**Coleford Town Council**

**ANNUAL ASSEMBLY 20TH May 2024**

At Coleford Town Council Annual Assembly held at Coleford Baptist Church, on Monday 20 May 2024 at 6.30 pm there were present:

Cllrs Mr N Penny (Mayor)

 Mr C Elsmore

 Mrs M Getgood

Mr P Kyne

Mrs M Cox

 Mr S Cox

 Mr R Dix

 Mr M Beard

 Mr R Drury

Ms Laura-Jade Schroeder Town Clerk & RFO

Also present was Debbie Sturgess

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr P Kay and Ella Beard

**3. To agree the minutes from previous Annual Assembly, 17 April 2023**

The minutes were proposed by Cllr. M Beard, seconded by Cllr M Getgood and agreed to be a true reflection of the meeting.

**Cllr. Penny signed minutes as a ‘true record’ of that meeting.**

**4. Matters arising from previous Annual Assembly, 17 April 2023**

Gigaclear works have skirted the town but not hit main town centre yet. They plan to be working within existing BT infrastructure and this may be why we haven’t seen any major works.

Monmouth bridge closure is still awaited.

**5. Mayor’s Annual Report**

Cllr. Penny welcomed those present and made everyone aware of fire safety.

**Annual Report**

Cllr Penny read the following Report (verbatim):

It is my pleasure as Chairman of Coleford Town Council to share with the community some of our work, and indeed highlights of the last 13 months. As 2023 was an election year we said goodbye to some Members, welcomed back some old faces, and through co-option have been able to bring fresh ideas onto the Council. Sadly, once again the wards of Coleford were not contested, in fact only 2 wards across the whole of the Forest of Dean were contested at Town and Parish level – a very sad state of affairs.

The year started with a Royal Visit when HRH The Princess Royal, along with members of the City Council of St Hilaire de Riez joined us for the official naming of St Hilaire Avenue and Sion Place – a wonderful occasion that resulted in Kerri joining us as a Councillor!

Through our twinning we were able to support a visit to St Hilaire de Riez of the Coleford Community Choir in June 23 and the Drybrook U18s Rugby Club at Easter (24) for the annual international match – sadly the trophy stayed in France this time! We also welcomed visitors from our twin town to Coleford for the annual Music Festival and Charity Dinner – true evidence of the strength of friendships between our towns.

Events continue to feature strongly within our work, and we were even quoted on Escape to the Country this year as “The Event Centre of the Forest of Dean” – I’ll take that. It is thanks to our amazing volunteers that we are able to host such a varied and successful events programme including the annual Carnival of Transport, Morris Festival, Music Festival, Christmas Lights, St Georges Day and Remembrance events to name just a few.

Through our annual Pride of Coleford Awards we were once again able to recognise some of the fantastic voluntary work that takes place in our community, and this year it was my great pleasure to be able to introduce the Freedom of Coleford award and present it to Cllr Clive Elsmore for over 34 years’ service to the town. Thank you Clive.

It is nice to have been able to go back to hosting a Charity Dinner and fundraising for a local charity. This year, my chosen charity is Great Western Air Ambulance Charity, and it is as much about raising the awareness of them being our local Air Ambulance as it is about raising funds – that said, through the combined efforts of the community we have raised over £7000 since I launched the campaign in September – and if anyone comes up with a suitable challenge for me to complete before this September, we may be able to get that figure nearer to £10,000 which would be superb.

The year ended on a high in terms of publicity for our small town, brought about through the selection of Olly Alexander to represent the UK in the Eurovision song contest – whatever your views on the competition, a lad who grew up and was educated in our town, got to perform to a global audience of over 160 million people. This meant that the spotlight was on Coleford and our schools, traders and wider community did not disappoint - seizing every opportunity for publicity. We had coverage from BBC Points West, BBC News Channel, BBC Radio Gloucestershire and BBC Radio in the West, HTV, The Citizen, Gloucestershire Live, the Western Daily Press, the Forester, Review, Monmouth Beacon and the Ross Gazette that I am aware of. We also have the promise of follow up news articles about the town’s independent businesses from HTV News.

As your Mayor I continue to work hard at maintaining relationships with our major employers within the town. We now have strong links with SPP who regularly support the work of our community volunteers, and continue to engage well with Suntory Beverage and Food GB&I who openly brief me on both positive and negative news within their business.

I believe it is also important to foster strong relationships with our schools, and once again this year we have been able to involve the Children from St John’s Academy in our Remembrance, Eurovision and Christmas events, Coalway Junior School in our Christmas Events, and the senior student team from Five Acres High School in Remembrance, the Pride of Coleford Awards, St George’s Day and my Charity Dinner, as well as wider representatives from the school in our Music Festival and Christmas event.

