

PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2026

Meetings:

As usual, the statutory six PC meetings were held during the year from May 25 onwards with no requirements for any Extraordinary Meetings.

Finances:

The finances of the PC remain healthy with a small surplus being accrued during the year in the General Reserve Fund. The balance is within the limits recommended by the local government advisory bodies.

The income from the 'Lightsource' solar panel farm continues to accrue to the Community Benefit account, which now stands at over £100k. This is a restricted and ring-fenced account from which payments can only be made to deserving local causes and bodies (not individuals) such as funding four defibrillators in each of the constituent elements of the parish, to repairs, wifi etc. to Pitchford Village Hall and to pay for the publication of the quarterly 'Village Views'.

The longer term use of this sizeable amount is open to discussion, but might for instance provide seed funding for either a new Community Shop, if and when the current shop and Post Office in Acton Burnell closes or for a new Village Hall, possibly in Acton Burnell, should the current one in Pitchford be forced to close when its lease expires in a few years' time.

The PC also holds Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies, which derive from payments made to the County Council and in part passed on to the PV by developers of new buildings. In the past this has been used for projects such as a new stretch of pavement in Acton Burnell or refurbishing the phone boxes in Acton Burnell and Pitchford, which are owned and insured by the PC.

Administration:

The PC is extremely fortunate in having in Anna Morris a well-qualified and highly competent Parish Clerk. Without her, the task of running the PC would be far harder, if not impossible, for all the Councillors, but especially for the Chairman.

However, increasing salary levels and NI costs mean that a very large proportion c80% of the annual precept levied by the PC through residents' Council Tax bills goes towards paying Anna's salary etc.

In large part, this is because we are what is known as a 'micro-council' ie we have a precept of under £10,000 pa (£7,240 in FY 25/26) and yet we have to undertake exactly the same amount of administration and comply with precisely the same rules, regulations and reporting cycles as a major Town Council. As an example, we are required to have at least 25 separate Policies and Procedures, all of which have to be kept up to date and reviewed by the Clerk and then formally approved annually by the PC at meetings. Whilst some of these policies are relatively short, others extend to over 40 pages.

Accordingly, the time has got to come soon when the local PC as we know it, that has existed for decades if not centuries, will have to combine with other PCs in order to save costs. This will undoubtedly ensure economies of scale, but will also mean that the local voice of the people will be muted. Assuming of course that this 'voice' exists because, in an ever changing world, village life has been diluted and even getting people to volunteer to be on the PC has become an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task. It is perhaps noteworthy that there has not been the requirement for an election of a Councillor since I was elected in 2012! All other new arrivals on the Council since have been by co-option.

I should emphasize that there are currently no plans to merge with neighbouring PCs. This is simply something that I consider is inevitable and certainly more cost efficient in the short to medium term.

Potholes:

The major topic of the year has of course been the dreaded and at times extremely dangerous potholes. The PC along with local residents has complained vociferously and regularly about the deteriorating state of the roads. Many drivers have lost tyres or even broken wheels and the claims procedure instituted by Shropshire Council is not exactly user friendly! Letters have been written with ever increasing frustration, the website 'FixmyStreet' has been updated virtually weekly and the local County Councillor has had his ear bent at every PC meeting.

As residents will have seen, in the last month several of the major craters have been repaired and for this we are very grateful. However, it must be noted that there are still many potholes that have not been filled, often in close

proximity to those that have been and this is extremely annoying because it is a very short-sighted approach by Shropshire Council to the problem. Why send out a team of men twice, when one thorough review of the situation would result in a wholesale solution? Equally, some of the work that has been done has been poor and, in some cases, downright shoddy, so that the 'fill' will be removed at the next heavy rainfall or during the next winter season.

This short-termism by Shropshire Council and its contractors is counterproductive and financially wasteful as well as being irritating for local residents.

Conclusion:

I hand over the Chairmanship to Carmen Culliss on 12 May and look forward to enjoying my time on the 'back-benches'. However, I along with several others Councillors will be standing down from the PC at the time of the next elections in May 2029, so if anyone wants to volunteer to step up, now is the time to start thinking about it!

Questions?