**Coleford Town Council**

**ANNUAL ASSEMBLY 19TH May 2025**

Coleford Town Council Annual Assembly held at Coleford Baptist Church, on Monday 19th May 2025 at 6.00 pm there were present:

Cllrs Mr N Penny (Mayor)

Mrs M Cox

Mr S Cox

Mr R Drury

Mr D Stevens

Mr C Elsmore

Mr M Beard

Ms M Getgood

Ms Laura-Jade Schroeder Town Clerk & RFO

Also present was:

Sam Baggus

Janet Robus

Sherry Phillips

Lynn Teague

Shaun Freeman

Neal Harden

Lily Stinton

Alison Stinton

Pat Williams

Reg Williams

Trevor Beckett

Jules Evans

Nicky Hampton

Linda Fuggle

Derek Pawling

Sue Pawling

Ella Beard

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

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr P Kay, Cllr K Robbins, Cllr J Templeton, Cllr A Fullerton, Deb Hutchinson (Great Oaks Hospice), and Simon Jones (Forest Deli)

**3. To agree the minutes from previous Annual Assembly, 20th May 2024**

The minutes were proposed by Cllr. C Elsmore, seconded by Cllr. S Cox 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, 20th May 2024**

There were no matters arising.

**5. Mayor’s Annual Report**

Cllr Penny read the following Report (verbatim):

As I come to the end of my 8th year serving this Council as its Chairperson and the community of Coleford as your Mayor, it is my great pleasure to update on our work over the last 12 months.

The year started with a very busy period settling into our new offices, whilst also trying to continue with running all aspects of Council business – there were, and continue to be so many occasions, where our staff go above and beyond to balance the pressures of the day to day activities of the Council and seizing the opportunities to expand the work that we undertake. Our new offices, and the improved working environment, has allowed space for us to grow!

In order to better support our community with the decisions we take on your behalf, early in this financial year we reviewed our internal meeting structures and disbanded many of our committees, which previously saw only a few members debating important matters, and knowledge was therefore perhaps limited across the wider team. Rather than have numerous committee meetings, we all agreed to double our Full Council meetings to two per month, meaning members were volunteering more time, but this has resulted in richer debates, and increased knowledge across the board. We now have time to fully discuss the important matters and take actions more swiftly.

During the year we have welcomed Anne Fullerton, John Templeton and Dave Stevens onto the Council, all completing formal training at the start of their term of office. Whilst this training is not mandatory, we have the policy at Coleford that in order to best serve our community, we need to appropriately train our Members.

In July, we said a fond farewell to Ella as she retired from her role as TIC Coordinator. During her 8 years in the role, Ella embedded a fantastic asset in our community and developed an amazing team of volunteers. Ella, through a chance visitor through the doors of the TIC, was instrumental in the recruitment of her successor, Mic Smith. Mic brings a wealth of visitor and destination management experience, having held positions with Visit Bristol, and is a fantastic addition to our team, and has proved popular with our volunteers – it’s amazing what keeping a biscuit tin well stocked can achieve.

Following necessary works to improve the access to part of 4 Mushet Walk we were able to complete the Tourist Information Centre relocation in August. This has already proved an extremely positive move in terms of increased footfall, wider services being delivered, and even being able to support by providing accessible toilet facilities to compliment those in the Railway Drive Car Park. My thanks to all of our wonderful volunteers, who, under the direction of our Coordinator Mic, provide such a warm and positive welcome to nearly 3000 visitors through our doors.

The Council’s relocation to 4 Mushet Walk has seen the occupancy and use of a prime site that sat empty for many years but still has so much potential through exploring a variety of uses for The Hive, the space on the first floor. To date we have hosted a two-day guitar show, a number of craft fairs, workshops and meetings in this space but we know, with improvements to its access, we could achieve so much more with The Hive. My thanks go to Cllr. Rob Dix for his drive and vision.

Your Council has responded to numerous consultations over the last 12 months – the Fire Service operational review, the Local Plan, Local Government Reform, Active Travel and environmental matters to name just a few.

