



"Not for self"

Minutes of the

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

of the Parish of Oswestry Rural
held at 7 pm on Thursday 13 April 2023
at Trefonen Village Hall

Present

Chairman, Oswestry Rural Parish Council, Cllr Martin Jones
4 Parish Councillors
Approximately 8 members of the public
Shropshire Canal and River Trust representative

In attendance:

Kathryn Lloyd, The Clerk Oswestry Rural Parish Council

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the annual meeting for electors advising that a representative from Shropshire Canal and River Trust Canal was present.

2. Annual Report

The Chairman, Cllr Martin Jones gave the following Annual Report of Oswestry Rural Parish Council.

“This last twelve months has seen many changes and challenges. We have finally left covid restrictions and fully face to face meetings have resumed with the addition of zoom facility remaining for more community engagement, should residents wish to take advantage of this medium. Sadly, take up of this and public attendance remains low, but this is unfortunately a nation malaise and apathy towards local councils. However, as I said the past twelve months has been a very busy period for the council on many fronts. Not all events have what might be considered a positive outcome for the council, and I would suggest the wider community, this has not been for a lack of effort on behalf of the council.

Some items to note:

Coed y Go traffic speed reduction efforts
Trefarclawdd
Morda Village Hall
War Memorial Maesbury
VAS in Treflach and Maesbury

Beginning with Morda Village Hall, of which the Council is no longer the custodian trustees. The Council has fought extremely hard on this and instructed a new legal team to provide advice. The Council should be commended in its efforts to protect the facility for the community, and in particular Cllr. Martin Bennett. Well done to you all.

The Council said goodbye to Robert Milton as a Councillor, however his motivation behind Morda Village Hall as its Charity Chairman is a cause for concern. Something the former Councillor Tony Milner would be upset about, and he is still much missed by the Council due to his untimely passing. On a lighter note, The Council lost Robert Milton as a Councillor and his seat remains vacant.

The Council set aside significant funds for legal and specialist expertise which is a first for the Council. This should benefit the community immensely and as well as help Councillors make well informed and balanced decisions

Maesbury's War Memorial has been successfully renovated and updated to reflect the additional name that was missing.

VAS signs are yet to be installed in Maesbury , but this is due to the incorrect post placement which will be rectified.

Coed Y Go is progressing well with finances in place and allocated.

The Tony Cheetham award was given to William Baker for his work in the community. Nominees can still be made for this year's award.

Councillor made several grants including one recently to the Shropshire Union Canal Society.

The formation of the Environmental Working Group and the Finance Committee has proven to be very effective and productive.

The EWG has worked extremely hard on the issues surrounding the development of Trefarclewdd industrial cattle farm and the wider planning issues that this has presented. The Council has been able to set aside funds for independent specialist legal advice, which will benefit the community moving forward and protect our countryside. The Council has not yet had the outcome it wanted but this does highlight the effort that goes in to studying planning applications by Councillors and is a positive reflection of your efforts regardless of the result. The challenges of protecting our watercourses and nighttime habitats remains a target for the Council to effectively engage with planning to ensure that proper EIA's are in place, not cut and pasted ones that are not adhered to. The Council will continue to intervene and petition where we are requested to by our wards.

The Council has established good communications with our new MP Helen Morgan, a marked improvement on the last incumbent of the post.

You will be pleased to know I have nearly finished!

The Parish Clerk resigned, and the Personnel Committee once again interviewed several candidates for the position. They recommended Kathryn Lloyd for the position. It is fair to say she has had a baptism of fire with us in the last six months, but I think you will agree with me that the Committee advised the Council very well, and Kathryn is an asset to the whole community.

Finally, you may notice a small, but considerable change to the Council's header. The inclusion of NOT FOR SELF is something that Cllr Peter Richardson has been trying to get reinstated for many years. It is now back.

