the stacks of paperwork relating to allotments within the village and have issued new tenancy agreements to all those lovingly tendering an allotment on one of the three plots we're responsible for. Again, I must thank our Clerks and Vice Chair for their hard work here.

We've welcomed several new councillors to The Parish Council this year and with one gap remaining to be filled tonight we should be back up to our full contingent of fifteen which is a fantastic achievement. Parish Councillor positions are unpaid, voluntary roles so it's great to see so many people willing to sacrifice their time to make the village a nicer place to live. I'd like to mention Councillors Alex Edwards, Louise Hodnett and Andrew Hancox who have joined The Council since our last Annual Parish Meeting this time last year and have already had a positive impact.

As always, this year The Parish Council has liaised with a number of different organisations from Shropshire Council to The NHS. One area we have changed our approach has been the police. In the past conversations between the police and The Parish Council have been undertaken by the Chair or Clerk and that was how I intended to keep things when I was elected as Chairman but following some significant frustration with policing in the village last year the decision was taken to form a Police Working Group consisting of Parish Councillors who could focus on building a relationship with local police, ensuring they understood what the village wanted and expected from the policy but also held them to account and escalated issues were necessary to ensure action. I'm very pleased to say the Police Working Group has had some positive results and we now have an active, co-operative relationship with the police who in turn have been much more engaged with the village. I hope to see this continue into the future and am optimistic we will also see a corresponding reduction in crime.

One of the biggest changes we've seen in the village this year has been the movement of the doctor’s surgery, first to the Severn Centre car park before finally moving into the building itself. The Parish Council has been involved every step of the way and I'm sure you'll all agree the end result is brilliant and exactly the kind of up to date, modern medical facility a village of this size deserves. As well as working with Shropshire Council and The NHS on the project we were also involved with Halo who run the Severn Centre. A collaborative partnership with Halo is really important for the village and it is something I have worked hard on as Chair. As with many things I'm sure there are areas for improvement, but I feel our voice is heard with Halo and they understand how the village feels about the centre including the pool, why it exists and how it was originally funded.

The Parish Council has a number of working groups who meet regularly to address specific areas of village life such as footpaths or village maintenance. Delegating some of the more detailed tasks from Full Council to a Working Group allows them to get the focus they need, and the groups can report back to the council as a whole at our regular meetings with recommendations for action. This has worked well in the last year but I'm sure there is scope for further improvements in how we operate.

It has been a privilege as Chairman for the last year to witness a number of fantastic events in Highley which have really shown the heart of the village and its people. The Remembrance Day Parade last year was one the best attended for many years, and I was honoured to be involved and to lay a wreath on behalf of The Parish Council. I was also able to take to the stage to present The Highley Civic Awards which took place at The Christmas Light Switch on. The whole event was such good fun, and it was really enjoyable to be able to honour the real superstars of the village who go above and beyond to give back, sacrificing significant time and effort to do so. Congratulations again to our award winners Dale Schnelting, Claire and Christo Van Aswegen and Alan Preece, Claire and Dale will be speaking this evening and I'm looking forward to hearing from them both.

There are so many fantastic events in Highley through the year, the carnival is always hugely anticipated and this year is shaping up to be better than ever, Highley In Bloom is promising to really add some splashes of colour to the village and the regular community sessions which have been run at The Severn Centre are ensuring as many people as possible know about the various services available to them should they need them. We've also got some free defibrillator training coming up on the 14th of May arranged by The Parish Council.

As well as all the positive and happy things which have happened in the last twelve months, we have also sadly seen the loss of some truly special people. I can't mention everyone, but PCSO Shelly Hyde who served Highley for a long time, Terence Holford who served on The Parish Council for over forty years and Ella Preston who was The Clerk of The Parish Council for over thirty years all sadly died this year, and all will be remembered fondly. Ella was the Clerk of the council when I joined and she made me feel very welcome as I began to navigate my way round the various processes and procedures, never making me feel like anything I asked was a stupid question!

As we look forward to the summer and a new Parish Council year, I'm feeling positive about continuing to further the work of the council, to do what we can to improve things in the village and to make sure the people of Highley are represented as they deserve to be.