We continue to proactively work on all matters relating to Planning in our parish. The Planning Committee have responded to 81 planning applications, attended and presented evidence at the Appeal Hearing for the proposed Greggs/KFC development, lobbied the local Flood Authority to ensure that historic matters affecting the town centre are managed, and where possible eliminated, through proposed new housing developments, and are now leading the review of the Coleford Neighbourhood Development Plan. My thanks to Cllr Marilyn Cox for her leadership and passion in this area.

Over the last 12 months we have awarded grants of nearly £14,000 to organisations based within, or supporting, our Parish. I’m delighted to be joined by representatives from some of those bodies we have supported this evening. Would anyone be willing to say a few words about the positive impact of the funding you have received?

**Coleford Grows** – Shaun Freeman spoke about the grant to refurbish the telephone box in Milkwall to turn it into a seed exchange. They also plan to include a magazine rack with various information in for people to use. Mayor Penny responded that this is a great example of community action through volunteers.

**Rotary Club** – President of Rotary Club Forest of Dean, Sherry Phillips, spoke about supporting families and children, particularly at Christmas time. The Great Train Ride idea was born. They approached the Salvation Army, Gloucestershire Domestic abuse services and Heart of Forest School, and asked for the names of people who would benefit. They were overwhelmed by the number of names put forward. They hosted 350 young people and their families - many from the Coleford area, providing transport for those that didn’t have it. The children went to Perrygrove, had a train trip, a visit with Santa, a small gift and lunch to have on the way home. CTC helped provide this. All children and families went home happy. The feedback was amazing.

**Music for Memories** – Trevor Beckett spoke about helping those suffering from memory loss, e.g. dementia, and helping to identify positive music memories to trigger good memories for them. Music is played through headphones or in end-of-life care, through a speaker. It was launched 1st March 2024, and they have 150 playlists and headsets for people already, given to individuals, the Coombs, the Elms, Great Oaks Hospice. 34 headsets have been given to the Coleford Parish. Linda is growing the work of the charity, working one day a week.

**Brody’s Trust** – Lynn Teague spoke about the work of Brody’s Trust - supporting children from birth with special educational needs buying equipment for 3 sensory rooms. This grant helped to set the ball rolling with other funders, match funding second-hand soft play equipment in good condition, so it saved £10k by buying second-hand. This was a huge bonus as they would have needed to raise £15k. CTC’s support is appreciated. They hope to open the doors in a small capacity in the autumn with an equipped blackout room. They have raised £90k of the £250k target, however this was before they began looking at buying a building. All are invited to come and look around to see what has been achieved. Mayor Penny responded that it is lovely to see how the relatively small amount we could grant can work through match funding and endorsement of CTC.

**Great Oaks Hospice** – Nicky and Jules spoke to offer thanks to CTC for the grant. They acknowledged that CTC supported last year with the wellbeing team and this year for the fundraising side. The community fundraises tirelessly, so it was nice to be able to thank them with t-shirts for the 3 peaks challenge. A package was given to people to say thank you for fundraising. They have been able to buy crash mats for the bouncy castle. It is lovely how a small amount of money can help and recognise volunteers.

Mayor Nick Penny wanted to note that people should not be afraid to ask again for funding again. We won’t fund the same thing twice, but new ideas and projects are always welcome.

We haven’t just given money out to our community; we have also worked hard to apply and secure grant funding to further the priorities of this Council and the wider community. Over the last 12 months we have secured the balance of the £50,000 UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Secured £50,000 from Section 106 funds for the Angus Buchanan VC Recreation Ground, Secured £8,000 Safer Street Funding for new CCTV equipment, £5,000 for cycle storage, £1,600 to support the Neighbourhood Development Plan review, and are in the process of receiving £17,000 to support additional youth provision within the parish in the former St John’s Ambulance building. That’s a total of £131,600 towards improvements for our town.

Public safety remains high on the Council’s agenda. We continue to lobby the County Council for safety improvements at Broadwell Crossroads and in February I Chaired a meeting with Gloucestershire Police and Gloucestershire Highways to challenge their response to recent incidents in that area based on the facts of what actually happened in each of the RTCs of the last 18 months. My thanks to the resident who shared valuable footage.

We responded to the Fire Service consultation around the Whole-Time crewing of Cinderford Fire Station raising our concerns about any potential impact on the service here in Coleford. We were given assurances that there would be no reduction in cover for Coleford and we will keep a close eye on that. I am working with our MP Matt Bishop to ensure there is no reduction in Ambulance service cover for our town, following concerning responses to a freedom of information request raised last year.