Looking at Planning for a moment, between the 2011 and 2021 census the population of Coleford has grown by 10%, now standing at 9275. We will see further growth through the completion of the former Sonoco site on Tufthorn Avenue, the Ellwood Road development in Milkwall, North Road Broadwell and the proposed 140 houses on the Poolway Farm site. Our planning committee under the chair of Cllr Marilyn Cox, looks at every application diligently, and seeks compliance with our Neighbourhood Development Plan and mitigation through conditions where possible.

Through our Environment Committee we have seen additional trees and hedgerows planted throughout the parish, have regular volunteer working parties in Coleford Cemetery, and actively support the more strategic climate change work of the Forest of Dean District Council. A tree policy has also been adopted by the Council – helping us to manage our environment more effectively.

The restoration of our Clock Tower is gaining momentum with the Listed Building Consent application expected to be determined any day, allowing us to move forward with detailed plans to enhance the public use of the building and restore some of its original features. Having the Listed Business Consent in place will also allow us to commence the process of applying for funds to deliver the project.

Regeneration remains high on the Council's agenda, and following the securing of £50,000 from the UK Share Prosperity Fund that I reported on last year, we have been able to appoint Chris Jones Studios to lead our work in this area. Over the coming months we expect to see new signage, agree a youth strategy, and progress items within our Active Travel priorities. It was pleasing to see credit given to Coleford in the following areas in the recent Flying Geese (FoDDC consultants) survey on the Forest’s market towns:

* Artisan and Independent Businesses
* Events and Tourism
* Walking and Cycling

I hope you agree that this is evidence that our work, and that of our community, is being noticed.

Public Safety remains firmly within our priorities with Marilyn and I regularly joining multi-agency meetings focusing on anti-social behaviour in the community. More recently we have engaged with residents in Broadwell around the concerns of safety on the Broadwell Bridge Crossroads and Marilyn and the Highways Committee will keep this very much on their agenda. Our resilience plan, that came into its own during the early stages of the pandemic, has been reviewed to ensure it remains current should we need to enact it in the future.

It is my opinion that over the coming year we must keep a very close eye on possible planned changes to Fire and Ambulance service provision in the Forest of Dean. We will fight to retain a strong presence here in Coleford.

We have seen changes within our staffing team – Chris Haine moved on to take up the role of Chief Executive Officer for GAPTC, Laura-Jade was successful in her aspiration to take on the role Chris vacated, and we were fortunate enough to be able to promote LJ to the role of Assistant Clerk, allowing us to recruit a new Administration Assistant and welcomed Lisa to the team in April. I firmly believe our staffing team is the strongest that I have ever known it to be, as evidenced by an exemplary internal audit just a few weeks ago.

In the latter part of the year, we were given the challenge of finding new premises for the Council following the decision by our landlord not to renew our lease. This brings huge opportunity to unite the staff team with our wonderful TIC volunteers when in the coming weeks we complete the move and open our new TIC premises in Mushet Walk. Having taken the lease on the first floor of these premises also, we have the opportunity to explore what additional services we can bring to the town, perhaps even expanding our offering for young people building on the fantastic work of Katy Virgo from the Forest Youth Association who has grown the regular attendance at the weekly young hub from 6 or 7 to 30 plus!

I would like to end with some thank you’s:

To Laura, LJ, Ella, Lisa, Jo, Janice and Katie – my sincere thanks for all of your hard work in supporting the council to serve our community – with each of you regularly going above and beyond in your roles. This has been an exceptional year in terms of embedding robust systems in all that we do.

To Marilyn Cox, my Deputy Mayor, who has been there to support as required, taking the Chair at meetings as necessary, and representing this Council professionally in all that she does. Marilyn regularly picks up day to day issues and resolves them before I am even aware that we have the issue!

To our Members – each of you so freely give of your time to serve the Parish of Coleford. I also thank the many of you that sit on external bodies and charities on behalf of this Council – giving many more hours of your time to our community.

Finally, I would like to thank our parishioners for their ongoing support of this Town Council, our work in the community, and to myself as your Mayor.

**6. Annual Review & Monitoring of the Coleford Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)**

To see Cllr. M Cox’s report attached to these minutes, at Appendix A.

The NDP is a community led review. It is important to reflect views of the community in the review.

**7. Matters Relating to Parish**

Debbie Sturgess wanted to thank the staff for their service, and excellent and prompt responses, especially LJ. She said it is a shame that she is the only member of the public tonight to hear all the hard work the Council does. This meeting was not advertised on the Facebook page, but was on the website. The public is not notified about a lot of the work CTC undertakes. Could the work be promoted to capture the resident’s attention? Improving communications with residents could encourage more people to attend. Cllr Penny responded to say that communication is being looked at more specifically within an office role in the near future, and we know that this is an area where improvements can be made, and we are working on this.

Cllr M Cox said we need to keep an eye on gateways in town. Changes are occurring. We know there are trees going up towards Forest Hills, but has this been talked about enough?

The Mayor thanked Parishioners for their participation and closed the Annual Assembly at **7:08pm**