**DRAFT POULTON PARISH COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON THE 9TH MAY 2022**

**AT 7.30 PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

Parish Councillors – Cllr. Collyer-Bristow, Cllr. Hyslop, Cllr. Davies

District & County Councillor – Cllr. Spivey

Poulton Playing Field & Allotment Charity – Caroline Allanson, Trustee

Poulton Parochial Church Council – Rev. John Swanton

Poulton Village Hall – Judy Harmsworth, Committee Member

Poulton Action Group – Neil Shackell, Committee Member

3 further members of the public also attended the meeting.

At the start of the meeting, the Chair asked for a minute’s silence for residents who have passed away in the last year.

**Poulton Parish Council, Chair’s Report**

The last year has been another strange and difficult year for most communities in Britain, including Poulton, with the hopeful final throes of the Covid pandemic. A blessing is that whilst Poulton has been impacted in various ways it has fortunately avoided the most severe effects of the pandemic. We must all now look ahead and together get things “back on track”.

The village has continued to work together with everyone continuing to look after neighbours, friends, and strangers alike. There are very few positives from the past two years BUT the “Blitz” spirit has been great to witness and hopefully that sense of comradeship and community can continue as normal times return. The upcoming Platinum Jubilee celebrations are a great platform for us all to utilise renewed unity.

Sadly, some notable Poulton residents have passed away in the last year. We have also said our “goodbyes” to some long-standing residents but happily they have been replaced by newcomers – some of whom have jumped straight into community events and activities.

The Parish Council has also had some relatively seismic changes in the last year with all the previous Committee having moved on and in one case moved on and then returned! My thanks go to Ailsa Summers, Mike Willis, Phil Heneghan and Andy Young for their various stints on the Parish Council and all their hard work. Fortunately, the Parish Council avoided having any expensive contested elections and is now made up of Ed Hyslop, Carolyn Sleight, the returning Chris Davies, and myself. We have one outstanding vacancy, which needs filling as soon as possible, and we await for the right character to put themselves forward. Meantime we will continue to seek wise counsel from those whom have “been there, seen it and done it”.

The one constant has been our excellent Parish Clerk, Heather Harris, and I know my fellow newbie Councillors would like to join me extending thanks to Heather for her guidance introducing us to the completely alien world of local politics, bureaucracy, and administration.

Issues old and new remain. A large number of AirBnB’s now exist in the village bringing an influx of visitors using the leisure facilities and footpaths and causing a loss of privacy and surfeit of noise in some parts of the village. Flooding, of sewage and surface water, are on-going problems and the state of the roads continues to tax and trouble all bar Trevor Carr’s repair shop. Planning applications, good and bad, come before us on a steady basis, and we hopefully do all we can to encourage traditional buildings alongside modern additions; and finally, the playground facilities need to be kept safe and sound. Many of you will have noticed the necessary removal of the Twin Towers which had become a risk to our children and grandchildren. Finally, the green areas of the village, verges and the trees falling under the Parish Council’s responsibility need to be looked after. And this all-costs money. This unfortunately has meant an increase in this financial year’s village precept charge via Council Tax but this has not been applied to the less well-off living in the village.

The speed of traffic and the number of heavy lorries travelling through Poulton continues to worsen despite countless requests to varying bodes, including our MP, to get something done. It impacts on our quality of life, our properties, and our safety. Ed Hyslop has taken the lead in this key area and a local Speed-Watch Group has recently been formed with about 10 volunteers. The police have also done two surveys regarding traffic-speeds in the village, and we are hopeful that working together with the local police that positive changes will soon be made. The ideal would be less heavy traffic using the village as a thoroughfare, a reduction of speed on the East of the village, possibly a 20mph speed limit throughout and certainly no speeding above 30mph happening at all BUT these will take time. We must all work to make sure that deterrents are put in place and stuck to. The recent fatal accident in the village highlighted to us all the life and death danger of traffic to our residents.

In a fortnight’s time on Monday 23rd May a public meeting will take place in the Village Hall primarily regarding traffic/speeding and the provision of cemetery space. All relevant organisations such as the Police, County and District Council and the Church have been invited. Hopefully we will get good turnout and some valuable input from the village – and those who can help facilitate change will be listening and taking notes that they will act on.

