

<b>ANNUAL MEETING</b>	<b>25 JUNE 2020</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM: 14(a)</b>
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## **Outgoing Chairman's report - Councillor Phillip Howells 2019/2020**

This is our first formal Council meeting since the pandemic lockdown meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March and our decision to cancel all meetings until at least the end of May, with delegated powers to the Clerk, Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Committee Chairman.

The 3 months since have been an extremely busy and challenging time as we have adapted to the social isolating regulations whilst working to keep Council business up to date and being available to support our community as needed.

I am sure you and the community would wish me to make some relevant comment on how Ledbury has coped during these last few worrying months. First, the weight of responsibility for making sure we have not only kept regular council business going smoothly, but also addressing the many issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been a constantly changing and uncertain scenario, has fallen upon our Clerk, Angie Price. She has handsomely risen to the occasion and I would like to first of all pay tribute to her for her conscientious and extremely hard work in keeping on top of her role and its onerous responsibilities during this period.

I would also like to thank all the Council staff on our behalf for themselves quickly adapting to a homework environment and continuing to support the clerk and us all on a virtual working basis.

I'd like to acknowledge with humility and pride all the fantastic Ledbury volunteers' responding to help the less fortunate during the crisis, with the Ledbury COVID-19 Support Group rapidly gathering over 100 volunteers and establishing themselves as a leading community grouping, working together with Ledbury Community Action, the Food Bank, the Town Council and others groups such U3A all selflessly pulling in unison to keep the Town going whilst most of us were in isolation in our homes.

And last, but in even greater gratitude, we can only offer our thanks for the NHS, care and key workers such as school teachers for putting themselves in the greatest risk on the front line, by either directly looking after affected patients or providing the services that allowed the NHS staff to go to work.

There were initially early days urgent matters for the Clerk in working out how to plan for a possible overload of the Council's role as a burial authority and our cemetery management should the COVID-19 casualty rate rise to worse case estimates. Fortunately, the death rates were not as severe as feared, but they were troubling weeks at first.

Then once it became clear we would be slowly easing lock down conditions, but still not able to meet physically, came the demands of understanding the Governments emergency legislation to allow virtual meetings that met the requirement for all Councillors to attend and vote and also permit public participation. The fact we are

able to meet at this Council meeting within the legislation is testament to her success at working that lot out.

As far as myself and other councillors are concerned, we have all had different challenges to contend with. My role during these months has involved:

- Working with the Clerk as part of the delegated powers group and as the Chairman on a whole range of matters requiring discussion and decisions
- By far and away the most demanding work during all this time for Cllrs Bannister, Harvey and myself, supported by the Clerk, has been preparing for the Viaduct development planning refusal appeal, for which Ledbury Town Council is a Rule 6 participant. This has meant days, often long nights, of detailed and careful work helping to prepare a Statement of Case, a Statement of Common Ground, and more recently, the particularly important Proofs of Evidence, for the online inquiry scheduled for 5 days from Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July. There is a lot more work to do between now and then, but we are well prepared and with our retained consultants and barrister we have developed a very strong case with which to defend the decision and reflect the very clear democratic mandate to do so.
- Other work I have been involved with is
  - o Working with the Ledbury Traders Association to help them prepare their shops to be safe for their customers and staff when they reopened on June 15<sup>th</sup>, including liaison with Trading Standards Officers, and arranging a Zoom coronavirus safety briefing
  - o Liaising with our local Deputy Lieutenants and the High Sheriff, who have been very keen to keep in touch with events in Ledbury and to offer their support where they can be useful. You will know the Lord Lieutenant is seeking nomination views on people the communities of Herefordshire feel should be particularly recognised for outstanding contributions during the last few months.
  - o Despite intentions to keep on working on the Neighbourhood Development Plan during the lock down, given myself and a key consultant have been intimately involved with the Bloor appeal that work is temporarily on hold. However, the insights into Ledbury issues that have arisen as part of gathering appeal evidence is certainly going to be of great value to both the NDP and how LTC can respond to other major developments in the future, which is a real bonus of the appeal work.

Last but not least, I am delighted to be able to say that the Corporate Plan we promised to deliver by the end of the Civic year when it started in 2019, is now completed in its first form, with again thanks to the Clerk for moving that project forward during the year. We can now announce it to the community and invite comment and feedback because it will be a living and evolving document.