**Cllr Aspin on behalf of Highley Community Project:**

Thank you for the invitation to speak, we have seen increased food deliveries from Birmingham Fare Share to twice monthly to meet the needs of the village. A huge increase of working families using the service with approximately 35 prepared food boxes per week and since Christmas, emergency food boxes have also increased to a minimum of 3 x per week with regular footfall visiting share table and community fridge. We also support the youth club (Friday event) and donate cereal to Highley Primary School to help with breakfast club. Kinlet Nursery also receive weekly fresh fruit and snacks, and mini-minors toddler group have snacks provided to enable them to help meet room rental with their subscription. Our support extends and reaches out to the entire community. People often ask, “where does the money go?” It costs £5,500 per year to run the project inc hygiene certificates, mileage, insurance, memberships etc. Kindness and generosity of villagers helps us to operate and there are members of the public who just walk in and hand £20 over on occasions which is gratefully received. We have contributed £10 towards every child swimming pass who applied within the village, also assisting families whose children needed swimming lessons, and we have donated to dementia UK. Food waste that has been saved from landfill equates to 82 tonnes which would otherwise have been wasted. Thanks to Halo for their assistance with space and electricity, offering time and facilities. A special thanks to the volunteers who collect the food for despatch.

**Claire Van Aswegen on behalf of Highley First Responders:**

Thanks to HPC and the community for the support, financially and in every other way. The first responders had a difficult time through covid as we were unable to get to events, the car was old and ended up being unusable. Thanks to the community support and the Parish Council we have now managed to buy a new vehicle. Everyone understands that the state of the ambulance service nationwide has prevented all callouts, and they can only attend certain category calls such as category 3 calls for example falls or breaks, and patients are being left waiting for hours if First Responders are unable to attend, this is because they are not permitted to wait if there is no cover. The First Responders are volunteers and stay within Highley to serve Highley and only Highley. Although occasionally they may get a call out to Bridgnorth for a cardiac call. Both current volunteers also have full time jobs and teenage kids with a demanding family life and are desperate for more volunteers. If any member of the Parish is interested in supporting them, please contact Highley First Responders.

**Mr Ed Andrews on behalf of SVCP:**

Our local site is managed by the team who manages and cares for 25 sites across Shropshire. These are busy sites with 200,000 visitors at SVCP per annum. The biggest challenge facing them is budget, because the country parks are not classed as a statutory service, so the county council is not obliged to run it and the team is also diminishing. The biggest pressure is keeping the site safe for visitors. Ash die-back means many trees are being targeted and having to be destroyed. Challenges like these do not respect budgets but as a team, we are finding ways to fund projects by applying for external grant funding, and stewardship for wildflower meadows through rural payment agency helps finance to manage these areas. Events such as a bat walk coming up and recently held dawn chorus walk, all of which help to raise money and support the local residents with their interests and education. Car parking also helps and thanks to Highley Parish Council for assisting with the funding which makes a massive difference to a strained budget. Looking at “the shared prosperity fund” which can be used to help, and local projects have been identified such as the path behind the toilet block down to railway and the “pond” area improvement with wildlife area fencing. On the Alveley side, the play area has had attention and will be receiving more with new safety surfacing allowing for all weather use. The New England area down by the brook has also had work completed including new steps. Kier will also be rectifying the donkey bridge sometime over the summer of 2024. Rights of way workers (Brian, the officer from Shropshire) have tackled some footpath work and steps within this area. Severn Valley Liaison Group is also in the process of being reformed. Cllr Moore then asked about rights of way and clarification regarding horses using paths that are not bridleways.

**Lin Foley from Crane Counselling:**

Thanks to the Parish Council for the invitation and for the recent grant. I had previously worked for the charity “relate” a national charity directed from on-high and in 2013 decided to retire, I left relate then it sadly closed in Shropshire and I was approached to create this new charity. Working with families, older generations, young people, based at The Roy Fletcher centre in Shrewsbury but also online and telephone counselling. When covid struck, there were six counsellors, now there are thirty and it is mainly due to covid. Crane are one of 5 charities that were awarded bereavement counselling contract from Shropshire Council and alone dealt with 11,000 across the county who had suffered bereavement. Then Shropshire Council decided to offer the counselling contract for young people – Highley schools fall into the catchment area and every child within Highley has the opportunity to access this bereavement counselling. Once referred, appointments are offered within 7-10 days, and there is no waiting list. We also notify GPs across the county that they can have patients referred. Not all services are free, as we are a not-for-profit organisation, but we aim to help support everyone who reaches out to us and the funding from HPC is guaranteed to be spent on residents within Highley.

