

Minutes of the AUST PARISH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

Held on Tuesday 13th April 2021 at 7:00pm

Via the Zoom video conferencing platform

Present:

Catherine Collinson, Chairman of Aust Parish Council – in the chair

Matthew Riddle & Keith Burchill – Severn Vale ward members, South Glos. Council

Emma Pattullo – Clerk

14 residents

1. Approval of minutes from the previous parish meeting held on 9th April 2019

Cllr Collinson welcomed attendees to the meeting and explained that no parish assembly was held in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Over the past year, we have all become more used to using Zoom and similar ways of communicating, as so she was pleased to be able to call an assembly this year using this technology.

The minutes of the 2019 parish assembly were therefore presented, agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

2. Annual report by Catherine Collinson, Chairman, Aust Parish Council

Cllr Collinson gave the following report:

“What has happened in the last two years – seems a long time, doesn’t it?”

Councillors and Staff

Cllr Ian Jenkins was welcomed onto the Council in July 2019 replacing John Pullen

Cllr Shaun Sutton was welcomed onto the Council in November 2019 replacing Ron Gwyther. Shaun was subsequently replaced in March 2021 by Cllr Jeremy Warren.

Kath Godden resigned as Parish Clerk in January 2020. A recruitment campaign was started but then had to be put on hold because of the pandemic and was re-started in June 2020. Emma Pattullo was finally appointed in August 2020. In between January and August I filled in as Clerk, and as a consequence learnt a great deal about what it meant to be a Clerk, and exactly how many emails they get each day. During that period the Parish laptop also died and had to be replaced.

Emma came to us from Oldbury Parish and so comes with a lot of experience, for which I am very grateful.

I would also like to thank all the Councillors for the support they gave during this time and during the pandemic. None of it has been easy!

Meetings

Since May 2020 the Council have been meeting via Zoom. This inevitably caused some challenges to begin with, but we all got used to it – including having to rejoin after 40 minutes because the Council only use the free option.

Remote meetings will no longer be legal after 7th May 2021 because the Government have not renewed the legislation allowing remote meetings. Our May 2021 meeting will be held a week early in order to beat this deadline, but we are still considering how best to conduct meetings in the future. Any thoughts from residents would be appreciated.

Planning

The major work of the Council, and the influence it can bring to bear on South Glos Council remains responding to Planning Applications. The number of applications during the years are as follows:

Over the course of the two years Aust PC has commented on 25 applications submitted to South Glos Council. Of these the PC actively supported one (an old barn to be converted); objected to 5 (all new buildings in the greenbelt) and did not object to the remainder.

Of the 25 applications South Glos Council has not yet reached determination on 5; refused 1 and approved 13. A further 6 were withdrawn by the applicants, and it is likely they would have been refused.

The Council also keep an eye on past planning applications and irregularities and do, from time to time, refer issues to South Glos Council for Enforcement.

Aust Defence Works

Work has commenced on the Flood Defences. If residents are interested please look at their website (<https://www.insouthglos.co.uk/enterprise/avonmouth/flood-ecology/>) to see exactly what is being done/has been done/is being planned to be done.

This quote from the website describes some of the progress so far:

Our achievements so far include substantial new earth embankments alongside Passage Road near Aust. The new, larger embankments replace the existing lower flood defence to further reduce flood risk to the area.

As well as flood defence, the improvements also provide the opportunity for people to walk near the coastline to discover nature from vantage points overlooking the Severn Estuary.

Planning applications are being put in when required to deal with any changes, and the Council will be looking at one such application tonight, dealing with minor, non-material amendments.

An additional thing to come out of the flood defences is that it seems to have moved on the caravans/vans that were parked up on Passage Road.

Membership of Groups

The Council continues to be represented at the Community Engagement Forum, the Town and Parish Council Forum and Oldbury Site Stakeholders Group.