This Council listened to concerns of our young people and installed the first publicly accessible bleed control kit across the Forest of Dean, something I am pleased to see has been followed by other towns. And finally, I continue to meet regularly with Inspector Nick Cook to discuss anti-social behaviour and Police incidents in our town.

Since becoming Deputy Mayor in 2014 I have worked hard to ensure that our young people have a voice in our community and are involved in civic events. I am delighted to have launched our first Mayor’s Cadet scheme last November and would like to invite Lily to say a few words about their involvement.

**Lily Stinton** from the Mayor’s Cadets spoke about working with the wider community, cadets and girl guiding, and attending events in town. They are currently working on funding towards Talk Well and sponsored walk. They are a group of active youngsters in the community, represented through the scheme.

We continue to work with the Forest Youth Association through a service level agreement to provide a weekly youth hub, as well as many exciting opportunities for our young people including for a second year a group from Coleford attending the Fired Up training via Skill Zone.

Once again, this year we have been able to include our young people in key events such as Remembrance, D Day and VE Day commemorations, the Battle of Coleford, and the Pride of Coleford Awards.

Cllrs Melanie Getgood and Stuart Cox continue to guide our environmental work in the Parish and we regularly have volunteer working parties (Col-e-Vols) supporting the natural environment at the Angus Buchanan VC Recreation Ground, the Cemetery and Bells Field. We continue to work hard to try and implement active travel schemes for Coleford, and have taken significant steps forward these last 12 months in this area.

We are currently working with the Forest of Dean District Council on a Citizen Visioning project to facilitate our community to inform the priorities we should be taking to tackle Climate Change for our town.

Through our UK Shared Prosperity Funding we have continued to focus on our Town Centre Regeneration plan that was put out to consultation at the end of November. Through the development of that plan we have been able to implement a number of quick win projects which include improvements to our town map, including new installations of the map in Railway Drive Car Park and at Puzzlewood, a review and installation of improved road signage especially the brown tourism signs, and the creation of a town centre heritage trail with the first 4 ‘tiles’ shortly to be installed and a printed route of the central elements of the Coleford Hidden Heritage app to be introduced.

We have worked with HSBC to bring community banking services to the town and have now held 3 ‘pop up’ sessions at our offices in Mushet Walk – these continue to prove popular, and it is hoped that they will continue. Unfortunately, our application for a Banking Hub was refused on the basis that we have sufficient access to cash in our community.

Working with the Forest of Dean District Council, and the 3 other Forest market towns, we are excited to be contributing to our new Market Towns Officer role and we look forward to welcoming Catherine into post on the 1st July.

We continue to see the value of providing a vibrant town centre events programme for Coleford and we continue to financially support the Carnival of Transport, Christmas Lights, Coleford Area Walking Festival, Carols around the Christmas Tree, Coleford Music Festival, as well as organising, running and promoting so many more events in our community. Each year we try to bring fresh events to the town and this year we are pleased to see the introduction of Coleford Festival of Brass, the Emergency Services Showcase and the Coleford Food and Arts Festival.

Our twin town link with St Hilaire de Riez remains strong as we approach the 9th anniversary of our coming together. We recently hosted a Gospel Choir from the town, and with that visit alone, for every £1 that we spent to support the visit, the Coleford economy benefited by at least £4 with companies such as Bells Hotel, FR Willetts Coaches, Café Sixteen, Five Acres Rental all playing a part in the success of the visit.

At Easter we saw the return leg of the annual youth rugby exchange with 18 young people and 10 adults visiting Berry Hill Rugby Club for an international match. The local side regained the trophy after its short stay in France last year!

The last year has not been without its challenges:

In January 2025 – this town, and me personally, lost one of most loyal supporters with the tragic death of Michelle Kay which leaves a hole in the lives of so many.

The much-needed restoration of our iconic clock tower remains a challenging one to fund, with estimated works exceeding £500,000, and that is before we explore the opportunity for enhancements such as installation of a peel of bells.

