

Ward Councillor Report: January 2020 – Happy New Year!

Meetings

I have attended the Viaduct Site Planning Committee, Employment Panel, 2 Scrutiny Committees, Budget Consultation workshops with Business and Councillors, Audit & Governance Committee Treasury Management briefing, and Cabinet over the period.

An invitation remains open for the Herefordshire Council Cabinet to visit Ledbury to meet with town councillors in order to discuss improved joint working, shared service provision, spending priorities in the Ledbury area and other local issues, if councillors are interested to pursue such a dialogue.

Planning

Viaduct Site (625 homes and 3ha employment land. Herefordshire Council planning application No: P171532 https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200142/planning_services/planning_application_search/details?id=171532) – On 11 December the Herefordshire Council Planning Committee refused this application on access grounds.

On 8 January Herefordshire Council was notified that Bloor have lodged an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate. The appeal inquiry is currently scheduled to be held Tuesday 28 April – Friday 1 May, and Tuesday 5 May – Thursday 7 May. I am hopeful that the inquiry will be held at a venue in Ledbury to enable local people to attend.

The outline timetable for the inquiry is as follows:

- 24th Jan – LPA to issue letters notifying of the appeal (by this date)
- 21st Feb – Statement of Case due
- 31st March – Proofs of Evidence due
- 28th April – 7th May – Inquiry Sitting days
- 23rd June – Decision expected by

The Town Council will need to decide what role it wishes to play in the appeal process. In doing so, it should be mindful that the inspectorate has already been notified of the possibility that the council will opt to be a full Rule 6 participant and that this is the reason for the extended inquiry duration. The number of full participants increases the complexity and cost of the inquiry for all participants and also brings with it the risk that the town council will share in any apportionment of legal costs as a consequence of the inquiry ruling.

For queries about the process/rule 6 parties, the case officer at Planning Inspectorate (PINS) is Leanne Palmer: LEANNE.PALMER@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

All the comments and submissions on this application which have already made by third parties do not need to be reiterated. They will all be provided to the inspectorate. Additional evidence and comment can be submitted in advance of the inquiry via the inspectorate website (<https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewCase.aspx?caseid=3244410>), or can be given in person at the start of the inquiry. The inquiry reference is: Planning Inspectorate APP/W1850/W/20/3244410: Land North of Viaduct, HR8 2QY

I urge members of the public and councillors to plan to attend the inquiry to show the level of local concern and to support ward councillors and the town council representative in opposing this appeal.

Consultations

Budget and County Plan: Following consultation on the draft priorities for the council's Corporate Plan, a round of detailed consultation on budget priorities and policies for the next 4 years of the council has been conducted and closed on 4 December (yesterday). The results of this consultation are available here: https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/consultations/article/10126/budget_202021_and_corporate_plan_2020-24_consultation

Hereford Transport Strategy: A new consultation was opened on 3 February on a Transport Strategy for Hereford. Details of the consultation can be found here: https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/consultations/article/10128/hereford_transport_strategy_review

BBLP Annual Plan: Ward Member consultation is open on the 2020-21 BBLP Annual Plan. Town Councillors are invited to let ward members know what you consider to be the priority works are for the coming year. My own in the North Ward include: maintenance of road markings; resurfacing on the Homend from Tesco to the station and in patches on the Bromyard Road. repair to the pavement surfaces; St Katherine's/Master's House public realm landscaping and car park resurfacing; drainage, path surfacing and tree works along the Town Trail and in the Queen's Walk Gardens, Residents' Parking Zones in Masefield Avenue, Queen's Court, Belle Orchard/Close.

County Council initiatives

Please see Leader's Newsletter (attached) with particular reference to the highlighted subjects:

- Initiative to encourage more Foster Families to come forward
- Internet Training for local people at Ledbury Library
- Support to Town Council on IT skills and improved web presence
- Tourism Forum and countywide Tourism Partnership
- Council Tax for 2020-21 – increase by 3.9%, continued 84% discount available under Reduction Scheme
- Improved financial procedures – which will include more transparent management of S106 monies
- Grant funding towards CCTV improvements in market towns
- Increased opening hours for the Ledbury recycling centre – summer and winter.

