

**CARDINGTON PARISH COUNCIL  
ANNUAL MEETING  
MINUTES  
held in Cardington Village Hall  
on  
Tuesday 5th March 2024  
Commencing at 7pm**

**Present**

C'Ilr Tonks (Chairman); C'Ilr Norris (Vice Chairman); C'Ilr Maydew; C'Ilr Davies; C'Ilr Pennington; C'Ilr Boulton; C'Ilr Watkins.; C'Ilr Rogers

PCC John Campion; Mr G Donaldson (Rural and Business Crime Officer);  
PPC R Walters; PCSO S. Roberts

13 Members of the public attended the meeting.

**1. Acceptance of Apologies**

There were no apologies. All Councillors were present at the meeting.

**2. Rural Crime – Police and Crime Commissioner John Campion**

The Chairman introduced Mr John Campion to the meeting. Mr Campion explained his role as the elected Police and Crime Commissioner.

He explained that five years ago there were 500 less police officer in West Mercia than today. Two further Officers would be recruited to add two officers per shift across five shifts in South Shropshire.

Rural Crime, including rural crime in South Shropshire was recognised and a special team “Operation Gander” were tackling rural crime and had recovered 35 items of farm machinery and equipment which had been stolen and 10 people had been charged.

Councillors and members of the public outlined two incidents where police response was very poor, especially when one of the live incidents was reported via 999 as it was ongoing. Mr Campion and the police present recognised that the response had been poor and explained that there was a chain of command who decides which reports should be prioritised. They were unable to state why this particular incident had not been given priority.

The Whatsap Group set up in the Parish provides a vital link to live crimes in the area. However, Mr Campion and the police present said , although they recognised that this was a useful community tool, they could not join local whatsapp groups and any reports should be made by dialling 101, for non urgent reports or 999 for urgent reports.

The Meeting told Mr Campion that residents are feeling vulnerable especially at the lack of police response to incidents.

Mr Campion said he took the comments on board and was willing, if re-elected, to come back in a year to see if the situation had improved. He agreed better public confidence was required and urged residents to subscribe “Neighbourhood Matters” on line. Details were circulated to all present at the meeting.

Mr Graham Donaldson the Rural and Business Crime Officer also handed out his business card urging anyone who had any concerns to contact him.

Mr Campion and the Police representatives then left the meeting.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**4. Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

It was proposed by C'Ilr Watkins, seconded by C'Ilr Rogers and unanimously agreed that the minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023 provided a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**5. Reports:-**

**(a) Chairman's Report (C'Ilr Tonks)**

The Chairman's gave the following report:, which had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting-

Fortunately our Parish remains beautiful and peaceful, especially when compared with many other areas of the world. Major changes are however taking place which are already and will impact all of us.

The wonderful scenery which we all enjoy results from the activities of generations of farmers. Since the nutritional deprivations of WW2, farmers have been incentivised to grow food. We have all become used to copious supplies and a wide selection of almost everything imaginable at very affordable prices. World events and national policy changes including placing less emphasis on food production and more on "Public Money for Public Good" have, and will impact our community. Brexit promises of growth via a global Britain doing major deals with China, India and the US so far have resulted only with arrangements with Australia and New Zealand to deliver beef and lamb, but the Government has kept to its pledge not to allow duty free imports of food such as chlorinated chicken and hormone fed beef, that does not equate to those standards imposed on our agricultural industry.

Economic challenges following Brexit which were dismissed as "Project Fear" exacerbated by the Covid pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and more recently middle eastern fighting and resultant disruptions have led to economic and political turmoil. Occasionally we are also reminded that Global Warming is happening and can impact our lives today rather than at distant point. Whilst we can attempt to shut our minds to these macro events they are impacting us, most routinely in the provision of public services. Incessant calls for cost cutting by Government whether or not they could theoretically be accommodated by increased productivity are resulting in inadequate services for us all.

Your Parish Council raised the tardy response of the West Midlands Ambulance service some years ago before it was revealed to be national problem, and sadly there are local recurrences of this unacceptable situation. We also suffer with difficulties of obtaining appointments with local GP's and stories are abound of difficulty in telephone calls being answered. A&E apartments are consequently over-run by folk believing there is no alternative in what they fear and may actually be a medical crisis.

