### HIGHLEY PARISH COUNCIL

**An ordinary meeting of Highley Parish Council was held via video conferencing on Tuesday 14th July 2020 at 7.00pm .**

**Present**: Cllr.M.Brooks - Chair - Cllrs**.** R.Honeybourne, A.Honeybourne, P.Vinall, D.Bayley, J.Marshall, D.Thakrar, N.Barker, D.Tremellen,

Clerk: Mrs.E.Preston

Parishioners: 10

00. Parishioners Time – Alice and Peter Burden referred to their email regarding problems with anti-social behaviour at the Severn Centre They understand how difficult it would be to close off the grounds when the centre was not open but felt that something should be done by Halo to ensure the area is secure . Mrs Megan Plant said that she understood that the children do need somewhere to go but they are out late at night playing loud music and letting off fireworks which is distributing neighbours and their pets. They are also leaving a lot of litter on the grounds which Mr. Plant has been on the Severn Centre to clear up . Mrs. Burden asked if it was possible to make somewhere for them to go, possibly a Youth Club. The parishioners said that the police did not appear to want to know about the situation.

 Councillor Bayley said she thought that the shutting off the centre would impact the community and would make it difficult for children to access play equipment and other users to access the grounds when the centre was closed.

Clerk said that she had spoken to the police who have ensured the parish council that when they are on duty they will go out and speak to the youths. They have already been to speak to them and given them a warning about their behaviour

The Parish Council to investigate this issue further and to be put on the Agenda for the September meeting.

***Declaration of any disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter to be discussed at the meeting. Members are reminded that they are required to leave the room during the discussion and voting on matters in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest, whether the interest is entered in the register of member’s interest maintained by the monitoring officer.***

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

Cllr.Phipson – unable to access Zoom. Cllr.R.Broome, P.Atkinson, June Law and G.Court – personnel

**RESOLVED**to accept apologies .

**02 To confirm the minutes of the meeting dated 9th June 2020.** Following an amendment atAgenda item 7, changed from his to thisminute confirmed as a true and correct record. Chair signed the minutes.

**03** **Matters Arising**

CCTV –Eon confirmed that all electrical installations had been completed. Technical services have given a provisional date of 3rd August to start their work. .

Container- Delivered. Parish Council maintenance contractor is looking at racking out the container.

Village Flowers – Luna Petals have agreed to plant the remaining planters and flower beds The watering of the flowers is being carried out by James Gittens of Severn Valley Landscapes. who has also carried out some of the urgent work to repair the water bowser. .Cllr.Thakrar asked that our thanks to Luna Petals be noted.

**04.** **Correspondence** (All correspondence emailed to Councillors) - no comments.

**05. Planning**

20/0243/Full- Land Rear of Bache Arms – Erection of four Terraced Houses and formation of parking area and on-site driveways – please could councillor’s access Shropshire Councils website to view planning application prior to meeting so they have all relevant information. ***RESOLVED NO OBJECTIONS.***

**06. Land East of Bridgnorth Road** – Land designated as public open space –

Email received from Developers asking if the Parish Council would like to adopt the public open space. Cllr. Tremellen said that when he and Cllr.Vinall meet with the planners at the planning committee site visit they expressed their concern about the access for this development. It was ***RESOLVED*** that we write stating that we are unable to even consider the open space land until we have received reassurance about the required crossing point. Abstained Cllrs. R.Honeybourne and A.Honeybourne.

**07. Bus Stop Village Centre** – Following further damage it was ***RESOLVED*** that we look for an alternative type of shelter and if nothing found the shelter to be removed.

**08. Local Plan** Consultation – Constitution date for the local plan has been put back- due to covid.

**09. Youth Project** – Cllr. Vinall sent details of his proposal to all Councillors. He has spoken to Shropshire Youth Services who are willing to help with the setting up and training of any youth workers. Cllr.Vinall proposed that a working group of possibly three councillors and three members of the public be set up to investigate these issues. Cllr N.Barker and Cllr D.Bayley to join Cllr.Vinall on this working group and three parishioners.

