

**POULTON PARISH COUNCIL
ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON THE 12th MAY 2025
AT 7.30 PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

Parish Councillors – Cllr. Collyer-Bristow, Cllr. Hyslop, Cllr. Gillibrand, Cllr. Davies
County & District Councillor – Cllr. Lisa Spivey
Poulton Playing Field & Allotment Charity – Cllr. Davies, Trustee
Poulton Village Hall – Hilary Antingham, Chair
Poulton Church – Ben Maxwell

No additional members of the public attended the meeting.

1. Chair’s Report – Poulton Parish Council

(Simon to forward)

2. County & District Councillor’s Report

Cotswold District Council

For part of the civic year 2024/2025 from May until November 2024, I was part of the CDC Cabinet, holding the portfolio of Communities and Public Safety. Much of my focus was on sewage pollution and flooding.

To that end in the build-up to our Sewage Summit, I held monthly meetings with the water companies serving the district (Thames Water, Wessex Water and Severn Trent), quarterly meetings with the Environment agency and met with several of the leading campaign groups working tirelessly to improve water quality in the District including WASP (Windrush Against Sewage Pollution) and Earthwatch, Citizen Scientists.

I know that many of you are passionate about this issue, and I would like to thank you for your continued efforts in protecting our precious landscape.

I hosted the Sewage Summit at the Corinium Museum on the 8th July 2024 where the water companies, the Environment Agency and WASP and Earthwatch presented the work they are doing and then there was a Question Time style debate in the afternoon with questions from the packed audience.

The event was very well attended, and I then took a report to Council in September 2024 with several recommendations on ways the District Council could have an influence on improving our waterways.

During that period, I also chaired a multi-agency working group looking specifically at sewage and flooding issues in Fairford and the surrounding parishes.

I also sat on the Cabinet Transform Working Group looking at how we can make up to £1.5million of savings each year over the course of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy period, whilst continuing to deliver services.

I continued to chair the Cotswold Safety Partnership and attended the Safer Gloucestershire partnership meetings.

I attended as many parish council meetings as I could and responded quickly to emails and case work requests.

In November 2024, I stood down from Cabinet at CDC in order to focus my attention on casework and the demands of the County Council where I was leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.

Financial pressure on Local Authorities has not abated over the course of this year, and indeed, many councils have issued Section 114 notices, effectively declaring themselves bankrupt, and others are in receipt of “Exceptional Financial Support” from government.

The Local Government landscape also dramatically changed with the publication of the English Devolution White Paper on the 16th December 2024.

This paper set out how the new Labour government sees the future of Local Government and whilst much of the Devolution element was as expected from the Labour general election manifesto, there was quite a degree of surprise about the Local Government reorganisation element which essentially asks that any “two-tier” authority areas like Gloucestershire reorganise to eliminate the District/City/Borough tier and form a unitary authority with one council overseeing all services.

For Cotswold District Council, this means that within the next 2-3 years, the council will cease to exist and its functions, both statutory and discretionary, will be picked up by a new unitary council.

Quite how this happens is yet to be finalised with Gloucestershire putting forward three proposals to government to consider:

1. A single unitary authority covering the whole of Gloucestershire
2. 2 unitary authorities largely dividing the county into an East and a West Council
3. A Greater Gloucester council with either 1 or 2 councils covering the remainder of the county

Final proposals need to be submitted to MHCLG by the 28th November.

In all scenarios, there is general consensus with all councillors that delivering good quality services where communities remain in contact with their council is key and the seven councils and their respective leaders are working to ensure that aim.

Closer to home, Cotswold District Council began the process of repatriating staff from Publica, with the first tranche of staff coming back to the council on the 1st November 2024. This included, planning, democratic services, communications, and HR. A further tranche of staff will be back in Cotswold District Council employ from this summer. This was following the recommendation from a Local Government Association Peer Review in 2023 and the decision made after change of control at Forest of Dean DC that they did not want to be part of the Publica model.

In amongst these big items, the day job continued, and I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight some of the great successes that hard-working council officers continued to deliver last year:

- 15 “Unsung Heroes” who have given outstanding service to their communities were celebrated at Full Council
- the Council introduced the LIFT scheme, securing over £1.3million in unclaimed benefits for those most in need
- Crowdfund Cotswold projects raised over £1.2million for local projects

- the UK SPF (Shared Prosperity Fund) and Rural England SPF supported community halls across the district to invest in solar panels and energy saving initiatives
- a new Cultural Strategy was published looking at the wonderful cultural offering the district has for residents and visitors
- HAF events were held in various Cotswold locations and the communities team held cost of living events and other community building days in partnership with other organisations and groups
- the flood risk team attended every home which had been flooded during the storms of this winter and plans are being established to alleviate further incidents
- 95% of planning applications were dealt with on time and the backlog largely cleared

Gloucestershire County Council

This year has again been a very busy time for the County Council and my focus has been taken up on local highways issues with much of the winter spent sorting out flooding as in the previous year. I have also assisted with issues on Adult social care and children's school placements, parking, and lots and lots of potholes and roads queries!