Finances

The PC's income is derived almost entirely from the Precept which in the year 20/21 was set at £5,341 and in the coming year 21/22 is set at £5,369. The main expenditure is the Clerk's salary, and obviously in 20/21, since we were without a Clerk for a proportion of the year, a chunk of the budget went unspent. This enabled us to keep the precept at a similar level for this year, and to build up some reserves.

Other significant expenditure are the grants to the three Parish Churches which are made each year (£440/church), the new laptop purchased in 2020 (£450), subscriptions, training, insurance etc.

WECA – West of England Combined Authority and Spatial Plan

I'm sure Matthew may touch on this, but the basic position at the moment is that the West of England Spatial Plan was rejected by Planning Inspectors with a recommendation that the plan was withdrawn.

WECA are now working on a Spatial Development Strategy which is in the very early stage and South Glos Council are working on a new Local Plan 2020 which will include a new strategy and policies to guide and manage growth and change in the area over the next 15 years. Aust PC will contribute to this and respond to consultations on this where appropriate, as we respond to other consultations where appropriate.

Moving Forward – challenges for the year ahead

Woodwell Meadow

A resident raised a query about work done in Woodwell Meadow and whether that had affected the badger setts there. This has led to a realisation that the Management Plan drawn up between South Glos and Aust for the management of the Meadow needs to be updated and work is now being carried out to ensure that the plan properly reflects what is needed to keep the Meadow at its best.

Littering Problems at Aust

Residents have raised concerns about littering in Aust, particularly around the Service station and volunteers regularly litter pick there. The Parish is considering what can be done, and whether we should perhaps purchase another dog waste/litter bin. Not as simple as it might sound, since South Glos Council will charge us for the emptying/ maintenance of the bin.

M48 traffic

Since the removal of the tolls there was a concern that traffic would significantly increase, particularly through Elberton. Whilst the traffic has been light throughout lockdown, we will keep an eye on this as traffic levels return to normal.

Enforcement

We have been informed that we shouldn't publicise enforcement issues we raise until they have been determined, so won't let you in on the details, but Aust are looking at several sites to assess whether they are being used for the proper usage, meeting planning conditions, and what can be done about noise issues etc."

Residents then raised questions about the flood defence works at Passage Road, these are covered in section 4 below.

3. Annual report by Matthew Riddle, Ward Councillor, South Glos Council

Cllr Riddle gave the following report:

"Thank you for the invite to Cllr Keith Burchell and I this evening. Keith is the other Cllr for the Severn Vale Ward and we work closely together on Aust Parish matters. At the last SGC election in 2019 a new ward was formed called the Severn Vale Ward which is two Cllr ward. Previously the Severn Ward was a single Cllr ward which included Aust, Olveston, Oldbury, Hill and Rockhampton Parishes, which I had represented since 2003. The new Severn Vale Ward now includes Alveston and most of Almondsbury Parish.

Keith is the Chair of the Councils Planning Committee and also sits on the Licensing Panels and I am a Lead Member on the Council's Scrutiny Commission and the Budget Task Group.

This year has been a year like no other. The pandemic has had a big effect on the lives of the residents of South Gloucestershire and on the workings of South Glos Council. I would like to start by thanking residents in Aust Parish for the way they have rallied around and provided support to their neighbours and communities. The Parish Council has done very well too, quickly embracing this new technology and holding online meetings quickly. None of Aust Parish Council meetings have gone viral, which is a good thing!

In terms of South Gloucestershire Council services, the Council has been extremely busy delivering food parcels to those who had to shield and channelling government grants and other financial support to residents, organisations and businesses. The collection of the green bins was scaled back early on and Sort-It centres closed, as staff had to quarantine or be moved to essential services within the Council, but quite quickly these services came back on stream. Despite Covid 19 recycling rates remain some of the highest in England.

