### HIGHLEY PARISH COUNCIL

**An ordinary meeting of Highley Parish Council was held on Tuesday 11th January 2022 at 7pm at the Severn Centre, Highley.**

**Present**: Chair P.Vinall, D.Thakrar, T.Quinn, M .Moore, E.Moore, T.Pinches , N.Barker, S. Ambrose, J.Bowkett, D Tremellen, Vice Chair J. Marshall

Clerk: E.Preston

Assistant Clerk: H.Cordey

Parishioners : D. Fulton, Mr Hinton

**00. Parishioners Time**

Mr. Fulton, Highley resident and previous first responder attended the meeting in parishioners time to provide the councillors with the history and future of the first responders in Highley. He expressed his frustration at the service being currently unable to operate. There is a proposed first responder aiming to undertake the necessary training and become effective in post from May. Alongside this Mr Fulton is proposing a new cardiac arrest response team. This will entail, a team of approximately 6 volunteers being on call to attend out of hospital cardiac arrest within the village. ON AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION BY COUNCIL.

Mr. Hinton, resident of Rhea Hall Estate attended the meeting to bring to the attention of the parish council the current parking situation within Rhea Hall Estate. Mr Hinton expressed his concern for the safety of the residents in what he expressed as dangerous parking within 30 feet of a junction and expressed his dismay at the lack of CCTV and enforcement of the highway code. Mr Hintons personal details were obtained, so as he can be updated of the outcome of this matter once it has been discussed with the police. CLERK TO CONTACT THE POLIC REGARDING THIS ISSUE.

**01. Election of Chair**

Councillor Dave Tremellen resigned his role as chair. Councillor Pete Vinall was proposed, and it was resolved to accept he took the chair. Councillor Tremellen was thanked for his commitment and service to the parish council. Councillor John Marshall was proposed as Vice Chair. Resolved.

**02. Co-option of Parish Councillors**

Jack Bowkett and Snake Ambrose both stood for council positions and were elected to the council.

**03. Apologies for absence and reasons for absence:**  M.Williams , N.Waterson, J.Law due to illness for all. Resolved to accept.

**04.To confirm minutes of the meeting dated 8th December 2021** – Resolved to sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

**05. Matters Arising**

**Youth Project –** The youth club needs to recruit volunteers due to current staffing shortages. Councillor Vinal is hoping that the youth club will be in a position to expand later on in the year.

**Welcome Back Fund –** Clerk reported that the fund is being used to clean the high street and produce necessary notice boards and signs. Clerk is to consult with the Shropshire council to ensure the high street is cleaned after the resurfacing of the road.

**06.Correspondence**

**Mr.E.West,** Shropshire Council – CIL – Future Working.

**Salc –** Christmas Newsletter

**Road Closure:**  B4555 High Street, Highley. Start Date: 14th February 2022 - End Date: 20th February 2022. Awaiting meeting on the proposed diversions.

**Severn Centre –** Partnerships Reports and Community Plans received.

**Ffion Horton –** CIL funded Highways Report for Highley. This matter is on-going, and we are awaiting further discussions with Ffion Horton.

**War graves –** on the schedule

**07. Planning**

Reference: 21/05871/FUL (validated: 17/12/2021)

Address: Glencoe, Bridgnorth Road, Highley, WV16 6ER

Proposal: Removal of existing garden boundary wall and replace with a 1.8m timber fence with concrete posts and associated works - **RESOLVED TO ACCEPT**

Planning Reference - 21/05570/FUL

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED - Alterations to existing dwelling and associated works

LOCATION: - The Cedars, Bridgnorth Road, Highley, Bridgnorth, Shropshire. **- RESOLVED TO ACCEPT**

**08.Precept 2022/2023 –** To consider recommendations from the Revenue and Resources Committee for the 2022/2023 Precept. **RESOLVED TO ACCEPT.** The Clerk was thanked and acknowledged for her work on this matter.

**09. Queens Jubilee Celebrations –** It was proposed that a jubilee committee be put together to oversee this event.

**10. Climate Change – Cllr. E.Moore** brought to our attentionthe prominence of climate change and the current documents from south Shropshire climate action group

**11. Highley First Responder – operational issues –** The new proposed cardiac response team was resolved to support. This scheme allows for first responders to attend cardiac arrest within Highley and it near proximity. Councillor Vinall proposed an area to be distinguished for the scheme’s proposal.