I was delighted to be elected as the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group at our Group AGM in May last year and have spent my time in that position leading on the scrutiny of the Conservatives in administration and whilst also ensuring that the voices of the communities I represent are heard and considered in decision making.

Much of this happens in the larger arena of the Full Council meetings where I have put and seconded motions and asked many public questions. I also sit on various committees and use those forums to push for better services and value for money.

This year I continued to serve on the Adult Social Care and Communities scrutiny committee which looks at Adult Social Care, Public Health, Trading Standards and Coronary Services. This is a fascinating committee, and we have looked at various topics including The Future of Adult Social Care commissioning in Gloucestershire, the CQC inspection of ASC, Healthy eating, hospital discharge, domiciliary care provision, suicide prevention and Adults Safeguarding.

I also sat on Corporate Overview and Scrutiny which looks at the County Council's corporate remit and scrutinises performance.

Huge amounts of time at local authorities have been absorbed in Local Government reorganisation and Devolution since the publication of the government white paper on the 16th December 2024. This means in a "two-tier" area like Gloucestershire, the expectation from government is that the District/Borough/City tier of local government disappears and a unitary council/s is established to deliver all services. In Gloucestershire there are currently three proposals for how this might happen:

1. A single unitary authority covering the whole of Gloucestershire
2. 2 unitary authorities largely dividing the county into an East and a West Council

3. A Greater Gloucester council with either 1 or 2 councils covering the remainder of the county

Final proposals need to be submitted to MHCLG by the 28th November.

In all scenarios, there is general consensus with all councillors that delivering good quality services where communities remain in contact with their council is key and the seven councils and their respective leaders are working to ensure that aim.

The County Council appointed a new Chief Executive, Jo Walker, who joins from North Somerset having spent part of her early career in Gloucestershire County Council. Jo brings a wealth of knowledge, expertise and is rooted in the county.

County Council Elections

The County Council elections took place on the 1st May, and I was delighted to be re-elected as your representative with a large majority.

The political make-up of the new council is:

Liberal Democrats 27

Reform UK 11

Green Party 9

Conservative 6

Labour 1

Independent 1

Here is an overview of some of the work I have been involved in as your County Councillor.

Budget for 2024/2025

Proposals put forward by the Conservative majority administration for a budget of £665million were passed in February. This represents a £49m increase in the budget compared to 23/24. Council Tax was increased again by the maximum allowed by government. It is made up of 2.99% increase on council tax and a 2% precept for adult social care.

Amendments by all three opposition parties were put forward, some were accepted including on flooding, youth provision and libraries. Unfortunately, some of the amendments I moved were not accepted which was disappointing as they were largely for things which simply are not being addressed such as a fund for pedestrian crossings where they are requested by communities, funding to begin the overhaul of the highways drainage network which is not up to scratch and has resulted in internal property flooding over this winter, and cycling improvements to encourage active travel in local communities, not just a focus on the cycle “superhighway”.

Motions to Full Council

Over the last year, I proposed, seconded, or spoke on motions on the following topics:

- Civic Pride in our Highways
- Tackling the backlog and under funding in the Criminal Justice system
- Budget amendments
- Community Cohesion

Highways Local Fund

I was delighted to support some very important schemes across the division. These included ensuring that many CCTV drainage surveys were carried out following the issues on highways flooding, extra “find and fix” team allocation to tackle potholes, securing the extensive re-surfacing in Silver Street, South Cerney and localised patching in various locations.

I will be looking at next year’s allocations shortly, so if there are any key areas you would like to see addressed, please let me know.

Build Back Better – Councillor Scheme

I received many applications for the remainder of my Build Back Better pot and was able to support many fantastic groups this year including Down Ampney Primary School, Meysey Hampton Guides, Ampney Crucis Basketball court, Poulton Parish Council Playground, Kemble & Ewen Playground project. I spent every penny of the money allocated which has meant that over the last 4 years, so many wonderful community led projects have benefited.

Liberal Democrats committed to continuing a community fund to ensure that grass roots projects are supported. Details will follow when the new Council is formed.