**Dale Schnelting talking about the Pop-In Club:**

I am here to talk about the pop-in club, as it had been shut for 2 years when my neighbour started nagging and I told her that I worked on Mondays, a change in job role and I then mentioned that I didn’t work on Mondays any longer - and that is how it all began. The Pop In Club celebrated 50 years of the club this year. Veronica Lewis and Valerie Lloyd, our current members are nieces of the founders. Some of the regular members have been attending for 24 years! It was somewhere to pop in and have a chat and it has now become much more than that. BINGO – a very busy and much-loved past time of our members. Three members are over 90 years of age. 12 members live alone. 11 have lost their husbands, 1 has lost his wife. Monday is the highlight of their week where they get out of the house and have a laugh, it is a real lifeline to them. One member says, “It is so massive in combatting loneliness that you wouldn’t believe” Several members have disabilities, and some are even fighting cancer. The aim is to try to get them out of the village, to the pantomime, the coast, Evesham Country Park are some of the places we have been. We charge £2 a week and for that they get tea, coffee, biscuits. We are grateful for the donations that we have received to help get them to the seaside in July as they would not be able to as many do not drive and rarely leave the village, some cannot use the internet.

**Bridget O’Meara and Megan from First Highley Brownies and Guides:**

We are pleased to have received some financial support from HPC as we received zero funds from elsewhere to set up the group. Headquarters takes a lot of the subscriptions paid by the girls (families) each term, and the subs would not have left much for the unit - which had previously been closed since 2015. There would have been nowhere for the girls to go once they outgrew Brownies, other than Bridgnorth. We have a strong ethos and aim to let all girls know that they can do ANYTHING. We have doubled the numbers of members in the first year.

Megan: Some of the activities that we have been able to provide included making butter, making bird feeders, science experiments, pancake making and flipping, mother’s day cards, two-match challenge. Forms are required for everything even coming along today as it is not our usual meeting place, and we have a lot of paperwork. We do however, use many recyclable materials where possible but basics just as pens and the girls promise badges cost money and we have been able to purchase this thanks to the grant donation.

**Jack Noakes Manager of The Severn Centre:**

I have been at the Severn Centre since 2017, and General Manager since October. I have been involved in the carnivals, the Christmas fayre, birthday parties, managing bookings etc, and I have learned a lot about Highley as I had no previous connection to Highley and now this has become my home, and the Severn Centre has literally become home - as I am often here more than I am at my actual home! I am a founding member of Highley Reach Youth Club and enjoy this role immensely – the induction period Oct-Dec tasked me with the day-to-day operations and since December, a lot has happened and attention has been on the Severn Centre including the new GP surgery and more recently the MUGA and there is more to come for sure, also the library move, which the NHS has also been involved with, and a plan for a social space to come. The challenges that we face, we face together as we have a tight-knit team. We struggle for recruitment in terms of the pool lifeguards and staff. Personally though, I am very proud of the team who help facilitate this, all of our employees are local and have a lot of local pride. Visitors to the area love hearing about the ties to the community and I share this where I can and believe I am the right person to facilitate this. The swimming pool is now the only outdoor pool in Shropshire, facing huge costs. Other leisure operators are unable to facilitate such a resource yet we have in place short/medium and long term plans to allow this pool to continue to remain at the centre of the community. There are ongoing talks of how to maximise this unique facility and we are constantly facing challenges such as leaks and maintenance that Halo are also aware of – it is just case of resources to meet all the demands– we pride ourselves on being available to the community and if you are concerned about anything then please feel free to approach me or one of the team with any queries.

**Lesley Jewell – Community Development for Social Prescribing:**

Social prescribing helps people to connect with their local communities and to connect with their environment. 1 in 5 people visiting a GP do not really need to see a GP – they may have weight issues, low level mental health issues or loneliness for example. Our advisors see people for an hour initially and help people to find ways to help them overcome any lifestyle changes. They can continue and see advisors over a 12-week period to support them with activities and groups. Examples such as equine therapy at Much Wenlock and well-being walks at National Trust properties such as Comer Woods. We connect with communities and help to empower people. This results in less expenditure for the NHS. We help patients access training, funding also, and delivering activities, making them sufficiently aware – a holistic approach to help reduce inequalities. Bringing together people and away from the strained resources of the NHS to promote and share information. How do you ask for help? A local directory has been created and improved which has information for the public to find out what is going on in the area and signposts people to groups and activities for making referrals.