

Minutes of the AUST PARISH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

Held on Tuesday 12th April 2022 at 7:00pm at Elberton Village Hall

Present:

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

Matthew Riddle – Severn Vale ward member, South Glos. Council

Emma Pattullo – Clerk

18 residents

1 Approval of minutes from the previous parish meeting held on 13th April 2021

Cllr Collinson welcomed attendees to the meeting.

The minutes of the 2021 parish assembly were presented, agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

2 Speakers' presentations

PC Will Price & PCSO Paula Perry, Avon & Somerset Police

PC Price gave a summary of current policing issues in the area. In particular:

- Levels of burglary have increased – residents were urged to take precautions such as leaving lights on time switches or asking neighbours to keep an eye on the property, especially if the householder is going away;
- Catalytic converter thefts are becoming more common;
- Anti-social behaviour – several incidents have been dealt with recently around the Severn View services. The problems at the turning circle beyond the Boar's Head, Aust seem to have decreased following a programme of frequent visits by the local beat team, supported by colleagues from the Bradley Stoke team. Residents can still report any suspicious behaviour or frequent vehicle visits to the area;
- Greenacres, Aust – there is currently no-one living on this site, though there have been issues with dumping of waste. Residents are again urged to promptly report any problems so that police can investigate in a timely manner.

The local beat team can best be contacted via the police 101 non-emergency number, or via 999 if there is a significant incident underway. PC Price stressed that the police cannot deal with what they don't know about – if unsure, please report something rather than assuming someone else will have done so.

Neil Derrick, SGC Trading Standards

Mr Derrick gave a useful talk on "Rogue Traders", who often prey on vulnerable members of society by pressurising them to commission work and then charging inflated prices for a poor-quality or non-existent job. Such scams are often focussed on property maintenance such as roofing or driveways. Rogue traders are often charming at first, but can quickly become threatening or controlling if they don't get what they want. They may make contact by knocking on doors, but there is also an increasing problem via online sites such as Bark or Checktrade. Rogue traders often return repeatedly to their previous victims, sometimes conning them out of many thousands of pounds.

Tackling rogue traders is a high priority for the SGC trading standards team, but they rely on intelligence provided by the public to pursue these criminals. The team work closely with the police.

Residents are asked to keep an eye on vulnerable neighbours or family members and to report any suspicious behaviour, which may include:

- Unsolicited visits or calls offering work, for example “I’ve just noticed you’ve got some loose roof tiles”;
- A small job growing much bigger when additional ‘problems’ are supposedly discovered;
- Pressure to agree to work quickly or without any background checks – a legitimate tradesperson is rarely available to start at very short notice except in an emergency situation;
- No ‘cooling off period’ offered – legally, for any agreement made in your home the trader must provide written confirmation of a 14-day ‘cooling-off period’ during which you may cancel the contract with no repercussions;
- Expecting work to be paid for in cash, particularly for larger amounts.

Any suspicions of potential rogue traders can be reported via the Citizens Advice national helpline on 0808 223 1133 or via the police non-emergency number 101. It would also be appropriate to call 999 if the rogue trader is on site, so that police or Trading Standards may be able to intervene immediately.

Tracey Kovacs, Cool Ventures Business Support

Ms Kovacs gave an introduction to the business support training offered by Cool Ventures. This is open to all residents of South Gloucestershire and is aimed at existing small businesses or anyone who may be interested in starting one. Up to 12 hours of free training and advice are available, funded by South Glos. Council. Most is offered via live webinars led by industry experts.

Subjects covered are wide-ranging and include: starting in business; marketing; social media; finance; HR and wellbeing; websites; developing a business action plan. More details can be found at www.coolventures.co.uk or by calling 08000 418293.

3 Annual report by Catherine Collinson, Chairman, Aust Parish Council

Cllr Collinson gave the following report:

“Good evening and welcome. It’s good to see you all back in Elberton Village Hall.

It’s been a difficult and challenging year for all of us and I hope that you and your families are well and that life is slowly beginning to return to normal.

It has also been a challenging year for the Parish Council. Parish Council meetings went back to physical meetings in May last year because Government legislation allowing virtual meetings expired, and there were times when it would have been easier to have had a Zoom call, rather than risking catching or passing on Covid. Other related meetings, such as Community Stakeholder meetings etc continued to be virtual, so it has been a mix and match year.

There had been no changes in Councillors or staff until very recently, when Cllr Andrew Learmonth resigned. His replacement will hopefully be co-opted this evening at the Council meeting that follows this meeting. I would like to record my thanks for the work that Andrew has put in during his tenure, and indeed to all the Councillors for the work and the hours they put in.

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. During the year a new forum has been set up which the Council has become involved in – the Severn Vale Flood Defence Group, made up of Parish Councils along the coastal route between Aust and Sharpness. Cllr. Warren represents the Council on this.

Planning

The number of planning applications has remained fairly consistent over the last couple of years – 14 over the last year, most of them quite small residential extensions. The Council objected to one, a new build in the green belt and the Council will continue to support South Gloucestershire in protecting the green belt around the villages. Whilst the Council didn’t object to most of the

applications, it frequently requested conditions be attached if the application were to be successful, to ensure that the work was in keeping with the area. Some matters were also referred to South Glos. Council for enforcement where the PC became aware that planning regulations were, or could have been, breached.

