

November 2019

Rain, rain, go away.....

This autumn has been one of the wettest on record and it has presented challenges in flooding and erosion of road surfaces. Where there is a problem with flooding, particularly if this affects property, then it is crucial to do all that we can to find a solution. I have been receiving photos of some of the worst areas of flooding with annotated maps to show where the water came from – if you have any pictures or can add to this store of knowledge please get in touch. The more we know and understand about where the flood water is causing a nuisance the higher are the chances of fixing the problem. I am liaising with the Environment Agency and Farm Herefordshire who will be working with landowners in the area.

If you would like to discuss a specific problem please feel free to contact me.

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BUDGET AND CORPORATE PLAN

The Budget setting process is well underway and the Adult and Wellbeing scrutiny committee had early sight of the proposed revenue and capital budget for 2020/21 along with the new corporate plan proposals.

There are some really positive things coming forward in relation to the delivery of Adult social care like the proposal to spend around 13m on the development of care home and extra care provision, the proposal for ‘super hubs’ to strengthen the community offer, and 1.5m to increase the use of technology. There is also a proposal to spend around 800k to bring empty properties back into use.

Detailed business plans will be worked up once the budget has been agreed next year.

Due to the (dare I mention it) election, the timetable for rate retention has been pushed back and the government has allowed local authorities to levy an additional sum for adult social care as a result. The administration proposes to levy a further 2% ring fenced for Adult social care on top of the proposed increase of 2% in the base rate of council tax. I am mindful that over the last four years this had led to a cumulative increase in council tax of around 16% but feel it is important to point out that, even so, the cost of care is in the region of 75p of every pound raised in council tax.

One eye catching proposal in the corporate plan is to spend up to 100m on ‘public housing’ (council housing) – the calculation is that this will be revenue neutral with the capital coming from both borrowing and the sale of the council small holdings.

Performance of Adult and Wellbeing Directorate.

I attended a briefing on the performance of Adults and Wellbeing and came away with a degree of optimism. One of the key areas that needed to improve was the transfer of care – you might have heard about this as a national problem – delays in the system causing ‘bed blocking’ as the discharge is held up. Herefordshire had poor performance in this area but now, thanks to some radical rethinking, a strengths based approach and innovative problem solving we are leading the way. This

is all the more remarkable in the context of rising pressures in adult social care. Between 2018 and 2019 the number of delayed transfers of care has roughly halved – for example in August 2018 there were 1760 and in 2019 825; assuming the cost of a bed to the NHS to be in the region of £250-£500 per day this represents a saving of up to 6m.

This is not a stand-alone achievement. In Herefordshire domiciliary care has fallen by 22% whereas nationally it has risen by 16% - that's an aggregate of 38% - saving about 4m. The savings for 20/21 have already been made but at the same time outcomes and satisfaction has been improving.

We are meeting the needs and not capping services – other counties are looking to our Adults directorate to share their practice.

As always there are improvements we can continue to make and the Director is one of the most restless people I have ever met – he is constantly looking around for the next peak to climb.

Parish Council briefing on the Core strategy review and NDPs.

For those who didn't get there – it was a very interesting and rather sobering evening. The Core Strategy is now entering its review period and the length and complexity of the review is being determined. Clearly if there are no substantial changes then the review will be relatively short, but if (as I suspect) the changes are going to be more far-reaching then the process will take months, if not years. I rather hope that we do get a proper look at the core strategy, particularly RA2 and reassess which settlements are sustainable and which are not. There are a number of smaller settlements which have no services and a weak road infrastructure which, in my opinion, need to be reconsidered. However, there is a word of caution here, the housing targets for the county are likely to rise rather than fall as the Core Strategy extends for another 10 years. If the target rises, then more sites will need to be found and at the moment there are two problems that are impacting on our ability to deliver the current housing target let alone a higher one. One is the moratorium on building in the Lugg catchment due to the level of phosphate in the river and the other is the deliverability of strategic housing sites around Hereford in the absence of a road (bypass) to increase the capacity in the local road network.

There are plans to address both of these challenges but whether or not they succeed remains to be seen – for now, we are not able to deliver housing as envisaged but the target remains and therefore there is the possibility that the shortfall will have to be met elsewhere in the county.

NDPs that are more than 2 years old – especially where there are not specific site allocations – will lose a degree of weight in the planning balance where housing is concerned. To avoid this NDPs need to go through an almost constant process of review. This review can be minor, adjustments to syntax, de minimus alterations, or it can be substantial and require the process to re-run from regulation 16 to referendum. Parish councils who have adopted NDPs need to start planning the review in good time to keep their NDP at full weight.

And finally.....a news report says that Herefordshire is the drug and drink drive capital of the UK. That is not a distinction to be proud of. Please make sure that no one you know gets into a car when they are not fit to drive.