If councillors would like further information on any of the above initiatives, please contact me.

Councillor Liz Harvey

It's Our County – Ledbury North Ward Member – 5 February 2019

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Leader's newsletter

Welcome to my Leader's Newsletter. This monthly update provides an overview of the key activity that Cabinet Members and I have been involved in in the last month, and aims to keep you better informed on Cabinet and council activity. It is also intended as an aid to briefing your Parish Councils. I suggest that you highlight particular subjects which might interest your Parish Councils.

On 14th February the full Council will consider the Corporate Plan and Budget. This will be an important meeting.

Corporate peer challenge

The Local Government Association (LGA) conducted a peer challenge in February 2018 and paid the council a return visit in October last year. This visit was to assess how the council has progressed with their original recommendations – obviously a lot has changed between the visits so it was important to understand where there is continued room for improvement. The letter from the LGA is below, but in summary outlines there is a sense the organisation is moving forward and would encourage us to be confident in what is achieved. Relationships between members and officer are good and though members' training has been well received, it's now timely to identify next steps. LGA considered strategic communications needs to ensure corporate priorities are promoted and to promote what Herefordshire the "place" stands for. In addition, some aspects of corporate governance needs strengthening. The improvement areas are something we are aware of and have plans in place to address.



Herefordshire CPC
Follow Up FINAL.pdf

Budget and Corporate Plan Consultation

As part of the consultation on the budget and new Corporate Plan (2020-2024), we held a business and community conference. Stakeholders from across the sector engaged in an enjoyable and productive session to review the plan and proposed investments, identify any gaps and to help identify ways in which we can work better together to achieve the ambitions for Herefordshire residents. The plan was considered at the full cabinet meeting last Thursday.

NMiTE Growth Deal Underwrite Phase 2

In November the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership approved the second phase of funding to NMiTE to develop additional teaching facilities on the Hereford Enterprise Zone. We continue to work with the LEP, NMiTE and Shropshire Council (as the LEP's accountable body) to finalise the funding agreement to enable the project to proceed.

LEP Growth Deal Application Round

Following the LEP's call for Expressions of Interest for projects that could be funded through the Growth Deal, the council submitted six applications. It is understood that the LEP officers have assessed each application primarily considering deliverability. The LEP Board meeting on the 27 January considered which projects should be invited forward to the next stage. Three of the applications the council have submitted have been identified as low delivery risk, and have been invited to the next stage. These will compete for funding against other projects from the LEP area.

Children and families – Cllr Felicity Norman

There has been a cabinet decision approving the scheme to permanently expand Marlbrook Primary School which does excellent work with pupils and their families and also supports other schools in Herefordshire. Cabinet agreed £6.1m to be spent and the aim is to have the new works completed, including the discontinuation of temporary classrooms during the 2020/21 school year.

Two really useful conferences for education staff and leaders in Herefordshire took place in November, with representatives from schools and colleges- and a mixture of school leaders, safeguarding leads and governors attending. The first focused on contextual safeguarding, including peer on peer abuse. Delegates had the opportunity to hear from national speakers about the legal position, statutory guidance and to discuss in confidence issues they may be concerned about. Best practice was shared along with how victims and survivors felt and continue to feel.

We are campaigning to recruit more foster carers in Herefordshire and I hope you will join us in doing all you can to support this. There is more information at www.Herefordshire.gov.uk/fostering

Ofsted carried out a focused visit on the 18 and 19 December, focusing on Child in Need, Child Protection, peer on peer concerns, neglect, any issues the local authority wishes to discuss. This involved a huge amount of work for our children and families directorate and in particular our safeguarding and family support services. It is reassuring to note that no child was seen to be left at significant risk and all were receiving intervention. There were no priority areas for action. Ofsted recognise the continued challenges we face in recruitment and retention and that turnover of agency staff in particular affects the quality of work. However they noted that little progress has been made since the last inspection in terms of the quality of practice in our Child Protection/Court teams and that a number of areas are still to be resolved. The Directorate will continue to work to improve in these areas.