One positive item that really needs highlighting is the successful addition of the village newsletter, Poulton Eye. Many thanks to the Poulton PCC and the two editors, Rosie Arkwright, and Lizzy Wroughton, for their hard work plus all those who contribute “copy” and help “spread the word”.

In my brief tenure as Chair of the Parish Council I have really tried to incorporate together all the various village organisations via open and transparent communication. Whilst sounding rather trite, Poulton as a village and community will be much stronger working together rather than in factions and with individual agendas, as can sometimes occur in small communities. More people, especially newcomers and younger residents, being involved with our voluntary organisations will helps share the workload and also avoid any cabals forming.

Finally, and again, I would like to thank the Parish Clerk, Heather, and my fellow Councillors, Chris Ed, and Carolyn, for all their support in what was a totally unknown area to me. It is also very important to record my thanks to Lisa Spivey, our District and County Councillor for all her support and continual sound advice to the Parish Council and me. She has attended all our meetings and I know is working hard for us all.

**Poulton Playing Field & Allotment Charity (PPF&AC)**

The PPF&AC has installed three new allotments on Englands, the allotments are available to residents only and one is not being used. We have planted, with the help of volunteers, a new row of trees from the Woodland Trust. Our long-term plan for the meadow is to plant it with trees and wildflowers and mow paths through as a walk for villagers. For the Jubilee, we will be holding a sponsor a tree auction.

We have assisted people in need in the village, which is our main remit, we will ask villagers to let us know if they think anyone in the village needs financial assistance but, please bear in mind, that our resources are extremely limited.

Our main concerns have been the number of people still letting their dogs off a lead and therefore allowing their dog to mess either on Englands or the meadow without having a responsible attitude and picking up their dog mess. We are looking to provide free dog mess bags in the hope that this encourages the minority who refuse to act responsibly.

The PPF&AC are currently in need of a Clerk, if anyone is keen to apply, please contact the Trustees.

**Poulton Action Group (PAG)**

The action group was formed when a local farmer asked for an environmental impact report on the possibility of 200 acres of land being used as a solar farm. To date, no planning application has been made for this solar farm and it was felt that an application would not be made until next year at the earliest. The site proposed was from Greenacres to Lot Lane along the London Road.

The action group has 106 members in Poulton and Meysey Hampton. PAG said that they are ready with proposals if an application if made for the solar farm. It was felt that the solar farm needed to be pushed further away from the village but that there was a potential benefit to the community in terms of a payment on the land.

**Parochial Church Council (PCC)**

The Church has undertaken major tree works this year and has planning permission for a toilet and kitchenette. There has been a generous gift, but more funding is needed due to increasing costs.

Thank you to all those who give their time for cleaning and maintenance of the church and grounds.

The priorities for this year are on going funding for the improvements and resolution of the issue regarding the closure of the churchyard in the next few years and the possible cemetery in the village. Rev. Swanton will discuss the options for this at the village meeting.

**Poulton Village Hall**

During the lockdowns, the village hall had a complete refurbishment and reconfiguration which was kindly paid for by a generous benefactor and grants.

Hirers are now returning to use the village hall and events restarting. There is a new outdoor space with heating. The Trustees are working incredibly hard and are proud of their achievements.

The Councillors agreed that the hall was transformed by all the works undertaken and commented on how well the Village Hall Committee have worked to achieve it.

**District & County Councillor’s Report**

The last year has again been dominated by Covid and the consequences of dealing with lockdowns, restrictions, supporting businesses, families, and individuals.

The pandemic changed working patterns with staff at the District Council mostly continuing to work from home, increased workload, and pressures on the system when staff had to take leave when struck down with the virus. As many of you will have found through your own experiences, illness can range from nothing (asymptomatic), through a mild cold, to dangerously ill. Until the end of this year, any illness or positive test meant a period of absence which had knock on effects, especially for those juggling isolation due to children’s illness.

We are now heading towards something more akin to “normal” although it is important to note that the virus is still very prevalent in our communities and a 4th wave/lockdown cannot be ruled out.

