

ANNUAL MEETING	25 JUNE 2020	AGENDA ITEM: 14(c)
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Report Prepared by Councillor Dan Vesma

Economic Development & Leisure Committee – End of Year Report

Perhaps the most significant event for our town this year was LTC's blocking of the development of 625 houses to the north of the viaduct, until the proposed access could be improved. Our response to this scheme was fronted by Cllr John Bannister, who's tenacity in pursuing a better transport infrastructure for the town deserves a debt of gratitude. I also must, of course, thank the people of Ledbury who turned out in astonishing numbers to make their feelings heard at the Parish Poll on the matter. We listened, and so did Herefordshire Council. Regrettably, the developers have decided to appeal the decision, and we are having to spend more of our budget on preparing a robust defence. Whilst our preference was for the hearings to wait until after the COVID disruptions, the Planning Inspector has decided to move forward with proceedings virtually in July.

The Council also played a very significant role in defending the town against an ill-conceived scheme for 420 houses on the Dymock Road. The Inspector agreed with both the Town and County Councils that the development was too far from local amenities and could not be sustainable.

The number of large planning applications requiring our attention and the COVID disruption means that drafting and researching our next Neighbourhood Development Plan has perhaps not made the progress that we would have ideally liked. There is a highly motivated, engaged group of councillors and citizens on this Working Party, ably chaired by Councillor Howells, and the town will get to see the fruits of their labour soon.

As well as proposed developments beyond the bypass, and active planning applications on both sides of the Hawkes Rise estate, the next planning committee will have to consider the recently submitted Leadon Vale scheme. This scheme would, as proposed, move the surgery from the centre of town and create a purpose-built nursery and fourth supermarket for the town. As with many applications, there will be multiple, complex factors to assess and we will need your input in the form of comments and representations. For Example: Would it reduce the number of cross-town car journeys? Would it damage our independent high-street shops? Would extra local competition bring down food prices for shoppers? Most importantly for me, would moving the surgery out of town make access to healthcare more difficult for our elderly and more vulnerable citizens? We are all volunteers, and we rely on your feedback to gauge how to respond to these applications; please make your feelings heard either way. You can contact us, or write to Herefordshire Council, who will make the final decision.

As we slowly emerge from the lockdown, we need to acknowledge the changes that are taking place in society, especially around the ways that many of us earn our livings.

For some types of work, employers will become less reliant on our physical presence, and we will become more mobile and thus more able to choose where we live. Under these new circumstances, why wouldn't even more people choose to live somewhere with the rural beauty of Ledbury? This has the potential to increase the demand for housing further.

For so many people who can't work from home, local jobs will of course remain vital. I am pleased that we have been able to lend our support to almost all the employment-generating applications that have been brought to the committee this year. We supported the application to bring business back to the former Countrywide site, as well as supporting world class laboratories, new artists' studios and a close-care nursing home to the south of the town.