Looking forwards our priorities for the next twelve months must be:

* To maximise the value and potential for Coleford from our new Market Towns Officer.
* To complete the review of the Coleford Neighbourhood Development Plan
* To progress our Active Travel corridor linking the town centre with the cycle trail into the heart of the Forest
* To find a robust way forward for the restoration of the Clock Tower
* To maximise the potential of The Hive and to move forward with the former St John Ambulance building projects
* We must celebrate our 10th anniversary of the TIC and thank our volunteers
* And finally, we must work to ensure we gain the best outcome for Coleford and our surrounding parishes through the Local Government Reform.

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

To Laura, LJ, Lisa, Mic, 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 once again been an exceptional year in terms of the further embedding of robust systems, which were once again praised by an exemplary Internal Audit completed a couple of weeks ago.

To Paul Kay, my Deputy Mayor, who has been there to support as required, taking the Chair at meetings as necessary, and representing this Council professionally in my absence.

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.

Thank you.

**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.

A question was raised re: Biosphere – Cllr M Cox responded that we have a say, but have to work within the general conformity. The recommendation that goes forward will be a designation, therefore there are rules that go with that. It is not the same as designations, such as SSSI. We should be involved though.

NDP is coordinated by the council but is not owned by the council – it is a community group. There is a real opportunity for members of the community to inform this.

**7. Matters Relating to Parish**

Shaun Freeman spoke as a union representative re: mid and low-level letter boxes. Cllr M Cox responded that the NDP Review can put forward a design code. Shaun will share the information from the union to inform planning policy.

Sam Baggus spoke about there being not a lot of support services for veterans and mental health support services. Mayor Penny responded that FoDDC are doing a lot of work to plug that gap. One of their community builders, Fran Palmer, is leading that piece of work around veterans. Mayor Penny will find that information and share with Sam. Mental health support with the Mycelium project funding is coming to an end, but Simon Price is working hard to ensure a structured way to ensure mental health support with continue. Mayor Penny will get further information on this to share. We will continue to fight for services on the ground here in Coleford and shouldn’t be accessing emergency support so far away in Gloucester. Jules to share information with Mayor Penny. We can signpost to support services.

Alison Stinton spoke re: Broadwell crossroads and the planning permission for 58 houses, and her concern for how it will affect residents and the crossroads. CTC will be looking at this through the Planning and Highways Committee. Following a meeting with Highways, an advance warning, e.g. rumble strips, was discussed. We asked for STOP junction, but have been unsuccessful. The housing application is for an area within the emerging Local Plan. It has outline permission, but not full details. Cllr M Cox advised that it is wise to put in comments from the beginning directly to FoDDC. Consider - is it possible to put houses there? Is that access adequate? The point around access is valid to look at. They will need to look at safety again at Broadwell Bridge. Mayor Penny asked residents to pay attention to planning consultations – public are the experts on their local areas. Traffic lights were ruled out as there are higher priority crossroads that would get traffic lights before Broadwell crossroads. Traffic lights will create rat runs that will also move accidents into narrower locations. Highways have said that on current evidence it doesn’t meet the criteria. We will continue to lobby on behalf of the public.

Jules raised safety concerns around the recent incidents in Coleford and cuts to PCSOs. Cllrs Penny and Kay met with Inspector Cook on the back of more incidents in the Coleford area. They were assured there is not a risk to wider public safety. It is targeted and related to drug use within the town. There has been an increased visible presence. Plain clothes operations and successful arrests have taken place on back of CCTV in town that we run on your behalf, which is supporting arrests and detection of crime. We will continue to challenge the police. The 4 Forest Town Mayors met with senior police officers., where they were assured, the cuts are necessary. The police have not evidenced this though. They are restructuring PCSOs cutting from 19 officers to 8, but increasing police constables to provide more warranted officers on streets to apprehend criminals. We will watch and challenge.

Shaun Freeman raised a query around live streaming Council meetings. Mayor Penny responded that we publicly shared links during covid, however there was significant noise interference and nobody was proactively engaging. There were active keyboard warriors, getting half a debate. We don’t currently have the technology in our chamber. We can bring to the June meeting agenda, if we have details ready by then for debate. All our meetings are public. All agendas are on the noticeboard, and everyone is welcome to attend. There is a 10-minute public space for members of public to raise comments.

The Mayor thanked Parishioners for their participation and closed the Annual Assembly at **19:10pm.**