**10.** *To pass a Resolution That under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1990, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business as publicity would be prejudiced to the public interest because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.* **RESOLVED.**

**11. Severn Centre**

All Reports sent to Councillors. Councillors concerned about Halo proposing to not open the pool this year ***RESOLVED*** to wait to see what Shropshire Council agreed to do with regards to Halo and the consultants report. Scott Rolfe and Halo Finance Manager to be invited to the next Parish Council meeting.

**12. Shropshire Councillors Report**.

“Those of you who bother to read my blogs will be familiar with this in its original version, the seeds of which first appeared in the July 2013 edition of the Highley Forum. Events have overtaken the original concerns to exceed even the extent of the break-up of local democratic processes that I foresaw back then.

Well, local democratic processes as we used to know them, anyway? The sort that channelled a collective local voice into the decision making processes of what used to be “the local council”, whether parish, district or county, the last two long defunct in Shropshire since 2009 when unitary and its ‘Strong Leader with Cabinet’ model of governance came in.

Conversion to the unitary council model in 2009 channelled decision-making into the hands of just nine individuals chosen by the Leader (capital ‘L’), who is voted into place by members of the largest political grouping at Shirehall which in Shropshire’s case is the Conservative Party.

Of the 74 councillors at Shirehall, the political groupings comprise (non-aligned take no Party Whip):

Conservatives 49

Liberal Democrats 12

Labour 5

Independent 4

Brexit Party 1 (non aligned)

Green Party 1

Independent non-affiliated 2 (1 expelled from the Labour Whip for anti-semetic comments, one gave up the Labour Whip because of anti-semitism - not relating to the other’s expulsion - but both always vote with Labour.)

**Total 74**

The chosen few form a 'Cabinet' and assume the authority to make decisions as an executive not answerable, and certainly not accountable, to anyone.

In theory scrutiny committees do exist, with the nominal power to question proposed policy changes but which, in reality, are able only to “recommend” changes which the Cabinet is under no obligation to accept.

The shift of power started when Shropshire went unitary under Gordon Brown’s Labour government in 2009, council offices in Ludlow and Bridgnorth were off-loaded and staff offered voluntary redundancy. Only later, with the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2013, would the full implication of the resultant loss of 40% of the authority’s senior, more experienced planning staff begin to manifest itself, and continues to be felt now, in 2020!

We councillors were told (usually via the Shropshire Star) to get ready to come to terms with changes to the way local government would operate in Shropshire because central government was determined that things would change and the Executive at Shirehall were determined to toe their Party’s line.

The ‘For Sale’ signs went up on Shirehall and Shirehall started working to render itself obsolete by moving many of its functions into the council-owned company established by Keith Barrow, ‘ip&e’ (wound up in 2016 after Keith Barrow was forced to stand down at the end of 2015 as the result of my Code of Conduct complaint against him).

The sale of Shirehall was pretty much a foregone conclusion; earlier optimistic talk of a move to the Guildhall in Shrewsbury - retaining at least a semblance of the old way of doing things - was out because it was earmarked for use as part of the ‘campus’ of the University of Shrewsbury.

With Stonehouse in Ludlow and Westgate in Bridgnorth closed down, officers were even then either ‘hot-desking’ or operating from home or from their car, the Executive’s ambition for the wholesale move to a virtual council was only slowed by the poor-to-non-existent broadband coverage over great swathes of the county, particularly in the west.

But as internet connection improved, that impediment was overcome and the way was open to complete the transition to a truly remote council with all the advantages that offered to an Administration intent on cementing itself in place and, moreover, cementing itself in place in perpetuity.

But how to sell that idea?

Well, along came Covid-19 and handed them the solution on a plate.

On Friday 22 May 2020 elected Members were copied-in to the daily Covid-19 “up-dating” email to all salaried officers from joint interim Chief Executive Andy Begley. In the middle of the text it said…

*Over the past several weeks we have all been working differently. Our new ways of working, specifically the use of technology to deliver services, are foundations for a brighter, better and more sustainable authority.*

*We have mentioned changes and the new normal many times, but what has perhaps not been as clear is the fact that we will not be returning to the old ways of working. We cannot return to how we worked for many reasons. Covid is an obvious issue, but the reality is we need to make sure that our services and our organisation, as a whole, is fit for purpose going forward, and able to serve our residents as effectively and efficiently as possible.*

