HIGHLEY PARISH COUNCIL

The **Annual Parish Council Meeting** was held at The Severn Centre on Tuesday 8th April 2025 at 6pm following refreshments served by the Girl guides. The Chairperson of The Parish Council, Mr Tom Quinn, took the Chair and there were 8 Councillors and 22 parishioners present.

**Council Chairmans Report:**

Good afternoon and welcome to the 2025 Annual Meeting of Highley Parish Council, I am Tom Quinn, Chairman of Highley Parish Council.

It has been an honour to spend another year as Chairman of the Parish Council. It can be a challenging role, but it is very fulfilling to assist with improving our village and making sure every penny of your council tax which goes to Highley Parish Council is spent wisely. The Parish Council has changed significantly since I first joined over four years ago and I am proud of how we currently operate, getting things done and actually making a difference within our rather tight remit.

This year I have again been assisted by my very capable Vice Chair Tracy Pinches who unfortunately couldn’t be here this evening and our Clerk Alison Palmer. 2024 saw some changes in staffing at the Parish Council as we reviewed the requirements of the roles and worked around personal circumstances, namely our previous Clerk Holly who emigrated to Australia. We now have Alison working full time for Highley Parish Council, based from our office here at the Severn Centre. The stability and attention to detail brought by having such a talented person working for the council full time has been notable and we continue to go from strength to strength in all our operations.

The Parish Council has been incredibly busy since I was stood here a year ago. Last year I spoke about our focus on liaison with the police and the formation of our Police Working Group. We have continued to work closely with our local Safer Neighbourhood Team and I have been very pleased to see a high level of co-operation, co-ordination and police presence in Highley with the local officers being based out of the Police Station in the Severn Centre whenever they are on shift. Since then, we have increased our focus on young people in the village, we have always been involved and supportive of the Highley Reach youth club, but we took the decision to also form a wider Youth Working Group to allow us to address the requirements of the younger members of our community. It was great to see some teenagers actively involved in this including attending meetings. I also convened an Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force to address a rise in Anti-Social Behaviour in the village. It was great to hear about all of the work already going on to address Anti-Social Behaviour, not just from the police but also from the staff at the Severn Centre where a lot of the behaviour was taking place.

2024 was another year of really great events in Highley, Golf Fest, Highley Carnival and the Christmas Lights Switch On all benefited from grant money provided by the Parish Council and we were actively involved in other events too. Highley in Bloom was a highlight, really improving how the village looks and allowing me the honour of presenting the winner with their prize at the carnival. As has become tradition the Christmas Lights Switch on also included the presentation of the Highley Civic Awards, I’d like to congratulate our winners again tonight: Claire Schnelting, Dean Boden and Gay Lilley – well done on your awards! The Christmas Light Switch on was a great success again in 2024 and we raised a fantastic amount of money for the Gunner Lewis-Vale Trust with Gunner himself along with his sister Daisy turning on the lights.

The last year has seen significant public participation in some Parish Council activities especially when they revolve around what may be seen as a controversial planning application. Whatever the result from the planning department at Shropshire Council I’ve been pleased with the level of community involvement in these issues, as a village far from Shrewsbury it’s vital Shropshire Council remember we are here and that we will be heard! There is a national housing shortage and because of that it would be foolish to think we could prevent new houses being built in the village, but we must ensure whatever is built here is suitable for the village and is accompanied by infrastructure improvements. The roads are already falling apart with the amount of cars which are on them now let alone adding more.

2024 saw a general election which led to a new MP for our constituency of South Shropshire. Stuart Anderson has visited the village a number of times since being elected; I invited him to Highley shortly after the election and he has held a surgery here in the Severn Centre. Having the support of our MP is really valuable to the Parish Council and Stuart has been very accommodating in this regard.

As a new year in local government approaches, I’m feeling positive about the effectiveness of Highley Parish Council, our current councillors are all fantastic and are all fully motivated to drive the village forward. We will continue to represent the people of Highley as they deserve to be represented, to operate professionally in all we do and to continue to instil a sense of pride in everyone living in the village.

**PC Nicholas Nolan:**

Good evening, all, Thanks for having me, conscious of additional cost to police force, solely here to police Highley, Cleobury and the other parishes in the SNT area. Priorities around the area, update some of the activities: drink driver, banned substance, now prosecuted.

Intelligence received is really important and helps piece together the puzzle to create actions. Cannabis farms found outside of Highley, growing over 400 plants, considerably less on the streets for children to purchase. Puppy Farm closed down thanks to community intelligence. Speeding operations being carried out frequently leading to prosecutions. Anti-social behaviour received 5 calls last month, all related to one person having to work with community mental health teams and other services.