Your Parish Council has been relentless over many years in demanding our roads are repaired and preferably redressed or resurfaced. We have had numerous meetings with Highways Managers and SCllrs, conducted them on tours of our local roads and gained intermittent reaction. It was little consolation to be told that there were other roads in the county even worse than our worst. One PCllr resigned in frustration and another feels he has wasted so much time he feels similarly inclined. SC continue to

encourage everyone to report any problem on FixMyStreet on the SC website. The PC has annually taken up the match funding SC grants to employ a local contractor to complete work largely on roadside ditches and passing places.

More recently your PC has taken up the issue of inadequate Police response to crimes taking place. The WhatsApp group for reporting criminal activities has been a superb source of collating live information of suspicious activities, but even with such hard information the slow Police response has been very concerning. Enquiries gain some sympathetic understanding as resources are stretched and even when charges are made the criminal justice and prison systems seem overwhelmed. For law abiding citizens that is not acceptable.

Perhaps, technology will produce answers to some of the above intractable issues. AI which used to have a meaning only well known in farming communities now has a different definition more widely understood.

The PC has made some progress in ensuring the communication gap between us and the outside world does not grow too wide. Whilst BT cannot justify providing up-to-date services to such a rural community, SWS, a small local company, was able to bring broadband to most who desired it, and more recently aided by Central Government and SC funding and in part using BT infrastructure has brought fibre broadband to the village with intentions of extending the service. SWS has recently merged with a much larger company, Voneus so we hope that good service will be maintained and costs will not rise.

There are plans to site a base station locally which should improve our mobile telephone signal and subject to permissions being granted, may be erected during 2024.

Areas of the Parish have always been subjected to roads being turned into rivers and lower lying areas being flooded at times when fields are at their capacity from continuous rain are then followed by periods of intense rain. It is clear these periods are becoming more frequent. We have experienced two such periods this winter alone, with the previous such period some 4 years ago and possibly only 2 or 3 in the previous 20 to 30 years. To date, I understand only one property has seriously suffered despite the owner taking very expensive protective action. Several others have suffered from flash flooding of their gardens and out buildings. On each occasion unsuspecting motorists have had their vehicles marooned, damaged and written off. I understand the Environment Agency has developed a plan for the whole River Severn catchment area and perhaps the "Public Money for Public Good" may be of value in helping landowners to come to the assistance of the wider community.

The issue that has caused the PC greatest concern since June 2023 has been the appalling actions of Barclays Bank with whom the PC has banked for decades. Initially under Government pressure to clamp down on money laundering the Bank reviewed our account and its various signatories. This appeared a routine exercise with cheque signatories requiring to confirm their identities and various forms required to be completed. Despite all this being done the Bank, without warning or

justification, closed the account on the pretext that one form had not been returned. The form was never received and may never have been delivered or even sent. The PC received a cheque for the balance of the closed account which without an account was worthless although of course in the interim the Bank retained the money to use to boost its profits - GOOD BUSINESS!! Eventually the PC was offered another account on more onerous terms and without any alternative, and despite months of more form filling and visits to prove identities the account was only opened in mid-January and at the time of writing has only just become fully functional. The issue is not Parochial and has affected numerous such bodies leading to questions being raised in Parliament.

The national revision of constituency boundaries coming into force at the next election, later this year, will affect our Parish. The Parish will become part of the South Shropshire constituency currently represented by Phillip Dunne, MP, who however has announced he will not be seeking re-election. Simultaneously this Parish will transfer from the Burnell ward represented by SCllr. Daniel Morris to the Corve Dale ward currently represented by SCllr. Cecilia Motley. The PC objected to the latter change on the grounds that the Corve Dale ward already had 11 PC's which was more than enough for a single SCllr to fully represent. The objections were dismissed as the national drive was to ensure that each area has a similar number of electors regardless of geography. We could speculate that further changes would invite PC's to amalgamate and thus to mitigate the issue now created. Alternatively more meetings could at least be partly conducted remotely as more public places including our Village Hall enjoy good Wi-Fi.

Your PC continues to meet regularly to discharge routine business besides attempting to represent the community and deal with the various factors that are beyond its control, but impact residents. The PC has assisted in ensuring broadband is widely available and now fibre is available to the village. At long last we are seeing more potholes being filled and hopefully a length of terrible road between the Pub and the Longville crossroads will soon be redressed. Possibly during 2024 mobile telephone signals will be improved and perhaps we can advance plans for dealing with the deleterious effects of flash flooding.