*Funding, advances in technology, changes in service requirements and closer working with the NHS are all fundamental shifts in how we work and Coronavirus has been a huge catalyst to accelerate necessary changes – propelling us into a future we would have strived for over years, but one we can now step into together, as a better, more vibrant, inclusive and innovative Council.*

*We have discussed the idea of public sector staff being doers and right now we need you to continue doing your jobs, but we also need you to be curious about what could be better and work to truly transform.*

*There is no more room for inefficiencies, there is no more time to delay - this is here, the need is now.*

*As a management team, and with the support of several council services, plans are being drawn up as to what Shropshire Council could look like. These plans are being fed by responses from the staff survey, data we have about how we are working now, service requirements and Shropshire’s future needs.*

*Throughout this process we will work with staff to make sure everyone has a voice and right now we need you to stay strong, keep innovating and to consider the best bits from how we used to work, whilst planning for a new tomorrow - one we’ll shape together to be the best local authority we can be.*

A new tomorrow? That’s the first Elected Members had been told of it.

I read through it again.

*“...foundations for a brighter, better and more sustainable authority”* … A sentence we saw many times during the changes ~~wreaked~~ wrought back in the dark days of 2013.

*“... the fact that we will not be returning to the old ways of working” .*.. So no talk of consultation with elected councillors or the thousands of people they were elected to represent, so essentially an unequivocal statement of intent sealed with that one word “fact”.

*“… propelling us into a future we would have strived for over years”* … Except there has never been a “would” in there since 2013, that bit should more accurately have read: *“propelling us into a future we have strived for over years”*.

The old-fashioned concept of democratic representation had long ago moved into the cross-hair sights of the Executive, its finger poised over the trigger which, given the opportunity to blow a hole in democracy’s head, just needed a nudge.

And just in case anyone had any doubts about how serious the Executive was about finally realising that ambition…

*“There is no more room for inefficiencies, there is no more time to delay - this is here, the need is now.”*

“Now”. BOOM!

*“These plans are being fed by responses from the staff survey, data we have about how we are working now, service requirements and Shropshire’s future needs. […] Throughout this process we will work with staff to make sure everyone has a voice”.*

And all that achieved without once consulting with elected Members outside of the ten-person Cabinet?

*“… everyone has a voice”*

Really?

Whilst I’m obviously not happy about the distancing of people from the administration of their affairs through the diminution of local representation as indicated in that email, given the increasing apathy of people towards the machinery of government, local as well as central, I can understand people believing (wanting to believe?) that the profound changes that are happening will not impact directly on them.

Perhaps democracy is increasingly irrelevant to people’s daily lives?

Ah well, as long as nobody goes looking for a council office door to knock on. Oh, and they pick whatever the right time is to do it, just in case…

Technology, message from ICT:

Some people experienced issues this morning with their technology and we can only apologise. We believe the issue resulted from high demand on the infrastructure. This increase has been seen across the country, potentially as a result of organisations returning to somewhat normal work. Whilst we hope this issue does not recur tomorrow, we cannot guarantee, so please be mindful if there are problems tomorrow and if there are, they will likely ease mid-morning.

We are monitoring this, looking for opportunities to overcome the issues and have developed a plan to overcome the issues. We will keep you posted on your Directorate Teams sites.

02 June 2020. Staff Update Covid-19.

Karen Bradshaw & Andy Begley

Acting Interim Chief Executives

**13. Finance:**

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| ***SALC*** | ***Training Fundamentals for Councillors*** | ***30.00*** |
| ***Bill White Nurseries*** | ***Village Flowers*** | ***720.00*** |
| ***M.E.Preston*** | ***Salary*** | ***993.54*** |
| ***HMRC*** | ***TAX & NI*** | ***67.36*** |
| ***S.J.Maintenance*** | ***Maintenance Issues*** | ***405.00*** |
| ***S.J.Maintenance*** | ***Maintenance Issues*** | ***270.00*** |
| ***Luna Petals*** | ***Flowers*** | ***991.00*** |
| ***Information Commissioner*** | ***GDPR*** | ***40.00*** |
| ***Dianne Bayley*** | ***Chairman’s Allowance – Award to James Warick-Smart*** | ***25.00*** |
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Meeting Closed 8.55PM

Signed: ……………………………………………………Chair Date: ……………………………………………..