**Jack Noakes (Manager, The Severn Centre):**

Thanks to PC Nolan etc for supporting SC with ASB also. The gym refurbishment and brand new equipment including medical practice construction, planning and recruitment – operation costs expensive running the pool partly due to the recruitment and swimming instructor/lifeguard programme. Young people given an opportunity and go on to do better things, Spud maintenance. Limited timetable – seasonal work, other commitments and aim to open the pool as much as possible. Swimming lessons, welcoming three schools. Also offered Highley Primary School (via Lee) a water safety programme for every child! The lifeguard trial volunteer scheme, including a 37-hour training course, did not generate extra support. The investigation will continue scheme, includes 37 hr training course didn’t yield any additional support but will continue to look into this. Improvement to library space, lost café but thanks to Dr Jess Harvey for helping with equipment etc Honesty pot tea trolley for user groups, generated £2,000 to put back into the SC inc new TV and lights, equipment. Swings replaced following inspection. July/Sept attempting to balance books running pool was not easy. Health and Wellbeing group end of year, also looking at MUGA grant request rejected but approaching football foundation. Halloween and Christmas fayre inc food vendors and stalls. Disco daddy doing free events. LED lights refit in sports hall. Improving the wider space around the pool and usability outside of the swimming inc expanding the timetable.

**Tom Plim (Head Teacher, Highley primary School):**

Here is an overview of the school and what we get up to, it was built in the late 70s and has been extended since. I started in 2019 and have been HT for 6 years. Covid changed education and presented all kinds of difficulties. 97% of children are within catchment and mainly within walking distance. Cohorts fluctuate year on year with a maximum of 41 per year group. Currently on role we have 247 with a capacity of 287. New housing will not impact on pupil numbers. Free school meals have increased rapidly since covid with a pre-covid rate of 17% and now are up to 27% all from a statistically disadvantage background. We have 10 classes, each with 24-25 students. Many of them are disadvantaged, with 12% being monitored for additional needs and another 12% already identified as SEN students. The schools’ values prior to covid were: Trust – Aspire - Teamwork but we have worked hard to change and instil new core values: Respect – Resilience – Relationships. The pupils appreciate where they come from and the rich heritage of Highley, and they aspire to look beyond the horizon and reach life goals. Highley is threaded throughout their learning and is displayed on a timeline in the hall using local context across it. Linked their learning with Highley along the way. E.g. Victorians to the SVR, Tudors to the Manor House, even the Space race and the colliery: all valued community links and supported by members of the community including Councillor Williams, delivering harvest food parcels, bags of kindness, choir attending events etc. We offer a HAF programme through holidays and focus an important part of the curriculum on Outdoor play and learning. PLAY – we follow the OPAL scheme. Children are given a ‘Highley 100’ passport with local activities to complete as they grow through school! Nurturing is really important to us, and a mentorship programme invites residents into school to support and talk to pupils.

**Ed Andrews (Severn Valley Country Park):**

Thanks to HPC for financial support over the last few years. Shropshire council’s budget now only allows an “essential spend” = health and safety jobs only. We maintain two sites (station road) and the site over the river to Alveley as well as the donkey bridge/New England area plus another 25 sites around the county, so spend much of our time applying for grants and external funding to support our work. Last year, we accessed the “UK shared prosperity fund” to overhaul the site at station road and make it more accessible for all, with paths now resurfaced and new gates, lining of the pond and fencing it off for a wildlife (and not dogs) to access. New equipment has been purchased for the play area at the big park and a new all-weather surface installed.

The Donkey bridge has finally been replaced, and our events continue to be well supported inc weekly toddler sessions, also school visits teaching children about the history and wildlife along the Severn Valley. Looking forward, the income through car parking and café (employing local people) may need to go out to tender.

**Alistair Macnaughton (Environmental group/The Forum):**

I joined the PC Environmental group because of an interest in the subject and I write a monthly article for the forum sharing and encouraging sustainability within the village. I set up a group as part of ‘Friends of the earth’ and called it “Sustainable Highley”. The Environmental working group have completed projects such as the litter picking events, tree planting, and although not always successful, we keep going at it and give the message to others that nature is interesting and how important it is to care for the planet. It is easy to be disconnected from the natural world so we must educate and show others how to care for the planet. There will be an Eco-corner at the carnival including the repair café, marches energy, and offering birdboxes and hedgehog houses crafts.

**Mary Homer (The Friday Event):**

The Friday event was started by some young people wanting something to do – they had a few discos in the welfare hall and eventually became a weekly event and have had lots of volunteers over the years. There is a strong core team of volunteers running every Friday 7.30-9pm and offering a safe space for the young people of Highley. Approx. 25 children are in attendance each week and we have organised trips inc paddleboarding, training CPR from first responders, and partnered with SYA for equipment and time. Different trips planned and as a team, and we are honoured to support the youth of the village.