I am grateful for all the efforts of my fellow PCllrs and particularly our superb clerk, Jennie Griffiths, who besides her ongoing commitment to support the PC has suffered stress and unremitting aggravation in attempting to deal with a recalcitrant bank. I also record our thanks to our SCllr., Dan Morris, who more recently has also taken up the challenge of being the Cllr responsible for Highways. We wish Dan every success in that role which impacts nearly everyone, nearly everyday of their lives.

#### **(b) Financial Report (Clerk)**

The Clerk gave the following report:-

I continue to report the latest financial position to every Parish Council meeting, together with a copy of the latest bank statement and a bank reconciliation. The bank reconciliation is reviewed, and when unanimously agreed, the bank statement and the bank reconciliation are then signed by a non-cheque signatory'. At every meeting the Parish Council maintains a clear process for cheque approval and this has been followed throughout the year'.

The Parish Council expenditure during 2023/24 totalled £6,986.37. However, this includes the additional payment of £1,935.02 for extra Environmental Maintenance Work undertaken during 2022/23. It was agreed that this would be paid in the 2023/24 financial year and was taken from the CIL monies held by the Parish Council and not out of Parish Council funds. This resulted in £5,051.85 being spent against the precept of £7,260. This suggests an underspend against the 2023/24 precept of £2,208. However, with the commitments for the Environmental Maintenance Work £1,500 matched funding, and Payroll Costs (£60) not yet paid and the Election Expenses (£100) held for future elections and the Contingency (£200) not used the actual underspend against the precept amounts to £348 as shown below:-

	£
Grass cutting underspend for year	120
Training budget not spent	100
Stationery/Postage underspend for year	70
Other small savings Audit/SALC etc	58

During this financial year in addition to the £7,260 precept the Parish Council received £1,500 Environmental Maintenance Grant (in addition to the £1,500 matched funding shown above) thus making a total of £3,000 for Environmental Maintenance Work carried out during 2023/24. They also received a burial fee of £142.

A VAT claim amounting to £1,125 was recently submitted to HMRC in relation to VAT paid during the period 2022-2024 and HMRC have confirmed that this has been processed and has been paid into the Parish Council bank account.

In October Barclays closed the Community Account for absolutely no reason. It is understood that they have taken the same stance with many Charity and Community Accounts which did not pay any bank charges. The excuse was that the Parish Council had not responded to a request for information to satisfy money laundering laws. This seems to have been reported by other charity community account holders. After months of form filling, lengthy telephone calls and e mails it took until February for Barclays to open a new account which now incurs bank charges. The Parish Council had no alternative as other banks approached did not operate bank accounts for Community organisations such as Parish Councils and we were unable to open an account with an alternative Bank. The complaints procedure with Barclays was followed, they initially offered £300 compensation and then after further evidence was given of ongoing problems since the £300 was offered they agreed to offer £500 compensation. Although if the matter had been referred to the Banking Ombudsman the compensation may have been increased it was felt that this would be a lengthy process and require a great deal of work to present everything to the Ombudsman. It was unanimously agreed via e mail that the Clerk would accept the £500 compensation. This has been done and paid into the Parish Council's new bank account.

Shropshire Council have not yet announced if the Environmental Maintenance Grants will continue in the 2024/25 financial year. The Parish Council have built the £1,500 matched funding into the 2024/25 precept and a claim will be submitted as soon as an announcement is

made that the Environmental Maintenance Grants will continue in the 2024/25 financial year.

The 2024/25 Precept of £7,800 was agreed at the January Meeting. This has been submitted to Shropshire Council for payment in April.

Shropshire Council have confirmed that the Parish Council will receive a £747 Neighbourhood Fund payment. This will be paid into the Parish Council bank account on or around 26<sup>th</sup> April. This amount will be added to the £2,294.36 already held in the Neighbourhood Fund from payments received in previous years.

The 2023/24 Accounts will be presented to the May Meeting following the Internal Auditor examining the accounts and providing the Internal Audit report.