This minor change in wording should be a huge reminder to Councillors that we are not here to benefit ourselves or our own causes, but the wards you have been elected or co-opted to serve. Councillors are not here for personal gain; indeed, it costs us to be here, however your efforts do not go unnoticed by us.

So, thank you all for your time, effort, and continued attendance.”

3. Minutes

The minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting held on 12 May 2022 were considered for approval. **It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and AGREED that the minutes be signed and ADOPTED as a true record. Cllr Peter Richardson abstained**

4. Open Forum

The Chairman invited members of the public to speak and raise matters of concern. He advised that a representative from Shropshire Union Canal Society would like to present celebrate the recent award and provide an update

Shropshire Union River Trust

The representative advised he was a trustee from the Shropshire Union River Trust Society which has been trying for the past 50 years to restore the canal and make it a local asset. The Parish Council's website photograph shows a view of the canal. The Society has been working progressively and last year finished a mile and a bit, adding to the navigation with an opening in June. The Canal & River Trust (CRT) owns the canal with the SURT providing the workforce to do the restoration work. It has moved on to the section at Crickheath South. Villagers have said for work on the tow path. An application was made to the Parish Council with a request for people to volunteer and do voluntary work over the Kings Coronation weekend. Joint adverts for voluntary work have been published. He welcomes more community engagement to allow working together.

Cllr Martin Jones advised of the two listed bridges in Maesbury, one of which is in a very bad state of repair and causes issues for users. He asked the representative if he could help with this. The representative advised his colleague Tom was much closer to the CRT although he is happy to find out from the CRT Local Regional Manager what can be done. The CRT are meeting tomorrow to inspect the work done and to sign off.

A resident asked what the longer term plans for restoration is and timescales. The representative advised that Powis Council have plans to rebuild two bridges demolished and to allow further access into the canal network. SURT is actively working on the tow path which will take a number of years. Hopefully in time the network will extend into Welshpool and almost into Newtown.

Work of the Council , Finance , Community Engagement and Website

A resident thanked the Council for its work and efforts this last year with a lot of movement with Coed y Go speed calming measures and the work achieved by the Road Safety Working Group. He has concerns with Trefarclawdd Farm and was pleased with the Environmental Working Group (EWG) and the setting up of a Finance Committee.

The resident thought it was a shame about Morda Village Hall.

The resident expressed his thoughts on Finance with concerns of a balance of £233k of residents money being held. The Clerk advised a large amount of money related to Community Infrastructure Levy Funding (CIL) and advised there had been no increase on the precept for 2023/24. The resident stated he was unsure of funding and Cllr Martin Jones provided an explanation for the funding of the precept. He also advised of reserves and CIL funds can only be used for infrastructure projects.

The resident wanted to ensure the Council is not keeping residents money and wanted the Council to be more aggressive in its spending. He mentioned residents had been asked previously to suggest ideas to spend funds on and a couple of these have been completed. The Clerk advised the resident that the Council has a lot of money as detailed in the forecasted outturn position. This includes CIL funding, allocated (e.g. Nant Mawer/ Coed y Go speeding measure) and unallocated reserves. A gross expenditure budget of £136k has been set for 2023/24 so the Parish Council can see what it has committed to and is planning to spend. This includes precept, CIL, allocated and unallocated and the use of general funds to support the budget due to a shortfall. Unallocated funds need to be reviewed in conjunction with the strategic plan. The precept funds will be fully utilised with the Council drawing down the general reserves. The Clerk advised the Parish Council may hold significant funds at the end of next year but there should be a plan in place. The Clerk will be supporting the Parish Council to determine what it wants to achieve, the best use of funds and how it is to be delivered for the benefit of the community. The Strategic Plan needs further details, and a Finance Committee has been established to provide further scrutiny and challenge and review earmarked reserves. Moving forward The Clerk advised she will be supporting the Council to make the right decisions in utilising its resources. Cllr Martin Jones advised had the Council not rescinded its decision on £92k Morda Village Hall it would have been a different position. The Council cannot waste money. The Clerk advised some of the plans were with Shropshire Council and these have not been taken forward. The RTUR representative stated from an independent perspective, having been a Councillor elsewhere, the Clerk is absolutely correct in what she is saying. The Council needs to have a steady hand on the tiller and cannot suddenly increase the precept, which should be increased incrementally. Keeping the precept steady indicates the Council is acknowledging some reserves. Having observed two meetings, the Clerk is doing a very good job.

