### HIGHLEY PARISH COUNCIL

**An ordinary meeting of Highley Parish Council was held on Tuesday 1st March 2022 at 7pm at the Severn Centre, Highley.**

**Present**: Chair P.Vinall, Councillors; D.Thakrar, T.Quinn, E.Moore, T.Pinches , J.Law, N.Barker, J.Marshall, N.Waterson

Clerk: E.Preston

Assistant Clerk: H.Cordey

Parishioners: Mr. Roy Addlington

**00. Parishioners Time**

Mr. Roy Addlington brought to the attention of the council the development Colliers Way by TC Homes, which is now near completion, and still does not have an appropriate pedestrian crossing in place despite this being part of the planning condition. The Council advised Roy that the council is aware of this issue, and it has been chased up with the relevant organisations. The Council will also be raising this matter with Shropshire Council at the face-to-face meeting taking place on Thursday 3rd March.

Mr. Addlington also wished to raise concern over the upkeep and current state of the flats that are rented out above the WEST MIDLANDS CO-OP, in particular the metal security protection. It was **RESOLVED** by councillors to write to the housing association who lease these flats to try to improve this.

Finally, Mr.Addlington advised the council that he is concerned at the narrow footpaths close to the Severn Centre. The council again advised Mr. Addlington of the awareness of this issue, and it will be raised at the Shropshire Council Meeting on Thursday 3rd March.

**01. Apologies for absence and reasons for absence**

Councillors: M.Moore and J. Bowkett due to illness. Cllr S. Ambrose due to work commitments. Apologies accepted. **RESOLVED**

**02. To confirm the minutes dated 1st February 2022**

Resolved to sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

**03. Shropshire Councillors Report – CLLR.D.TREMELLEN**

‘I often read over exchanges of emails from the early years and feel so sad that it hasn’t been a case of people “getting on with their job”, but rather that politics and egos got in the way. The only thing that saved my sanity was my stand as an Independent. I was answerable to no one except the people of Highley. But it’s time to stand down and let someone else take it all on because frankly I’m tired of the way things are going. There won’t be much of a council to work with anyway, in fact there isn’t much left of it now, so all that’s left to do is talk, not do. I only stood again in May 2021 because I could see no one out there who would represent Highley’s interests and not follow the agenda of some national Party.

At the 2021 election I saw some really good people leave the county council, one of them with substantial time as a local councillor, serving with distinction on a number of high-profile committees, but de-selected by their Constituency Association who wanted a more compliant advocate for their Party’s national core values, and another who, totally disillusioned with a Party he no longer recognised as the principled one he had joined, relinquished the Party Whip with words that showed how betrayed he felt and stood (and won) as an Independent. I’m hoping that someone will be found who, despite their outward political leanings, stands for Highley rather than Westminster and there are signs that that might actually happen. Whoever it is, they’re entering a changed world in which the key word is “Shirehall”, except that it isn’t “just” a word; for me it encapsulates our individual idea of what a “council” is and does.

If I have a reference point it goes back to 2015 and ex-council leader Keith Barrow’s ambitious plans for “his” council-owned trading company, ip&e, and what most people wouldn’t be aware of, a subsequent police report (2016), which said that whilst the initiative established a more “businesslike approach” to the council’s activities, it also removed those activities from the scrutiny of Shirehall, raising the question of whether that removal from scrutiny was intended or was just an unintended consequence.

Intentional or not, closing Shirehall and moving its activities to a town centre location (or, as a leading member of the Green Party in council suggested, moving council activities out to the “outlying” areas in order to spread democracy around – totally impractical) achieves that same outcome by removing those activities from immediate scrutiny because councillors are, at a stroke, removed to the periphery where they’ll be chasing from pillar to post trying to locate the “right” officer in possession of the information they need. As daft ideas go, the words “lunatic” and “asylum” come to mind.

To me, Shirehall is more than a concrete symbol of 1960’s architecture, it is demonstrably a well designed building for its purpose, although that will obviously be open to debate, much of it based more on personal prejudice and vested interest than the £380,000-worth of detailed technical consultancy that argued a solid case for the original decision to retain and refurbish Shirehall but which later, as if by magic, was used as the basis for the subsequent decision to demolish Shirehall.