Ofsted recognised the investment that is taking place, the strong understanding of the service by senior managers, informed by a growing audit programme that accurately reflects practice. There saw gaps in supervision and recording. They noted the strong work in the Children with Disabilities team, including plans focused on the child's needs, packages of support tailored to their needs, social workers having a clear understanding of the child's needs and consistent guidance and reflection from supervising managers.

The feedback from Ofsted will help us to continue to improve our services, despite the significant challenges that we face. There is more detailed feedback on the [Ofsted website](#), which does not come with any change to our rating.

Please can I take the opportunity to remind councillors of their role as corporate parents. We all had training on this last year and your continued support is important. Also, visits to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and assessment team can be arranged to enable councillors to further understand the work of our children's safeguarding service and early help. Please contact Chris Jones, strategic business intelligence manager chris.jones@herefordshire.gov.uk who will arrange the details.

Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Trish Marsh

Internet training to help more people get online in 2020

Herefordshire Council, through its Fastershire team and library service, are offering free IT training for beginners to help more people get started with the internet and computers, as well as learning how to get the most from their smartphone or tablet. The training takes place monthly at Hereford, Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye Libraries with the aim of people become more confident with using technology and making the most of the superfast broadband network funded by the council. The training is free, and available for residents to book via the relevant library through a phone call or visit. For more information visit the [Fastershire website](#)

Digital Visits

Fastershire are offering support and advice to parish and town councils on a range of IT skills to help refine and increase their online presence. This is in response to more people going online to find information and parish / town councils wanting to involve and keep in contact with residents. These face-to-face visits can provide help and advice on websites, sharing information on line, the cloud, social media, email and online accounts. Visits are free- for more information visit the [Fastershire website](#)

Town Board

Hereford is one of 100 cities/ towns selected by government for Stronger Towns funding support (up to £25m). One of the requirements of accessing the funds is that a Town Board is formed to oversee

the development of a Town Plan, and developing a town plan. A date for the first meeting is currently being identified with Jesse Norman MP's office.

Tourism Forum

We helped sponsor the Marches Tourism Forum event, hosted by The Green Dragon, Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire and Rural Media in Hereford on the 21st January. Over 100 people attended from across the Marches with a range of high profile national and local speakers. The event went very well, and received very positive feedback. Building on this event we are working with partners across the county to explore the potential to establish a new countryside Tourism Partnership to help develop a very important local industry.

Finance and corporate services – Cllr Liz Harvey

Local Land Charges

The Local Land Charges office is a statutory service responsible for the maintenance of the Local Land Charges Register and the completion of Local Land Charge searches, based at [Hereford Archive and Record Centre](#) (HARC). The office deals with approx. 2000 official local authority searches per year and the register is also available for public inspection during normal office hours. The target for the turnaround time for searches is 15 working days – and the office has achieved 99.93% to the end of December. The current turnaround time is 6 working days.

Fees are established under a cost recovery process and are reviewed every three years as governed by The Local Authorities (England) (Charges for Property Searches) Regulations 2008. The fees are due to increase this April as part of the schedule of charges. More information is on the council's [land charges webpages](#).

The Pay Policy

The pay policy will be presented to Council on 14th February after being considered by the Employment Panel on the 13th January. The document meets section 38(1) of the Localism Act 2011 that requires councils to produce an annual pay policy statement that articulates the council's own policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce. The council adheres to the national pay bargaining for local government employees, including any negotiated annual cost of living increases and as outlined in the report the majority of terms and conditions are universal and apply to all employees, unless otherwise specified.

Agreeing and leading the process for developing revenue and capital budgets, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Council Tax and Business Rates

Following the election, Government confirmed the settlement details on the 20th of December, this helpfully provided the council with a small amount of additional grant that has been included in the draft budget that was presented to the three scrutiny meetings and will be presented to Cabinet on the 30th of January. We have received some very helpful feedback from a range of stakeholders which the Cabinet have considered very carefully when preparing the draft budget.