3. Poulton Playing Field & Allotment Charity.

New lease agreement between Cricket Club and PFAC was signed in November 2024 (replacing the previous agreement dated April 2001)

It is a 25 year lease (reviewed every 3 years) providing security of tenure to Poulton Cricket Club.

The Cricket Club raises all funds necessary to maintain the pavilion and the cricket field all year round. The PFAC Trustees are responsible for the car park area, meadow, and allotments.

The space we all know as Englands (that includes the closely mown cricket field, the meadow, and the allotments), the land itself is owned by the Official Custodian for Charities on behalf of PFAC and managed by PFAC on behalf of the village.

The Trustees have in place a schedule for mowing the meadow. At present dogs are allowed off lead in the meadow space only, dogs must be on leads on the mown area of Englands (the Cricket pitch) at all times. Owners are expected to pick up when on the meadow. I have been made aware by David Dunn that the Parish

Council have offered to install a dog bin at the kissing gate on the southern boundary and they will also organise collection.

The fence on the southern boundary has been replaced. The western boundary fence (between cricket field and meadow) is in a state of disrepair and will be removed this year.

There are tenants on all eight allotments. The old allotments fencing will be replaced in due course and the fence around the new allotments treated with preservative. The pile of earth/spoil by the allotments will also be removed this year.

The Cricket Club and PFAC Trustees are looking at alternative water sources (water tank and well) for use on both the cricket field and allotments.

4. Poulton Village Hall

Hilary Antingham, Chair of the Village Hall Committee, reported that there is a good team of nine Trustees including new members. The Village Hall is in a healthy financial state which acts as a resilience buffer, and they feel privileged to have this. Running costs are covered by bookings however, items such as the repair of the wall boundary with BT, has come from reserves.

Activities run at the hall have been successful particularly, the Curry Evening in January which was run by new people to the village.

A new communication group is being set up to help with dates for bookings to ensure that they do not overlap.

There is Summer Event on 28th June from 5pm.

Cllr. Hyslop asked if the Post Office on a Tuesday was going well. Ms Antingham said that it was part of the Outreach Services and would be a permanent fixture for the village.

5. Poulton Church

Ben Maxwell represented the Churchwardens. He reported that the Vicar had now retired, and it was felt that it would be many years before a replacement was found. He said that the church only has a small number of people attending, but the costs were £25,000 per annum however, half of this amount goes to the Diocese for a Vicar. He said that many churches without a Vicar, now refused to pay this amount. He asked that local residents support the church by adding themselves to the Church's Register of Electors.

Parking – The Churchgoers have had problems with parking on Cricklade Street. Most are elderly and infirm. They are not able to use the parking on Englands unless the Cricket Club (who rent the land) are not using it, which rarely happens, and they must arrange to use it. One Churchgoer recently had their car written off by a passing agricultural vehicle. The Churchwarden will discuss this issue with the Trustees next week at the Poulton Playing Field & Allotment Charity meeting. Cllr. Davies said that Englands has a secure gated system and CCTV in place as part of

their security arrangements. Costs have been waived for the church whenever they have used the car parking.

The Councillors and public attending then discussed the matter of flooding in the village. The flooding in November had a devastating impact on some residents in the Ranbury area of the village. The bridge at Ranbury is too small to cope with excessive rainfall and the increase in water from the Wheelers Rise development. Cllr. Davies said the bridge's arch acts as a dam when there is excessive rainfall. The Chair asked what the answer was to this issue and both Cllr. Davies and Mr Maxwell said that a bridge at Ranbury without an arch would be the only real answer. Cllr. Davies also said that the promised extension to the bund would certainly help. He said that the attenuation pond which was put in at Wheelers Rise did not seem to be working properly and during Storm Bert it remained empty. Cllr. Davies has written to the Chief Executive at CDC regarding this. Mr Maxwell said that his property, which has been there since 1720, had not been flooded until the 20th century. He said that the footbridge on the public footpath was also too low, and water came up against the footbridge causing resistance. Cllr. Davies said that this had a knock-on effect on other properties. The Chair asked who was responsible for the infrastructures. Cllr. Davies said that it was:

Gloucestershire County Council – Footpath
Gloucestershire Highways – Bridge
Ditches and clearance – Cotswold District Council
Planning – Cotswold District Council

The Chair said it was a responsibility maze. Cllr. Spivey said that weather patterns have changed and Gloucestershire County Council lead on this with the Local Flood Authority and cascades to Cotswold District Council. She said that there would be a cost benefit analysis for a new bridge and the decision would be based on this. She asked everyone affected by flooding to use the Flood Online Reporting Tool.

<https://floodreporting.gloucestershire.gov.uk/>

The meeting closed at 9 pm.