**12. Shropshire Councillors Report**  Councillor D.Tremellen

‘The meeting on the 11th January will be the last one chaired by me and my last as a parish councillor. I shall resign at the end of that meeting. Whilst the actual date of my stepping down has never been known until now, it has always been my intention to stand down because (as only Ella and Peter knew) it was never my intention to stand for Chair in the first case. I stood because I didn’t want to see ‘business as usual’, I wanted to see the parish council opened up and hoped that our having gained a new set of eyes in the form of new councillors would achieve that. That was in part a vain hope. I have only been partially successful, some of those I expected a lot from haven’t lived up to expectations, but perhaps I was being my usual unreasonable self in having such high expectations.Having said all that, I wish I could see the same motives for beneficial change behind what is happening at the empty shell of what used to be Shirehall.

There is a certain irony in my calling for a new look with a new approach to council business from the parish council, and yet object with every atom in my body to what is being done (and being allowed to be done) to Shropshire Council by Lezlie Picton, but the difference is one of scale, the reach of the changes being wrought.Which, on a personal level, means there is too much going on at what’s left of Shirehall to be ignored, as recent articles in the Shropshire Star point out…

<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/politics/2021/12/24/leader-of-shropshire-council-commits-to-leaving-shirehall-within-years/?fbclid=IwAR3oz0zIngvlUBxK3xPI3JY1us9K9MHiHTTny-Gu1aMy9b86xtIAUs_I1Qo>

That signals the end of democratic representation in Shropshire. What’s happening goes beyond the petty party politics that will see any change lead to “more of the same”, although the heavily-whipped Tory ruling group members could not have been selected on the basis of their support for Picton and her loading of the decision-making sector with either ex-Shropshire Council salaried employees\*, because of course she hadn’t been elected as Leader of the ruling group then.\*NOTE: Picton was one such, not many people know that, or that she is closely involved with a property development company with interests in Shrewsbury shopping centres, CEO Andy Begley is another) who developed and harboured their “councillors are a bloody nuisance” attitude until such time as they could manoeuvre themselves into positions of power within the Shirehall administration.

Picton’s actions have been a classic power play, her deliberate policy of “informing” of significant changes in Shropshire Council policy using the local media outlets rather than the formal process of internal briefing notes first, being a deliberate snub both to elected representatives AND to the people who elected them. On the evidence of her behaviour so far, there is no end to her arrogance. And if Lezlie Picton has been the director of the main feature, the Second Unit director has been the recently acquired Assistant Director for Economy and Place Tracey Darke who, as Enforcement Officer, is our erstwhile righter of all wrongs – as long as they conform to her definition of what’s right and what’s wrong according to her application of something called “proportionality”; she won’t have it that the concept of proportionality depends on the highly subjective views of the person applying the rule. Her interventions over pecuniary interests in the planning committee that finally decided the Harworth development of the old Ironbridge Power Station being a case in point.

According to her the principle behind declarations of pecuniary interest isn’t as simple a question of avoiding ANY AND ALL relationships between the parties involved in a planning application, it is not – according to her – the avoidance of ANY AND ALL connections that might, just might according to the guidance that the rest of us are constrained to observe, be construed as POSSIBLY forming “a relationship” regardless of its nature. On the face of it, Mrs Darke appears to disagree with her predecessor, Claire Porter, that, where pecuniary interest is concerned “public perception is all”, but then with Claire Porter it was always a case of don’t do as I do, do as I say. Lip Service Ruled, OK.

It doesn’t matter what you think as an officer or a councillor or an appellant in a case, that bit about “public perception” is all that matters and you declare it anyway just to be on the safe side of the law. **OF THE LAW**. But none of that matters a damn to the final arbiter in such issues. If Mrs Darke doesn’t like or disagrees with what she’s hearing she’ll close it all down. It’s why she was appointed, in which act Leaders of the Opposition on her selection panel have some questions to answer!!

As you’ll see from that Shropshire Star article I’ve linked to above, the changes at Shrewsbury will be, indeed are profound, they have been ever since the change in leadership of Shropshire Council in May 2021, and the significance of those changes has increased by an order of magnitude with the predicted shortfall in Council finances which, despite impassioned denials by directors involved in the change from a local authority to a business housed in commercial premises, has always been a **possibility**, even without the pandemic. Only a fool discounts possibility as too improbable to consider.The basic safeguards that ought to be part of the most basic of calculations on a scheme the size of the proposed closure of Shirehall and the moving of its functions to the Pride Hill shopping centre were dismissed because “improbable”. I doubt any lessons have been learned, in fact on the basis of recent developments they haven’t!

