

Minutes of the AUST PARISH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

Held on Tuesday 9th April 2024 at 7:00pm at Elberton Village Hall

Present:

Cllr. Steve Meredith, Chairman of Aust Parish Council – in the chair

Ward Cllr. Matthew Riddle – Severn Vale ward members, South Glos. Council

Representatives of Sustainable Thornbury group

Emma Pattullo – Clerk

14 residents

1 Approval of minutes from the previous parish meeting held on 11th April 2023

Cllr Meredith welcomed attendees to the meeting.

The minutes of the 2023 parish assembly were presented, agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

2 Speakers' presentations

Speakers from the West of England Rural Network "Village Agent" scheme and the local Police beat team had been invited but did not attend the meeting.

Danny Bonnet and Melinda Evans from the Sustainable Thornbury climate action group gave a presentation on proposals for a community energy scheme.

Danny and Melinda explained that South Glos. Council (SGC) declared a "climate emergency" a few years ago and one of the actions they have taken as a result has been to put in place support for community energy schemes. The Sustainable Thornbury group are investigating whether a community-led scheme to promote renewable energy of some kind could be put in place in or around Thornbury.

The type of energy generation has not been decided – it could be solar power, wind generation, heat pumps or some other method. It may be one big generation site, or split across a number of small scale installations. The aim would be to not only generate 'green' electricity but also to provide social and/or economic benefits and increased biodiversity.

An open workshop is taking place on 27th April to look at options and ask the community what they might like to see; residents were invited to attend. More details of the workshop and the community energy proposals can be found at <https://www.sustainablethornbury.org/>.

3 Annual report by Steve Meredith, Chairman, Aust Parish Council

Cllr Meredith gave the following report:

"The parish council started the year with an election. David Spratt, Jeremy Warren, Ian Jenkins and myself were elected, leaving three vacancies. These have since been filled by co-option with

Anne Wiseman, Heather Bayston and Jeremy Cooper joining the council. I would like to thank all the parish councillors for the efforts over the year, and also Emma, our clerk.

Planning matters, as ever, have been under consideration. It has been a relatively quiet year for planning, with 15 applications considered. The biggest planning issue has been the application for a change of use at Whale Wharf Business Park to develop an addiction treatment centre. The council held an extra meeting in August, in Littleton, to discuss this. Although the parish council recommended refusal, the application was eventually approved by SGC in March.

We have also responded to consultation on the SGC Local Plan. The proposed plan will mean considerable changes for the county, though hopefully not directly in Aust parish. Parts of the Green Belt are under threat, with proposals for development on some green belt land including in Olveston.

On highways, the council has also looked at issues of speeding around the parish. Matthew Riddle has put forwarded requests to SGC for speed control measures along the A403 and Main Road, Aust. Councillors also met with National Highways to discuss matters including congestion around Aust roundabout, and the ongoing closure of Sandy Lane tunnels. The congestion problems have eased recently since National Highways stopped the practice of filtering high sided vehicles off the bridge during high winds. Sandy Lane tunnels are still closed, but works have finally started.

The council has tried yet again to get repairs made to the cycle lane from the north side of the B4461 down to the tunnels. Unfortunately so far this has not been successful as SGC and National Highways both say it is the other's responsibility.

Other successes of the year have included a successful application for grant funding from SGC towards village events to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles. Elberton held a community picnic, Littleton had a Coffee and Prosecco morning, and Aust's share of the funds were donated to the village hall.

The council has made small grants to various charities (SARA, CPRE, the Air Ambulance and Thornbury Citizens Advice) and given financial support to the three village churches to maintain their churchyards as public open spaces.

During the year we also managed to re-register the White Hart, Littleton as an Asset of Community Value – which means that should it ever be put on the market, the community would have the opportunity to consider purchasing it themselves. Thanks to the many residents who provided evidence of what a well-used community resource the pub is.

One of our plans for the coming months is to look at formation of a volunteer group to carry out practical conservation work at Woodwell Meadows. The area is managed by SGC but anyone who has visited recently will have seen that meadows are becoming dominated by scrub, rather than the open meadow habitat. It is hoped that regular work parties could improve the management of the site.

The parish council will continue to represent the interests of residents wherever we can over the coming year.”

4 Annual report by Matthew Riddle, Ward Councillor, South Glos Council

Cllr Riddle gave the following report:

“Thank you for inviting me to speak. I will also pass on apologies from my fellow ward councillor Tony Williams, who has another engagement this evening.

South Glos Council also had elections last year, at which a new governing party took over the leadership of the council. I am now on the Scrutiny Committee, which oversees and challenges the operation of the council to help with better decision making. I am also a representative on Avon Fire Authority, the Oldbury power station stakeholders' group, and the Lower Severn internal drainage board.

Planning matters are always important to me and I have looked particularly closely at bigger applications in the area including the one at Whale Wharf. The Greenacres site in Aust, which has been the focus of issues in the past, has been quiet recently but I continue to monitor issues around that site.

You may be aware that the coast around Aust has recently been designated as part of the King Charles III Coastal Path. A footpath is being created along the top of the cliff, where it will be fenced off from the fields. Natural England are leading on the Coastal Path project and will be responsible for maintenance of the fencing.

As Steve mentioned, I have requested speed reduction measures on the A403 near to Aust roundabout, including a reduction in the number of lanes coming off the roundabout. Unfortunately this scheme has to compete with others across South Glos for funding so we do not yet know if it will go ahead.

Also on speeding, SGC has deployed speed monitoring equipment on the main road through Elberton and has found that the average speed is 44 miles per hour, with 15% of traffic over 50 mph. The police will continue to carry out speed checks and will also stop any HGVs using the road improperly.

Littleton residents will know that planning enforcement notices have recently been issued against works at Whale Wharf. I have been pushing for action on these notices, at the moment the enforcement officers are trying to work with the site owner to rectify the problems. The Environment Agency have also been involved but so far have not identified any breach of waste regulations.

The SGC budget, like most around the country, is extremely tight with a lot of extra funding needed for children's services and adult social care. Proposed measures to increase income include the introduction of parking charges in the council's car parks, including those in Thornbury. The charges for green bin collections will also be going up.

One piece of good news is that recycling rates across the county have increased. We now recycle 60% of our waste on average, with a council target of reaching 70% by 2030. The soft plastic kerbside recycling scheme, already operational in parts of the county including Elberton, has been very successful and is to be extended. Anyone not covered by the extended area can still take soft plastics to local supermarkets for recycling."

5 Open Forum

Residents raised the following matters, which was answered by Steve Meredith and Matthew Riddle:

Q. Are the quoted recycling rates by weight or volume?

A. MR is not sure but will find out!

Q. Why is the composting site in Thornbury leisure centre car park closed?

A. MR - The site is run by volunteers and is still open sometime, though opening hours have been reduced since SGC has had to reduce the level of support given to the group.

Q. Will the new parking charges be payable in cash or online/via an app?

A. MR - This has not yet been determined. It may be either or both, or perhaps charged via number plate recognition cameras.

Q. Local roads are in a very poor state with lots of potholes. What is being done about this?

A. SM & MR - Highways are the responsibility of South Glos. Council. They are aware of the problem, which has been made worse by recent weather conditions, and are trying to prioritise repairs to the worst areas. Residents can report specific potholes and other highways issues using the SGC "Report It" online tool: <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/report/>. The Clerk commented that if residents are unable to access the online system, she can report on their behalf if they let her have details including the exact location.

6 Close of meeting

Cllr Meredith thanked all for attending.