

Chairmans Report 2022 to 2023

This year has seen us now return to some resemblance of normality after the Covid pandemic. We are now back to meeting face to face but have facilities in place now for remote access to all for our regular meetings. This remote access is proving to be very useful for Councillors and guest alike and is ably supported by Councillor Sidwell.

Our web site has also had a spring clean and draft meeting minutes are posted within 7 days of the date of the meeting. Relevant notices and community advice are also posted and regularly updated on the website. A big thank you to Councillor Anderson for his time and expertise in facilitating this.

Planning has again taken up a great deal of our time with the continued progression of the Replacement Local Development Plan. We have continually canvassed to change to Plan of employing a high growth strategy to a low growth one, which has now in part been successful.

Across the County housing numbers have been reduced but the policy does still focus development on the Chepstow and Severnside Area, arguing that there is sufficient infrastructure in place to support such development. We continue to actively argue against this assumption. Individual Candidate development sites have now all been submitted by developers, and we have commented on those that impact our villages either directly or indirectly.

We continue to review local Planning Applications, always endeavouring to protect our special environments whilst not being resistant to change or blocking developments unnecessarily.

We continue to challenge respective statutory authorities responsible for protecting our environment and the interests of our community. We have found that without regular and active challenge these bodies are not minded to pursue contraventions of regulations and Planning Laws. This continues to be a very frustrating part of our role.

Local drainage issues continue to be a focus of our concern. The maintenance backlog on road gullies was addressed but without regular cleaning past issues will reoccur. This will remain an ongoing matter, particularly with the ongoing challenge of mud and debris on our roads which regulatory bodies seem disinterested in addressing.

We have identified that the sluice gates at St Pierre Pill, the outfall for Moun-ton Brook, are not working to their full potential due to vegetation overgrowth and one gate is broken. We are pursuing Natural Resources Wales to get these replaced as a matter of urgency as the outfall rate of the brook is currently compromised.

Speeding through our villages has been a major concern of residents for many years now and a 20MPH zone has now been introduced through Mathern Village. Hopefully this will slow traffic down considerably but is an area that we will closely monitor with residents to see if any additional speed calming measures are needed. All our villages continue to suffer from being used as 'rat-runs' due to the impact of congestion at High Beech roundabout, which again we are pursuing authorities to address.

Through grants we have been able to support local groups, any grants being awarded and vetted based on the broader benefit they bring to the community. This year we have supported the Village Hall purchase gazebos, the Athletic club replace outside benches and tables and Villages in Bloom to replace tired planters.

Our finances remain in a strong position as supported by the Wales Audit, auditing process.

We have held our first Community Coffee Morning since the Pandemic which was relatively well attended. We are keen to maintain these events to engage with the Community. The greater support for these events, the better we can, as a Council, be in making sure we address all issues of concern to the Community. Councillors full contact details are displayed on all our notice boards and on our website.

I would like to particularly thank County Councillor Louise Brown for all her hard work looking after to interests of the community at County Council level. We have worked collaboratively with Councillor Brown, who has worked extremely hard to pursue matters with us and has been a tremendous support throughout.

All within the Community have enjoyed the respectful way in which the war memorial has been lovingly presented and cared for and I must thank Chris and Carol Wheeler for their continued hard work and dedication to this valuable and respected memorial. The 2022 Remembrance Service followed that of 2021 and was particularly well attended event with families and residents young and old.

I am very grateful for the professional support and guidance I have received throughout the year from our Clerk, Jane Kelley. Jane has been a great support to me personally and offers challenge and support in progressing issues. Jane also helps ensure that we stick to process and provides support through her wealth of knowledge in this role.

Similarly, Councillor Carolyn Ovenden has been a great support to me as Vice Chair, offering her years of experience and providing constructive challenge to our decision making.

Councillor Ovenden has also invested significant time in supporting the reviewing processes and policies on behalf of the Council. These are often hidden, thankless tasks that people do not generally recognise but take a huge amount of time. I thank Jane and Councillor Ovenden for their tremendous support and guidance in this respect.

I thank my fellow Councillors for supporting me over the past year, support that is essential and hugely valuable. I look forward to 2023-24 and look forward to working with my fellow Councillors ensuring we protect, support and enhance our community as best we can.

Yours

David

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Chair of Mathern Community Council