In all innocence, when the decision to demolish was announced, I genuinely thought that another extensive, detailed study had been done and so I asked for the data on which the decision to demolish Shirehall was based. I was sent the identical documents that had made the case for its retention and refurbishment.

Thinking a mistake had been made, I pointed out that what I had been sent was the identical report that supported Shirehall’s retention. The senior officer I was talking to merely looked at me and smiled. It could have been paranoia but I’m sure I detected a faint look of pity in his eyes.

The word “Shirehall”, as much as the building itself, represents all the established principles of local government that have been established by successive administrations over the years but which now finds itself threatened by what seems to be an endless search for ways to up-end those principles in pursuit of what I have a distinct feeling will turn out to be a bad dream.

Activity at “council” continues to be restricted to limited meetings that are, to all intents and purposes, ‘invitation only’; the days when meetings were going on, somewhere, almost continuously, are now long gone.

Quite apart from the power this shifts into the hands of the unelected Executive, the justification for this closing down of the human side of council activity is the financial savings that the Administration are realising through staff working from home. Concerns about decisions being made in what is, to all intents and purposes, closed session, are dismissed by making the RECORDINGS of such meetings available on the council website.

Although management play down concerns and talk up the opportunities flexible, remote working offers, a lot of staff are desperately worried about redundancies, of which there will be many this time around and far fewer voluntary redundancies than there were back in 2013, the impact of those redundancies back then were catastrophic and the effects are still there in the corner cutting that goes on as a matter of routine (NOTE: more to come on that with an in-depth look into some pretty whiffy planning decisions), and when efforts are made to uncover the consequences of that cutting of corners, Freedom of Information requests that are trying to unravel often complex situations are dodged with an evasive response accompanied by the threat of being labelled ‘vexatious’.

It is impossible to exaggerate the benefits of personal contact, especially the ability to pick up on an unconscious facial tic when an awkward question is asked. Those little unconscious, revealing, moments often saying more than several minutes of carefully rehearsed bullshit when you’re looking for what is really behind an executive decision – like demolishing Shirehall? Just joshing.

Looking back over my old diaries, in the days leading up to the Covid lockdowns I was at Shirehall at least twice, often three times a week, occasions when I fitted in meetings with individual officers to follow up on something local to Highley or personal to a Highley constituent.

There were often meetings of various committees going on which you could drop into and eavesdrop on proceedings and, because of the “open forum” nature of such meetings, if there was anything arising that piqued interest, it was not only allowed but expected that “visiting” councillors sitting-in on the meeting contributed (at the invitation of the committee chair, of course) to the proceedings from the public ‘gallery’. That’s open democracy. We’ve seen the last of that!

I’ve mentioned elsewhere that when I first raised my concerns that our Administration’s practice of by-passing local councillors with plans for their new way of working, further side-lining councillors by abandoning briefing notes and announcing policy changes in the local press, the response I got from our Chief Executive was: “Your comments have been noted.”

Which said it all.

Indeed, so much said in so few words.

Basically, the new top layer of administration is accountable to no one but itself and, critically, the body of professionals who meet regularly to formulate the policies that determine the direction in which the county is now running, so the question about what will happen when I step down is a purely academic one unless they’re prepared to be as big a pain in the ass to the Administration as I’ve been!C”

**04 Matters Arising**

**Youth Club**- New term activities circulated. Any councillors are welcome to attend on a Thursday.

**The Castle Inn-** Nock Deighton are currently planning to take this property to auction in August this year.

**High Street-** Road works have now been completed. The jet washing and cleaning of the high street will now take place tomorrow on Wednesday 2nd March.

**Welcome Back Fund-** All money from this fund has now been spent within the village.

**First Responders-** The cardiac response team is now live. They are still looking to recruit 6 first responders before training is due to commence in April.

**Rhea Hall Parking-** Park Right attended the village and 4 parking tickets were issued, two of which were on the Severn Centre car park. The parking was discussed at our meeting with the police where they informed us, they can only intervene if a vehicle is evidenced of having no MOT, Tax or insurance.

**Village Maintenance Meeting**- Flowers are now in the process of being ordered. See attached notes below.

**Astbury-** We have liaised with Astbury Hall to aim to work with them on the delivery of upcoming lodges for their site. We will help to communicate these delivery time to our parishioners.