Finances

The PC's income is derived almost entirely from the Precept which in the year 21/22 was set at £5,369. The council also received £676 from the Community Infrastructure Levy, part of which was used to fund a new dog waste and litter bin in Aust.

Jubilee Celebrations

The Council has also been very successful in obtaining a grant from South Glos. Council for the Jubilee Celebrations which will take the form of an inter-village competition to be held on 5th June at the garden of The Boar's Head. Whilst the PC is not organizing the event, it is supporting it, and it will be good to have something to celebrate this year, so I hope all will do their best to attend, and I believe the organisers are still looking for volunteers if you are interested.

The Parish Council were also donated two oak trees which have been planted as part of the Queen's Green Canopy – "plant a tree for the jubilee".

Aust Defence Works

The following details are taken from the Environment Agency website:

"We have completed some sections of the new flood wall at Aust Wharf Road and expect to complete all sections by spring 2022. We have installed a section of new filter drainage system at Passage Road adjacent to the earth flood embankment which we have raised. Works are ongoing to raise sections of the road to tie in with the new defences. Excavation works have commenced at two of four new flood gate locations.

Improvements to existing earth embankments are in progress and set to be complete in autumn/winter 2022.

We will install new flood gates, one of which will be on top of the new road ramp at the northern end of Passage Road, near Old Passage. To deliver vital flood defences, works to construct flood ramps and associated structures will mean part of Passage Road will remain closed until Autumn 2022."

Woodwell Meadow

A significant amount of time has been spent trying to agree a new management plan with South Gloucestershire Council – one that will work effectively to maintain the flora and fauna in Woodwell Meadow, and will ensure the PC has prior knowledge of work being undertaken. Unfortunately, mainly because of staffing levels in South Glos., this is taking a long time to resolve, but progress is being made and eventually we anticipate having a meaningful management plan.

Other work

Examples of other areas that the Council have been involved in over the year are the Elberton Postal addresses (still ongoing), anti-social behaviour in parts of the Parish, traffic problems in various parts of the Parish which seem to be exacerbated by the increased traffic caused by the removal of tolls on the M48, and maintaining a watching brief on those two old perennial issues, Greenacres in Aust and Whale Wharf in Littleton."

4 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 me this evening. Keith is away supporting a family member who has a health issue and sends his apologies. Keith is the other Councillor for the Severn Vale Ward and we work closely together on Aust Parish matters.

At the last South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) elections in 2019 a new ward was formed called the Severn Vale Ward which is two councillor ward. Previously the Severn Ward was a single councillor ward which included Aust, Olveston, Oldbury, Hill and Rockhampton Parishes, which I had represented since 2003. The new Severn Vale Ward also now includes Alveston and most of Almondsbury Parish. Keith has represented the Almondsbury Ward since 2015.

Keith is the Chair of the Council’s Planning Committee and also sits on the Licensing Panels and I am a Lead Member on the Council’s Scrutiny Commission, Budget Task Group and the Climate Emergency and Children’s Social Services Standing Groups.

Despite Covid 19, recycling rates remain some of the highest in England at just under 60%. Well done to residents who do the recycling, supported and facilitated by SGC.

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.

The Council set a balanced budget in February for the next four years, with a 3% increase in Council Tax. One-third of this increase will raise spending on services for elderly people and those younger residents with learning difficulties and disabilities. The number of older people in South Gloucestershire continue to rise and therefore these services need to grow.

This is the first time ever that the Council has been able to set a balanced budget over 4 years. In the past a 2-year balanced budget has been achieved with deficits in the 3rd and 4th year. A 4-year balanced budget allows for more certainty and planning of services.

The new Local Plan has had its second consultation and officers are now working through those responses. One issue is the safeguarding (reserving) of land for 130-metre high wind turbines in the Severn Vale.

Locally, Whale Wharf and Greenacres continue to be places of interest in terms of planning and we are keeping a very close eye on both sites.

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 above Ordnance datum (AOD - a reference sea level), protecting land behind them which is 6 to 7m AOD, so at high risk of flooding if the tide comes over. A very big tide is predicted for 30th September 2023.

The work to raise the riverbanks 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.”

5 Open Forum

The only issue raised by residents was that of the current planning application for a carp fishing lake on land above Stock Farm, Stock Hill, Littleton.

A neighbour spoke about his concerns about the development, which included:

- Excessive scale and visual impact of the development;
- Development of buildings and hard standing areas in the green belt;
- Potential risk due to leaking or collapse of the earth bund holding in the lake;
- Possible impacts on local surface water drainage and groundwater systems;
- Possible ecological impact, particularly restrictions on movement of wildlife due to the otter fencing to be installed around the site;
- Lack of public benefit, as the development is intended for the use of a private syndicate.

Other residents expressed similar concerns and mentioned that there are other fishing facilities, including carp fishing lakes, within the area.

Parish councillors agreed to consider the comments made when they discussed the application in the council meeting which was to follow the Assembly.

6 Close of meeting

Cllr Collinson thanked all for attending.

The meeting was closed at 8:22pm.