Financial policy, fees and charging policy, financial control and reporting

As part of the Audit and Governance team's annual review, they are considering a number of changes in our financial procedure rules that will help improve transparency and accountability for the public money we look after.

Infrastructure and transport – Cllr John Harrington

Hereford Transport Review

Following my decision last October to review the Hereford bypass (Hereford and South Wye Transport Packages, including Southern Link Road), officers have developed the review scope and a further decision on the review was taken on 23 January. The proposed review of the transport strategy for Hereford will include work to better understand existing and future road conditions, alternative transport options and the changing national policy context, particularly the declared climate emergency, alongside the originally planned independent peer review of the proposed major road schemes. The review will consider alternative options as we look to the long term and towards providing a high quality, integrated and low carbon transport system. This will give us the opportunity to consider options that deliver improvements more quickly, including the possibility of an eastern link

road and river crossing, removal of traffic lights on key routes, emergency response arrangements to remove breakdowns, an electric bus fleet for the urban bus network and improvements that provide safer routes to school. The views of residents, commuters and local businesses are very important to us and we plan to consult widely during the review.

Both the Hereford and South Wye Transport Packages include improvements to walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure in the city and work towards the implementation of these will continue subject to funding being available.

Hereford City Centre Transport Package

Work on the project continues and consultation is due to commence in February with key stakeholders and afterwards with the public using commonplace consultation to develop the design of the transport hub and public realm schemes. Following consultation a further Cabinet Member report will be drafted, setting out the design approach for sign off and approval. Further stages include completion of preliminary design and planning application.

Hereford City Centre Improvements

An Officer decision to progress and spend budget is due to be taken shortly. Early discussion with stakeholders were held in November 2019. A further session with key city centre stakeholders will take place on 24 January 2020, to agree the set-up of the steering group and terms of reference. Initial design steps to be discussed and initial collection of views from the group.

Natural Flood Management

The Defra funded [River Wye and Lugg Natural Flood Management \(NFM\) Project](#) is making excellent progress. The project is working with landowners, farmers and communities within seven catchment areas, looking at the ways we can work together to reduce flood risk to downstream communities.

Some great partnership work was undertaken at Croft Castle in January 2020 when staff from the National Trust, Forestry England, Wye and Usk Foundation and the Environment Agency worked together to build over 25 leaky dams at the top of the Ridgemoor brook. National Trust volunteers also helped to build 4 of the leaky dams within the Fishpool Valley. The dams will not only help to slow the flow of water, helping reduce the flood risk to downstream communities such as Yarpole, but will also achieve multiple benefits such as improved water quality and habitat diversity.

People are being encouraged to get involved with the project in a variety of ways, either by attending the NFM Community Group meetings held in each of the catchments, by having NFM on their land or by becoming a project volunteer, helping to gather the evidence to show the multiple benefits of NFM. Visit www.herefordshire.gov.uk/nfm for more information.

Housing, regulatory services and community safety – Cllr Ange Tyler

CCTV

The upgrade and Renewal of CCTV Equipment project started on 20 January and is expected to run until the end of June 2020. The service is applying to the Police and Crime Commissioner for a £50K grant to go towards the upgrade to lessen the burden on the market town councils. The £50K is earmarked for CCTV projects.

Strategic Housing

The delivery of affordable housing will exceed the target set for 2019/20. A target of 210 new affordable dwellings provided through the planning gain process, delivered by housing associations or the refurbishment of council owned dwellings, with an expected 218 dwellings. The properties provide a mixture of property types and tenures for general needs accommodation, supported accommodation for young adults and physical disabilities

There are currently 287 properties recorded as empty long-term. This includes; properties that have been advertised for sale for more than six months; properties in the process of probate; a small number of properties where the owners are detained at Her Majesty's prisons ; and a number of properties empty due to the owners moving in to residential or nursing care. Following the appointment of an Empty Property Officer in late November, three properties have successfully been brought back in to use through advice or assistance. The Empty Property Officer is actively talking to a further eight households to find a solution to bring their properties back in to use. A letter has just

been posted out to shop owners in the market towns to encourage them to discuss with Strategic Housing the possibilities of bringing the accommodation above their shops or even empty shops to use for residential accommodation.