**Severn Centre Report-** The Severn centre are exploring alternatives to the children’s swimming pool which cannot be reopened. There is still some remaining money which was fundraised for the swimming pool which could be used for this. The Severn Centre is to be open on a Saturday and Sunday once their summer opening hours begin. At the next monthly meeting with the Severn Centre management, concern is to be expressed in regard to the current lack of weekend opening and accessibility. There is currently no hot drinks machine within the Severn Centre, Councillors **proposed and accepted** that Halo be approached and ask if this could be reinstated.

**05 Correspondence**

SALC- Monthly Report

**06 Planning**

Reference: 22/00527/OUT (validated: 18/02/2022)

Address: Land West Of 13, Beech Street, Woodhill, Highley, Shropshire

Proposal: Outline application with all matters reserved for the erection of a pair of semi-detached dwellings (resubmission of application 20/03697/OUT) **RESOLVED**

Reference: 22/00446/FUL (validated: 02/02/2022)

Address: 39 Redstone Drive, Highley, Shropshire, WV16 6EQ

Proposal: Erection of first floor extension over existing garage . **RESOLVED**

Reference: 22/00377/FUL (validated: 14/02/2022)

Address: Bache Arms, High Street, Highley, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, WV16 6JU

Proposal: Conversion of existing first-floor apartment and function rooms to form 3No. apartments **RESOLVED**

Reference: 21/05634/FUL (validated: 10/02/2022)

Address: Land At, New England Lane, Highley, Shropshire

Proposal: Change of use of agricultural land for the siting of 14No holiday lodges, reception/toilet building, formation of vehicular and pedestrian access (with visibility splay) and installation of package treatment plant **PUT RECOMMENDATIONS IN.**

PLANNING REFERENCE - 22/00522/FUL

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED - Erection of single storey rear extension

LOCATION: - 62 Yew Tree Grove, Woodhill, Highley, Bridgnorth, Shropshire. **RESOLVED**

**07 St Mary’s Churchyard Grant Request**

New contract has been received from St. Marys, which is now three yearly subject to an annual review. Councillors proposed to accept this on the condition of St. Marys accounts being circulated and they are found satisfactory. St. Marys has now received permission for the proposed feasibility study to go ahead. Once the Parish Council has received this invoice and the corresponding documentation then the grant of £4100 will be released by the clerk.

**13, Finance –**

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| **Highline Electrical**  |  | **139.20** |
| **HMRC**  | **Tax and National Insurance**  | **110.63** |
| **M.E.Preston** | **Salary**  | **1014.75** |
| **H.L.Cordey** | **Salary**  | **820.18** |
| **EON** | **Street Lights** | **1254** |
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| **OGL Computers**  | **E-mail System** | **147.64** |
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| **S.J.Maintenance** | **Village Maintenance Issues** | **320** |
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| **Severn Centre**  | **Room Hire Parish Council**  | **128.40** |
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**Signed ……………………………………….Chair Date: ……………………………………..**

**NOTES FROM MEETING OF THE VILLAGE MAINTENANCE GROUP HELD ON TUESDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 2022 AT THE PARISH COUNCIL OFFICE AT 6.30PM**

**PRESENT**: Parish Council Chair: P.Vinall, Cllrs- T.Quinn, J. Marshall, E. Moore

Clerk: Mrs Preston

Assistant Clerk: H Cordey

The flower colour scheme was discussed for this year, and it was proposed that red, white and blue would be the best option for this year to mirror the upcoming Jubilee. Quotes will be sought to find the best price for the hanging baskets and the flowers within the planters. We will aim to put a call out for volunteers to help to plant these flowers which could be a community event, and approach Highley Primary school in case they wish to take part in this.

Cllr Marshall has kindly agreed to check the bowser is suitable for this year and make any minor repairs needed. We are hoping to meet with James Gittins to discuss if he can water the village flowers again this year, as previously James has very generously performed this service free of charge.

The existing wooden planters within the village have now become quite rotten and need to be removed. We will seek quotes for the best price for this to be achieved.

Risk assessments for village street furniture is required. We will ask Cllr Bowkett to help produce appropriate risk assessments for us to implement within the village. The safety of the village clock needs to be assessed with the possible need for a structural engineer to do so.

The Welcome Back Fund has now been spent, with the remainder of the money being used to jet wash the high street which will take place on Wednesday 2nd March. Re-painting of the street furniture is due to commence after this.