The Council finances have been greatly helped by large grants directly from the Government as Council income fell and costs increased, because of the effects of Covid 19. Due to this help last

year, it has allowed the Council to set a balanced budget in February for the next two years, with a 5% increase in Council Tax. 2/3rds of this increase is to increase spending on services for elderly people and those younger with learning difficulties and disabilities. The number of older people in South Gloucestershire continue to rise and therefore these services need to be grown.

The new Local Plan has had its first consultation and officers are now working through those responses, before going out for further consultation later this year.

Locally, Whale Wharf continues to be a place of interest for us and so does Green Acres in Aust, and we are both keeping a close eye on both of them.

Sadly, Ash Die-Back disease is taking hold in our area and SGC has recently cut down many local diseased trees that are on verges, but have replanted with different species.

Longer term, with increasing sea levels, the banks between Aust and Sharpness will need to be raised and Keith and I are campaigning for this work to be done. The banks are currently 9 metres AOD, protecting land behind them which is 6 to 7m AOD, so at high risk of flooding if the tide comes over. The work to raise the river banks between Aust and Avonmouth is well under way.

Keith and I are always very happy to be contacted by Aust Parish Council and Aust Parish Residents and will help wherever we can.

Lastly, I was very sorry to hear of the passing of John Pullin, for many years a member of your Council. When I was first elected John was never shy to ring me up and voice an opinion about an Aust village issue and over the years we worked together on many issues especially affecting Aust Village, in fact he rang me only 10 days before his passing, to tell me of a planning issue in the village. I know he is sorely missed in the community.”

Cllrs Riddle & Burchill then took questions on several related topics including calculation of the recycling rates and more details of the issues at Whale Wharf.

4. Open Forum

The following issues were raised by residents.

Passage Road – flood defence works & future management

A resident noted that works are not having a huge impact on local residents and that the construction staff are pleasant and co-operative. The removal of caravans from Passage Road has led to a reduction in anti-social behaviour. However, he raised several questions about what will happen when the works are completed.

Firstly, how will the new flood defence gates be controlled? They will need to be closed when there is a high risk of flooding; at the moment it is thought this will be done by Environment Agency staff. Residents would prefer to have a local key holder who could shut the gate on instruction from the EA.

Secondly, what will happen on Aust Ferry Lane, which has previously had problems with parking? The road will be narrower once the works are complete, and residents are concerned that if parking is still allowed, it could be difficult for emergency vehicles to gain access when needed.

Lastly, would it be possible to instigate a ban on overnight parking on Passage Road? This would give the police and SGC an additional means of dealing with any anti-social behaviour should be caravans return once the road re-opens.

Action: Parish Council to consider at future meeting

Speed monitoring in Elberton

Vehicle speed monitoring on the B4463 at Elberton is due to end soon. A resident asked what the results had been? Cllr Riddle agreed to obtain the results from SGC and pass on. Cllr Riddle also noted that the police beat team have been active in challenging HGVs using the route, which is subject to a 7.5 tonne weight limit.

Action: Cllr Riddle to obtain results of speed monitoring

Postal addresses in Elberton

A resident noted that the Royal Mail seem to have changed their official postal addresses of properties in Elberton so that the address is now given as Olveston rather than Elberton. This is causing many problems with deliveries, especially since there are some properties in Olveston which have the same names as Elberton properties. It is also a matter of pride in the village – residents are pleased to live in Elberton and do not want it to be written off the map!

Cllr Riddle suggested that this matter could be raised with SGC, who work closely with Royal Mail in determining addresses. He also suggested that it might be possible to tidy up the electoral register, to clarify road names and village names on there.

Action: Parish Council to consider at future meeting

5. Close of meeting

Cllr Collinson thanked all for attending and said how pleased she was that it had been a productive and well-attended meeting despite the online format. Residents were reminded that if they wish to raise matters with the council during the year, they are welcome to contact Cllr Collinson, the Parish Clerk or any other councillor to discuss.

Residents thanked councillors and the clerk for organising the meeting and for their work throughout the year.

The meeting was closed at 8:03pm.