For the Council, this was an opportunity to re-evaluate the use of the Council buildings in the district and following a thorough staff consultation and review made of the Trinity Road office, 40% of the current office space will be allocated for rental, with the remaining 60% used in a more agile way by current staff. The building will undergo some renovations, including fixing the leaking atrium roof and, using the grant funding we won last year, work to decarbonise the building will happen.

Following the somewhat unfathomable decision by the government to insist that all decision making meetings of the council must be held in person after May 7th 2021, the council (like your PC) moved back to in person meetings, although the new technology installed in the council chamber has meant that it is possible to access meetings online, allowing residents to watch from home (not always seamlessly!), but improvements to the system will continue to be made. I note that there have been comments on the audibility levels when attending the chamber in person and will ensure that that is looked at so that everyone can hear what is being said. Perhaps some councillors need to speak up!

We held some Parish and Town Councils forums in order to establish better communications with towns and parishes and to explain the financial situation the council finds itself in after 10 years of cuts from central government and the looming Fairer Funding Review which could see CDC lose up to a quarter of its budget. This has meant that some tough financial decisions have had to be made including losing the “free after 3” parking in some car parks in order to generate more income. Evening, overnight and Sunday parking remains free, and we are beginning the roll out of Electric vehicle charging points in 4 carparks in the district which will offer EV charging to visitors and residents who don’t have their own charging points. It is hoped that over time, we can implement an overnight rate so as to help those who don’t have their own off-street parking and encourage the transition away from petrol and diesel engines.

Work has progressed on making the Local Plan “green to the core” with a consultation running earlier this year which saw over 500 responses. I’d like to thank those parish councils and individuals who took the time to respond. The consultation was run using a new platform, commonplace, which we received grant funding to set up and use.

The “Clean and Green” initiative has got off to a very good start with the creation of 2 new enviro-crime officers who have been out and about helping to tackle fly-tipping, supporting litter picking and generally working on making our District the clean and green place we would like it to be. Thank you in your communities for all the efforts you make year-round to pick litter and keep the area looking good.

Crowdfund Cotswold has been an incredible success, leveraging over £300,000 in funding for a range of community led projects from playground resurfacing to statue installation, to a zip-wire flying through Avening.

This has meant that there has been 3 times the amount of money used on community driven projects than we could ever have supported.

This coming year will see a revamp of the council owned gyms in Cirencester, Bourton and Chipping Camden and work continues on implementing the Leisure Strategy with its focus on the health and wellbeing of residents to achieve and maintain a healthy way of life.

This will include modes of active travel and, in the newly created role of Sustainable Transport Manager, Hannah Fountain, has been fantastic this year in liaising with the County Council and other stakeholders to secure funding for improvements for the safety of cyclists and pedestrians and is working on a Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan looking at Cirencester and a 7-mile radius and how connections can be improved.

After a very difficult period in 2020 transitioning to working from home and a huge spike in applications, the planning department saw a return to more normal levels of applications and internal changes have been carried out to help the department get back to pre-pandemic service levels. There continues to be staff vacancies which have been difficult to fill given the national shortage of planners, and indeed the recruitment and retention crisis in general in the public sector, but all efforts are being made to improve the service. In many cases, delays in decisions are because of waiting for 3rd party consultees who are also short staffed.

A great proportion of my working time is dedicated to reading through planning applications, assisting residents and parishes to respond to applications, liaising with planning officers and often visiting sites. This year has been no exception, and I have spent a huge amount of time working on various issues within the ward.

In my own portfolio at CDC (Housing and Homelessness), we have continued to work on tackling the housing affordability crisis in the Cotswolds by encouraging Housing Associations to deliver homes for social rent and have invested in making affordable housing schemes low carbon.

We have vastly reduced our use of hotel and B&B accommodation for those needing temporary housing by using the property we lease in Tetbury which has 9 self-contained units. We currently have no official rough sleepers, everyone has been offered a home, although we know that there continues to be some people street begging. Mostly they are from Gloucester or Cheltenham and come to our towns to beg. We do follow up with these individuals to check whether there are safeguarding issues and do what we can do to help.

Over the coming year before the elections in 2023, I will continue to do what I can to help and support residents and remain contactable by phone or email.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.