### **(c) Shropshire Council Report (C'Ilr D Morris)**

C'Ilr D Morris gave the following report which had been circulated to all Councillors prior to the meeting:-

This year the dominant theme for the council has been budgetary pressures. For the year 2023/4 the council has to date made savings of £41m out of target of £50m without any discernible notice of loss of services, and there will still be some to be made before the end of the financial year. For 24/25 it will be different - there will be things that change and unfortunately people will be paying more to receive less. The council will undergo a re-organisation to re-size itself to fit the financial reality it finds itself in. There will sadly be job losses of around 300 people. The reasons are that for every £5 the council has, £4 goes on Adult Social care and children's services, £0.50 goes on waste and the remaining £0.50 has to pay everything else. 5 years ago, the figure would have been closer to around £3 out of the £5. These are tough financial times for all local authorities. Included in the savings plans are: -

- Reviewing the strategy for library provision to make savings.
- Reducing support for leisure provision
- Reducing the number of Household Recycling Centres
- An optional, charged, household green waste collection service.
- Reducing the number of council buildings and other assets, and accelerating the move from Shirehall, Shrewsbury into alternative offices
- Changing how we meet the transport needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities: a consultation is ongoing.

The budget includes a 4.99% increase in council tax, which the Government assumes councils will make, and includes a 2% adult social care precept. For the average band D property in Shropshire, this will mean an extra £1.57 a week for Shropshire Council's part of council tax bills. 95% of all councils with a responsibility for social care are, like Shropshire, raising their bills by this amount.

The Local Plan is one of the council's most important policies and sets out locations across the authority's area where housing and commercial developments are recommended take place up until 2038. It is made up of a combined 30,800 homes over that period and 300 hectares of employment land. It is now unlikely to be in place until 2025, as the council will have to conduct a fresh six-week consultation on updates to key documents, owing to concerns raised by the inspectors. That consultation will be on updated versions of a 'sustainability appraisal' and 'housing and employment topic paper' – set to run from April into June

2024. It is required because the inspectors have voiced concerns over the council's plans to find space for 1,500 homes and 30 hectares of employment land for councils in the Black Country. The issue has also been the subject of legal threats from lawyers acting for The Bradford Estates, which wants to build up to 3,000 homes on green belt land to the west of Tong – a proposal the council has decided not to include in the local plan.

Big infrastructure projects like Mile End Roundabout in Oswestry have been completed, whilst the North West Relief Road has now achieved planning permission and the Final and Full Business case should be put before council in September with a view to have spades in the ground by March 2025. In addition planning permission for demolition of the Riverside Shopping Centre was received.

In July 2023 we learned that a bid to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), under the UK Levelling Up Fund Round 2 (LUF2) was successfully made for Shrewsbury. The Shrewsbury bid was successful with a LUF2 award of £18.701m to support two packages of work as follows, the Smithfield Riverside Redevelopment Programme and secondly transforming Movement and Public Spaces in Shrewsbury.

In September 2023, the council agreed to take forward a collaboration of 4 local authorities called the Marches Forward partnership.

I am pleased about the recent Government announcement of £136.4m extra to spend on council roads from 2025 and anticipate that Parish councils will be asked to give their views on how this Money may be spent. I am also pleased to note that the road from Cardington to Gretton will eventually be looked at this year.

The boundary review this year saw a decision that sadly means that Cardington will move into the Shropshire Ward of Corvedale. In addition, we note that Cardington also moves into the South Shropshire Parliamentary Constituency.

Thank you for all your support this year and I look forward to working with you up to May 2025.

## **6. Reports from Parochial Charities/Organisations**

### **(a) Village Hall (C'Ilr Davies)**

C'Ilr Davies told the meeting that the village hall committee were planning to instal a new kitchen in the hall.

C'Ilr Maydew questioned the income generated from donations for using the village hall car park. C'Ilr Davies told the meeting he would get a report from the Village Hall Committee.

### **(b) Cardington Charity (C'Ilr Pennington)**

C'Ilr Pennington told the meeting that the Charity still had the same Committee and conscientious who all worked very well together.

Donations had been made at Christmas to 14 widows in the Parish. All were very grateful. 4 students had also received grants. The donations and grants totalled £2,400

The two tenants occupying the properties were proving to be an asset to the Charity. Repairs had been carried out to the properties during the year.

The Young Farmers continue to use the Reading Room and the carol service this year raised £2,350 which was divided between the Lingen Davies Cancer Fund and the Sepsis Charity.

C'Ilr Pennington thanked his fellow trustees for their support .

**7. Electors Questions**

There were no electors questions.

**8. Date of next Annual Meeting – Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.10pm.