The fundamental error was their dependence on the reliability of the forecasts upon which predicted future income was based. The whole scheme was predicated on the assumption of superiority that came with their buying-in of the expertise that comes in the form of consultants who, if they can promote anything, it’s themselves. A point I made at the initial briefing by Peter Nutting when the shopping centres were first purchased, when he rolled out his consultants as if that was the end of the discussion and not the beginning. That more or less set the tone of things to come.

The message Peter Nutting (another one with, albeit tenuous, Shrewsbury Town Centre interests) was putting out was the one that has prevailed and which is consistently promoted by Mark Barrow (to the council) and Andy Begley (to the staff, who have been cleverly manipulated thanks to Covid) with his repeated *ad nauseam* talk of “Covid Opportunities”. What we’re repeatedly told is that consultants are the ones who know, here only to give us the benefit of their expensive expertise, their fees coming out of a different back pocket, so let’s not waste **our** money by trying to undermine them with naive arguments based on the different experiences of consultants in our previous working lives, even the ones who didn’t wear red braces (inside joke)!

Trouble is, you see, having staked their reputations and our money, the incredibly highly qualified directors of service and the incredibly highly qualified consultants they employ to draw up **their** visions for **our** futures, are free to walk away from the mess they’ve left for the rest of us to clear up. Think on. Two who walked away were Ian Kilby and Adrian Cooper (both of whom were at least approachable until their last few months, having latterly well and truly screwed some of us). And of what’s left of planning? As the Treasury purse strings begin to tighten in the New Year, when our true financial position is revealed in all its gory detail, the Christmas holiday will have given impetus to practical considerations of where their futures lie.

With certain individuals, their activities regarding the planning of the Big Town Plan (BTP) will look mightily impressive to prospective employers on their CVs. Regardless of the size of the cock up with the shopping centres, the BTP is impressive enough to make it one hell of a distraction in a sort of “never mind the quality of the shopping centre debacle, feel the width of the BTP” sort of way.

I didn’t originally sign on for the online briefing for the BTP because it was “all about Shrewsbury and cycle lanes, and park and ride”. Having one of my regular clear outs and browsing the available online sessions, one of which was that briefing session, I thought why not and so went into Teams and prepared to enter that cloistered world north of the Wenlock Edge. Boy, am I glad I did. It was a hell of an eye-opener hearing talk of sums in the tens of millions and at one point, hearing Mark Barrow nonchalantly remark (in answer to a question about the extent of the development of the Riverside) that, of course, the BTP being such a major investment, a total overall cost would probably be in the hundred millions. He observed that at that meeting, when such a sum was mentioned “no one around the table baulked at that figure”. I almost choked on my chocolate biscuit.

I have the recording, but you need to know the characters involved in the discussion for it to have any significance, a bit like trying to understand what’s so significant about Lezlie Piction’s plans without having any knowledge, let alone understanding of what started happening back in 2009 with the change to unitary, although the seeds of real change didn’t start in earnest until after the election in 2013.Until Lezlie Picton went to press with that two year timescale, doing it with such certainty as to kill off any hope of a reprieve for democracy in Shropshire, the fact that the original £318,000 consultants report is still out there and available to anyone who takes the time and trouble to read it - and then thinks long and hard and reminds themselves of the arguments Keith Barrow adduced in support of ip&e – there was a glimmer of hope, but if that glimmer of hope had a head then Lezlie Picton’s statement of intent put a well placed boot in it.

Oh, and perhaps a read of that 2016 police report. I’ve still got it somewhere on file, I’ll have to pull it out. Picton might profit from a read because, of course, she wasn’t around when a few of the rest of us learnt the lessons she can’t be accused of ignoring. That’s her defence, ignorance, which is why she can smile. But always remember how easy it was for her to apply the Party Whip (the one they persist in denying exists, or at least that it’s actually applied) to Robert Tindall for voting against the Taylor Wimpey development at Tasley just north of Bridgnorth (for the benefit of those in the ruling group who can’t see beyond The Wrekin) which his constituents opposed. Picton dismissed him, never to darken his old constituency doors again, the gates to the garden parties slamming shut and the dogs set on him if he should dare get within a hundred yards. Except that a lot of his constituents supported him. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGkdcpTY1QI

I’m all about sharing what goes through some of our minds and with a regular readership and emails of support that’s obviously what some people out there want – to be taken beyond the factual reports because as one local journo, responding to my criticism of the Shropshire Star’s apparent unquestioning support (2016) for Keith Barrow following his stepping down as Leader of the council AND as a local councillor despite being subject to an ongoing police investigation, responded by saying that he was simply “reporting” the facts as they came to him. Fair enough, but that’s the difference between a “reporter” and a “journalist”.