The resident gave an example of grant funding. According to the rules, requests need to be submitted by January to be considered in March. He suggested the limit be increased and an opportunity to use funds. Cllr Martin Jones stated the point had been laboured

The resident stated the Council had alluded to more Community engagement.

The resident offered help to fix the website stating it was unfair on the clerk having too much work already. It needs the right skill set, time, and machinery. This would be useful to the community.

Cllr Martin Jones advised everyone of a resident who raised concerns with Trefarclawdd Farm at a meeting earlier in the year. When asked how many meetings of the Parish Council he had attended he had confirmed this was his first one. Cllr Martin Jones gave this as an example for a lack of apathy by the community. Cllr Martin Bennett has been pushing for a newsletter every month.

Cllr Martin Bennett advised The Oswestry Town Council has increased its precept by 7% this year. It is burning through the Smithfield windfall. Money has to be spent wisely not quickly. Of the allocated reserves, £60k are for traffic calming measures, £30k set aside for a judicial review and further funds for legal advice EIA and Morda. The Council is trying gradually to get better, the Clerk is an expert, and the Finance Committee will be reviewing these closely including a potential new grant policy for the Council.

He stated The Clerk has been working her socks off for the last six months but there is only so much she can do. As a result, the Council has increased her hours. Cllr Roger Jones has brought the website to the attention of members. The Town Council has a member of staff to deal with this. The Parish Council will need to think about this very carefully and take this forward.

Cllr Bob Kimber advised members that having been a Councillor on a Council in Hampshire, the attendance by members of the public is representative of Parish Councils.

A resident wanted to comment and make an observation about the time limitations on the CIL and Shropshire Council ambitions to recoup funds. Cllr Martin Jones advised the Council were aware of this. The recoupment of funds was one of the threats made in relation to the funding of Morda Village Hall.

Trefarclawdd Farm

Cllr Roger Jones referred to the minutes of the previous meeting and the agreed actions.

- 1. That the Environment Agency, planners, and a representative from Trefarclawdd farm should be invited to attend a public meeting.**
- 2. To write to the local MP and invite her to attend a public meeting.**
- 3. That the Parish Council should set up an environment working group whose terms of reference would be to deal with local environmental issues referred to them by members of the public.**

He advised action 1 was unlikely to be achieved given planning permission has been given on block by the Northern Planners Committee in November 2022. Action 2, he has written to his MP and has a meeting this month. Action 3, he thanked members of the EWG . Disappointed the decision has been made regardless of the EIA and the Shropshire Council Planner non-compliance.

He thanked the Road Safety Working Group for their efforts for a speed restriction in Coed y Go and the allocated funding. He sent an email to local residents asking for their attendance at this evening's meeting and is disappointed by the turnout.

Cllr Martin Jones advised members of the emails forwarded to members this afternoon and advised he was in the process of contacting the MP and local schools, asking for attendance at a broader meeting.

Cllr Martin Bennett , Shropshire Star , Shrewsbury Twon Council is outraged with Shropshire Council planners. An application is going to appeal. Shrewsbury TC

Note of thanks

A resident advised members that he does not attend every meeting but pays attention to the agenda and minutes . He is extremely impressed with the work of the Council and thanked Councillors for their time and effort particularly those representing the Trefonen ward.

The Chairman thanked all those present , wished everyone a safe journey home and closed the meeting at 19:52 pm.

Signed: _____

Chairman