The Strategy on Housing Prevention & Rough Sleeping was agreed by Cabinet on the 16th December, and will be made available for viewing on the Council website. The first year action plan was written and agreed as part of the adoption and actions within the plan are progressing well with the extension to Hope Scott House due to complete in March, providing an additional four en-suite rooms for rough sleepers and the homeless plus an additional room that can be used by health professionals or housing professional for meetings, wellbeing advice or homelessness interviews.

Commissioning, procurement and assets – Cllr Gemma Davies

Waste

Cllr Davies is incredibly grateful to the General Scrutiny Committee who have agreed to undertake a number of waste-related projects as part of a task and finish group. She is delighted that this is going to be a cross party working group as these decisions should have input from all of our groups. A reduction in winter Sunday opening hours at the Herefordshire's Recycling Centres has been agreed. This was in light of figures that showed a significant decrease in visitors after 4pm during the winter months. Therefore the decision has been made to reduce all Recycling Centre hours to 0800 to 1600 from current hours of 0800 to 1800. However, subject to a successful planning variation, Ledbury Household Recycling Centre will be extended on a Sunday to 0800 to 1800 in the Summer and 0800 to 1600 in the Winter (current hours are 0930 to 1300). This will allow parity across all of our centres on a Sunday.

A continuation of free permits to tip for charities in Herefordshire has been agreed. Charities do a great deal of work in taking waste out of our household streams and as a result of the free permits schemes charities have implemented quality checks on what they receive, so good news

Cultural Services

Cllr Davies has met with a number of user groups and staff in cultural services who are fully behind our transformation programmes for the services. We are truly blessed in Herefordshire with not only great cultural services but great exhibits and a fantastic Herefordshire Cultural Partnership (HCP). In the budget for this year £100k has been made available to us to help transform the services. As such the council team are working on some projects, in conjunction with the HCP, that will allow our services to transform and expand as part of our corporate plan. This will be brought together for the Cultural Services Summit which is on March 27th. More details on this will follow but key themes are digitisation of our exhibits and archives; museums models of working including Trust models and the connection between cultural services and health and wellbeing including social prescribing.

Assets

There is a clear focus of recognising the potential of our council owned assets. We have a large amount of properties then may be best placed in the hands of the community. Numerous complaints have been made about the procedure being clunky, long and drawn out therefore we are looking to streamline the process of community asset transfers. We have also asked for a different approach to be taken with regards to the maintenance and works undertaken on our assets. Currently there is a great deal of focus on the reactive works but we need that to change. It is proposed that there be a 'futureproofing' approach to the programme and a full budget proposal will be put forward that ensures that our assets are protected if we were minded to sell them or transfer to a community. If you have anyone who is currently thinking of taking of assets and would like a conversation with Cllr Davies then please do give them her contact details.

Health and adult wellbeing – Cllr Pauline Crockett

To follow.

Executive decisions taken during December are [available online](#)
Forthcoming decisions are available on the [forward plan](#)

Latest press releases are available on the council [news feed](#)

Subject:

FW: Ward Cllr Reports

I have attended Board Meetings for both Malvern Hills Trust and the AONB plus numerous training sessions. MHT meetings are lively and conflicting views are strongly vocalized, eg. The Charity Commission Scheme Consultation report.

I attended an informative meeting with John Campion

Eastnor and Donnington Parish council meeting was held last night. The overriding problem for the parish is the lack of Broadband availability and reception. Fastershire certainly does not describe their present service!

Adult Scrutiny Committee focused on the situation of the NHS Minor Injuries Units around the County.

Most pressing for Ledbury is Viaduct Site Appeal and I am sure that this will be fully addressed by my fellow Ward Councillors. Just to highlight the AONB's offer to assist.

Council will discuss the 2020/21 Budget next week and I anticipate a robust debate!

I am now a Trustee of Ledbury Food Bank

It is good that we are working together to create a thriving community in Ledbury, and that the days of politics first have gone and now it is communities and people first.

Helen I'Anson