Of late that’s more or less the difference between the Shropshire Star and Emily Lloyd’s Border Counties Advertizer, although I’ve noticed that Keri Trigg, employed under the new industry-financed (‘Local Democracy’) scheme to report for the BBC and the Shropshire Star and the Advertizer (Emily Lloyd is Keri’s boss), is taking a more in-depth approach to stories. Mind you, both newspapers are now the conduit down which Shropshire Council (for which read Picton) engages with its councillors, such is the arrogance, so apparent that it comes across as a deliberate snub to councillors; well, she no longer has to care what anybody thinks now that she’s surrounded herself with nodding dogs, who respond to criticism with squeals of protest about the unfairness of such criticism, that testify to their total ignorance of fairly recent history (although a lifetime in politics); but then why should they bother when they have Lezlie Picton to tell them what to believe and Directors of Service acting as if nothing existed before they took over?

Since this year’s local elections, gone are the free-thinkers in her Party. David Minnery is now Leader of the Independents; David Turner (my favourite cynic) symbolically stepped down by standing against the Lib Dems in Bishops Castle; Tina Woodward stood down in Alveley; Karen Calder was shamefully de-selected, as was Keith Roberts; Lee Chapman; and in have come the conventional Party apparatchiks, largely hand-picked by their constituencies for their loyalty to the message.

And notice the timescale she gives for the completion of her Master Plan, that’ll be the year of the next election to county so even with direct challenges on the hustings it’ll have been a done deal. She isn’t stupid, she’s laughing all the way to the counting hall. She’ll go down in history as the person who single-handedly destroyed whatever passed as a democratic organisation centuries in the making.(And remember also that by the time of the next election the proposed boundary changes will have been more or less completed, so what’s the betting that any “cross-party” discussions will have seen a mysterious transformation of Tory constituency fortunes (or lack of them across the county at the last elections in 2021) since the fall out from the Owen Paterson affair and the election of a Lib Dem to replace him.)

That more recent media report brings home the reality awaiting us. She is a woman of broad, very singular ambition. It is all very much Lezlie Piction, who sees herself as the woman of destiny who has grasped the means to bring that destiny to fruition; she will spend the next few years pushing her way around or over every obstacle that comes her way. <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/politics/2021/12/27/shropshire-council-year-of-opportunity-beckons-for-leader-who-wants-change/> No wishful thinking apparent there, this is all very real to her. This is her dream. She may not have started it, but by god is she’s determined to bring what is now HER dream to reality. She will doubtless expect people to love her for it… until the effect hits home. And even then, what the hell can anyone do to stop her? In a word: nothing!

But then, those living in the south of the county can always catch a bus or drive to Shrewsbury and get on the park and ride to take them to the council offices in the Pride Hill shopping centre while they wait for the promised economic trickle-down effect of the investments in Shrewsbury, the ‘Picton Effect’. (I was particularly annoyed that she credits Steve Charmley with all the highways work the rest of us assumed had been started by Steve Davenport, which Charmley claimed to be of county-wide benefit, picking up on the ground-work laid down by
Steve Davenport during his frequent local site visits to gauge the real depth – no pun intended – of the problems.) See: <https://wordpress.com/post/dtremellen.com/1675>).

Councillors, meanwhile, will do as they’re bloody well told. I did try warning you it was happening, in fact already well on the way to seeing Picton’s dream come true. And there you all were thinking it was all Peter Nutting’s and Clive Wright’s fault. It was always going to be a Tory dream. Keith Barrow just sowed the seed. It appears it fell on well-tilled ground after all.’

**11. Finance .**

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| **Highline Electrical** |  | **139.20** |
| **HMRC**  | **Tax and National Insurance**  | **73.76** |
| **M.E.Preston** | **Salary**  | **1014.76** |
| **M.E.Preston** | **Computer**  | **478.00** |
| **NPower** | **Street Lights** | **171.75** |
| **NPower** | **Street Lights** | **2836.00** |
| **OGL Computers**  | **E-mail System** | **147.64** |
| **OGL Computers**  | **E-mail System** | **1764.44** |
| **S.J.Maintenance** | **Village Maintenance Issues** | **180.00** |
| **S.J.Maintenance**  | **Village Maintenance Issues**  | **240.00** |
| **SALC** | **Training** | **20.00** |
| **Severn Centre**  | **Room Hire Parish Council**  | **55.80** |
| **Severn Centre**  | **Room Hire Youth Club** | **90.00** |
| **SLCC** | **Subscriptions** | **171.00** |
| **Technical services**  | **CCTV** | **110.00** |
| **Viking direct** | **Stationary** | **212.80** |

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