**Alex Edwards (Highley Minors Welfare Football Club):** Apologies sent, unable to attend due to illness.

**Elaine Moore (Highley Companions):**

Highley Companions is a local group ran by trained volunteers to cater for those in the community diagnosed with memory problems e.g. Alzheimer’s and age-related memory issues. Our aim is to provide a safe haven where carers can provide a family member with care, or they can bring members to be looked after, offered support or take time away for a little while. Many activities happen including taking part in conversation, word searches and games, silly games, quizzes, singing, crafts, creating memory boxes for reminiscing, photographs (Mandy one of the volunteers takes photos) to help spark things in their minds. We operate fortnightly for 3 hrs and include tea and coffee, cake and sandwiches. We offer trips out including the annual boat trip where we all sit and enjoy watching the world go by. This time gives the carers the needed release time which is also very important as caring for people with dementia is hard work. We have taken picnics to RAF Cosford and enjoy that, Bewdley Museum, including getting fresh air and getting out and about. Music groups come along, companions love the music and clap away and come out of themselves and have fish and chips afterwards. Ukelele bands, visitors and most sessions between the volunteers. Companions allows people to gain in confidence and one example of a member who began quite shy now plays guitar to all. There are currently 12-15 members but always looking for more people to join via referral through Elaine.

**Emma Aspin (Highley Community Project):**

Thankyou once again for inviting me to speak at this evenings’ meeting again, this has been an incredibly busy year for Highley Community project, we have increased our food delivery from Birmingham FareShare from monthly to twice monthly thus doubling our FareShare fees, this enables us to meet the demands of our clients. The last 12 months has seen an increase of working families using our service. We average 35 food boxes a week, 3 emergency foodbank boxes and a strong, regular footfall at the community fridge. We are helping to support The Friday Event, Highley Primary school with breakfast cereals, Highley Minors and Kinlet playgroup with fresh fruit and snacks, Highley Mini-Minors toddler group with snacks and we also provide fresh fruit for schools visiting the Severn Centre for swimming lessons. I would like to take this opportunity to thank halo for continuing to support our project and providing a space for free, for us to continue to operate. Their collaboration and support has been invaluable. It costs just over £6,000 per year to operate, financed mainly by our food boxes voluntary contribution and our honesty pot. We also receive an annual donation from Highley thanks Co-Op, and anything left is distributed within the village supporting charities and families in need including 21 swim passes and 25 children with swim lessons, subsidising primary aged children with at least one swim lesson. Finally, special thanks to our driver volunteers, without whom none of this would happen. 105266 kg (over one hundred tonnes!) of food waste was saved from landfill in Highley alone.

**Vanessa Postle (SYA All about Youth):**

SYA have been working with youth groups across the county, since June 2021 and have a partnership arrangement with HPC where they pay for 1 lead youth worker weekly on a Thursday night throughout the year (termtime). Jack Noakes has been a volunteer since day one along with volunteers Lisa and Jo. The young people carry out a range of activities including arts and crafts, cooking and games. We encourage the young people to plan and evaluate their own activities and hold issue-based discussions. A recent visit from the High Sherrif of Shropshire and councillors from HPC also attended. We also offer young leader training courses over 2 days to encourage and learn about the role of youth workers and eventually lead tasks within the group. We are also affiliated with the Friday event, sharing support and resources.

**Holly Lewis-Vale (The Gunner Lewis-Vale Trust):**

I am the proud mom of Gunner: The Gunner Lewis Trust was set up following our son’s diagnosis in March 2021of Mucopolysaccahriosis type 1, which is a skeletal sugar storage condition. Gunner has undergone two bone marrow transplants the first in 2021 and the most recent in 2024. We are pleased to say so far, the later has been successful. Unfortunately, this treatment is only a preventative to hopefully slow down the condition and as it currently stands there is no cure. Gunner has corneal clouding and a large prescription. Scoliosis in his spine, developmental delay, autism and suffers from fatigue and nighttime pain. However, he is currently thriving, and we are now focusing on making memories, enjoying Gunner and raising awareness for his rare condition. The support from our local community and in particular the Highley Parish council has been incredible and at times has really helped us through the darkest days of treatment and the thought of our inevitable loss. Not only have they generously donated time to organise two Christmas events in aid of the trust which has provided funds for the trust but have arranged for him to see Father Christmas even during the days when we couldn't be around others following his intense chemotherapy. The most amazing honour of turning on Highley Christmas lights with us which his sister and I will cherish forever. The trust is there to help us give him the best possible life and to pass onto his sister one day to continue in his memory. So, we are very grateful for Highley Parish councils ongoing support and for helping us feel a part of the community and so supported on our journey.

**If there are any errors or omissions, please contact the Clerk immediately. Minutes to be agreed at Annual Parish Meeting 2026**